

Part II

The German Question

Chapter 7

Gorbachev and the GDR

Daniel S. Hamilton

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was the illegitimate offspring of the Cold War, in the words of one writer, the “state that cannot be.”¹ Even after forty years of separate existence, the GDR never became a nation; it was never seen as a legitimate state by its own people, by West Germans or even by its own superpower patron, the Soviet Union.²

The illegitimate nature of the East German regime proved to be an incurable birth defect. It was also a characteristic that distinguished East Germany from its socialist neighbors. Unlike Polish, Hungarian or Czechoslovak rulers, the GDR regime could not fall back on distinct national traditions or a sense of historical continuity binding its citizens to its leaders. The Finnish diplomat Max Jacobson captured the essence of the GDR’s precarious position:

The GDR is fundamentally different from all other Warsaw Pact members. It is not a nation, but a state built on an ideological concept. Poland will remain Poland, and Hungary will always be Hungary, whatever their social system. But for East Germany, maintaining its socialist system is the reason for its existence.³

As J.F. Brown put it, “history has been full of nations seeking statehood, but the GDR was a state searching for nationhood.”⁴

This lack of legitimacy afflicted the regime during the entire 40-year existence of the East German state. Without legitimacy, the regime could never consolidate its internal authority or its external stability. The imperative to gain legitimacy on each front—at home, from the West, and from the East—became the driving force behind the regime’s policies. Yet the requirements to do this on each front were mutually exclusive. Full legitimacy would have been conferred by the West only if the GDR had transformed itself into a democratic state, which would then be relatively indistinguishable from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Legitimacy in the eyes of the East German people would

have meant the right to travel, to free expression and free elections, and greater material well-being. These conditions were not only unacceptable to the East German regime, they would have posed a fundamental challenge to the Soviet Union. Full legitimacy was unlikely to come from an imperious ally who viewed the GDR as little more than war booty, the largest chunk of German flesh and soil that the Soviet Union had been able to command in return for the deaths of untold millions of Soviet citizens at the hands of the Nazis during World War II. In Soviet eyes, the purpose of the GDR was to keep Germany divided and partially under Soviet control, and to guarantee Soviet influence in European developments.

Brezhnev and the GDR

As the westernmost outpost of the East, the clamp of stability on the restless Soviet empire, the hinge of Soviet power in Europe, and the Soviet Union's most important economic partner, the GDR was critical to Soviet external and internal policies.⁵ In the summer of 1970, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev made this view brutally clear to Erich Honecker, who at the time was the heir apparent to Walter Ulbricht, the GDR's hard-line leader:

The GDR is an important post for us, for the fraternal socialist countries. It is the result of the Second World War, our acquisition, obtained with the blood of the Soviet people. I told you already once before that the GDR is not just your affair, but ours together ... After all we have troops in your country. Erich, I'm telling you frankly, don't ever forget it: without us, without the Soviet Union, its power and strength, the GDR cannot exist. Without us there is no GDR.⁶

Brezhnev's discussion with Honecker took place as rifts appeared between Soviet and GDR assessments of East-West détente in the early 1970s. From Walter Ulbricht's perspective, relaxation of East-West tensions, particularly West German leader Willy Brandt's new *Ostpolitik*, were dangerous attempts to undermine his efforts to build socialism at home and bolster the GDR's position in the East, thereby forcing its eventual acceptance by the West. His foreign minister, Otto Winzer, fumed that Brandt's "change through rapprochement" was nothing

more than “aggression on felt slippers.”⁷ Ulbricht stuck to a maximalist position: de jure recognition of the GDR; an end to West Berlin’s ties to the FRG; no easing of people-to-people contacts; and a combative intensification of the ideological struggle to prevent greater West German influence in the GDR.

The Soviet approach to détente was based on a different assessment of the relative opportunities and risks involved. Economic pressures and related demands for technological development were pushing the East toward greater reliance on the West for highly valued goods, technology, credits and markets. Brezhnev clearly recognized the seditious possibilities inherent in the new *Ostpolitik*. Nevertheless, the risks seemed tolerable given Bonn’s offer of de facto recognition of the GDR and the territorial status quo in Europe. Moscow overruled Ulbricht’s opposition, yet warned its allies that vigilance was still required. Moscow remained firm in its position that the German Question had been resolved and reaffirmed the Four Power status of Berlin, which provided Moscow with a lever of influence over all of Germany. The Kremlin brushed aside Ulbricht’s demand that the GDR have a direct role in any settlement of Berlin’s status. Some progress in German-German ties was also in Soviet interests since these developments, if gradual and controlled, promised to contribute to the political stability and economic survival of Moscow’s key ally in Eastern Europe. The pull of German-German ties was also seen as a means for the Soviet Union to seek greater influence over the Federal Republic, less in the sense of a direct bid for German neutrality and more in terms of anticipatory compliance by the Federal Republic with Soviet desires related to selected issues, a kind of “preventive good behavior” that might lead to a less active FRG within the West.

Ulbricht’s continued obstreperousness in foreign policy, coupled with his assertiveness on matters of Marxist doctrine, in which he presented himself more as teacher than student, rankled the Soviet leadership. His intransigence was even more irksome given that his ambitious economic program was collapsing and his domestic power base was unraveling.⁸ In the end, Brezhnev worked with Honecker to engineer Ulbricht’s ouster as party first secretary in early May 1971.

During Erich Honecker’s entire tenure as leader of the East German regime, he would be preoccupied with managing the openness generat-

ed by relaxation of East-West tensions in ways that could enhance, rather than disrupt, domestic stability. Whereas Ulbricht had been hostile to *détente*, Honecker sought to limit its domestic impact while using the process to advance stability at home, promote the GDR's indispensability in the East, and bolster its legitimacy in the West. Honecker's rule was predicated on the notion that the GDR could manage German division and its own inherent illegitimacy by sustaining a series of precarious balances: between exposure to the West and insulation from it; between loyalty to the East and latitude within it; and between domestic viability and control. What appeared to be a relatively stable, even rigid, European order rested, in fact, on a number of delicate balances, each of which had to be sustained to compensate for the abiding absence of legitimacy in the GDR.

Over time, economic ties to the Federal Republic became the umbilical cord that nurtured Honecker's ambitious domestic economic and social program. The GDR began to rely on German-German trade as a stop-gap to overcome production bottlenecks or protect against short-term economic disturbances. At the same time, Honecker was careful to reaffirm and strengthen East German ties to its patron power, the Soviet Union. The GDR enhanced its position as Moscow's most important economic and strategic ally. The East German economy continued to deliver valuable machinery, chemicals and other industrial products, and provided an essential military contribution.⁹ Having chafed under their second-class status for so long, GDR leaders relished the chance to act as Moscow's loyal agents, castigating Eurocommunists for ideological deviation, aligning themselves behind Kremlin policies, and supplying military and technical training as well as sophisticated weaponry to key Soviet clients in the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa.¹⁰ In the eyes of the regime, a higher international profile would enhance the GDR's prestige and visibility around the world and at home. Honecker also realized that any latitude he might have to pursue more specific GDR state interests would derive from his utility to Moscow. Support for the Soviet economy, the Soviet military alliance, and Soviet global adventures might allow some greater maneuvering at home and vis-a-vis the West. The more indispensable the GDR was to the Soviet Union, the more leeway it would have.

These efforts also coincided with Soviet interests. From the Soviet point of view the very process of *détente* required a high degree of

bloc discipline. Although the Soviets had pushed the GDR regime toward a more conciliatory stance toward Bonn in the early 1970s, Moscow remained interested in a status-quo policy regarding the German Question. The Soviet Union's principal stance was that the network of East-West agreements concluded in the early 1970s—the 1970 Moscow Treaty, the 1971 Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin (which the USSR and the GDR continued to try to apply only to West Berlin), the treaties between the FRG and its eastern neighbors (including the GDR), and the 1975 Helsinki Final Act—constituted a “settlement” of the post-World War II European territorial and political order. In the Soviet view, these agreements constituted legal and political recognition by the FRG that the German Question was irrevocably closed. Any attempt to reopen it was ipso facto “revanchism” and a danger to peace. Conversely, continued adherence to these agreements, as Moscow and East Berlin interpreted them, was a precondition for continued good relations.¹¹

Thus, despite improved West German-Soviet relations and some initial hopes in Bonn, for years there was no “Soviet card” for Bonn to play in its relations with East Berlin. Some in Bonn began to argue that any attempts to pressure East Berlin, even if initially successful, could prove counterproductive in the long run by destabilizing the East German leadership and unnerving Moscow. Bonn was interested in internal liberalization in the GDR, but not to the point of political upheaval which, it was feared, could lead to unpredictable and possibly violent consequences on the front line of the Cold War. Richard Löwenthal summed up what he called the “silent consensus” in Bonn:

unless there were a major change in the nature and policy of the Soviet regime that would open the door to basic transformation of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, no change in the status of East Germany could occur. Even in that case, the consequence would be a rapprochement rather than a reunification of the two German states. Short of such a basic change in Soviet policy, even a major crisis in East Germany would be most unlikely to provoke active West German intervention because such intervention would not only be contrary to the international commitments assumed by West Germany, but might also lead to its physical annihilation by the Soviets.¹²

The Lull Before the Storm

As the motorcade glided up to the squat black Chancellery building in Bonn, what from a distance appeared to be a harmonious sea of black, red and gold circling the Chancellery courtyard was transformed upon closer inspection into the colors of German division. A hammer and compass within a garland of wheat, the symbol of East German sovereignty, was imposed on every other black-red-gold tricolor. The flags hung limply in the wan Rhineland sunshine as the leader of East Germany stepped from his limousine onto a red carpet. The West German Chancellor welcomed his guest with a stiff handshake and the gray-uniformed *Bundeswehr* band struck up the anthems of the two states. As the discordant sounds of German division rang out, the two men standing uneasily at attention seemed to have become frozen caricatures of the states they represented: a wooden Erich Honecker, resolute yet conveying a hint of frailty; and a huge, hale and hearty Helmut Kohl.

Honecker's visit to Bonn in September 1987 was the first by an East German leader to West Germany. It was marked by a variety of conflicting positions and ambivalent images that appeared simultaneously to dilute and harden the 38-year-old partition of the country. The man who supervised the building of the Berlin Wall, the symbol of German division, was now standing next to a man who held eventual German unity to be a sacred constitutional and moral obligation. For Honecker, the visit was a triumphant affirmation that Bonn accepted the sovereignty and legitimacy for which East Berlin had struggled for so long. For Kohl, the visit was proof that his efforts to deepen the cohesion of the nation were bearing fruit.

This tension characterized the entire five-day trip. Honecker declared that "socialism and capitalism are as incompatible as fire and water;" Kohl insisted that the "unity of our nation is our goal." Honecker evoked the common responsibility of both German states to ensure that "war never again emanate from German soil;" Kohl gave his visitor a tongue-lashing about the order given to East German border guards to shoot on sight anyone attempting to escape to the West.

Despite Kohl's efforts during the visit to convey the enduring unity of the nation, the ceremonial honors bestowed on Honecker all appeared to confirm its division. At the same time, Honecker's strident

affirmations of this division seemed to be undermined by his visit to his own dingy Saarland hometown of Wiebelskirchen—a testament to the very personal ties that continued to unite Germans across the barbed-wire border. When Honecker drove to Dachau, one of Nazi Germany’s most terrible concentration camps, and laid a giant wreath of red roses before a wall inscribed with the words “Never Again,” he validated the deep bonds of obligation imposed on both German states by a common history.¹³

Honecker’s visit to Bonn in 1987 was the most visible ratification of the tacit consensus that had come to govern intra-German detente. It was less a breakthrough than a benchmark of the progress that had been reached over the 17 years since Willy Brandt’s visit to the East German city of Erfurt in 1970 had ushered in a new era of German-German ties. Each German state remained a loyal member of its respective alliance, yet both had built a relatively extensive network of relations across the Iron Curtain. German-German cooperation had expanded beyond a tense and narrow tradeoff of East German political concessions for West German economic concessions to incorporate cultural exchanges and cooperation on energy, environmental, scientific and transportation matters.

In retrospect, this period of budding German-German cooperation was but the lull before the storm. Yet at the time, Honecker’s visit was the most concrete signal yet to most observers that the German Question had been transformed from the issue of reunification in a unitary German state to the more practical issue of how German-German re-association might affect the East-West balance in Europe. “The unification of Germany is not on the agenda in the historically anticipated future,” the Polish government newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* declared on the eve of Honecker’s visit. Neither, of course, was the demise of communist Poland. Yet gathering forces of change were to prove the “historically anticipated future” wrong on both accounts, and with breathtaking speed.

The Eroding Pillars

By the time of Honecker’s visit, the pillars of the regime’s rule in the GDR were eroding. Yet the extent of the damage was not clear to the

rulers or the ruled. The ascension of Mikhail Gorbachev to power in Moscow not only unleashed a new dynamic in the Soviet Union, it clarified and accelerated two other important factors shaping the historical forces at the heart of the Cold War in Central Europe. The GDR, the Soviet Union's key strategic and economic partner, formerly the most active protagonist of socialist conformity in Eastern Europe, quickly emerged as the strongest proponent of individuality. This dynamic was compounded in turn by a new, complex triangular relationship between Moscow, East Berlin and Bonn that transformed the German Question. These currents of change, together with Gorbachev's own agenda for reform, produced a volatile potion that was to recast the balance of European and global power.

The German Democratic Republic, no longer a child of the Cold War, remained a 38-year old political adolescent. Outward manifestations of self-assertion were motivated by more deep-seated feelings of insecurity, which in turn were aggravated by a veritable volte face in the behavior of its guardian power. An excessively intransigent Soviet Union suddenly became a dangerously reformist Soviet Union. Soviet subsidies reversed themselves into Soviet demands. As the rest of COMECON slid into economic disaster and the domestic GDR economy began to falter, German-German ties provided the only source of external relief. At the same time, the GDR could not afford to stray too far from the Soviet fold, for the limited latitude it enjoyed resulted from its utility within its Eastern alliance. Drifting too close to West Germany would further erode the regime's chronically weak domestic legitimacy and forfeit Moscow's support for continued German-German ties. While Bonn was supporting the GDR economically, the seditious effects of détente, marked by increased travel and communications, had only increased the attractiveness of the West. A relatively cohesive Western alliance faced an increasingly diffuse Eastern alliance.

While Moscow continued to support East Berlin's position on the finality of the German Question, it was undermining it politically and economically. East Berlin's refusal to acknowledge, let alone resolve, the inherent contradiction between its abiding political rigidity and the imperative of economic modernization was bankrupting the country. Dealing with détente with the West, *glasnost* from the East, and disaffection at home required an impossible dexterity in turning the spigots of power that were at the heart of Honecker's complex balancing act.

Gorbachev and the German Question

The deterioration and eventual rejuvenation of Soviet foreign policy was related to a prolonged triple succession crisis prompted by the death of three General Secretaries of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in less than three years. “I can’t get down to business with Soviet leaders,” President Ronald Reagan complained. “They keep dying on me.”¹⁴

In March 1985 relatively young and highly energetic Mikhail Gorbachev emerged as the new leader of the Soviet Union. He promptly set out to rouse his country from the lethargy associated with its prolonged leadership crisis. Gorbachev had “iron teeth,” Andrei Gromyko noted approvingly; the veteran Soviet foreign minister hoped the new leader would be able to convince audiences at home and abroad that the Soviet Union was again a dynamic force to be reckoned with in world affairs. Gorbachev intended to do just that, but hardly in the way Gromyko had expected. One of the new General Secretary’s most significant early acts was to bump Gromyko up to the ceremonial presidency and thus out of the Foreign Ministry he had dominated for decades. Eduard Shevardnadze, a Gorbachev ally and a Georgian with little foreign policy experience, was appointed Foreign Minister in July 1985.

Concerned with stagnating economic performance, deteriorating social conditions and relative isolation in foreign affairs, and buffeted by pressures from a new, educated, urban social strata that came of age in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Gorbachev advanced a triad of reforms in domestic and foreign policy. He initiated a major campaign for domestic economic and social “restructuring”—*perestroika*; pushed for a new transparency and self-critical attitude—*glasnost*—within the Soviet state and Soviet society; and proclaimed a “new thinking” in the Soviet approach to international affairs.

The spectacle of an energetic, reform-minded Soviet leader was a daily fascination for audiences at home and abroad who had grown accustomed to a plodding and heavy-handed group of old men in the Kremlin. Yet despite Gorbachev’s vigorous image, the early stage of his tenure, which lasted until the fall of 1986, was characterized by a confusing *mélange* of old and new thinking. On the one hand, he issued tantalizing proclamations about human rights and human values. At

the Central Committee plenary in April 1985, for instance, he spoke out for “civilized relations between states based on true adherence to the norms of international law.” This was followed by a speech before French parliamentarians on October 3, 1985 in which he praised Europe as “a cradle of spiritual values” and stressed that the Soviet Union attributed “greatest importance” to human rights. After his first meeting in November with President Reagan, Gorbachev emphasized that every people had the “right to choice...the choice of their system, their methods, forms and friends ... If one does not recognize that, I don’t know how one can shape international relations.”¹⁵

On the other hand, there was continuing evidence of old thinking, such as Gorbachev’s report to the 27th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on February 25, 1986, in which he charged that the main dangers to peace emanated from the West. Even his toughest rhetoric, however, was modified by references to global interdependence and the resultant need for cooperative rather than competitive “peaceful coexistence.”¹⁶

Early contradictions were apparent in Moscow’s European policies. In the fall of 1985 Gorbachev spoke for the first time in public at some length about the “European House,” an initial indication that arms control initiatives were to be only the beginning, and not the end, of his foreign policy reforms, and that for the first time a Soviet leader would not be reluctant to link arms control to human rights concerns.¹⁷ Despite such images of cooperation and isolated pronouncements about a “socialist commonwealth” and new notions of “socialist internationalism,” it was unclear whether the Kremlin was prepared to risk a fundamental redefinition of its relations with its East European neighbors. Traditionally, Moscow wanted regimes that were economically and politically viable but whose policies and domestic systems came under broad Soviet control. The abiding tension between these two goals led to periodic eruptions. By the mid-1980s Eastern Europe had entered a period of economic and political change marked by a conjunction of destabilizing elements, including economic decline, open social unrest and the dwindling appeal of ideology, all against the backdrop of highly uncertain leadership succession issues in various countries. For many observers, it appeared that the added impact of the winds of reform from the Soviet Union itself could so aggravate these processes that things would get out of control. Scholars were comparing Gorbachev

with Khrushchev, wondering whether he would become so preoccupied with internal problems that he would miss the signs of impending turmoil in Eastern Europe until it would be too late.¹⁸ The optimal mixture of alliance cohesion, internal autonomy, and controlled opening to the West was quickly becoming the unresolved and ultimately unresolvable equation in Soviet-East European relations.

Gorbachev reflected this ambivalence. While he tolerated more individual expression of national interests in Eastern Europe and was careful to stress “their autonomy in their internal affairs,” at the same time Moscow urged more “efficient” economic integration among the COMECON states and raised its expectations of East European economies. The resulting push-me pull-you policies promoted individualism on the one hand and increased demands for tighter bloc efficiency on the other. Yet economic cooperation among the COMECON nations remained indifferent. Although the Soviets were keen on stepping up COMECON integration, the economic interests of the East European countries led them to look westward. In addition, Gorbachev remained tied to elements of the Brezhnev Doctrine. In Poland on June 30, 1986 he declared that “socialist achievements” could never be reversed, nor could this or that country be ripped out of the socialist community. Any other policy, he added, would mean “challenging not only the will of the people, but the entire postwar order and, as a final consequence, peace.”¹⁹

In sum, despite a fresher rhetorical approach to differences within the socialist camp, there was no indication, as 1986 ended, that Moscow would abandon its traditional twin goals of viability and control in Eastern Europe. While the degree of diversity and experimentation in Eastern Europe was remarkable by postwar standards, the parameters of permissible political reform and national autonomy ultimately remained undefined. The “Gorbachev Doctrine” vis-a-vis Eastern Europe had neither been formulated nor tested. While Gorbachev was clearly prepared to sacrifice some control for greater viability, it seemed unlikely at the time that he would risk too much in this regard. The benefits of a somewhat more dynamic Eastern Europe appeared to be insufficient to risk a revival of such crises as in the GDR in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1980/81. And a serious future eruption in Eastern Europe, so the common wisdom, would certainly reverberate in Moscow.

The limits of new thinking seemed most clear in Moscow's position on the German Question. Despite rumors and eager talk in the West, there was little indication until 1989 that "new thinking" would lead to any Soviet initiative regarding a new framework for the German Question. Upon entering office Gorbachev did little to change the Brezhnev position on the closed German Question and general Soviet foreign policy toward the two German states. There were only vague and superficial hints of change in the "principal stance" of the Soviet Union toward the German Question, a position supported fully by the GDR. During the interlude between Brezhnev's death in 1982 and the first two years of Gorbachev's tenure, the Kremlin's ties with Bonn, its major European partner during the heyday of *détente*, were in the deep freeze.

Honecker had been acquainted with Gorbachev since the 1960s and did not believe him to be a radical reformer.²⁰ Gorbachev, for his part, had been struck by Honecker's willingness to buck Moscow's hard line during the early 1980s with his call for "damage limitation" in the wake of the stationing of the INF missiles. During their first serious encounter as general secretaries of their parties on May 5, 1985, both appeared keen to reconfirm their close ties and present an image of unity on all major issues, particularly on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II.²¹ Any West German hopes for new flexibility were quickly dashed by the uncompromising language of the final communique, which stated that both leaders "firmly rejected any concept regarding an 'open German question'." Internally, Gorbachev told his advisors that while the GDR was "stronger" than the other east European countries, "it could never withstand a union with the FRG."²² The orthodox Soviet position was so strong, in fact, that Gorbachev rejected Honecker's plan to visit the Federal Republic, did so again when the two leaders met in Moscow during the 27th Party Congress of the CPSU on February 26, 1986, and did so a third time in East Berlin for the 11th Party Congress of the SED in April 1986. "We were resentful of his playing games with the West Germans," recalled Shevardnadze's chief aide Sergei Tarasenko.²³

First signs of serious conflict between Honecker and Gorbachev became apparent in the fall of 1986. Two weeks before the two leaders met in Moscow, West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had traveled to the Soviet capital to revive the tenuous relation-

ship between Bonn and the Kremlin. While the West Germans detected no sign of change in the Soviet position on the fundamentals of the status quo, a new flexibility was apparent in Moscow's view of both German-German ties and the West German-Soviet relationship.²⁴

New Thinking

When Honecker arrived in Moscow, Gorbachev made it clear that he was ready to redefine the West German-Soviet relationship as part of his concept of the European House. One had to be careful of the West Germans, the Soviet leader said, but for "peace in the world and for the development of Europe this triangle of USSR-GDR and FRG has extraordinary weight."²⁵ While Honecker was somewhat wary of the new warmth evident in the West German-Soviet relationship, he welcomed Soviet efforts to reinvigorate détente, and was pleased now that it was clear that nothing stood in the way of his visit to Bonn.

The East German leader reserved his harshest words for what he believed to be a much more significant challenge: *glasnost*. Soviet artists and writers were telling their East German colleagues to "overthrow their generals," Honecker charged angrily. "Political deviants in the GDR could quickly use this to their advantage." He demanded that Gorbachev reign in such comments. "It is important for us to have to fight on one and not on two fronts," he fumed.

The battle had been joined. By the turn of the year Soviet diplomats were circulating word that Hans Modrow, the SED party chief in Dresden, was considered favorably by Kremlin reform circles and was Gorbachev's candidate eventually to replace Honecker. KGB Vice-Chairman Kryuchkov visited Dresden in 1987 to discuss reform proposals with Modrow. The East Berlin gerontocracy was further distressed by Gorbachev's pronouncement to the Central Committee of the CPSU in January 1987: "We need democracy as we need the air to breathe." Honecker promptly told Anatoly Dobrynin that what Moscow did at home was its own business.²⁶

During 1987 and 1988 Moscow sought to recapture the gains of Soviet-West German detente that had languished during the previous five years, although Gorbachev was unnerved when Chancellor Kohl compared his public relations talents to those of Nazi propaganda chief

Josef Goebbels. Moscow focused on Bonn's stand on arms control negotiations, seeking to persuade West Germany that it was not in German interest to modernize short-range nuclear weapons. The Kremlin also courted the SPD and the anti-nuclear opposition. During this period Moscow also focused much more clearly on the potential role West German trade and investment could play in ensuring the success of Gorbachev's ambitious program of economic reform.

The Kremlin made it clear, however, that a "new page" in relations with Bonn could only be based on the political and territorial status quo in Europe. Gorbachev clung to the "reality" of two German states and was not prepared to acknowledge the continued existence of one German nation, as he indicated in his discussion with German President Richard von Weizsäcker on July 7, 1987. There were two German states with different socio-political systems and differing values, he said. This was the reality. "What will happen in a hundred years will be decided by history...No other approach is acceptable." For the time being, he warned, "one should proceed from the existing realities and not engage in incendiary speculations."²⁷

1988 was the turning point, as Gorbachev himself has acknowledged. When he came to power in 1985, he believed he could work through the party-dominated bureaucracy to implement his agenda for reform. But the Communist Party apparatchiks upon whom he was relying to push through change stood to lose most from it and therefore resisted.²⁸ There was little movement. "By the beginning of 1988," Gorbachev recalls, "it became clear that the efforts to implement the reforms - primarily the efforts toward radical economic reforms—were foundering on the political structures, on the regime itself, on the prevailing property relationships. That was the point when it became clear to me that we were in a systemic crisis and that the system itself would have to be transformed."²⁹

A shake-up of revolutionary proportions was launched. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze now went beyond such earlier isolated statements as "no single party has a monopoly on the truth" and that socialism had "no model to which all must orient themselves" by renouncing the Brezhnev Doctrine itself. In a Soviet-Yugoslav declaration in mid-March 1988, both states declared that neither intended to "force others to comply with its views on the development of societies" and that each

rejected “any threat and use of force and interference in the or internal affairs of other states.”³⁰

Behind the scenes, deeds followed words. The Soviets privately made it clear to Hungary’s beleaguered communist party boss, János Kádár, that he could no longer count on Soviet support in the event of a major internal crisis. Kádár was replaced in May 1988 by Károly Grósz, a Gorbachev admirer who received complete Soviet support for further political and economic liberalization in Hungary, including the implementation of a multi-party system.³¹

At the 19th All-Union Party Conference in Moscow on June 28, 1988, Gorbachev declared that a key element of new thinking in foreign policy was the concept of freedom of choice. “We are convinced of the universality of this principle,” he proclaimed. “In this situation, outside imposition of a particular social order, a particular way of life or a particular policy—by whatever means, not to mention military ones—is a dangerous rudiment of a bygone age...to resist freedom of choice means to oppose the objective course of history itself.”³²

For the first time Gorbachev spoke not of getting more out of the old system, but of “radical reform.” Later that year he announced what he called a “blowing up” of the old political system: freer elections, a full-time working parliament, more powers to the local councils, or soviets, all of which were intended to shift power away from the bureaucracy.³³

Hungary was not the only country that appeared to be free to pursue its own course. Reform-minded forces in Poland also gained new room for maneuver. In September 1988 Nikolai Shishlin, a Gorbachev adviser from the Central Committee, told *Le Monde* that Moscow had abandoned the Brezhnev Doctrine. The Kremlin, he said, no longer had a “right of veto” in Polish internal affairs. Other Soviet officials indicated they would not be overly concerned if *Solidarność* reemerged. Soviet reform circles were openly calling for “an evolutionary path between the neo-Stalinist, centralized bureaucratic ‘socialist’ system in the East, and the pluralist, social democratic, market-oriented ‘capitalist’ system in the West.”³⁴

Gorbachev’s ultimate goal was a more humane and productive socialism, not the end of socialism itself. Leading circles in Moscow se-

riously considered whether an explicit bargain should be offered to the east European “allies:” in exchange for a pledge by the east European regimes to remain socialist, Moscow would drastically reduce, and perhaps even withdraw, its military forces.³⁵

A bitter battle was simultaneously underway within the Soviet bureaucracy regarding German policy. For years the Third European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by Alexander Bondarenko, had been the guardians of Soviet orthodoxy on the German Question. Nicknamed “the Berlin Wall” by their own colleagues, the German experts in the Foreign Ministry had made a career out of defending the status of Berlin and Moscow’s rights regarding Germany as a whole from any and all challengers. “German problems were isolated” from other areas of foreign policy-making, recalled Shevardnadze’s aide Tarasenko. “They had a special status and were under the authority of a close-knit company” within the bureaucracy. For decades they had enjoyed a privileged position under the watchful eye of Foreign Minister Gromyko, who prided himself on his own knowledge of and steadfastness on German issues, and who did not hesitate to punish Soviet diplomats who did not toe his rigid policy line in this area. A further bureaucratic division of labor in Moscow complicating German policy was that relations with socialist countries, including the GDR, traditionally fell under the purview of the International Department of the Central Committee, led by Valentin Falin, former Soviet Ambassador to Bonn.

The Third European Department was “stonewalling on everything,” Tarasenko recalls. “They saw their role as spoilers.” By 1987, with relations with East Berlin increasingly tense and ties to Bonn still in limbo, even Moscow’s German experts realized that changes were necessary—up to a point. They understood better than Gorbachev or Shevardnadze that the GDR’s economic and political position was not what it seemed, and that closer economic ties between Bonn and East Berlin were inevitable to prevent the GDR from slipping into “Polish conditions.”³⁶ They were eager to open a new chapter in Moscow’s relations with Europe’s economic powerhouse—the Federal Republic of Germany. At the same time, they were resentful that East German insecurities hampered fuller bilateral ties between Moscow and Bonn.

That there was little serious consideration of any fundamental change in the basic status quo was made clear by an explosive meeting in the fall of 1987. Upon assuming office Shevardnadze formed academic advisory councils as a mechanism to discuss unconventional ideas. Vyacheslav Dashichev, a controversial department head at the Institute for the Economics of the Socialist World System, was made Chairman of the Advisory Council for the socialist states. In April 1987 Dashichev continued his heretical ways with a 26-page paper on the German Question, which he presented to an Advisory Council meeting on November 27, 1987.³⁷ In the paper Dashichev examined a wide range of possibilities in the future evolution of the German Question, including the continuation of the two German states; confederation or unification based on the principle of neutrality; and a unified German state integrated into the Western alliance. That Dashichev would reject option three right away was hardly controversial. But he unleashed a storm of controversy by arguing for option two—a unified, neutral Germany—instead of the status quo. The existing situation was disadvantageous to Soviet interests, Dashichev claimed. It could only prolong Cold War confrontation and the economic burdens of empire. The real cause of East-West confrontation, he argued, was German division. As long as the key to the solution of the German Question was in Moscow's hands, the Kremlin should use it to unlock new possibilities for a new relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union that could significantly advance Soviet interests. If it didn't, he predicted, unification would occur regardless of Soviet wishes.

Even in the prevailing atmosphere of “new thinking,” Dashichev had broken a long-standing taboo. He was accused of “political sins” and all copies of his paper were ordered destroyed. Sergei Tarasenko commented on the reaction by the senior leadership at the time: “We heard about his early paper and were in general agreement with his position, but the basic attitude then was still ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.’ We were distracted by many problems. We didn’t see that Germany was broken, and so we didn’t try to fix it. In our gut we knew that sooner or later there would be a problem, but it seemed far enough away so we were not preoccupied with it.”³⁸

Dashichev persisted in his efforts. In a May 18, 1988 article in *Liturnaya Gazeta* he presented a comprehensive critique of Soviet Cold War policies. Blind Soviet adherence to a status quo policy in Europe, he ar-

gued, was damaging Soviet interests by imposing inordinate economic burdens on the country and isolating it from the rest of the world. The Cold War had resulted in an intolerable militarization of Soviet society. The only way to change this was to change the Soviet position vis-à-vis the division of Germany and Europe, which was the true source of East-West antagonism. He again proposed various solutions to the German question, including a neutral confederation. This was followed by his highly publicized remark in June 1988 that the Berlin Wall was a relic of the Cold War and would disappear under more favorable political circumstances. A virulent response, most likely drafted by Honecker himself, appeared the very next day in *Neues Deutschland*, the official communist party newspaper. Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov was forced to disavow Dashichev's remarks.³⁹

New Winds of Change

As these debates continued, Bonn and Moscow struggled to revive their own relationship after five frosty years. Shevardnadze visited Bonn in January 1988 and Genscher visited Moscow in July to prepare a visit by Chancellor Kohl to Moscow in October.

New momentum was clearly apparent. At the summit German business executives and Soviet representatives signed 16 agreements on economic cooperation and a consortium of German banks approved a credit of 3 billion Deutschmark (DM). The two governments signed a cultural agreement that had been in the deep freeze since 1973 as well as an environmental agreement that had also been on hold for years because of persistent differences whether and how such agreements would include West Berlin. For the first time since World War II the defense ministers of the two countries met for an exchange of views. Outside the wintery Kremlin walls the temperature was -6°C, but inside Gorbachev announced that "the ice had been broken." In advance of the summit Bonn officials looked hard for signs that Moscow might be willing to reconsider its "principal position" on the German Question and the situation of Berlin.

During the summit the Chancellor was so insistent on both issues that Gorbachev chose to respond in public with the toughest of various responses that had been prepared for him in advance by the Foreign

Ministry's "Berlin Wall." The present situation was the result of history, the Soviet leader declared. Any attempt to "force the pace of events through unrealistic policies," he warned, was an incalculable and even dangerous undertaking." He did not object to Bonn including West Berliners in its international activities, but the West Germans had to realize that "the special status of the city remains unshakable." Quoting Goethe, he admonished Kohl that "nothing is as dangerous for the new truth as old mistakes."⁴⁰

Privately, however, there were clearer hints that the Soviet position was changing. "All the possibilities to overcome the phenomenon of the 'Iron Curtain' have not yet been exhausted," Shevardnadze told the West German delegation. Both sides agreed to explore these possibilities in advance of a visit by Gorbachev to Bonn in the summer of 1989.⁴¹

Among the East European regimes, responses to Soviet debates on the nature and scope of *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and "new thinking" were mixed. While Hungary and Poland joined the Gorbachev course, Romania openly scorned the Kremlin's initiatives, and in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria the leadership was paralyzed. For East Berlin, however, Gorbachev's calls for reform threatened to undermine the GDR's very rationale for existence as an "antifascist, socialist alternative to the Federal Republic,"⁴² in the words of Otto Reinhold, one of the party's leading theoreticians. If the GDR introduced reforms à la Gorbachev, it would lose its socialist identity and be only a poor copy of the Federal Republic. Under such circumstances pressures for reunification would grow and the GDR would eventually be swallowed up by its economically more powerful sister state. Hence, the regime felt it had to resist taking any steps, however, small, down the slippery slope of reform.

The GDR regime differentiated its response to Gorbachev's triad of reform by supporting "new thinking" wholeheartedly in broad terms, while hoping thereby to gain some margin of maneuver, particularly in German-German relations and to retain some influence over Moscow's own *Deutschlandpolitik*; interpreting *perestroika* narrowly to mean simply economic restructuring, which the GDR then sought to dismiss by pointing to the relative success of its centralized command economy; and rejecting *glasnost* outright by building new walls to shelter its society from the fresh winds blowing from the East.

Perestroika and the East German Economy

A key to the GDR's maneuvering room internally and externally was how well it could maintain its reputation as socialism's economic workhorse. Viewed from East Berlin, *perestroika* looked like a prescription for disaster rather than a solution to the GDR's problems. While acknowledging that the *Soviet* economy was in need of massive reforms, they denied that this was true for the GDR. "Many of the changes in the Soviet Union are already routine in the GDR," Honecker sniffed.⁴³ Kurt Hager, secretary of the Central Committee and chief ideologue of the SED, presented Gorbachev's domestic reform policies as nothing more than interior decorating, a cosmetic touch-up for which the GDR had absolutely no need. "If your neighbor would re-wallpaper his apartment," he asked rhetorically, "would you also feel compelled to repaper your apartment?"⁴⁴

The relative economic success of the GDR did in fact give the leadership some breathing space, particularly given the quite incoherent nature of Gorbachev's own plans for economic reform. The GDR, East German officials argued, enjoyed the highest standard of living, the highest economic productivity, the strongest and the steadiest growth in COMECON. The GDR was the largest supplier of machines and consumer goods within COMECON. It was the Soviet Union's most important trading partner. For most of the other COMECON countries the GDR was the second most important trading partner after the Soviet Union. The GDR population of less than 17 million produced more than its 37 million Polish neighbors. COMECON countries looked to the West, if possible, to secure leading technology, but when left to their own resources, they looked to the GDR. In fact, GDR officials argued, the Soviets themselves counted on the GDR economy to make important contributions to the long-overdue modernization of the Soviet economy. GDR officials were particularly keen to distance themselves from Soviet economic reforms also because they found that Gorbachev's efforts at COMECON efficiency would chain the GDR to its uncompetitive partners and drag down east German standards of living. Thus, while their minimum goal was to limit the impact of the Soviet debate on the GDR, their maximum goal was to exploit Moscow's higher tolerance for east European autonomy by diversifying their economic ties.

Given this position, GDR officials could be relatively secure that there would be little chance of Soviet pressure to undergo an East German version of *perestroika*. Soviet officials confirmed this view. "We thought Honecker's position was strong, we were convinced the GDR was a bulwark of socialism composed of good solid socialists," recalled Tarasenko.⁴⁵ Throughout this early period the new Soviet leadership still had an unrealistic picture of the GDR's economic achievements. Warnings about the real situation from other Politburo members were ignored. "We were so busy with our own problems," recalled Vyacheslav Kochemasov, the Soviet ambassador to East Berlin, "we left the GDR to its fate."⁴⁶

Behind this façade of superior economic performance, however, lay a grimmer reality. Honecker's commitment to consumerism and prestige-oriented technology-driven growth had bankrupted the GDR economy. Growth had eased under the weight of growing subsidies, sagging investments, flagging productivity and poor export performance. By 1985 the economy had eroded so badly that the regime has forced to assign up to 55,000 soldiers to work each winter in coal mining, aluminum, and chemical factories even though it refused to ease up on its high standards of defense readiness. This led to increasing morale problems and contributed to the inner erosion of the National People's Army (NVA).⁴⁷

The gap between official propaganda and reality on the streets had become so wide that in 1987 and 1988 the SED was forced to concede openly for the first time since 1971 a clear failure to achieve the targets of the plan, even though this had been true for some time and the Politburo had been falsifying the data on a regular basis. For the average East German, official proclamations of "social rights" rang increasingly hollow when medicine was unavailable, housing remained problematic, the wait for a Trabant automobile or a telephone connection was 12-15 years, and social status was dependent partially on who had access to hard currency.⁴⁸

Official recitations of the GDR's economic achievements compared to its COMECON partners also overlooked one significant fact: for most East Germans, the yardstick of progress was the alternative German state, the Federal Republic of Germany, rather than any of the GDR's Eastern neighbors. Yet despite its position as the most produc-

tive socialist economy and its favored access to Western technology, goods and finance through the special German-German channel, the gap in performance and living standards with the FRG widened steadily. Western estimates at the time consistently overestimated the GDR's economic capabilities. Productivity in the GDR was about one-third the level in the FRG. Per capita purchasing power in the GDR was at least 60% behind the West German level. Even more significant than quantitative comparisons, however, was the fact that the growing number of GDR visitors to the FRG were now able to experience first-hand the gap in living standards and the possibilities of a modern social market economy.⁴⁹

In the face of these massive economic challenges, the regime was running on borrowed time and borrowed money. By 1987 the GDR's net foreign debt had climbed to 34.7 billion valuta marks. Domestic economic policy had been reduced to managing scarcity and securing sufficient infusions of quick cash from the West simply to meet the interest payments on its growing mountain of debt.⁵⁰

In sum, by the late 1980s much of the Honecker regime's hard-fought internal and external achievements were being undermined by the GDR's precarious economic situation. Economic performance was no longer able to compensate for its lack of internal and external legitimacy. The fundamental dilemma for the regime was that in the new global economy economic development could not be commanded from above. Technological innovation, creativity, modern communications and information flows were essential to the GDR's own goals of intensive and extensive growth. Yet this presumed a degree of openness and decentralized authority the SED was unwilling to tolerate for fear of political destabilization. The regime was caught between the consequences of greater openness as a precondition for competitiveness and the equally unnerving alternative of stagnation on the front lines of the East-West divide. In short, economic pressures were directly related to the political pressures facing the regime, which in turn were being aggravated by a far more disturbing aspect of the fresh winds blowing from the East—*glasnost*.

***Abgrenzung* to the East**

During the 1970s and 1980s, East Berlin responded rather successfully to West German attempts at “change through rapprochement” with its own policies of “change through *Abgrenzung*”—a policy of carefully controlled opening that maintained the party’s control over society. Now, in a remarkable turn of events, the GDR’s leadership was faced with a similar challenge of openness; this time, however, the challenge was coming from its own superpower patron, the guarantor not only of East Germany’s external security but also of the regime’s internal authority. Bewildered, yet skeptical that Gorbachev’s reforms would succeed or, for that matter, that Gorbachev himself would remain in power, Honecker attempted to ride out the storm with a stopgap version of *Abgrenzung*, directed this time at the East yet derived from the same fear that unsettling ideas could loosen the regime’s precarious grip on its own society.

Fearful that its own population might contract *glasnost* fever, the regime cracked down harshly on internal dissent. It also took active defensive measures to insulate East German society from the provocative ideas now coming from Moscow. Media restrictions were tightened; the internal Soviet debate was censored, and the notion of individual paths to socialism was promoted.

Nonetheless, the mixture of years of détente with the West and now *glasnost* from the East was forcing change on three fronts simultaneously—the West, the East, and from within.

New Thinking and the GDR

Internal retrenchment was accompanied by external activism. GDR officials sought to compensate for their rejection of *glasnost* and *perestroika* at home by embracing Soviet proclamations of “new thinking” abroad, which promised to reduce East Berlin’s military costs and grant the GDR greater autonomy to advance its interests in the German-German relationship.

The initial focus of Soviet “new thinking” was in the field of arms control. A variety of new initiatives by Gorbachev reflected arguments Honecker himself had used in 1983-1984 against Moscow’s hard-line

positions at the time. Thus, the GDR supported the military security aspects of “new thinking” wholeheartedly, primarily out of GDR state interests rather than blind allegiance to the Soviet Union. GDR officials echoed their Soviet colleagues by explaining that the imperative of “new thinking” in foreign policy was defined out of the “logic of the atomic age” with the purpose of avoiding a “nuclear inferno.”⁵¹ Given the economic strains facing the regime, one motivation for GDR support for new thinking was to reduce the burden of defense spending on the economy. Next to the Soviet Union the GDR’s defense spending was the highest in the Warsaw Pact, both in absolute and per capita terms and in relation to national income.⁵²

Yet “new thinking” could only extend so far. The regime made it clear that “cooperative peaceful coexistence” would not erase the dividing line between socialism and capitalism but provided “the framework condition for peaceful contest between the two different systems and is, at the same time, the major prerequisite for both sides to exist according to their own needs and to do things their own way.”⁵³ In other words, such a condition would bolster the position of the GDR as an accepted member of the interstate system.

The regime had greater difficulties with Gorbachev’s growing emphasis on respect for human rights as the basis for a new international order. East German officials stuck to their traditional position that peace between societies (read: full acceptance of the GDR) “is the prerequisite for any human right and its implementation.” In addition, they relativized such political rights as free expression and travel, placing them on a par with social rights and even vaguely defined “cultural” rights. “We do not discriminate between more or less as important rights,” declared Max Schmidt, Director of the Institute for Politics and Economics. “Any claim to exclusiveness by one side would be counterproductive, not to speak of attempts to pervert the human rights issue to a lever of discrediting and eventual elimination of the system opponent.”⁵⁴

The Home Front

At the time of Honecker’s 1987 visit to Bonn, it appeared from the outside that the regime had proven itself able to contain pressures for

change: it had garnered a more legitimate standing from Bonn; it had wrested a degree of maneuverability from its superpower patron; and it appeared to be maintaining its domestic balance rather successfully due to a combination of repression and carefully calibrated doses of openness. Dissidents were either isolated internally, by being sentenced to jail or confined to the shelter of the Church; or were isolated externally, through emigration or expulsion.

Upon closer inspection, however, the overall effect of the regime's doses of openness was similar to that of splashing water on a hot stone in a sweat-house: it only made the atmosphere hotter. Easier emigration, greater possibilities for travel to the West, the rehabilitation of significant figures and epochs in German history, the greater maneuvering room granted to the Church, and support of "socialist" consumerism were all designed to build down domestic dissatisfaction. Yet they served to create higher popular expectations that were inflamed by the regime's economic mismanagement and ideological rigidity. Thus, just as the regime was faced with growing pressures of détente from the West and *glasnost* from the East, it found itself confronted with an equally challenging situation at home.

The GDR dissident population, torn between those seeking emigration to the West and those preferring to stay and press for reforms at home, remained one of the smallest, least vocal, and most isolated in the Soviet bloc until 1987. Moreover, on the whole east German dissidents continued to seek an "improvable socialism," whereas most of their counterparts in other East European countries sought to overturn it. Gorbachev's assumption of power in the Soviet Union and dramatic changes in Poland and Hungary accelerated the efforts of East German opposition groups to transcend single issue themes such as the environment, peace or the Third World and demand fundamental political reforms that would lead to "improvable socialism." "Gorbachev was our source of hope and we viewed him as a secret ally," said activist pastor Friedrich Schorlemmer. "The situation is exactly the reverse of 1945," noted maverick communist intellectual Jürgen Kuczynski in his diary on March 3, 1987. "Then at the top close allegiance to the SU and down below hate in the population. Today at the top true anti-Sovietism, down below enthusiasm for Gorbachev."⁵⁵

By early 1989 a different kind of solidarity had become apparent within the East German population. Whereas in the past the divergent goals of those seeking to change the system and those seeking to escape it through emigration had dissipated the strength of domestic opposition, the two now joined to form a new critical mass of unrest in the population that started alarm bells ringing within the SED leadership. East German writer Monika Maron commented at the time that the realization had slowly dawned that “the Emperor has no clothes, and the latest fashions from Moscow are simply too revealing.”⁵⁶

Spurred by dramatic events in 1989, the diverse currents of domestic dissent that had been gathering force over the preceding months and years coalesced into the revolutionary movement that ultimately would sweep the SED from power. Yet these strands of opposition, in and of themselves, were too weak to be much more than the kindling wood of revolution. The sparks came from external events. They did hollow out sufficiently the SED’s claims of legitimacy, however, so that when the GDR’s external framework collapsed, its brittle interior immediately shattered.

The Pot Boils Over

Erich Honecker’s thin voice quavered with fury and bewilderment. “The Wall,” he fumed, “will still be standing in 50 or even 100 years... That is quite necessary to protect our Republic from thieves, not to mention those who are prepared to disturb stability and peace in Europe.”⁵⁷

Honecker was supporting his Wall so vociferously because he had his back up against it. At first glance, Honecker’s shrill defense was directed at challenges made by Western leaders in January 1989 at the closing ceremonies of a marathon two-year meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The Vienna CSCE meeting had just produced an agreement promoting East-West trade and safeguarding a broad range of human rights, including freedom of travel and emigration. The Vienna accord pledged the 35 signatory nations, including the GDR, to “respect fully the right of everyone... to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his own country.”⁵⁸ The retiring U.S. Secretary of State, George Schultz, used the Vienna meeting to issue a blunt challenge to Moscow and East Berlin:

tear down the Wall. The Cold War would not be over, Schultz declared, as long as the Wall remained standing. It remained, he said, the “acid test” of improved East-West relations.⁵⁹

During the Wall’s 27-year existence Honecker had grown accustomed to Western bluster. That was not his primary concern. His real message of defiance had been directed at the much more palpable and threatening challenge posed by his own patron power, the Soviet Union. The long-simmering feud between Moscow and East Berlin had now boiled over into public. “We didn’t build this Wall—this is not our Wall,” Aleksandr Yakovlev, one of Gorbachev’s key advisers, declared a few days before. Asked to comment on the Wall, Shevardnadze said that it was a question for the two Germanys to decide, but hinted that in Moscow’s view, it was time for a change. “When the Wall was built,” Shevardnadze ruminated, “there were most likely reasons for it. One must see whether these reasons are still there.” Oskar Fischer, the East German Foreign Minister, was indignant. The factors that led to the construction of the Wall, he snapped, still existed. Shevardnadze was undeterred. In an expansive mood, he leveled his sights on his East German ally in his closing remarks to the Vienna conference. “The Vienna meeting,” he declared, “has shaken the Iron Curtain, has weakened its rusty bars, has torn new holes and sped its corrosion.”⁶⁰

In response to Yakovlev’s remarks, SED Politburo member Werner Krolikowski sniffed that he “never listened to Yakovlev in his life and wasn’t about to now.” His colleague Günter Schabowski, himself married to a Russian, proclaimed to anyone who would listen that “everything the Russians do is nothing but manure and cheese.” Given Gorbachev’s embattled position at home and the sluggish progress of *perestroika*, Honecker remained skeptical that the Soviet leader would remain in power. He continued to pin his hopes on Gorbachev’s conservative opponents in the Politburo while rejecting any suggestion that the GDR itself was in need of fundamental reforms.

One year earlier the Honecker regime had agreed to grant its citizens a right *to apply to leave* the GDR. This was not the same as agreeing to the right to leave, and authorities could still decide whether to approve an application. Such a step was part and parcel of Honecker’s *Abgrenzung* policies—limited concessions that remained under state control. By the time of the CSCE Vienna meeting in January 1989,

however, this limited step was insufficient, and the GDR came under pressure from both East and West to sign the Concluding Document. Honecker was intent on circumventing such pressures.

Honecker's brazen attitude was on full display in a private meeting on January 5, 1989 with Yuri Kashlev, the head of the Soviet CSCE delegation. The GDR could not accept two points in the final draft of the Vienna document, Honecker said. The first dealt with granting CSCE observer groups access to average citizens. "We all know what is concealed behind so-called Helsinki observer groups," Honecker declared. "This would mean legalization of counterrevolutionary activities." The second point was a clause that would further legitimize West German demands that the minimum daily currency exchange requirement be abolished. The GDR would not veto the final document, Honecker told his guest, but if these two points were not dropped, Kashlev was asked to convey to "comrade Gorbachev that the GDR would not honor the two points." The GDR, he reminded his guest with more than a hint of *Schadenfreude*, was a "quiet island" compared to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia.⁶¹ Stasi chief Erich Mielke ordered his colleagues to block implementation of the Concluding Document wherever possible.⁶²

During the first four years of Gorbachev's tenure, Moscow had tolerated Honecker's obstreperousness for various reasons. First, the GDR's role as Moscow's leading economic partner played an important role in Gorbachev's own calculations for reform in the Soviet Union. Second, the GDR's critical position as one of two German states on the front lines of the ideological divide and the clamp of stability on a more fluid, fragmented Soviet empire imposed some caution on impulsive reformers. Third, the GDR remained a powerful symbol among the Soviet people of the Soviet victory over German fascism. Fourth, Gorbachev continued to be preoccupied with his reform efforts at home. Finally, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze did believe in and adhered to the policy of non-interference they had been proclaiming.

As 1988 came to an end, however, so did Soviet patience. The Wall and the man who built it were becoming embarrassing anachronisms in the age of *glasnost* and *perestroika*; they were damaging the credibility of Gorbachev's entire program of reform. Gorbachev was anxious to move ahead with a new approach to international relations that

had little room for walls of concrete and barbed wire, automatic guns, and shoot-to-kill orders. "We felt we could not hinge our policy on Honecker," recalled Shevardnadze's key aide Sergei Tarasenko. "He would be a passing leader. We were ready to proceed in our own way whether it pleased him or not."⁶³

In his speech to the United Nations on the morning of December 7, 1988, Gorbachev declared that in an age of global mass communications, "the preservation of any kind of 'closed' society is hardly possible." Then, in a signal about Soviet intentions toward Eastern Europe, Gorbachev declared that "all of us, and first of all the strongest of us, have to practice self-restraint and totally rule out any outward-oriented use of force." He went on to say that "the principle of freedom of choice is a must" for all nations, a universal principle that "knows no exceptions." In other words, East European regimes could no longer rely on Soviet military intervention to keep them in power. They would be responsible for sustaining their own legitimacy and viability. To underscore his position, Gorbachev issued a stunning announcement: the Soviet Union would undertake massive unilateral military cuts, including the withdrawal of 6 tank divisions and other forces from the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, which amounted to about 10% of Soviet armed forces and much higher percentages of the most threatening Soviet forces in Central Europe.

These cuts had been under discussion in Moscow for more than a year between Gorbachev and his military establishment. Earlier that year, in a Warsaw Pact meeting in July, Gorbachev had proposed a unilateral cutback of 70,000 men in the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but the proposal was blocked by those regimes. That same month the Soviet General Staff was instructed to begin work on a bigger cutback. Several events during the fall, including a September shakeup in the Politburo in which the influence of the conservatives was reduced, were important in making the cutbacks possible.⁶⁴

In Moscow's secondary elite, the debate over German policy continued. At the end of 1988 Vyacheslav Dashichev was invited to make a brief presentation to the Central Committee's senior advisers on European policy. He repeated his heretical position that the division of Germany hurt, rather than helped, Soviet interests. Valentin Falin, Chief of the International Department of the CPSU Central Commit-

tee, exploded with rage, shouted that the Cold War had been unleashed by the United States, began a rambling response and then abruptly left the room.⁶⁵

Dashichev refined his views in a paper dated April 18, 1989 that was presented to Shevardnadze and most likely also read by Gorbachev. The East-West confrontation had damaged the Soviet Union badly, he argued, and could not be overcome without a solution to “the German Question.” Dashichev criticized the “ideological primitivism” of the GDR regime, based as it was “on force against its own population,” and derided Honecker’s assertion that the Berlin Wall would still be standing in 100 years as “absurd.” Only radical reforms could bring the GDR out of the dead end in which it now found itself. This would lead to a “revolutionary rapprochement between both German states” and thereby “defuse the German question” which could “open prospects for the creation of a confederation of both German states...or a unification on the condition that the security of all the countries of Europe would be guaranteed. One cannot conceive of a common European home without overcoming the division of Germany in its present form,” he concluded, although he added a cautionary note: “It is very important that this process take place under conditions of internal and external stability.”⁶⁶

Lightning Strikes

By 1989, a mutually reinforcing confluence of accelerating change abroad and deepening disillusionment at home was transforming the East German situation fundamentally. Cumulative changes emanating from the West, the East and at home were causing the triple high wire upon which Erich Honecker had conducted his delicate balancing act for eighteen years to wobble badly. During the mid-to-late 1980s the Soviet tides of change in particular had been carving channels in which the issues at the heart of the Cold War in Europe were now flowing with gathering speed. The quickening pace of events was creating its own dynamic, generating a heady sense of anticipation that was soon to transfix, and ultimately transform, the continent.

Anticipatory gusts began to blow in from Poland and Hungary. Despite seven years of suppression by Poland’s martial law regime,

Solidarność retained its resonance throughout Polish society. General Jaruzelski's regime, buffeted by gales of economic crisis and political illegitimacy, initiated discussions with *Solidarność* leaders in early February. Arduous roundtable talks followed, resulting in legalized status for *Solidarność* in April. The communists agreed to free elections for a new upper house of the Polish parliament, on the condition that they and their traditional parliamentary allies would continue to control the more powerful lower house.⁶⁷

The Hungarian path of reform, in contrast to that in Poland, had been charted by the party itself. These efforts had progressed far enough that on February 11 the Hungarian Central Committee endorsed, with Soviet approval, the idea of a multiparty system. On March 14, the Hungarian government took a little noticed yet fateful step by becoming the first East European state to accede to the 1951 Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees (under which states agreed not to expel refugees or return them to their homeland if they would face persecution there). The Protocol obligated Hungary, alone in the East bloc, not to force refugees to return home. On May 2, Hungarian soldiers began to tear down the twin barbed wire fences and electronic fortifications along Hungary's 260 km border with Austria.⁶⁸ By the end of the year, the government announced, the Iron Curtain between Austria and Hungary would completely vanish.

These actions unnerved East Berlin, which had signed a treaty with Budapest in 1968 that committed each country to prevent each other's citizens from crossing into a third country without specific permission from the home government. In their discussions with East German officials, the Hungarians downplayed the significance of these steps. The actions were intended only to build down the more inhumane aspects of the border installations, Budapest argued. Hungarian officials continued to prevent east Germans from fleeing to Austria. But this was an untenable long-term position, and the reformist leaders in Budapest knew it.

The GDR leadership clearly underestimated the magnitude of the Hungarian action. Honecker preferred to focus on the annual spectacle of hundreds of thousands of East Germans marching for socialism during the traditional May 1 parades than on the increasingly real prospect that those same masses, given the opportunity, would turn their

backs on socialism in a flash, risking their livelihoods and even their lives in a headlong dash through the now-porous Hungarian border to the West.

There were also darkening clouds at home. The first thunder claps were heard in Leipzig on January 16 and again on March 13, when hundreds of young people protesting the right to free expression and to emigration took to the streets after regular peace services in the Nikolai Church. Throughout the spring, the Stasi provided the leadership with an unvarnished picture of popular concerns: housing and infrastructure problems, environmental damage, an overbearing bureaucracy, consumer shortages, problems with drinking water, limited opportunities to travel. Even “progressive” (i.e. loyal party) forces, it was reported, were concerned that “the general mood among broad segments of the population has noticeably deteriorated.”⁶⁹ Rather than acknowledge the need to introduce reforms, however, the regime stepped up its means of reprisal.⁷⁰

Lightening finally struck on May 7 when independent monitoring groups produced hard evidence that local elections had been manipulated by the regime. Instead of backing down, the regime responded with a new crackdown. Over one hundred protesters were detained in Leipzig. Yet this only fanned popular outrage. Over five hundred people demonstrated in Leipzig on May 8 to protest the elections and the detentions of the previous day. A subsequent demonstration scheduled for June 7 in East Berlin was disrupted by state security forces. In a sign of growing sophistication and organization, the demonstrators quickly regrouped and arranged services the next day in the Gethsemane Church that attracted 1,500 people.⁷¹ The communal elections made clear that popular dissatisfaction had reached broadly throughout the population and the people were losing their fear. Popular outrage over the elections had infused new life into the opposition groups. By June 1, over 160 opposition groups—most of them still weakly organized—existed throughout the GDR.⁷²

The polarization of the East German internal scene was sharpened further by external developments in June as a cascade of unprecedented events hammered the ideological foundations of the communist world. The stark contrast between the situation in the GDR and in neighboring Poland was brought home on June 4, when pro-*Solidarność*

candidates won overwhelming victories in elections for the Polish Parliament. In Hungary, roundtable talks between regime and opposition were about to begin. On June 27, the Hungarian and Austrian foreign ministers gathered near Sopron to cut away the border of barbed wire separating their two countries—a symbolic act opening the Iron Curtain. On the other side of the world, the Chinese army launched a bloody suppression of a peaceful student demonstration in Tiananmen, Beijing's Square of "Heavenly Peace."

The Open Wound

For the Honecker regime, the seemingly inexorable moves in Poland and Hungary toward democracy and pluralism raised the spectre of encirclement and isolation by reformist states. The SED Central Committee responded by denouncing the changes in Hungary, lashing out at Dresden party chief Modrow, who had been drawing greater domestic and international attention as the one prominent reformer within the party, and moving energetically to form a rejectionist front by forging closer ties with reactionary communists in Czechoslovakia, Romania, China and Albania. On June 8 Egon Krenz offered a resolute defense of the Tiananmen Square massacre, and the East German parliament approved an official statement supporting the actions of the Chinese government. This was followed on June 19 by an official visit by Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer to isolated hard-line Albania, the first visit of a Warsaw Pact foreign minister to Albania since it broke its alliance with Moscow in 1961.

The frosty relations between East Berlin and Moscow stood in stark contrast to the thaw evident in relations between Moscow and Bonn. Honecker was now not only being challenged by Gorbachev directly regarding the nature and development of socialism, he feared being outflanked by an improved Soviet-West German relationship that might sacrifice East German interests. Such fears were fanned by intense speculation inside and outside of Germany that Gorbachev would soon signal a dramatic turn in Soviet policy on the German Question.

Expectations of such a change were heightened by Gorbachev's state visit to the Federal Republic in June. The visit heralded a new stage of Soviet *Deutschlandpolitik* that aimed to strengthen Soviet ties to the

Federal Republic, Europe's economic dynamo and Moscow's most important Western economic partner.

In anticipation of Gorbachev's visit to Bonn, West German officials conducted intense discussions with their Soviets counterparts in an effort to win Soviet endorsement of a common document that would lock in earlier Soviet statements about self-determination, human rights, and freedom of choice. The Joint Declaration of the two states, signed by Gorbachev and Kohl on June 13, did in fact reflect elements of new thinking and fundamental principles of the Western community of values. In addition to the aim of securing peace, both states affirmed the "right of all peoples and states to freely determine their destiny." Both states described their "primary task" as "overcoming the division of Europe," a goal to be reached through the construction of "a European Peace Order, a common European home in which the USA and Canada also have their place." The building blocks of a new "Europe of Peace and Cooperation" included "unconditional observance of...peoples' right to self-determination" and "realization of human rights." Kohl, beaming with delight, called it a "sensational" accord.⁷³ The Soviet Union had endorsed the right to self-determination—which the West Germans had always declared to be the core of the German Question—in an official declaration together with the Federal Republic.

In his meetings with Gorbachev, Kohl used the pledges inherent in the Declaration to press his guest on the German Question. German partition remained an "open wound," he declared. "The feeling of belonging together is unbroken among Germans in east and west." At their October 1988 encounter in Moscow, Gorbachev had sharply refuted Kohl's references to the German Question. The division of Germany was a product of a specific history, Gorbachev had said, and to change it at that time would be "an unpredictable and even dangerous undertaking." This time he was less categorical. While cautioning against deepening existing difficulties and alluding to "certain realities" and "obligations," he observed that "nothing is eternal in this world," and said that the Berlin Wall could be removed as soon as the conditions that had led to its construction no longer existed. "I do not see a particularly big problem here," he added.⁷⁴ During the entire visit Gorbachev mentioned the GDR, his most important strategic and economic partner, only peripherally.

These intriguing new turns were balanced by more familiar statements on Berlin and on state sovereignty. While the visit did not result in any breakthroughs on the German Question, there were clear signs that major Soviet rethinking was under way. While Soviet Foreign Ministry officials continued to reiterate the dangers of a new German *Reich*, others, particularly those close to Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, were expressing different views. They spoke of Soviet interests being better served by a “reassociated” Germany tightly integrated into a broader European political and economic community than by the maintenance of an artificial division of Europe in which one German state remained threatened by chronic domestic upheaval.⁷⁵

The GDR regime was acutely sensitive to the Gorbachev visit. Officials avoided any reference to “self-determination.” The East German media featured the distant Chinese crackdown on dissent far more prominently than the Gorbachev visit next door.

In subsequent weeks Gorbachev reaffirmed the principles to which he had agreed in Bonn despite vigorous objections by hardline states. At a tense meeting of the political advisory committee of the Warsaw Pact, Romania called for military intervention to suppress the reforms in Poland. In the end, however, reformist forces carried the day. On July 7, the Warsaw Pact joined Gorbachev in a public repudiation of the Brezhnev Doctrine: “Any interference in internal affairs, any attempt to restrict the sovereignty of states, whether by friends and allies or other states, is unacceptable.”⁷⁶ The hardliners went home in disarray, but the battle was not over.

Meeting Shevardnadze in Paris on July 29, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker said that U.S. support for the reform process in Poland and Hungary was not an attempt “to create problems for the Soviet Union.” Serious problems would arise, however, if Moscow were to use force to stop the development of peaceful change. U.S. officials were particularly keen to ascertain the Soviet threshold of tolerance should the East German state start hemorrhaging. Shevardnadze answered U.S. concerns in Paris and in a subsequent meeting in September with Secretary Baker in Jackson Hole, Wyoming by stating that the use of force to stop the reforms in Eastern Europe “would be the end of *perestroika*.” He insisted that these reforms were not a threat. “The

pace, the movement, the process” in those countries was up to them, Shevardnadze told Baker.⁷⁷

Despite these momentous changes and hints of more to come, consensus opinion among experts in and out of governments in East and West was that neither the GDR nor the Soviet Union could afford my fundamental change in their “principal stance” toward the German Question. While Washington and Bonn welcomed the pronouncements ostensibly undermining the Brezhnev Doctrine, Gorbachev’s rhetoric had not been put to a practical test, and some skeptics wondered whether the GDR might be exempt from such proclamations. The end of the Wall, so the mainstream argument, would shatter the modicum of domestic legitimacy garnered painfully by the GDR regime over the past 40 years and immediately question communist rule. The GDR was the keystone of the Warsaw Pact, the chief economic and strategic partner of the Soviet Union. Its disruption, it was argued, would accelerate the destabilizing elements already discernible in the East and ultimately deal a shattering blow to the Soviet system itself—certainly an unacceptable consequence even for Gorbachev. Thus, evidence of Soviet and East German “new thinking” in various areas of international affairs, particularly security relations, had not yet extended to the core issues at the heart of the German Question, nor, did it seem to most analysts at the time, was there much prospect of this occurring in the foreseeable future. U.S. views were conveyed through an editorial in the *Washington Post*:

If there is anything that could incite Soviet military intervention, it would be instability in East Germany. That’s why there is a tacit but powerful agreement among Western politicians and governments, including the West Germans, that for the present East Germany’s status needs to remain as it is.⁷⁸

This “tacit agreement” actually extended much further, embracing most of the east German opposition and the Moscow reformists as well. All had pinned their hopes on a gradual, stable East German evolution toward “improvable socialism.” Georgy Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev’s chief advisor on Eastern Europe, said that the Poles and Hungarian could “do what they want,” but that the GDR was “a special case,” although not one that Gorbachev would have to worry about anytime soon.

Most East German dissidents agreed. "The Wall seemed stable," recalled Friedrich Schorlemmer. That summer, at a German-German forum on the "European House," he said, "I don't believe it appropriate to erect a pan-German room in this house, but rather two rooms separated by a sliding door. I see our chance in speaking with one voice while remaining in two states."⁷⁹

There was also no indication that any leading West German politician believed that the division of Germany could soon be ended. While Kohl and the CDU remained committed to reunification as a declaratory principle, it was not part of operational policy.⁸⁰

Skeptics could also point to the lack of a reformist faction within the upper echelons of the SED. Some leadership changes were thought possible at the next party conference, which had been brought forward from 1991 to May 1990, but when Honecker finally did depart the scene, the likelihood seemed great that he would be replaced by an East German Chernenko, not an East German Gorbachev.

Finally, most Western leaders harbored deep doubts whether Gorbachev would remain in power. The CIA reported in May 1989 that the Soviet situation was so volatile that Gorbachev had only a 50% chance of surviving the next few years unless he stepped back from his reform policies. Given his tenuous situation it was practically inconceivable that he would be prepared to sacrifice East Germany. According to this broad consensus, any overt moves by the West toward reunification, or any attempt by the East to impose a "Chinese solution" on domestic unrest would represent an intolerable exacerbation of tensions on the most sensitive border in the world.

"Almost everyone agrees to that prudent proposition," the *Washington Post* commented, "except, of course, the people who live in east Germany." The challenge was to find ways to accommodate "these entirely legitimate aspirations of the East Germans without bringing in the Soviet tanks."

The Make-Or-Break Point for the Brezhnev Doctrine

By August the situation in the GDR was transformed dramatically by a series of synergistic developments. Honecker had collapsed at the

Warsaw Pact Summit in July, underwent gall bladder surgery and was not to return in any significant way until September. With the advent of summer vacation, the trickle of East Germans who had been escaping via Hungary's open border turned into a gushing stream. Hundreds of would-be emigrants jammed West German missions in Budapest, Warsaw and Prague, forcing them to close their doors. East German dissenters were emboldened to emerge from the shelter of the Church; there was a sudden proliferation of independent opposition groups throughout the GDR.

These developments were being monitored carefully in Moscow. Valentin Falin told Soviet political leaders in mid-August that the SED leadership itself was to blame for the growing exodus, and that it was "powerless and perplexed" as its citizens continued to leave. He warned that popular dissatisfaction "will, in a relatively short time—by spring of next year at the very latest—lead to mass demonstrations which would be very difficult to control."⁸¹

The emergence of a *Solidarność*-led government in Poland in late August was the make-or-break point for the Brezhnev Doctrine, the real-life challenge that would test Gorbachev's rhetoric of reform. Hard-line communist resistance still could have prevented the formation of a non-communist government.

Eduard Shevardnadze was vacationing on the Black Sea. His aide, Sergei Tarasenko, had received an urgent early morning call from Moscow and relayed the message to the foreign minister, who was sunning himself on the beach. Romania's Ceausescu was demanding decisive military action against *Solidarność*, and was offering to host an emergency Warsaw Pact meeting to approve the intervention. "Others," he said, shared his view. For the next few hours Shevardnadze and his close aides sat on the beach and discussed the situation. There would be no intervention, Shevardnadze declared. The Polish predicament could not be resolved by military force. But "from now on" Moscow would have to accept the consequence of losing eastern Europe.⁸²

Ceausescu's demands were rebuffed. On August 22 Gorbachev spent 40 decisive minutes on the telephone urging Polish Communist Party first secretary Mieczysław Rakowski to convince his comrades to join the *Solidarność*-led government in the interest of national unity.⁸³

The emergence of a non-communist government in Poland further accentuated the GDR regime's problems. Whereas the communist Polish government had been circumspect in its commentary on the internal situation in the GDR, members of the new government headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki openly urged the GDR to undertake reforms. Mazowiecki and Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski remained relatively cautious in their approach toward the issue of German unification, but other leading members of *Solidarność*, such as Bronislaw Geremek, Adam Michnik and Lech Wałęsa, took a much more positive attitude, arguing that it would be hard to deny the Germans the very right of self-determination that *Solidarność* had been fighting for in Poland. By mid-October Wałęsa was calling the division of Germany "illogical" and stated that it could be overcome through the reunification of Europe.⁸⁴

Statements such as these galvanized the east German opposition and sent a shudder of anticipation through the populace. As a 35-year-old worker exclaimed, "Think of *Solidarność*. Back then we never would have thought that they would accomplish anything. Now they're sitting in the government. Watch out, now it's going to happen here."⁸⁵

"The Most Difficult Decision of My Life"

The next dramatic development came when Hungarian Prime Minister Nemeth and Foreign Minister Gyula Horn, after meeting secretly in late August with Kohl and Genscher in Bonn, decided that on September 10 they would break Hungary's treaty with the GDR, which pledged that Hungary would return East Germans attempting to escape to the GDR, and open permanently its western border to the East Germans. "It was the most difficult decision of my life," Horn recalled.⁸⁶ He flew to East Berlin on August 31 to deliver the news. GDR Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer stammered that Horn was black-mailing the GDR and accused him of "treason." Horn called Fischer a "blockhead" and flew back to Budapest.⁸⁷

The Hungarian decision was doubly significant due to the lack of Soviet reaction. Before making his fateful decision, Horn had asked his deputy minister, László Kovács, to sound out the Soviet reaction should Hungary let the East Germans go. "We didn't specify, but we hinted,"

said Kovács. “The Soviets did not object.”⁸⁸ Horn in fact waited to inform the USSR until the day before the action was taken. The GDR, of course, had informed the Soviets earlier. But the Soviets swung behind the Hungarian decision. Furious GDR attempts to call an emergency Warsaw Pact meeting fell apart due to Soviet reluctance.⁸⁹

The GDR regime’s cataleptic response to these developments was not only due to intransigence or old age. It also reflected a lack of viable options. Otto Reinhold, one of the SED’s chief theorists, defined the true dilemma succinctly:

The key question...is what one might call the socialist identity of the GDR. In this question it is quite obvious that there is a fundamental difference between the GDR and other socialist countries. They all had already existed as states with capitalist or half-feudal orders before their socialist transformation. Their statehood was therefore not primarily dependent on the societal order. This is not so for the GDR. It is only conceivable as an antifascist, as a socialist state, as a socialist alternative to the FRG. What right to exist could a capitalist GDR have next to a capitalist FRG? None, of course.⁹⁰

According to this definition of East German identity, which was shared by many regime leaders, any true reforms, however well intentioned, would mean the beginning of the end of the GDR. Even in its 40th year of existence, the GDR continued to draw its identity from the confrontation with the political, economic and social system of the FRG. This had always been fragile. In the wake of the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary it had become even more so. The Politburo’s inflexibility could thus not be attributed solely to incompetence or senility: it went to the heart of the GDR’s very existence as a state. “Socialism in the colors of the GDR,” said Reinhold, was “an essential expression of our national identity.”⁹¹

By September 22 over 120 east Germans had sought refuge on the grounds of the FRG Embassy in Warsaw and over 900 had done so in Prague. Unsanitary conditions forced the Embassy in Warsaw to close. The non-communist government in Warsaw announced that East Germans would not be forced to return to the GDR. The hard-line communist government in Prague, in contrast, closed its border with Hungary to east Germans attempting to escape.

Still in convalescent care, Honecker reasserted command from his sickbed. He authorized negotiations with Bonn to resolve the situation in the FRG embassies in Warsaw and Prague. Genscher also pressed Shevardnadze, who showed some understanding for the situation and agreed to press East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer and Czech Foreign Minister Jaromir Johanes for a “quick solution” for the embassy refugees. In the end, East Berlin agreed to let the refugees head west in special trains on the condition that they pass through the GDR, from which they would be formally “expelled” for disloyalty—an empty face-saving gesture.⁹²

The solution to the refugee problem in Warsaw and Prague had also been preceded by contacts between Kohl and Gorbachev. Gorbachev let the East Germans know that he would not go to East Berlin to attend ceremonies marking the 40th anniversary of the GDR, which were to take place little more than one week away, if there were the danger of his being implicated in the refugee drama. He had already had that experience during his June visit to China, which had been eclipsed by pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and their brutal suppression soon thereafter. Gorbachev told his aides that he was “disgusted” with Honecker’s “inept” handling of the refugee issue.⁹³

To Honecker’s horror, the refugee drama did not end. As soon as the refugees had left the embassies in Warsaw and Prague, thousands more arrived. Despite efforts by the Czech police to seal off the West German embassy grounds after the last refugees had left for the West, by the very next evening another 350 seeking to escape had arrived in Prague. In Warsaw another 200 arrived. The very next day, October 3, over 3000 refugees had again ensconced themselves on the embassy grounds in Prague. Hundreds more stormed the embassy grounds during the afternoon.

Honecker again agreed to allow all the refugees to leave yet at the same time slapped a visa requirement on GDR citizens seeking to travel to Czechoslovakia, the last country to which East German citizens could travel freely. In 1988 more than 4 million East Germans had vacationed in Czechoslovakia and several millions more crossed the border regularly on business. Although East German authorities called the

ban a “temporary measure,” it appeared to foreshadow a longer-term crackdown.

The Wall was now complete--to the East and the West. The country that called itself a democratic republic had finally become a prison for its people.

The situation had become dramatic. In a series of secret meetings in the fall of 1989, officials tasked with monitoring the GDR's economic health had come to a stunning conclusion. The regime's rosy public presentations of GDR economic strength belied the fact that export targets had not been met since 1982, and if the target was not met for the current fiscal year, the GDR would “become insolvent already in 1989.” In 1988 the GDR's entire national income increased by only 11 billion east marks, whereas the interest payments alone on the state's Western debt were DM 5 billion—the equivalent of 20 billion east marks.⁹⁴ Yet consumed by domestic political upheaval, neither Honecker nor his top lieutenants responded to these warnings.

“He Who Comes Too Late Will Be Punished By Life”

Buffeted by internal pressures, the Honecker regime was now to receive another twist of the screw from its patron power, the Soviet Union.

For Mikhail Gorbachev, the GDR had been transformed from the bastion to the ballast of socialism. Arriving for the GDR's 40th anniversary on October 7, Gorbachev was determined to give his East German hosts a clear message.

Honecker clearly was wary of the visit. On his motorcade route into the center of East Berlin, Gorbachev was greeted only by thin lines of selected welcomers waving plastic East German and Soviet flags that had been issued for the occasion. After attending a ceremony in memory of Soviet war dead and victims of the Nazis at Treptow Park, Gorbachev moved into a nearby crowd. “The Berliners welcomed Gorbachev as a savior,” Shevardnadze later remarked. He was quickly surrounded by cries of “Gorbi! Gorbi” and “We are staying here!”

“Don't panic. Don't get depressed,” he replied reassuringly. “We'll go on together, fighting for socialism. Be patient.” Throughout his visit

Gorbachev remained a model of public diplomacy and outward courtesy. Asked whether he thought the situation in the GDR was dangerous, he replied, "Alongside our problems in the Soviet Union, there is no comparison. *Perestroika* would not have begun if it had been suggested to us from outside." And then in a carefully worded message he was to repeat throughout his visit, he proclaimed, "I think that dangers exist only for those who don't grasp the situation, those who don't react to life. We know our German friends have the ability to learn from life, to make changes." In response to questions by Western reporters, he said "whoever picks up the impulses generated by society and shapes his policies accordingly should have no fear of difficulties."⁹⁵

Honecker and Gorbachev then proceeded to East Berlin's Palace of the Republic, where they were scheduled to give major speeches marking the 40th anniversary. Each speech was the subject of intense speculation. Would Honecker now use the occasion, with Gorbachev at his side, to signal that reforms would be undertaken, that the message of the streets and from Moscow, Budapest and Warsaw had been heard? The answer was a resounding *Nein*. In a speech full of empty slogans and self-congratulatory phrases, Honecker addressed none of the serious challenges facing his regime. As thousands streamed out of the country and as massive demonstrations and violent altercations erupted outside the Palace of the Republic, Honecker spoke of a "trusting discussion in the cities and the countryside."⁹⁶

Honecker's dismal performance outraged the East German population as well as members of the party itself. It was another example that the GDR had been transformed, in Schabowski's words, "from the bastion of Marxism-Stalinism to the bastion of Marxism-Senilism."⁹⁷ Modrow added bitterly that "there was never a more unrealistic and hypocritical speech in the GDR as Honecker's address."⁹⁸ The speech served to convince other SED senior leaders that Honecker had completely lost touch with reality and that changes at the top were imperative if an explosion was to be avoided.⁹⁹

Gorbachev then stepped to the podium. In clear, measured tones, he stressed the challenges and necessities of reforms throughout the socialist world. He referred directly to Ronald Reagan's appeal two years earlier to tear down the Berlin Wall without explicitly rejecting it. He

stressed the sovereignty of the GDR, but by so doing sought to distance himself from the Wall:

One has even heard the call: Let the USSR remove the Berlin Wall! Then we will at last believe in its peaceful intentions...our Western partners must proceed on the understanding that matters affecting the GDR are decided not in Moscow, but in Berlin.

Gorbachev's statement not only underscored East German sovereignty, it made the point that the rules of the game had changed: the East Germans were on their own and could not count on the Soviets to bail them out. Gorbachev had pulled the plug on the East German leadership, leaving them little choice but to embark on a reform course. Standing only a few blocks from the Wall, Gorbachev promised that as East-West rapprochement progressed, "all walls of enmity, estrangement, and distrust between Europeans will fall." The speech was a careful yet clear rebuke of the Honecker regime and an appeal for reforms in the GDR.¹⁰⁰

Gorbachev repeated his message more bluntly the next morning in a tense one-on-one talk with Honecker in Niederschönhausen Palace.¹⁰¹ This was followed by a meeting with the Politburo in which Gorbachev again pressed for change. He appealed both to the gerontocratic leadership's incessant hunger for legitimacy as well as their deeply rooted feelings of superiority vis-a-vis their Eastern allies. "The German Democratic Republic is our primary partner and ally," Gorbachev proclaimed. It was precisely East Germany's economic success, he argued, that would "permit you to restructure more easily." He then pressed home the point:

I can assure you it is not an easy thing to pass a resolution regarding political changes...Courageous times await you, courageous resolutions are required...a good deal of sausage and bread is not everything. People then demand a new atmosphere, more oxygen, a new breath, particularly for the socialist order...A human being needs the appropriate material conditions, but at the same time he needs the corresponding intellectual atmosphere in society. I believe it is very important not to miss the moment and to pass up any chance...If we remain behind, life will punish us immediately. Our experiences and the experiences of Poland and Hungary have convinced us: if the Party does not react to life, it is condemned.

In his response, Honecker directly rebuked Gorbachev's admonition for change, stubbornly reiterating yet again his time-worn litany of self-congratulatory praises. He even went so far as to cite Friedrich Engels' remarks at the grave of Karl Marx, "where," according to Honecker, "he is known to have said that man first needs something to eat, to clothe himself, and to live. As he said this he of course did not underestimate the intellectual problems that we have to solve even today." The SED, concluded Honecker, had already chosen the correct answer: "to continue the policy of continuity and renewal...we are the party of innovators."¹⁰²

After Honecker was finished, he looked around the room. Everyone was silent. Gorbachev quietly looked up and down the table. Finally, he turned to one of his Soviet colleagues, uttering nothing more than an incredulous "Tsss!" and, with a final, piercing glance into the lifeless faces of the Politburo, abruptly stood up and marched out of the room.¹⁰³

That night, as the Leipzig Thomas Church's Men's Choir sang Bach's cantate *Frieden sei im Lande* for the assembled dignitaries in East Berlin's Palace of the Republic, 3,000 people on the other side of the Spree river chanted "We are the people!" and "Gorbi, help!" Reality and façade stood face to face. The regime wanted to celebrate 40 years of the GDR; the people want to celebrate 200 years of the storming of the Bastille. As the rulers sought to demonstrate the achievements of socialism in East Berlin, the ruled preferred to demonstrate for "Democracy, now or never!" in Berlin, Leipzig, Plauen, Jena, Potsdam, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Magdeburg, Ilmenau, Arnstadt, and other cities in the largest demonstrations to that point since 1953.

As the Stasi beat down the demonstrators and the melee on the streets turned ugly, Gorbachev left the official festivities directly for the airport. Back in Moscow, he declared on Soviet television that he had found many "fiery supporters of *perestroika*" in the GDR. To underscore Gorbachev's anger and impatience, Gennady Gerasimov repeated Gorbachev's phrase that "he who comes too late will be punished by life."¹⁰⁴

Despite the regime's escalating use of force, over the next two days protesters chanting "Gorbi, Gorbi" and "Democracy, now or never" demonstrated across the GDR. Tensions peaked on October 9 in

Leipzig. Faced with tens of thousands of demonstrators, in the end the regime backed down from its threatened use of force. Various Soviet sources have stated that the Kremlin had issued a directive to General Snetkov, Commander of the Western Group of Soviet Forces, not to intervene in such events under any circumstances. Military units were to remain in their garrisons and not engage in any military exercises; military personnel and their families were not to leave their military installations—a clear sign that the renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine was real, not rhetorical.¹⁰⁵

The weight in the Politburo had clearly shifted away from Honecker's hard line. On October 13 the National Defense Council issued Secret Order 9/89, which explicitly prohibited the use of deadly force against the demonstrators.¹⁰⁶ The same day, all the demonstrators who had been arrested were released. The regime also agreed that the approximately 1,000 refugees in the West German embassy in Warsaw would be allowed to leave for the West, without the previous stipulation that they travel over GDR territory.¹⁰⁷

On October 17 Honecker was deposed and replaced by Egon Krenz, who immediately announced prospects for more liberalized travel regulations, more open media and a more self-critical discussion of domestic problems with broader elements of society. Krenz quickly demonstrated, however, that he was less reformer than renovator—certainly not the Mikhail Gorbachev of East Germany. He continued to seek to control the pace of change while maintaining the leading role of the party and isolating democratic opposition groups. Krenz's glimmers of *glasnost* reflected no overarching plan for a viable socialist GDR; they simply reflected his attempt to buy time and find alternative channels of control. True pluralistic reforms were equated in his mind with the end of the GDR as a separate country; a reformed GDR would have no inner rationale to distinguish itself from West Germany.

Krenz's promises of reform, however, did little to mollify popular fury. Throughout the rest of October and early November hundreds of thousands of people from across the GDR marched peacefully to demand democracy and free elections, ending the power monopoly of the communist party, legalizing independent political groups, tearing down the Berlin Wall, and committing to the rule of law and freedom of the press. Notably, there were no calls for reunification.¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile, on October 23, Shevardnadze again declared that the Soviet Union recognized freedom of choice for all countries, including those in the Warsaw Pact. Two days later, Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov declared that the Brezhnev Doctrine had been exchanged for a new and far more humorous doctrine. "You know the Frank Sinatra song 'My Way'?" he asked stunned reporters. "Hungary and Poland are doing it their way. We now have the Sinatra Doctrine."¹⁰⁹

By mid-October, Krenz's economic advisers now presented him with truly devastating news: the GDR was essentially bankrupt. "Stopping the debt alone," they concluded, "would require a reduction in living standards in 1990 of 25 to 30 percent and would make the GDR ungovernable." The only way out, they contended, was "fundamental change" toward a "socialist planned economy oriented to market conditions," coupled with a grand German-German bargain in which Bonn would provide a DM 3 billion credit in exchange for a pledge by East Berlin that "the conditions could be created still in this century to render the nature of the border between the two German states, as it exists today, superfluous."¹¹⁰ GDR emissaries held confidential discussions with West German officials in Bonn to see what the West Germans might be prepared to give the East German regime in exchange for greater political liberties in the GDR and "de facto unlimited travel between the two German states." On October 26 Krenz pitched the deal to Helmut Kohl personally in a phone call. Kohl was noncommittal; West German officials felt that Krenz's negotiating position was weakening by the day.¹¹¹

On November 1 Krenz flew to Moscow to consult with Gorbachev. The Soviet leader had little sympathy for the GDR's problems. Honecker had believed himself to be "the number one in socialism, even in the world," Gorbachev exclaimed. "He no longer saw what was really happening." Gorbachev also harbored deep doubts that Krenz would be able to pull the GDR out of chaos. His advisors viewed Krenz as a "transitional solution," and preferred Hans Modrow or even Markus Wolf, the long-time head of the GDR's intelligence services.¹¹²

Krenz knew of Gorbachev's doubts, yet he was reluctant to embrace the Soviet leader's admonition to "get rid of any unnecessary problems that hinder you," perhaps because he understood quite well what

the full consequences would be. The party was prepared “to look the truth in the eye,” Krenz said unconvincingly. He was afraid that if the full truth about the desolate economic situation was revealed, “it could unleash a shock with devastating consequences.”¹¹³ Gorbachev himself was unnerved by Krenz’s depiction of the GDR’s economic woes, particularly since the GDR was Moscow’s largest trading partner, and Gorbachev was consumed by the Soviet Union’s own economic challenges.

The two discussed East Berlin’s relations with Bonn. Krenz indicated that he was considering further opening of travel opportunities for GDR citizens, but only if they had a passport, a visa, and could demonstrate they could pay for their travel. Gorbachev responded that extensive contacts between the people in both German states could not be prevented, one simply had to be able to control and channel them.¹¹⁴

This was precisely the goal behind a new travel regulation that the GDR authorities were drafting.¹¹⁵ The regime touted it as a comprehensive revision; the reality was that those seeking to travel would still need to apply for permission, they would still need a passport (which most citizens did not have), and the government could still deny applications for a range of opaque reasons.

An initial version of the draft law was released on November 6. The public denunciation was thunderous. The legal committee of the East German parliament, normally a rubber-stamp for party decisions, took the unusual step of rejecting the law. Bewildered, the regime attempted to focus on the most urgent question: that of emigration.

On November 7 GDR Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer met in East Berlin with Soviet Ambassador Vyacheslav Kochemasov and his deputy Igor Maximychev, informing them that the regime was considering a new exit, or hole, on the German-German border (not in Berlin, which was subject to Four-Power control) to facilitate emigration by East Germans to West Germany without them having to go through Czechoslovakia. Fischer asked for Soviet “opinion” on the plan.

The Soviet embassy concluded that what it called the “hole variant” was simply a further example of Krenz’s weakness and confusion. Kochemasov reached Shevardnadze, who responded that if Krenz thought such a solution was possible, Moscow would probably not reg-

ister objections. He told Kochemasov, however, that the Foreign Ministry in Moscow should still review the idea—after the major Soviet holidays of November 7 and 8—before giving Krenz an official reply.¹¹⁶

The same day, East German emissary Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski met with officials in Bonn in an attempt to secure more than 10 billion DM in exchange for a vague promise to open the Wall.¹¹⁷ West German officials demurred. Kohl had a different bargain in mind. On November 8, he announced to the West German Bundestag that if the GDR government wanted Bonn's support, it would have to agree to free elections.

As of the morning of November 9, Krenz had still not heard back from Moscow. Meanwhile, four mid-level officials from the GDR Interior Ministry and the Ministry for State Security formulated yet another draft travel law, this time addressing not only permanent emigration but also temporary travel, and not only between the GDR and the FRG, but also, fatefully to "Berlin (West)." This addition, which was initiated without any consultation with the Soviet embassy or with Moscow, clearly circumvented Soviet and Four-Power authority over all of Berlin, a prerogative the Soviets guarded jealously. While the draft law still required would-be travelers to apply and receive permission to leave, it also stated that the new regulations would come into effect "right away." A press release announcing the next draft law was embargoed for November 10 at 4:00 am.

Later that day, unaware of the new draft law, the wording of which rendered the "hole variant" obsolete, and having been unable to reach Shevardnadze, Kochemasov was able to find Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Aboimov, who told him to inform the East Berlin Politburo to proceed with the "hole variant." Armed with the group of four's text, which he did not read thoroughly enough to understand its significance, and with what he thought was Moscow's approval of the decision represented by the text, even though Soviet approval was for the now-superseded "hole variant," Krenz pushed the document through the Politburo and the central committee that afternoon. He then told Politburo member Günter Schabowski to read the press release at his evening press conference. Schabowski also simply glanced over the text without comprehending its true meaning, fumbling through the text at the press conference. Bewildered journalists couldn't believe what they

heard. When would this new regulation take effect? Schabowski again rummaged through his papers and then gave his historic reply: “As far as I am aware it goes into effect right away, without delay.”¹¹⁸ The run on the Wall had begun.

The Berlin Wall was breached suddenly and peacefully late in the night of November 9 without Soviet knowledge, participation or intervention. The Soviet embassy was furious that the travel law included Berlin, which treaded on Soviet authority for the city, yet Soviet diplomats remained passive observers as thousands poured across the open Wall from East to West Berlin.¹¹⁹ The Soviet Ambassador slept through the night; the deputy ambassador decided against informing Moscow. Krenz waited until the morning of November 10 to inform Gorbachev of the events. He claimed that things were under control, and that only East Germans who had passports and who had applied for and received a visa were being let out, even though masses of people without documents had gone back and forth across the now-open barrier at will.¹²⁰

Writing in his diary, Gorbachev confidante Anatoly Chernyaev captured the moment. When “the Berlin Wall fell,” he wrote, “a whole era of the socialist system ended.” It meant “the end of Yalta, the finale for the Stalinist legacy,” and the “overcoming of Hitler’s Germany.”¹²¹

Into the Vacuum Steps Helmut Kohl

“My God, someone has put us in a real mess!” Krenz complained on November 10, only hours after the first East Berliners had crossed over to West Berlin.¹²² As the Wall crumbled, so too did the East German communist party’s chances to revitalize itself. The regime had botched one of the greatest opportunities imaginable to demonstrate that it was committed to real reforms, and had forfeited its chance at a grand bargain with Bonn, as Krenz’s economic advisers had urged. The party was in free fall.

On November 13 Hans Modrow—touted as the Gorbachev of the GDR—was pulled out of provincial exile in Dresden, named successor to Willi Stoph as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and tasked with building a new government. Modrow’s subsequent actions belied his reformist rhetoric, however. His half-hearted attempts at re-

form were doomed from the beginning. Something fundamental had occurred. The party had proven unable to convince the east German people not only that the government seriously intended to implement reforms, but that an East German *raison d'être* still remained. Honecker's carefully cultivated image of the GDR as the one country where socialism had actually produced exploded in a matter of days amidst a string of revelations detailing the extent of the country's insolvent financial situation, repressed inflation, price distortions, uncompetitive industries, scarce consumer goods and widespread environmental degradation. Ordinary east Germans who had previously half-believed government propaganda about socialist economic success were given a severe jolt. The quickly deteriorating situation further robbed many of the hope that they could improve their lives under communism or "improvable socialism," accelerating demands for unification and fueling the continued exodus abroad, as 2,000 people a day fled the country.¹²³

East German opposition groups were also caught flat-footed by the opening of the Wall. Having pushed the people into the streets, the East German opposition now began to follow rather than lead the spontaneous, angry revolt from below.

With the SED and the opposition in disarray, the mood quickly changed among the Monday marchers on East German streets. On Monday, November 13 a single placard calling for "Reunification!" was lost among the sea of slogans in Leipzig demanding "Free elections now!" and a variety of other political reforms.¹²⁴ Yet only one week later a new message rang out in the political void. In deafening chorus hundreds of thousands chanted "Germany united Fatherland," a phrase from the GDR anthem that had been banned since 1974. The banner cry of the revolution, "We are the people," was suddenly transformed into "We are one people!" The East German people had jumped on the roller coaster of unification.

West German political leaders, alarmed by the intensity of East German anger, were increasingly concerned that the peaceful revolution could turn violent. Politicians urged caution, but the demand for unification threatened to drown out all other voices.

Beyond stuttering steps toward intensified collaboration on practical issues, however, Bonn had no plan, secret or otherwise, to cope with the situation that West German politicians always said they wanted but

in reality had not thought about seriously for years: the unification of Germany. In part this was because eager pursuit of such a goal would have raised the suspicions of Germany's neighbors in the East as well as in the West, and also because there seemed to be no realistic prospect of even visible progress toward that end. As a result, West German politicians made ritual proclamations about unity while assuring the world that the Federal Republic, unlike the Germanys of the past, would never go it alone or even do much to bring about unification. Policymakers concentrated on small steps to alleviate the lot of their oppressed countrymen.¹²⁵

Now all this changed. Into the vacuum stepped Helmut Kohl, whose 10-point plan outlined a path to unification that forever changed the context of the East German revolution.

While Kohl was convinced that German-German reassociation was now inevitable, he was anxious that the number of East Germans deserting the GDR for the West might swell to millions, incapacitating the East and sowing chaos and resentment in the West. He was worried that the so far heroically disciplined East German marchers on the streets might get carried away by frustration, provoke the Soviet Union, and spark a dangerous and unpredictable confrontation. He was also concerned that the Bush-Gorbachev summit meeting at Malta might take up the German Question without any Germans at the table. He thus sought an approach that would establish himself as the navigator of German unity by channeling the revolutionary energies in the East in such a way that the historic opportunity that had now appeared would not be squandered by popular chaos or fears, and preempting any possible moves by the Four Powers that might impinge on German interests.¹²⁶

The opportunity came at the end of November. In this atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty in the face of growing unrest, Kohl's national security advisor, Horst Teltschik, met on November 21 with Nikolai Portugalov, a German expert in charge of the Soviet Central Committee's department responsible for international relations. Krenz would not survive the party congress in December, Portugalov ventured, and would be replaced by Hans Modrow. He handed Teltschik a paper in which the Soviets aligned themselves with the changes in the GDR and, in a bit of revisionist analysis, declared that ever since the "dawn of

perestroika” they knew the situation in the GDR would have to develop in this way. At the same time, they expressed their concern about the galloping dynamic in German-German relations.¹²⁷

“On the German question we are considering all possibilities, even quasi-unthinkable alternatives,” Portugalov told Teltschik. He could even imagine the Soviet Union giving a “green light” to a “German confederation.” Teltschik was, in his words, “electrified.” He immediately suggested to Kohl that a speech outlining realistic and workable step-by-step plan for unification be prepared for the Chancellor to give during the Bundestag’s budget debate the following week. If the Chancellor did not present such a plan soon, Teltschik argued, rival parties would beat him to the punch. Kohl quickly agreed.

To secure the optimal surprise effect, the initiative was kept under wraps. During the weekend of November 24 and 25 an internal working group developed a ten-point plan charting a course via confederal mechanisms between the two German toward an eventual German federation embedded in European structures.¹²⁸

Then, without warning to most of his party compatriots, his coalition partners, his allies in the West, or his neighbors in the East, Kohl stepped to the podium of the Bundestag on November 28 and outlined a ten-point plan for German-German cooperation based on an “ever closer network of agreements in all areas and on all levels.” He was cautious not to give any timetables, and emphasized that such a process would have to proceed in harmony with broader European events. “The development of inter-German relations remains embedded in the pan-European process and in East-West relations,” he declared. “The future architecture of Germany must fit in with the future all-European architecture.”¹²⁹

Nonetheless, the speech awaked hopes by some, and concerns by others, that German unity was now a real possibility. Despite its many caveats, the speech surprised and alarmed Germany’s neighbors. It also omitted any reference to German borders. The joy with which non-Germans viewed East German advances was tempered with concern about the pace of change and the uncertain direction in which it was heading. Kohl’s speech exposed this raw nerve.

The harshest reaction to the galloping pace of German developments came from Moscow. The initial Soviet reaction to the opening of the Wall was muted. Gorbachev instructed the Soviet ambassador to the GDR, Kochemasov, not to interfere and told the GDR leadership to ensure a “peaceful transition”—a signal that there would be no repeat of the events of June 17, 1953 or the bloody suppression in Tiananmen Square.¹³⁰ Soviet spokesman Gennady Gerasimov repeated his “Frank Sinatra Doctrine” and hinted that the Soviet Union would accept a non-communist government in the GDR as long as the GDR remained a member of the Warsaw Pact, as had non-communist Poland. He dismissed the question of unification as “groundless gossip” and warned against “recarving the boundaries of postwar Europe.” Soviet officials warned that Moscow would not tolerate the demise of its “strategic ally.”¹³¹

Gorbachev reformers were concerned that the breakneck pace of change in Germany could overwhelm efforts by GDR authorities to retain political control of the situation. They feared that Soviet forces could be drawn into the turmoil and that Gorbachev’s position at home could be undermined. Just as Kohl was about to speak to a mass assembly in Berlin on November 10, the Soviet ambassador in Bonn, Kvitzinsky, phoned Kohl’s adviser Teltshik to relay a message from Gorbachev, who called on the Chancellor to ensure that “chaos” not be allowed to erupt at such a delicate time.¹³² Kohl and Gorbachev spoke by phone the next day. Change in Eastern Europe was unfolding much faster than had been expected, said Gorbachev. Each country must proceed at its own pace; the GDR would require time to implement its reforms. There was no threat or warning, only the request to let prudence prevail.¹³³ While Gorbachev’s call reassured Kohl that Moscow would not interfere in the internal developments in the GDR, it also underscored the Kremlin’s concern that events could spin out of control. Shevardnadze, who had been receiving reports warning that the situation in Berlin was quite dangerous, asked Genscher directly about the situation by phone. Genscher replied that while there was certainly a crush of people visiting the West, the situation was peaceful and under control.¹³⁴

Although the Kremlin had been engaged in “new thinking” on Germany’s future, it was not yet prepared for a historic reversal of Germany’s division. In Gorbachev’s view, long-overdue reforms in the GDR

were intended to save East Germany, not undermine it; the opening of the Wall, if managed properly, would stabilize German division, not end it. But ordinary East Germans, Poles, Czechs and Hungarians were teaching Gorbachev a lesson he would eventually be compelled to learn at home as well—that the forces of democracy, once released, could escape the party's guiding hand and take off down avenues of their own choosing. The breathtaking collapse of the GDR was particularly shocking. Despite many differences, what united Gorbachev, the Krenz/Modrow leadership and most of the East German opposition was their overestimation of the capacity of "improvable socialism" to sustain the second German state. Their earlier notions of reform were all predicated on change within socialism. Events forced them to realize that freedom of choice could also mean the freedom to reject socialism.¹³⁵

Nonetheless, in the weeks following the opening of the Wall, the internal battle in Moscow raged on. On November 16 the Krenz regime received a written set of recommendations from Moscow as to how to proceed following the fall of the Wall. The so-called "non-paper" praised the fall of the Wall as a "bold and significant action" that demonstrated that the party leadership not only understood the situation but was committed to overcome the growing alienation between the populace and the government. It recommended that Krenz take the high road and characterize the opening of the Wall as a humanitarian decision grounded in respect for human rights. At the same time, the document reiterated the standard Soviet position: "Any attempts to exploit the situation to try to force the reunification of Germany or to revise the territorial order in Europe will unquestionably be doomed to fail." A precondition for closer cooperation with West was "Unconditional recognition of the existence of two German states as a factor of stability in Europe." It warned that "attempts to put the unification of Germany on the current political agenda and to negate the existence of the sovereign socialist state GDR not only affect the interests of the citizens of both German states but also the extremely sensitive security interests of the entire European continent." It affirmed that the GDR could expect continued Soviet support for this position.¹³⁶

The non-paper, which exemplified both a traditional Soviet view of its interests regarding Germany as well as its foreign policy dilemma—as Ambassador Kochemasov told West Berlin Governing Mayor

Walter Momper, Moscow did not want to “occupy” the GDR “a second time”—was one of the last examples of the classical mechanisms through which the Soviet leadership sought to influence the East German communist party. But it also revealed how far behind the political curve Moscow was. The pace of events in eastern Germany was being set on the streets, and the world was racing to catch up.

Another example that Gorbachev had yet to embrace any change in position regarding the two German states came in a message from him to Egon Krenz on November 24. In that message, which was intended to foreshadow his discussions with U.S. President Bush in Malta, Gorbachev indicated that he was ready to move ahead with significant arms reductions, but reiterated the standard Soviet position that such efforts would only be possible if “the foundations of European stability are maintained and strengthened,” that “existing borders” could not be questioned, and no “territorial claims” could be allowed, because those were the causes of the two world wars. “Peace in Europe,” he wrote, “will last as long as this Pandora’s box remains closed.” He then went on to state that the “existence and development of the GDR was and is an extremely important underpinning for the European equilibrium, for peace and international stability.”¹³⁷

Only two weeks after the opening of the Wall, key Soviet reformers had already given a conditional yes to unification. They argued that the Soviet Union was not in a position to prevent it and could actually use the unification process to harness German energies to propel Soviet reforms. Soviet officials began to call for the transformation rather than the dissolution of the blocs. They started to view the German Question as the lever by which they could pry open the rigid bloc structures toward pan-European security arrangements based on the CSCE.¹³⁸

But there were reservations. Kohl’s 10-point plan convinced many in Moscow that Bonn was steering East German developments in a nationalist direction and proscribing the nature and pace of reform. They were genuinely worried about a revival of extreme right-wing activities in Germany and about German attitudes toward the Polish border. Most importantly from their point of view, loose German talk about quick unification would play into the hands of the conservative Soviet opposition. For the dogmatists the GDR had become legend: a model for the viability and effectiveness of a disciplined socialist econ-

omy. The shock of Honecker's removal, the fall of the Wall, the arrest of Politburo members and the abolition of the security apparatus by their German communist comrades sparked a conservative revolt. Elements of the Soviet bureaucracy and the army launched a fierce attack on Gorbachev and Shevardnadze for having "lost" Eastern Europe.¹³⁹

The Soviets, deeply concerned over the course of events, called for a Four-Power meeting with the three Western allies—a not-so-subtle signal to Bonn that the still-occupying powers were not to be disregarded or neglected.¹⁴⁰

The Four React

The rapidity of change within East Germany not only caught the Germans by surprise, it stunned the Four Allied powers who retained rights and responsibilities for all of Germany resulting from their victory in World War II. More than 40 years later, the formal legal framework of the German Question had not changed since the wartime allies split over Germany's future between 1945 and 1947. Since Cold War animosities had overwhelmed efforts, envisioned at the 1945 Potsdam Conference, to conclude a peace treaty with Germany, the four powers still reserved rights and responsibilities for "Germany as a whole," its borders and a peace settlement, despite the creation in 1949 of two separate German states. These rights represented the legal basis of the Four Power role in the negotiations leading to unification.¹⁴¹

The initial assumptions in the White House was that unification, though perhaps inevitable, would—and should—unfold gradually.¹⁴² Scowcroft said that Krenz was "buying time for himself, and for the system." He saw no reason yet to presume that either Moscow or East Berlin would allow the east German people to "go their own way and take the state with them." He could not imagine that Gorbachev would allow the GDR to leave the Warsaw Pact. "The basic reality," he said, "East Germany as a Communist state within the Soviet sphere—hasn't changed and probably won't change."¹⁴³

American concerns appeared justified by the initial Soviet response to the opening of the Wall. Gorbachev sent a message to the other three leaders in which he endorsed the leadership change in the GDR but cautioned against any Western attempt to exploit the situation.

Events in Germany were moving at such breakneck speed, Gorbachev warned, that they could still become violent or spin out of control. He repeated his standard line that history had dictated there be two Germanys. He suggested urgent consultations and insisted on being part of any forthcoming decision-making process. "This guy's really upset, isn't he?" Bush said after reading Gorbachev's note. After consulting European allies, Bush sent back a vague reply, emphasizing the importance of German self-determination but not, at this point, accepting the Soviet demand for a role in decision-making.¹⁴⁴

Soviet attitudes toward unification were also colored by Moscow's changing relationship with Washington. The Malta summit began only four days after Kohl announced his 10-point plan. On the eve of the conclave, Gerasimov's lighthearted quip about a progression of historic events "from Yalta to Malta" contrasted sharply with Kohl's stern admonition that Malta could not be a "status quo summit." Kohl sought to assure both superpowers that the tremendous changes underway in the GDR would neither result in chaos nor in West German attempts to exploit the situation to seek unification "unilaterally." He asked Bush to support his policy when the President met with Gorbachev. Bush was careful to reassure those Europeans who were concerned that Moscow and Washington might cut a deal to decide Europe's fate that there would be "no Yalta at Malta."¹⁴⁵

Opening the summit in the midst of a raging storm on board the Soviet ship Maxim Gorky, Bush expressed support for *perestroika* and disclosed a variety of initiatives intended to aid Gorbachev, including faster track arms control proposals and U.S. willingness to begin negotiations on trade and investment treaties. In all, 19 initiatives were proposed, partially with the German situation in mind. The U.S. would not exploit Soviet weakness, Bush told Gorbachev. He also tried to persuade the Soviet leader that German unity within Western security structures would be in Soviet interests. Little progress was made on this point. "We have inherited two Germanys from history," Gorbachev replied. "History created this problem, and history will have to solve it." Adopting what he had been told was Bush's favorite word, he said, "Where the question of Germany is concerned, I have a *prudent* and cautious policy." Shevardnadze told Baker during their separate talks that there was "deep unease" within his government about German unification and West German ambitions to regain ter-

ritory lost at the end of the war, a point underscored in Gorbachev's private talk with Bush.¹⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the U.S. delegation believed that Gorbachev remained open to further developments on the German question.¹⁴⁷

The new era of Soviet-American relations being charted off of Malta had profound implications for developments in Germany. Whenever the superpowers clashed during the Cold War, the Germans found their margin for maneuver squeezed. A much more cooperative Soviet-American relationship, in turn, was not only likely to facilitate a more forthcoming Soviet approach to developments in Germany, it was likely to free German policy options vis-à-vis both Washington and Moscow.

The day after the NATO Summit Genscher flew to Moscow where he received a tongue-lashing from Gorbachev and Shevardnadze for events in Germany. Both rejected Kohl's 10-point plan as a "*Diktat*;" Gorbachev called it an attempt to "annex the GDR."¹⁴⁸

On December 4 Gorbachev briefed Warsaw Pact allies on his meeting with Bush. Gorbachev was critical of Kohl's proposal for a German-German confederation. Such a confederation would mean a common defense, common foreign policy, common armed forces. Would this confederation be in NATO or in the Warsaw Pact? Or did it mean a neutral Germany? He said that nothing good could come of Kohl's "immature" idea except more tensions and greater instability.¹⁴⁹

Soviet alarm over developments in the GDR reached such a peak that it placed some military forces in the GDR on a higher alert status out of concern for safety of Soviet bases and nuclear weapons depots.¹⁵⁰ The primary fear of the Soviet leadership was that German political leaders might take advantage of the street-driven chaos in East Germany to engineer unification as a *fait accompli* without any regard to Soviet interests. If such a situation were to develop, Gorbachev told Mitterrand in Kiev on December 6, "there would be a two-line report that a Marshall had taken over my position."¹⁵¹

This did not mean, however, that Gorbachev objected in principle to unification. Gorbachev had in fact already conducted a radical reassessment of the Soviet position, one much more favorable to a gradual and predictable process of deepening cooperation between the two Ger-

man states, perhaps even leading to unification, channeled if possible by the Four Powers and “synchronized” with broader efforts to transform East-West relations in Europe. Humiliation of Germany would be counterproductive, Gorbachev told Mitterrand. The Germans had a right to unity, he said. The time had come to develop a framework to channel the process. Soviet officials underscored this approach. Moscow was not trying to brake German unity, they insisted, but rather sought “a synchronization between the political relations among the German states and the parallel development of the renewal of the Helsinki system.”¹⁵² The key, they said, was the security arrangements for Germany. They pushed the new line that the German Question, if controlled, could unlock the entire Cold War alliance confrontation and lead to new cooperative pan-European structures based on the CSCE.

Behind the scenes Moscow’s hard-line German experts were waging an all-out bureaucratic war with the group of flexible thinkers who had been assembled by Shevardnadze, most of whom had far more experience dealing with the United States than with Germany, to determine Moscow’s approach to Germany. Long years of experience with the legalistic and arcane minutia of the German Question had conditioned the Foreign Ministry’s “Berlin Wall” to stick to an unyielding position regarding the evolution of the two German states and Four Power rights in Germany as a whole. The Americanists, on the other hand, were accustomed to more flexible opening positions that could be molded and shaped to that “one did not paint oneself into a corner.” The conflict of styles between the two groups exacerbated more significant conflicts over substance, and contributed to the erratic picture Moscow presented during most of the unification process.¹⁵³ Shevardnadze, who was beginning to believe that unification was inevitable, was concerned that if it came too soon, negative domestic reaction in the Soviet Union could mean the end of Gorbachev’s reforms.¹⁵⁴

Moscow’s fear of chaos in the GDR and its hope for controlled change prompted the Soviets to urge the UK, France and the United States to convene an urgent meeting of the Four Powers on December 8. It was the first such meeting since 1972, when they had signed the Quadripartite Agreement on the status of Berlin. Soviet officials told their Western counterparts that if the domestic situation in the GDR erupted into violence, they “would be obliged to use force.” Hard-line

elements in the military and the KGB were demanding that Moscow intervene militarily to prevent the collapse of the GDR.

The Four Power meeting turned out to be relatively short on substance, apart from an agreement to stress “the importance of stability.” Kochemasov welcomed the changes in the GDR yet added that one had to proceed from the realities of the postwar period, which included two independent sovereign German states. To question this would endanger stability in Europe for which the Four Powers were responsible. The Soviet Union was prepared to negotiate Four Power agreements to contribute to the normalization and improvement of the situation “in the affected area.” His proposal for regular meetings and the formation of working groups was rejected by the three Western ambassadors, who said that they were only prepared to speak about Berlin. U.S. Ambassador Vernon Walters stressed that even though the Four retained legal authority over Berlin as a result of agreements signed by the Allies after World War II, and that the rights of the Four in Berlin mandated that they be involved in the unification question, they could not simply dictate terms of settlement to the Germans. A further meeting was not agreed upon.¹⁵⁵

Uncertainty about Germany’s future security orientation was compounded by the lack of an acceptable framework in which to balance the German right to self-determination with the right of Germany’s neighbors to peace and security, all in a Europe in which the Cold War was rapidly dissolving. Britain, France and the Soviet Union initially preferred that the Four Powers discuss the future of Germany among themselves—and not, at first, with the Germans. The British and French proposed a meeting of the Four alone, to be followed by a conference of the six powers, i.e. Four Plus Two. The Soviets were more interested in Four Plus Zero. The Germans rejected both. “We don’t need four midwives” to give birth to unity, snapped Kohl upon hearing in early January that the Soviets had again approached the Americans to hold a Four Power meeting to discuss German issues. Eventually all came around to the U.S. proposal that the Germans had to be in on the negotiations as equal partners from the start. The idea quickly became known as “Two Plus Four.”¹⁵⁶

Debate on both the internal and external aspects of unity remained inconclusive until the furious pace of change on the ground in East

Germany forced the German Question to the forefront of the international agenda. On January 28, 1990, with an average now of 3,000 East Germans a day flocking to the West, Modrow announced that he was advancing the date of the GDR's first free elections to March 18, instead of May as originally planned, and would form an interim government that would include members of the opposition. A unified Germany now loomed as an imminent certainty.

The collapse of the GDR wrenched Moscow from its preoccupation with its own internal chaos. On January 26, 1990, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, meeting with their closest advisors, finally came to the conclusion that "the reunification of Germany was unavoidable." They agreed that the Soviet Union should take the initiative to call a conference among the four powers and the two German states. Contacts with the East German leadership should be maintained, but Soviet policy on Germany should also be more "closely coordinated with London and Paris." Marshall Akromeyev was asked to examine the question of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the GDR.¹⁵⁷

Two days after Modrow's announcement, Gorbachev accepted the inevitable by signaling publicly his tentative and reluctant acceptance of unification. "No one casts any doubt upon it," the Soviet leader told journalists just before receiving Modrow in the Kremlin. After meeting Gorbachev, Modrow could only conclude that "the unification of the two German states is the prospect that now lies before us."¹⁵⁸

The Balancing Act Comes to an End

To the casual outside observer, the German Democratic Republic may have seemed marginal to the world's affairs: a small, loyal and repressive satellite of the Soviet Union. In fact, however, the GDR proved to be pivotal, rather than peripheral, both to the Cold War European order and the eventual breakdown of that order. As the fulcrum of the two central issues that had ignited the Cold War in Europe—the future of Eastern Europe and the German Question—the GDR was the embodiment of Cold War division.

In retrospect, the relative stability of the East German system is as much in need of explanation as is its sudden and dramatic collapse in the fall of 1989. Both the Cold War and East-West détente rested in

part on the question of East German domestic stability. Yet this stability was inherently precarious, because the regime was never regarded as just and legitimate. To compensate, the regime sought to sustain a series of delicate balances on three different fronts: to the East, to the West, and at home. The regime could only advance its authority at home if guaranteed support from its patron in the East and a modicum of legitimacy in the West. It could only gain legitimacy in the West by granting greater freedoms at home and receiving greater latitude within the East. And it could only gain latitude and be ensured of continued support in the East if it maintained its authority at home and controlled the destabilizing effects of its relations with the West. The complex, contradictory and fluid dynamic among these three fronts did much to shape the evolution of the German Question and the Cold War order in Europe.

In the end, the regime was unable to sustain this triple balancing act because of shifting dynamics on each front. After Soviet leaders had argued for decades that European stability rested on the division of Germany, Mikhail Gorbachev made the opposite case: stability in Europe was now endangered by continued European divisions, including those between the Germans. At home, the East German people, emboldened by the fresh winds coming from Moscow and the rise of non-communist governments in Eastern Europe, and fearful that their peaceful, democratic revolution could end badly unless East Germany was tied quickly and irrevocably to a stable and prosperous democracy, swept aside the opposition's dreams of "improvable socialism" in favor of rapid unification. And West German leaders, particularly Helmut Kohl, who had neither believed they would experience unification nor had operational plans to achieve it, seized the historical moment to end the divisions of Berlin, of Germany and of Europe. As the unification express sped ahead during the course of 1990, the GDR was becoming the Gradually Disappearing Republic.

Exiting the Cold War, Entering a New World

On January 17, 1991, Helmut Kohl stood before the Bundestag as the newly-elected Chancellor of a Germany united in peace and freedom. The main subject of his inaugural address, however, was war. That very day multinational forces under the leadership of the United

States launched a fierce “Desert Storm” to reverse Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein’s August 2 invasion of the oil-rich Middle East sheikdom of Kuwait. The Iraqi crisis built up steam through the late summer and fall of 1990, but German leaders and the German public remained riveted on unification and the subsequent all-German election. As a result, Germans were completely unprepared for the dramatic and violent conflict that now erupted in the Persian Gulf.

For a brief period, the heavens had opened to allow German unity. They now closed with a thunderous clap. Kohl had gotten “the hay in the barn” before the storms came, but the sky had now darkened. Only three days before Desert Storm rumbled, a hail of bullets in the Baltics killed *perestroika* as Gorbachev ordered Soviet military forces to stop Lithuania’s bid for independence. Some weeks earlier, Eduard Shevardnadze suddenly resigned, warning of impending dictatorship and bloodshed. Gorbachev suddenly appeared to be the sorcerer’s apprentice who, after having unleashed changes of historic scope, now proved not only unable to contain them but likely to be swept away by them. “He who comes too late will be punished by life,” Gorbachev once told Erich Honecker. One abortive putsch later, Gorbachev himself was forced to resign as republic after republic asserted its independence. By Christmas Day of 1991, the Soviet Union was no more.

Europe had exited the Cold War. It was now entering a new world.

Notes

1. See Ernst Richert, *Das Zweite Deutschland: Ein Staat der nicht sein darf* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Verlag, 1964); also, Edwina Moreton, *East Germany and the Warsaw Alliance: The Politics of Détente* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1978).

2. Robert Gerald Livingstone, "United Germany: Bigger and Better," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1992, pp. 157-174.

3. *International Herald Tribune*, December 13, 1988.

4. J.F. Brown, *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 134.

5. A sense of the relationship, even though self-serving, is conveyed by Piotr Abrassimov, the Soviet Ambassador in the GDR from 1962-1971 and again from 1975-1983, termed by many in the West as the "Governing Ambassador." Abrassimov viewed the GDR as nothing more than a test tube baby of Soviet foreign policy: "Strictly speaking, one could compare the GDR with a homunculus from the Soviet test tube. Our influence was unprecedented. Almost half of GDR trade was with the Soviet Union. Without our oil and gas, our metal or our cotton the GDR would not have been able to exist for one single year. KGB advisers—there were more than enough of them—monitored their colleagues. One also had a watchful eye on the NVA [National People's Army]—advisors from the Soviet Union were everywhere, down to the level of division commander...above all, we viewed the GDR as our line of forward defense." See the *Izvestia* interview with Abrassimov, reprinted in *Der Spiegel*, August 17, 1992, pp. 20-22.

6. See Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991), pp. 101-115.

7. Quoted in "Angst vor den Akten," *Der Spiegel*, August 24, 1992, p. 51.

8. See Michael Sodaro, *Moscow, Germany, and the West from Khrushchev to Gorbachev* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 202.

9. Ibid; also Karl Wilhelm Fricke, "Der Verteidigungshaushalt der DDR," *Deutschland Archiv*, No. 2, 1977, pp. 160-168.

10. James McAdams, *East Germany and Détente* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 152-153; also Michael J. Sodaro, "The GDR and the Third World: Supplicant and Surrogate," in Michael Radu, ed., *Eastern Europe and the Third World* (New York: Praeger, 1981), pp. 106-141.

11. I am grateful to John van Oudenaren for his crisp summary of this position in a presentation at the Aspen Institute Berlin in May 1987.

12. Richard Löwenthal, "Germany Steps Up," *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1976, p. 180.

13. For accounts of the Honecker visit, see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 6-12, 1987; Peter Jochen Winters, "Erich Honecker in der Bundesrepublik," *Deutschland Archiv*, October 1987, pp. 1009-1016; *Neues Deutschland*, September 6-12, 1987; articles by Serge Schmemmann, *New York Times*, September 7-12, 1987; *Bulletin*, Federal Republic of Germany, September 7, 1987; Erich Honecker, *Reden und Aufsätze*, Vol. 12, pp. 539-540.

14. Quoted in "Who broke down this wall?" *U.S. News and World Report*, November 2, 1992.

15. Quoted in Boris Meissner, "Das 'neue Denken' Gorbatschows und die Wende in der sowjetischen Deutschlandpolitik," in Werner Weidenfeld, ed., *Die Deutschen und die Architektur des Europäischen Hauses* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), p. 54.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

17. The phrase was first used by Konrad Adenauer on June 11, 1961 at a meeting of Germans expelled from Silesia after World War II. "Our goal," he proclaimed, "is that Europe at some point in time will be a large, common house for all Europeans, a house of freedom." The phrase was subsequently used by Brezhnev during his visit to Bonn in November 1981, and by Foreign Minister Gromyko in his January 1983 visit to Bonn, although without reference to Adenauer's "house of freedom." See Michael Mertes and Norbert J. Prill, "Der verhängnisvolle Irrtum eines Entweder-Oder," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 19, 1989. Also Daniel Küchenmeister, "Wann begann das Zerwürfnis zwischen Honecker und Gorbatschow?" *Deutschland Archiv*, January 1993, p. 35.

18. William H. Luers, "The U.S. and Eastern Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, June 1, 1987; Sodaro, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

19. Meissner, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

20. Küchenmeister, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-40, which contains numerous citations from the minutes of Honecker-Gorbachev meetings between 1985 and 1989.

21. Central Party Archive of the SED, ZPA, IV 2/1/399.

22. "Aus einem Gespräch M.S. Gorbachevs mit Mitarbeitern vor der Sitzung des RGW, 29. September 1986," in Galkin and Tschnerjajew, *op. cit.*, Aleksandr Galkin and Anatolij Tschnerjajew, eds., *Michail Gorbatschow und die deutsche Frage: Sowjetische Dokumente, 1986-1991* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011), pp. 15-17.

23. Author's interview, February 13, 1993; Vyacheslav Kochemasov, the former Soviet ambassador to the GDR, confirmed that Moscow prohibited Honecker from visiting Bonn. For his recollections, see his interview with *Der Spiegel*, November 16, 1992, p. 148. Gorbachev also spoke of how Moscow's tough line with the Federal Republic also held the GDR in check. See "Protokoll der Sitzung des

Politbüros des ZK der KPdSU, 27. März 1986,” in Galkin and Tschnerjajew, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

24. Author’s interview with Hans-Dietrich Genscher, February 15, 1993.

25. ZPA IV 2/1/414.

26. Cited in Küchenmeister, op. cit., p. 39.

27. “Attempts to overturn that which it [history] has created or to force it with an unrealistic policy” were labeled as “an incalculable or even dangerous undertaking.” See Meissner, op. cit., p. 72. Gorbachev later recounted that he dismissed talk of “German unity” as “far from being ‘Realpolitik’.” See Meissner, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

28. “The rise and fall of perestroika,” *The Economist*, January 19, 1991, p. 40.

29. See Gorbachev’s interview, “Es war mein Ziel, eine politische Evolution zu vollbringen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 10, 1992.

30. Quoted in Milan Svec, “East European Divides,” *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1989-1990, p. 49.

31. See Jacques Renard, et al., “Comment le Plan Secret de Gorbachev a echoue,” *L’Express*, July 6, 1990; “Hungary: Gorbachev Vows Noninterference,” Facts on File, April 7, 1989, pp. 243-244.

32. That same month, in a speech to the Soviet diplomatic service, Shevardnadze repudiated a key principle of Soviet foreign policy: “peaceful coexistence” as a method of class struggle. “Coexistence,” Shevardnadze argued, “that relies on such principles as non-aggression, respect for sovereignty and national independence, non-interference in internal affairs and so on cannot be identified with class struggle. The conflict between opposing systems is no longer the decisive tendency in the present age.” “19th All-Union Conference of the CPSU: Foreign Politics and Diplomacy,” *Pravda*, July 26, 1988.

33. “The rise and fall of perestroika,” *The Economist*, January 19, 1991, p. 40.

34. “Shishlin Interviewed on Polish Crisis,” FBIS-SOV-88-174, September 8, 1988, p. 31; Hannes Adomeit, “Gorbachev and German Unification: Revision of Thinking, Realignment of Power,” *Problems of Communism*, July-August 1990, p. 3.

35. Author’s interview with Tarasenko; interview with Dashichev. In his interview with me, Tarasenko chose to emphasize Shevardnadze’s Georgian heritage. “As a Georgian, Shevardnadze had the feeling that no one likes a foreign military presence. He said we needed to solve this problem and that we shouldn’t abuse our ‘friendship’ with these countries.”

36. In early 1987 Nikolai Portugalov, one of the USSR’s leading German experts, implied that the citizens of West and East Germany belonged to a single

German nation: "For every German...the people in the GDR remain Germans who belong to one and the same nation." See Christian Schmidt-Hauer, "Ein Besucher unter vielen," *Die Zeit*, October 21, 1988. In various other statements Portugalov expressed support for efforts at reform socialism in the GDR, welcomed a confederation, but continued to stress that "both Germanys [would] continue to exist as sovereign and equal states." See "Zwei Systeme, Eine Nation," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 17, 1989, p. 2; Nikolai Portugalov, "The Soviet View: two Germanys, in Confederation," *New York Times*, December 15, 1989.

37. Author's interviews with Dashichev, Tarasenko and Portugalov. See also Angela Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, the Soviet Collapse, and the New Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 71.

38. According to Dashichev, only Yuri Davidov of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada agreed with this position. Author's interviews with Dashichev and Tarasenko.

39. See the interview with Dashichev, "Dann erhebt sich das Volk," *Der Spiegel*, January 24, 1991, pp. 136-143; *Die Welt*, June 9, 1988.

40. For accounts of the summit, see *Der Spiegel*, 44/1988; Gerhard Spörl, "Reise mit kleinem Gepäck," *Die Zeit*, October 21, 1988; "Gorbatschow: "Das Eis ist gebrochen,"" *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 25, 1988; Eghard Mörbitz, "In Moskau fiel Kohl mit der Tür ins Haus," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, October 26, 1988.

41. Author's interview with Tarasenko. See Horst Teltschik, who also quotes Shevardnadze: "Das Konzept vom gemeinsamen Haus," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 23, 1988, p. 6.

42. See his interview with DDR Radio II, August 19, 1989. A capitalist GDR would make little sense and would have little reason to exist as a separate state, Reinhold said. Hence the strategy of the East German leadership had to be uncompromisingly aimed at "solidifying the socialist order" in the GDR.

43. Quoted in *Neues Deutschland*, June 3, 1987.

44. In 1988 Honecker told Kochemasov, "we won't use your term 'perestroika' anymore." Quoted in "Jedes Land Wählt seine Lösung," *Stern*, No. 16, April 9, 1987. For Kochemasov's recollections, see his interview with *Der Spiegel*, November 16, 1992, p. 148. For Hager's statement, see *Neues Deutschland*, April 10, 1987. In October 1988 Hager explicitly rejected Soviet reforms as "not transferable" to the GDR. *Neues Deutschland*, October 29, 1988. See also *Neues Deutschland*, April 11/12, 1987, p. 3.

45. Author's interview.

46. Kochemasov interview, *Der Spiegel*, op. cit. The tendency of COMECON members to dump shoddy, uncompetitive goods in each other's markets led an exasperated Gorbachev to declare in June 1988 that "the socialist economic com-

munity had degenerated into the garbage pail of its member states.” Quoted in Jacquelin Henard, “Der Rat der Ratlosen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 8, 1988, p. 13.

47. According to Carl-Heinz Janson, the proportion of the national income devoted to subsidie rose from 7.8% in 1971 to 22.8% in 1987. Carl-Heinz Janson, *Tötengräber der DDR: Wie Günter Mittag den SED-Staat ruinierte* (Düsseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1991), p. 81. For the NVA role in the economy, see Jörg Schonbohm, *Zwei Armeen und ein Vaterland. Das Ende der Nationalen Volksarmee* (Berlin: Siedler, 1991), pp. 44, 135, 144-145.

48. As Friedrich Schorlemmer recalls, “Everyone was busy, but only a few had real work.” See Schorlemmer, p. 365.

49. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 7, 1987; Janson, op. cit., p. 79; Harry Maier and Siegrid Maier, “Möglichkeiten einer Intensivierung des innerdeutschen Handels,” *Deutschland Archiv*, February 1989, pp. 180-191.

50. During the last years of its existence the GDR’s ability to repay its debts became its highest economic priority. All economic decisions were affected by the GDR’s position on the brink of bankruptcy. Exports were pushed in exchange for whatever hard currency could be gained. Imports were sought on the most long-term credits possible. As Schorlemmer recalls, “in the end everything was being sold—cobblestones for pedestrian passages in the revitalized old cities in West Germany, the best meats, the best wood, the cheapest pots and—when needed—people in prisons.” See Schorlemmer, op. cit., p. 365; Janson, op. cit., pp. 68-72.

51. Max Schmidt, “Die Erde—gemeinsames Haus der Menschheit,” *Einheit*, No. 2, 1987; Max Schmidt, “New Approaches to Security in Europe,” address to the XIV IPSA World Congress, Washington, DC, August 28- September 2, 1988, p. 3, Author’s copy; “Militärische Aspekte der Sicherheit—Militärdoktrinen und ihre Umsetzung,” *IPW Berichte*, 9/88, pp. 39ff.

52. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, GDR defense spending in 1984 was 7.7% of national income, compared with 4% for Czechoslovakia, the next highest spender. West Germany’s defense spending in 1986 was 3.3% of GDP. *IISS Survey*, 1986-1987.

53. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 24.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

55. “We were regularly under the influence of *perestroika*,” recalled Jens Reich, co-founder of New Forum two years later. “We read the Soviet journals. There was an expectation of reform.” Conversation with the author. See Schorlemmer, op. cit., p. 19; Kucynski, op. cit., p. 35.

56. Monika Maron, “Der Kaiser ist ja nackt,” *Zeit-Magazin*, February 18, 1988.

57. For a summary of remarks by Honecker and other leaders at the Vienna CSCE Conference in January 1989, see Bundesminister für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, *Informationen*, No. 2/89, January 27, 1989, p. 2.; also “Die Mauer als Überraschungsthema in Wien,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 21-22, 1989, p. 6; “Honecker: Die Mauer muss unsere Republik vor Räufern schützen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 21, 1989, p. 1; “Schultz: Mauer-Abbau ist Test für die Haltung Moskaus,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, January 17, 1989, p. 1.

58. “Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” Vienna, January 17, 1989, *Department of State Bulletin*, March 1989, pp. 21-50. The final document was printed with important omissions and changes in *Neues Deutschland*, January 21-22, 1989.

59. Schultz was joined by his Western colleagues. For similar remarks by UK Foreign Minister Geoffrey Howe and FRG Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, see Bundesminister für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, *Informationen*, No. 2/89, January 27, 1989.

60. When asked how he could condemn the Iron Curtain while supporting the Berlin Wall, Shevardnadze replied, “These are two completely different things.” *Washington Post*, January 20 1989, p. A1. See also Daniel S. Hamilton, “Dateline East Berlin: The Wall Behind the Wall,” *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1989.

61. “Strafsache gegen Honecker,” Przybelski (II), pp. 88-89.

62. See Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), p. 19; “Hinweise zur Reaktion der Bevölkerung,” January 27, 1989, BStU, MfS, ZA ZAIG 4246, pp. 1-11; Hans-Herman Lochen and Christian Meyer-Seitz, eds., *Die geheimen Anweisungen zur Diskriminierung Ausreisewilliger* (Cologne: Bundesanzeiger Verlag, 1992), pp. 7-17, 251-254; “Der Minister, Dienststeinheiten, Leiter,” January 23, 1989, BStU, MfS, ZA, HA IX 687, pp. 134-136.

63. Interview with author.

64. See Don Oberndorfer, *The Turn* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), pp. 318-321, 343-347; Hannes Adomeit, op cit., p. 5; *Pravda*, December 8, 1988; Gorbachev repeated his views in Kiev on February 23. For the West German military’s reaction to Gorbachev’s speech, See Schonbohm, op. cit., p. 16. On January 23, Honecker announced that the GDR would cut 10,000 troops and trim defense spending by 10%, 600 tanks would be dismantled or refitted for civilian use, and one squadron of 50 combat planes would be disbanded. See Robert J. McCartney, “East Germany Pledges to Cut 10,000 Troops,” *International Herald Tribune*, January 24, 1989.

65. Author’s interviews with Dashichev, Tarasenko and Portugalov. For an analysis of other views in the Soviet secondary elite, see Michael Sodaro, *Moscow, Ger-*

many, and the West: From Khrushchev to Gorbachev (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 364.

66. See *Der Spiegel*, February 5, 1990, pp. 142ff. Relations between the GDR and other socialist states were also in a nosedive. On February 1 the GDR raised export tariffs on a range of consumer items, following similar measures by the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Western diplomats were speaking of a “socialist trade war.” See Karl-Heinz Baum, “Brüder Im Handelskrieg,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 10, 1989.

67. Oberndorfer, op. cit., pp. 358-359.

68. According to *Le Monde* of May 4, 1989, only around 300 people were known to have escaped to Austria by breaching the fences since their construction in the mid-1960s, compared to over 13,000 people who had been apprehended in the attempt; more than 90% of those would-be escapees had entered Hungary from other East European countries.

69. See the secret Stasi report on efforts to disrupt the March 13 demonstrations, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 122/89, March 14, 1989, “Information über eine provokatorisch-demonstrative Aktion von Antragstellern auf ständige Ausreise in Leipzig,” and an assessment of the popular mood, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 0/216, April 26, 1989, “Hinweise zur Reaktion der Bevölkerung im Zusammenhang mit der Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Kommunalwahlen am 7. Mai 1989,” reprinted in Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, eds., *Ich liebe euch doch alle! Befehle und Lageberichte des MfS January-November 1989* (Berlin: Basisdruck Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1990), pp. 28-33. As Honecker feared, the Vienna CSCE document was, in Schorlemmer’s words, a “powerful” instrument for the domestic opposition: “We devoured every sentence. We searched for everything that legitimized our actions vis-à-vis the state, and finally found that in this document Basket III of Helsinki had been spelled out correctly.” See Schorlemmer, p. 21.

70. The *Kampfgruppen*, militia units, 400,000 strong, which had been formed in factories and institutions following the shock of the 1953 uprising, began a new training program geared explicitly to domestic rather than foreign threats.

71. See the secret Stasi report, MfS ZAIG Nr. 286/89, June 9, 1989, “Information über eine Veranstaltung in der Gethsemanekirche im Stadtbezirk Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg am 8. Juni 1989,” reprinted in Mitter and Wolle, op. cit., pp. 76-78.

72. See the secret and relatively comprehensive Stasi report of June 1, 1989 on the background and current activities of opposition groups, as well as recommendations aimed at limiting their influence, MfS ZAIG Nr. 150/89, “Information über beachtenswerte Aspekte des aktuellen Wirksamwerdens innerer feindlichen, oppositioneller und anderer negative Kräfte in personellen Zusammenschlüssen,” reprinted in Mitter and Wolle, op. cit., pp. 46-71.

73. For accounts, see Meissner, op. cit., pp. 72-73; Thomas F. O'Boyle, "Gorbachev's Visit Boosts Bonn's Standing," *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 1989, p. 3; Enno von Loewenstern, "'Gorby' in Germany: The Wall Stays But Anxieties Rise," *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 1989.

74. See Sodaro, op. cit., p. 361.

75. See Meissner, op. cit. This assessment also reflects my conversations from April-June 1989 with officials from the Soviet Foreign Ministry, including those at the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin, and various members of the Soviet intelligence, including Dashichev.

76. See *Umbruch in Europa. Die Ereignisse im 2. Halbjahr 1989* (Bonn: Foreign Office of the Federal German Government, 1990); also Fred Oldenburg, "Sowjetische Europa-Politik und die Lösung der deutschen Frage," *Osteuropa*, 1991, p. 757. Gorbachev reiterated the principles again in a speech before the Council of Europe on July 6.

77. Author's background interviews with Soviet, U.S. and West German government sources. See Oberndorfer, op. cit., p. 360.

78. "East German Hopes and Dangers," *Washington Post*, August 23, 1989, p. A26.

79. Schorlemmer, op. cit., p. 195.

80. Even as late as November 8, the day before the Wall opened, Kohl urged the Germans, "no matter how hard this may be," to "maintain the steadfast patience to count on the path of evolutionary change, the final result of which can only be full respect for human rights and free self-determination for all Germans." *Frankfurter Rundschau*, November 9, 1989, p. 4.

81. The report, which was intercepted by West German intelligence sources, appeared in *Die Welt*, September 15, 1989 and was quoted in the *Washington Post*, September 15, 1989, p. A22.

82. Author's interview with Sergei Tarasenko. Tarasenko reviewed this incident with me in considerable detail, stressing that the situation in Poland forced the Soviet reformers to come to terms with the true implications of their rhetorical policies.

83. Jackson Diehl, "Poland: The Communists Lose Control of the Process," in special section of the *Washington Post*, "The Turning Points," 1990; Charles Gati, *The Bloc That Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 168; "Gorbachev Persuades the Communists," *Facts on File*, August 25, 1989, p. 13.

84. "Walesa, Deutschlands Teilung nicht logisch," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 18, 1989; see also Brown, op. cit., p. 57. Adam Michnik said recogni-

tion of the right of Germans to self-determination was “dictated by morality” and was a “precept of the Polish *raison d’être*.” Adam Michnik, “Liegt die Einheit der DDR im Interesse Polens?” *Der Spiegel*, No. 42, 1989, p. 49.

85. *Die Tageszeitung*, November 4, 1989.

86. Gyula Horn, *Freiheit, die ich meine* (Hamburg: Hoffman & Campe, 1991).

87. When asked when this would happen, Horn told them the night of September 3, and said they could use the time to convince their citizens to return home. See the review of Horn’s memoirs in *Der Spiegel*, 36/1991, September 2, 1991, pp. 110-126.

88. Quoted in Oberndorfer, *op. cit.*, p. 362. Tarasenko confirmed to me that there had been Soviet-Hungarian discussions.

89. A few days later, Yegor Ligachev, Honecker’s conservative ally, traveled to East Berlin, ostensibly to discuss agricultural matters, but in reality to convince the regime that time was running out. See Gedmin, *op. cit.*, p. 94; Oldenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 757; *Neues Deutschland*, September 15, 1989, p. 2.

90. Otto Reinhold, in Radio DDR 2, August 19, 1989; See “Die DDR ist jedoch als kapitalistischer Staat neben der kapitalistischen Bundesrepublik nicht vorstellbar,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, October 13, 1989; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 23, 1989; Jürgen Engert, “Sargnagel für den Sozialismus,” *Reinischer Merkur/Christ und Welt*, September 1, 1989, p. 2.

91. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Ibid*; Engert, *Ibid*;

92. Authors’ interview with Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Frank Elbe, Claus-Jürgen Duisberg and Sergei Tarasenko. According to Tarasenko, Shevardnadze called Gorbachev to pressure Honecker, and then bluntly told Fischer not to “deepen the crisis.” See also Frank Elbe, “Die Nacht von Prag,” typewritten manuscript given to author of an article written for the *Thüringer Tageblatt*; Cordt Schnibben, “Wie Erich Honecker und sein Politbüro die Konterrevolution erlebten,” *Der Spiegel*, 16/1990, pp. 72-90; *Die Welt*, September 25, 1989, p. 1. Also Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-31.

93. Interviews with Sergei Tarasenko, Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Frank Elbe. Also Beschloss and Talbott, p. 132.

94. Gerhard Schürer, Gerhard Beil, Alexander Schalck, Herta König, Werner Polze, Geheime kommandosache b 5—111/89, “Prognose über die Bewegung und Beherrschbarkeit der DDR-Schulden im Zeitraum von 1989 bis 1995 gegenüber dem kapitalistischen Ausland,” Berlin, September 28, 1989, p. 4. Reprinted in Przblynski (II), pp. 358-363; Wolfgang Stock, “Die DDR-Führung sah vor der Wende die Zahlungsunfähigkeit am Horizont,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 16, 1992.

95. For accounts, see *Die Zeit*, October 13, 1989; Bundesminister für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, *Informationen*, Nr. 19/1989, October 20, 1989, pp. 7-10; *Time*, October 16, 1989; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 7-9, 1989.

96. Erich Honecker, "Durch das Volk und für das Volk wurde Grosses Vollbracht," *Neues Deutschland*, October 9, 1989.

97. Günter Schabowski, *Das Politbüro*, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

98. Hans Modrow, "Bilanz nach 150 Tagen," *Die Zeit*, April 13, 1990.

99. Schabowski, op. cit., p. 70.

100. A nervous *Neues Deutschland* and the GDR news agency ADN translated Gorbachev's comments about "walls" as "Schranken" (barriers). See Christian Schmidt-Hauer, "Durch Evolution zur Einheit?" *Die Zeit*, November 24, 1989, p. 6; For the Russian text of Gorbachev's speech, see *Pravda*, October 7, 1989, pp. 4-5. In English, see FSIB-SOV-89-194, Soviet Union, October 10, 1989, pp. 29-32. See also *Berliner Morgenpost*, October 7, 1989, p. 1.

101. For the Soviet minutes of the discussion, See "Aus dem Gespräch M.S. Gorbatschows mit E. Honecker, 7. Oktober 1989," in Galkin and Tschernjajew, op. cit., pp. 187-190.

102. "Aus dem Gespräch M.S. Gorbatschows mit Mitgliedern des Politbüros des ZK der SED, Berlin, 7. Oktober 1989," in Galkin and Tschernjajew, op. cit., pp. 191-197. Also reprinted in *Der Spiegel*, 37/1991, September 9, 1991, pp. 107-110.

103. Schabowski, *Das Politbüro*, op. cit., pp. 73-74; Schnibben (II), op. cit., p. 92. For Kochemasov's recollections of Gorbachev's visit, see his interview with *Der Spiegel*, November 16, 1992, p. 148.

104. Shevardnadze later said that the SED leaders had rejected real reforms because they assumed all social problems had been solved and reforms were not necessary. "Thus the time for reforms was irretrievably missed." He added, however, that because he and Gorbachev had been clear about Soviet acceptance of "freedom of choice," they "could not force our position on Honecker." See Fred Oldenburg, op. cit., p. 758, who cites Shevardnadze interview in *Izvestia*, February 19, 1990. Also see Bundesminister für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, *Informationen*, No. 19/1989, October 20, 1989, pp. 7-10.

105. See the article by Stanislav Kondrasov, based on an interview with Kochemasov, in *Izvestia*, April 29, 1990, p. 7, reprinted in translation in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XLII, No. 17 (1990), p. 11; Vyacheslav Kochemasov, *Meine letzte Mission* (Berlin: Dietz, 1994), pp. 90-91. Willy Brandt, returning from a trip to Moscow, reported that already in August Soviet troops in Eastern Europe had been told to refrain from intervention in internal unrest, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 14, 1989. This was confirmed by Tarasenko, who told me that there was

“never any possibility” that Soviet forces could have intervened. Author’s interview. Falin also made similar assertions. According to Ekkehard Kuhn, Krenz disputed that there were such instructions, arguing that he would have known of their existence. See Ekkehard Kuhn, *Der Tag der Entscheidung: Leipzig, 9. Oktober 1989* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1992) and Sarotte, *The Collapse*, op. cit., pp. 52-82; Also see the declaration by the Warsaw Pact states in *Izvestia*, September 27, 1989. According to Oldenburg, the official Soviet position appeared to be that the GDR was free to regulate its internal affairs, but that a revision of its borders would not be accepted. Any efforts in this direction would be seen as “revanchist” and thus more open to Warsaw Pact intervention. Oldenburg, op. cit. Also Angela Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, the Soviet Collapse, and the New Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

106. See Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro: Die Akte Honecker* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991), p. 192.

107. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, October 14, 1989.

108. *Wir sind das Volk. Die DDR im Aufbruch*, op. cit., p. 97.

109. See William F. Buckley, Jr., “The Sinatra Doctrine,” *National Review*, May 26, 2004, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2004/05/sinatra-doctrine-william-f-buckley-jr/>.

110. Gerhard Schürer, Gerhard Beil, Alexander Schalck, Ernst Höfner, Arno Donda, “Vorlage für das Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der SED, Betreff: Analyse der ökonomischen Lage der DDR mit Schlussfolgerungen,” October 27, 1989. The Politburo accepted the document without changes. Central Party Archive (ZPA-SED J IV2/2/2356). The document is reprinted in *Deutschland Archiv*, October 1992, pp. 1112-1120. See also “Die Wahrheit einfach zugeklebt,” *Der Spiegel*, November 9, 1992, pp. 113-119.

111. Sarotte, *The Collapse*, op. cit., pp. 90-92, who cites various internal documents.

112. Quoted in “Er hielt sich für den Grossen,” *Der Spiegel*, August 3, 1992, pp. 25-27.

113. Ibid; the East German version of the minutes of Krenz’s discussions with Gorbachev are reprinted in Hertle, *Staatsbankrott*, op. cit.; see also “Maueröffnung ohne Befehl,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 5, 1990; Uwe Engelbrecht, “Sowjets hätten eine schnellere Gangart gewünscht,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, November 11, 1989.

114. On these subjects, there were differing opinions within the party. Most reformers within the party with whom I spoke sought to keep the discussion limited to reforms within the socialist system. When asked about the Wall, there was a surprising range of views. Almost all believed that the GDR could withstand a much

more open interaction with the West, and said that even if the Wall itself “might not come down, it can be made much more porous. This should not frighten us.” In early November, the first secretary of the SED in Neubrandenburg, Johannes Chemnitzer, publicly expressed the view that the Berlin Wall “is up for discussion.” See “Krenz und die Mauer,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, November 2, 1989; Also *Wir sind das Volk*, op. cit., p. 98.

115. The story of this travel regulation, and the miscommunications regarding it that eventually led to the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9, has been told in detail elsewhere. See, for example, Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Chronik des Mauerfalls. Die dramatischen Ereignisse um den 9. November 1989* (Berlin, 1996); Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer. Die unbeabsichtigte Selbstauflösung des SED-Staates* (Opladen, 1996); Hans-Hermann Hertle and Kathrin Elsner, eds., *Der Tag, an dem die Mauer fiel: Die wichtigsten Zeitzeugen berichten vom 9. November 1989* (Berlin: Nicolaische, 2009); Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse*, op. cit.

116. Author’s interview with Gerhard Lauter, at the time chief of the department for passports and registration in the GDR Interior Ministry. See also Walter Süß, “Weltgeschichte in voller Absicht oder aus Versehen?” *Das Parlament*, No. 46-47, November 9-16, 1990, pp 8-9; Ten days earlier Schabowski had told West Berlin Governing Mayor Walter Momper that the flood of East Berliners going to West Berlin could no longer be channeled through the Friedrichstrasse crossing point. Author’s conversations with members of the Senate of West Berlin. As Lauter told me, “anyone who read the November 5 law would know that the Wall would be opened soon.” As relayed by Igor Maximychev, in “Was ist bei euch los?” *Der Spiegel*, 44/1994, pp. 43-45; also recounted in Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse*, op. cit., pp. 102; Author’s interview with Igor Maximychev. See also Stent, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

117. Hertle, *Chronik*, op. cit., pp. 105-106; Sarotte, *The Collapse*, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

118. Günter Schabowski, *Das Politbüro* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), pp. 137-139.

119. Sarotte, *The Collapse*, p. 108; author’s interviews with Igor Maximychev and Gerhard Lauter.

120. Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, ed., “Vorwärts immer, rückwärts nimmer!” *Interne Dokumente zum Zerfall von SED und DDR 1988/89* (Berlin: Dietz, 1994), pp. 240 ff; Hertle, *Chronik*, op. cit., p. 237; Sarotte, *The Collapse*, op. cit., p. 160.

121. Sarotte, *The Collapse*, pp. 162-163; Chernyaev diary, November 10, 1989, MG, 246. NSA online version of the diary.

122. Quoted in Süß, op. cit.

123. David Marsh, "Wind of realism blows through the Wall," *Financial Times*, November 23, 1989, p. 2; "DDR am Rande ihrer Zahlungsfähigkeit," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 20, 1989; *Chronik der Ereignisse*, op. cit., p. 46; "Krenz is Purged by East German Party," *International Herald Tribune*, January 22, 1990, p. 1.

124. See the account by Dieter Strekies in *Neues Forum Leipzig, Jetzt oder nie—Demokratie—Leipziger Herbst '89* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 1990), pp. 239-240.

125. For a summary of these views, see Robert Gerald Livingston, "United Re-thought but Not Reborn," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1989.

126. See Elizabeth Pond, *After the Wall: American Policy Toward Germany* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1990)

127. Portugalov presented two papers, one entitled "Unofficial Position," the other "Official Position." The first part of the paper had been initiated by Chernyaev, Gorbachev's foreign policy advisor, and had been discussed with Valentin Falin, former Soviet Ambassador in Bonn and now head of the international department of the Central Committee. Portugalov and Falin had gone over the second part, which concerned itself with questions regarding cooperation between the two German states, unification, the admission of the GDR into the European Community, alliance membership and the possibility of a peace treaty. Author's interview with Nikolai Portugalov and background interviews with senior West German officials; Teltschik, op. cit., pp. 42-45. Portugalov, as usual, was also saying different things to different audiences. In an article in the November 29 edition of the *International Herald Tribune*, Portugalov is quoted as saying confederation would be "impossible."

128. For a description of Portugalov's visit and Kohl's 10-point plan, see Teltschik, op. cit. pp. 43-56; Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 70-72.

129. As cited in Ferdinand Protzman, "Kohl Sets Out Framework for German Federation," *International Herald Tribune*, November 29, 1989.

130. Author's background interviews with senior Soviet diplomatic officials. See also Oberndorfer, op. cit., p. 365; Teltschik, op. cit., p. 23.

131. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 10, 1989.

132. Teltschick, op. cit., pp. 19-20. *Der Spiegel*, November 13, 1989, p. 25 and November 20, 1989, pp. 17-18. See also Gerasimov's comments in the *Washington Post*, November 11, 1989, p. A25; Gorbachev's remarks opposing reunification, *Washington Post*, November 16, 1989, p. A44; Shevardnadze's comments, *Washington Post*, November 18, 1989, p. A17; and Fred Oldenburg, "Sowjetische Deutschland-Politik nach der Oktober-Revolution in der DDR," *Deutschland Archiv*, No. 1, 1990, pp 68-76.

133. For the Soviet minutes of the conversation, see “Aus dem Telefongespräch M.S. Gorbachevs mit H. Kohl, 11. November 1989,” in Galkin and Tschernjajew, op. cit., pp. 229-232.

134. Teltschick, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

135. Gerhard Wettig, “Moskau und der Wandel in Osteuropa,” *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien (BIOst-*, No. 25, 1990); M. Skak, “The changing Soviet-East European relationship,” Manuscript for the IV. World Congress for East European Studies in Harrogate, Aarhus, 1990, p. 18; Heinz Timmermann, “Die Sowjetunion und der Umbruch in Osteuropa,” *Osteuropa-Archiv*, January 1991, pp. 5-6; Nakath, et al., op. cit., p. 23.

136. The paper is reprinted in Nakath, et al., op. cit., pp. 66-69. See also Hans-Hermann Hertle and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, eds., *Das Ende der SED*, pp. 87ff.

137. The text of Gorbachev’s message is available in Nakrath, et al., op. cit., pp. 69-72. On November 29, Gorbachev reiterated his position that “the unification of the FRG and the GDR is not a current issue” in a conversation with Italian Prime Minister Andreotti. See “Aus dem Gespräch M.S. Gorbachevs mit G. Andreotti, Rom, 29. November 1989,” in Galkin and Tschernjajew, op. cit., pp. 245-248.

138. *Pravda*, November 15, 1989; John van Oudenaren, “The Role of Shevardnadze and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Making of Soviet Defense and Arms Control Policy,” RAND/National Defense Research Institute R-3898-US-DP, July 1990.

139. Shevardnadze continued to advocate the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Europe, but he moderated his support for the dissolution of the blocs, no doubt in the hope that preservation of the Warsaw Pact could help to maintain Soviet influence and give the USSR leverage in negotiations concerning German unification. Ibid.

140. Kohl also asked Hungarian Prime Minister Nemeth to arrange a meeting with Gorbachev. Kohl wrote to Gorbachev on December 14 in another attempt to reassure him. See Teltschik, op. cit., pp. 76-85.

141. For background, see Lothar Rühl, “The three touchstones of relations between Washington, Paris, London and Bonn,” *The German Tribune*, March 25, 1990; Wilhelm Grewe, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik der Nachkriegszeit*, Stuttgart, 1960, p. 84; Edwina Moreton, *Germany Between East and West*, op. cit., p. 8; Karl Kaiser, “Germany’s Unification,” *Foreign Affairs—America and the World 1990/91*, Vol. 70, No. 1.

142. Interview with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker on “Good Morning America,” in USIS USBER, November 15, 1989, pp. 14-15.

143. Teltschik, op. cit., p. 48; "Der Druck von unten wächst," *Der Spiegel*, No. 48, November 27, 1989, pp. 14-18.

144. See Theo Sommer, "Wem gehört die deutsche Frage?" *Die Zeit*, December 15, 1989, p. 6; Jim Hoagland, "Unification: The Reason for Gorbachev's Retreat," *Washington Post*, February 12, 1990. U.S., British and French approaches to unification and the end of the Cold War are documented in detail elsewhere, including by other authors in this volume.

145. Author's interview with Nikolai Portugalov and background interviews with senior German officials; Teltschik, op. cit., pp. 42-45.

146. Author's background interviews with senior U.S. officials. Teltschik's assumptions about changing Soviet views on unification were supported on November 27 by Andrei Gratchov, Deputy Director of the International Department of the Central Committee, who commented on German television that "the German question is again on the agenda...even if a lot of politicians in the East and West do not want to acknowledge it." See Teltschik, op. cit., p. 55. Also Sarotte, 1989, op. cit., pp. 77-78; Michail S. Gorbatschows, *Gipfelgespräche: Geheime Protokolle aus meiner Amtszeit* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1993), pp. 93-129. For the Soviet minutes of the relevant meetings in Malta, see "Aus dem Gespräch M.S. Gorbachevs mit G. Bush, Malta, 2. Dezember 1989," in Galkin and Tschnerjajew, op. cit., pp. 249-254.

147. See Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 130.

148. Author's interview with Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Also Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), p. 683; Teltschik, op. cit., pp. 62-64; "Aus dem Gespräch M.S. Gorbachevs mit H.D. Genscher, 5. Dezember 1989," in Galkin and Tschnerjajew, op. cit., pp. 254-265.

149. The GDR delegation's minutes of the meeting are available in Nakrath, et al., op. cit., pp. 74-82.

150. *Washington Post*, December 5, 19989, p. A39.

151. *International Herald Tribune*, December 1, 1989.

152. Robert Kaiser, op. cit.

153. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, "World War II Final Settlement," Chaired by Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI). Witness: Robert Zoellick, Counselor, U.S. Department of State, Friday, September 28, 1990. Author's copy of the minutes.

154. As recounted by Pavel Palazchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 185-191; see also Stent, op. cit., p. 101.

155. Shevardnadze charged that “artificially forcing” the events in Germany could have “unpredictable consequences.” See Teltschik, op. cit., pp. 67-70; *Washington Post*, December 6, 1989, p. A20.

156. *Der Tagesspiegel*, January 18, 1990; *Bulletin*, Presse- und Informationsdienst der Bundesregierung, September 1990, p. 63; *Pravda*, December 20, 1989.

157. Others in the meeting included Ryshkov, Jakovlev, Vladimir Kryuchkov, head of the KGB, Falin, Akromeyev, Fedorov, Shachnazarov and Chernyaev. See “Erörterung der deutschen Frage im kleinen Kreis im Arbeitszimmer des Generalsekretärs des ZK der KPdSU, 26. Januar 1990,” in Galkin and Tschnerjajew, op. cit., pp. 286-291. Also see Mikhail Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: 1995), pp. 714ff; Nakrath, et al., op. cit., p. 28; Anatoly Chernyaev, “Gorbachev and the Reunification of Germany: Personal Recollections,” in Gabriel Gorodestsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1971-1991* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 166; Sarotte, 1989, op. cit., pp 101-103; Hans Modrow, *Ich wollte ein neues Deutschland* (Berlin: Dietz, 1998), pp. 413 ff.

158. Teltschik, op. cit., pp. 226-235; *Tass*, January 30, 1990; Serge Schmemmann, “The Rush to One Germany Starts to Blur Europe’s Map of Alliances,” *New York Times*, February 4, 1990.