It Took Three to Tango: The Role of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Relationship between Britain and the GDR, 1949-1990

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Relations between Britain and the GDR were profoundly and continuously influenced by the relationship of the two states towards the Federal Republic of Germany. This not only applies to official political contacts and negotiations, but also to economic and cultural relations. In any case, British governmental and (to a lesser degree) non-governmental institutions had to take the West German state into account. Until 1973, official Anglo-GDR relations were framed by the West German policy of non-recognition postulated by the 'Hallstein Doctrine' of 1955. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, in particular, economic relations and cultural exchange between Britons and citizens of the GDR proved to be partly resilient to political pressure and thus repeatedly troubled official relations between Britain and the Federal Republic. In a similar vein, British images of the GDR reflected fears of degradation as a major power as well as hopes and visions of a better future. Occasionally, even a genuine belief in the superiority of East German state socialism shaped perceptions of the Federal Republic. Self-images, projections, traditional stereotypes about 'the Germans' and the images of the new West German state closely interacted in British perceptions of the GDR.[1]

More generally, the relationship between Britain and East Germany was embedded in at least three overarching contexts. From the British perspective, relations to the East German state were *firstly* inextricably linked to Britain's official policy vis-à-vis the Federal Republic. *Secondly*, the European context profoundly affected relations between the British Isles and the two German states. Traditional notions like the doctrine of the 'balance of power' influenced British policy vis-à-vis Continental

1 See Klaus Larres, 'Britain and the GDR: Political and Economic Relations, 1949-1989', in: idem/Elizabeth Meehan (eds): *Uneasy Allies. British-German Relations and European Integration since 1945* (Oxford 2000), p. 69; Lothar Kettenacker, 'Englische Spekulationen über die Deutschen', in: Günter Trautmann (ed.): *Die häßlichen Deutschen? Deutschland im Spiegel der westlichen und östlichen Nachbarn* (Darmstadt 1991), pp. 196f., 199f., 207; Sabine Lee, 'Perception and Reality: Anglo-German Relations during the Berlin Crisis 1958-1959', in: *GH* 13 (1995), p. 69.

Europe, particularly towards divided Germany. Although the dictatorship which had been established by the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the late 1940s gained few outspoken admirers in Britain, the GDR was at least implicitly seen by British officials as a safeguard against the abhorred resurrection of Germany as a major power. Moreover, British governments tried to exploit West German fears of a collapse of its non-recognition policy in order to secure Britain's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1960s. On the other hand, West Germany's conservative governments tried to utilize British anxieties over a possible agreement between a united Germany and the Soviet Union (like the abhorred Rapallo Treaty of 1922) in order to commit Britain to a firm stance on the policy of non-recognition. *Thirdly*, the global context profoundly moulded Anglo-GDR relations. In the Cold War era, West Germany's non-recognition policy seemed to restrict the political influence of the Soviet bloc. As the global confrontation between the superpowers gradually ceded in the course of the 1960s, however, the 'Hallstein Doctrine' was increasingly seen as an impediment to détente by British politicians and officials. Initiatives which aimed at a de facto recognition of the GDR thus gained some support in Britain. On a diachronic level, relations between the East German state and the British Isles were also strongly shaped by the largely painful experience of conflict and war in the first half of the twentieth century.[2]

Apart from the realm of high politics, research on the relationship between Britain and the GDR had largely concentrated on literature and literary science until the late 1980s. Investigations had also dealt with academic exchange and sports relations. These fields had also been foremost in the interaction between the two states.[3] Since the unification of the two German states in 1990, historical research has extended to foreign and

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2 See the contributions to Jeremy Noakes/Peter Wende/Jonathan Wright (eds): *Britain and Germany in Europe 1949-1990* (Oxford, 2002). For an overview, cf. Henning Hoff, '"... Largely the Prisoners Of Dr. Adenauer's Policy." Großbritannien und die DDR (1949-1973)', in: Ulrich Pfeil (ed.): *Die DDR und der Westen. Transnationale Beziehungen 1949-1989* (Berlin 2001), pp. 187-191. Also see Ulrich Pfeil, 'Die DDR und der Westen 1949-1989. Eine Einführung', ibid., pp. 16f.; Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Einleitung: Großbritannien und die DDR. Wahrnehmungen, Beziehungen und Verflechtungen im Ost-West-Konflikt', in: idem (ed.), *Britain and the GDR. Relations and Perceptions in a Divided World* (Berlin, 2002), pp. 8f.; On British fears of an accord between Germany and the Soviet Union, see Daniel Gossel, *Briten, Deutsche und Europa. Die Deutsche Frage in der britischen Außenpolitik 1945-1962* (Stuttgart 1999), p. 226.

3 Ian Wallace, 'DDR-Forschung in Großbritannien', in: Gert-Joachim Glaeßner (ed.): *Die DDR in der Ära Honecker: Politik, Kultur, Gesellschaft* (Opladen 1988), 140–50.

economic policy. Moreover, various dimensions of cultural interaction as well as British images of the GDR (in comparison with the Federal Republic) have increasingly received attention.[4] Contrary to these detailed studies, which have provided valuable findings and new insights, this contribution will extend the analytical scope of research. It will be argued that the role of the Federal Republic in the relationship between Britain and the GDR in the arena of international politics as well as in the process of evolving images of and attitudes to the East German state merits a thorough investigation. West Germany variably served as frame of reference and a model, but also as a stick and a deterrent in Anglo-GDR relations. Altogether, attempts to strengthen bilateral contacts were largely overshadowed by the more important relationship of each of the two states to the dominant Federal Republic. In fact, a triangle between Britain, the GDR and the West German states evolved as early as in the 1950s.[5]

British Foreign Policy: From Non-Recognition to Rapprochement

Before the GDR was founded in 1949, British policy had gradually abandoned conceptions of Allied cooperation. Stalin's obstinacy towards British demands for the resurrection of an independent, democratic Polish state and Soviet intransigence on the reparations issue had appalled British officials and politicians. The rigorous and wide-ranging transformation which had been triggered off in the Soviet zone under the auspices of the military authorities of the USSR had also led to considerable disenchantment. More than the dispossession of the large estate owners by the land reform enacted in September 1945 and the confiscation of industrial enterprises, the forced unification of the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party in the Soviet zone in April 1946 indicated that the USSR and the German Communists were not willing to restrict themselves to denazification. On the contrary, the 'anti-fascist' stance seemed to camouflage the new communist dictatorship, which clearly evolved in the late 1940s. As British attitudes towards the new rulers in the Soviet zone of

4 Mary Fulbrook, 'GDR Research in Britain', in: *DA* 29 (1996), pp. 659–61.

5 Marianne Howarth, 'Das Berliner Dreieck. Großbritannien und die beiden deutschen Staaten 1989/90', in: *DA* 34 (2001), p. 956 (extended version: Marianne Howarth, 'The Berlin Triangle. Britain and the Two German States in the 1980s', in: Bauerkämper (ed.): *Britain*, pp. 173-198); Henning Hoff, *Großbritannien und die DDR 1955-1973. Diplomatie auf Umwegen* (Munich 2003), pp. 470, 475f.; Hans-Georg Golz, *Verordnete Völkerfreundschaft. Das Wirken der Freundschaftsgesellschaft DDR-Großbritannien und der Britain-GDR Society – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen* (Leipzig, 2004), pp. 114, 274, 276.

occupation hardened and finally mounted to confrontation, Britain's official policy vis-à-vis West Germany and the emerging Federal Republic shifted from 'punitive to colonial-cooperative and then partnership models'.[6]

It did not require the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany, therefore, to rule out a British recognition of the GDR. In November and December 1949, the western powers agreed on an official policy of non-recognition. From the outset, however, Foreign Office officials were concerned about the economic repercussions of this decision. Despite strong verbal attacks on the new East German government, the GDR could not be ignored, as the interzonal trade agreement between the Western occupation zones and the Soviet zone of Germany demonstrated. Thus, some kind of a de facto recognition of the GDR remained on the British political agenda. Against this background, Stalin's death on 6 March 1953 finally paved the way for a new initiative to ease tensions between the Allied powers and to establish a pragmatic cooperation between them. On 11 May 1953, Prime Minister Winston Churchill proposed a summit of the rulers of the United States, the Soviet Union and Britain in order to settle disputes and ultimately achieve a unification of Germany. But as a reunited and neutral Germany sharply contradicted his political objectives,

6 Anthony Glees, 'The British and the Germans: From Enemies to Partners', in: Dirk Verheyen/Christian Soe (eds): *The Germans and Their Neighbors* (Boulder, 1993), p. 43; Anne Deighton, *The Impossible Peace. Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford 1993), esp. pp. 223–235. Also see Marianne Howarth, 'Die Deutsche Einheit aus britischer Perspektive', in: Heiner Timmermann (ed.): *Potsdam 1945. Konzept, Taktik, Irrtum?* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 48–50. On British reactions to the transformation in the Soviet zone of occupation, see Günther Heydemann, 'Ein deutsches Sowjetrußland? Zur britischen Beurteilung der Entwicklung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone', in: Adolf M. Birke/Günther Heydemann (eds): *Großbritannien und Ostdeutschland seit 1918* (Munich, 1992), pp. 81–94; Heinrich Maetzke, *Der Union Jack in Berlin. Das britische Foreign Office, die SBZ und die Formulierung britischer Deutschlandpolitik 1945/47* (Konstanz, 1996), pp. 250–309; Rohan Butler/M.E. Pelly (eds), *Documents on British Policy Overseas I, Vol. 1: The Conference at Potsdam, July – August 1945* (London, 1984), pp. 192–199; M.E. Pelly/H.J. Yasamee (eds), *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series I, Vol. 5: Germany and Western Europe, 11 August – 31 December 1945* (London 1990), pp. 26–29, 76–83, 127–132. For a teleological view of Soviet policy in occupied Germany, see R.C. Raack, 'Stalin Plans his Post-War Germany', in: *JCH* 28 (1993), pp. 53–73. On British Post-War plans, see the the detailed analysis in Lothar Kettenacker, *Krieg zur Friedenssicherung. Die Deutschlandplanung der britischen Regierung während des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (Göttingen, 1989); idem, 'Die alliierte Kontrolle Deutschlands als Exempel britischer Herrschaftsausübung', in: Ludolf Herbst (ed.), *Westdeutschland 1945–1955. Unterwerfung, Kontrolle, Integration* (Munich, 1986), pp. 51–63; idem, 'Der Weg zur britischen Besatzungszone', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 63–82.

West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer not only tried to win over the American Administration headed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, but also to mobilize support among leading officials of the British Foreign Office. Indeed, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was particularly opposed to Churchill's plan. The uprising of June 1953, which almost dislodged the communist rulers from power in the GDR, finally sealed the fate of all conceptions of German unification.[7]

Nevertheless, British disenchantment with West Germany's insistence on the non-recognition of the GDR also grew. As trade relations expanded and unofficial contacts between Britain and the East German state intensified in 1950s, the 'Hallstein Doctrine', which denounced the recognition of the GDR by any other country as an unfriendly act, increasingly met resistance among British politicians and officials. As early as 1952, representatives of British sports clubs had called for a de facto recognition of the GDR in order to facilitate exchange.[8] However, it was only in the late 1950s that demands for a more flexible policy reached the echelons of high politics. Although the Western allies firmly and unwaveringly rejected Nikita Khrushchev's ultimatum on the access from the Federal Republic to West Berlin and the ensuing political pressure exerted by the Soviet party leader in December 1958, Foreign Office officials favoured a more flexible policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the GDR. During Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's journey to the USSR in February 1959, even Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd signalled that he was pondering the official recognition of the GDR as a solution to the Berlin crisis. Following the conference of the foreign ministers of the four powers in Geneva in May and June 1959, British politicians increased their pressure on the West German government to abandon their restrictive policy towards the GDR. Not only left-wing Labour mavericks like Tom Dreiberg and Sydney Silverman, but also established and more widely respected politicians of that party like Richard Crossman and Members of Parliament (MPs) with business interests in the GDR like Burnaby Drayson, Arthur Lewis and Ian Mikardo openly espoused a de facto recognition of the GDR. Like Macmillan in the late

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7 Klaus Larres, 'Großbritannien und der 17. Juni 1953. Die deutsche Frage und das Scheitern von Churchills Entspannungspolitik nach Stalins Tod', in: Christoph Kleßmann/Bernd Stöver (eds), *1953 – Krisenjahr des Kalten Krieges in Europa* (Cologne, 1999), pp. 155, 162, 171, 175, 177f.; Larres, 'Britain', pp. 65–70; Michael Gehler, 'Der 17. Juni 1953 aus der Sicht des Foreign Office', in: *APuZ* B 25/93, 18 June 1993, pp. 27f., 31; Marianne Howarth, 'Der Juni-Aufstand und die Deutschlandpolitik der Westalliierten', in: *APuZ* B 23/2003, 2 June 2003, pp. 22–24.

8 Martin H. Geyer, 'Der Kampf um die nationale Repräsentation. Deutsch-deutsche Sportbeziehungen und die "Hallstein-Doktrin"', in: *VfZ* 44 (1996), pp. 63f.

1950s, Prime Minister Harold Wilson favoured an agreement with the Soviet Union, even at the expense of indirectly recognizing the GDR. Due to the growing pressure of British business interest on British government in the late 1950s, the GDR was allowed to establish an agency of the department of trade (*Kammer für Außenhandel*), the KfA Ltd., which was to facilitate and promote trade between the two states. Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell endorsed the Rapacki plan for a nuclear-free zone in central Europe and the ensuing pragmatic accommodation with the East German state and in February 1959; forty-one Labour MPs called for a de facto recognition of the GDR. To the relief and delight of Adenauer's government, however, the United States and France firmly opposed this demand.[9]

Apart from economic motives as well as a commitment to 'anti-fascism' and state socialism, a critical attitude to the political development of the Federal Republic, objections to its rearmament and a rejection of West German capitalism fuelled support for the GDR, particularly among politicians of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the Labour Party as well as left-wing representatives of the trade unions. Yet the CPGB was on the political fringe and barely represented in Parliament throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. After ideological rifts had emerged between the British and East German Communists as early as 1958, new

9 Gustav Schmidt, 'Die unsichtbare Hand des "Dritten." Die USA und die deutsch-britischen Beziehungen 1950–1966', in: Gerhard Ritter/Peter Wende (eds), *Rivalität und Partnerschaft. Studien zu den deutsch-britischen Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift Anthony J. Nicholls* (Paderborn, 1999), pp. 343f., 350f., 358f.; Hoff, *Großbritannien*, pp. 270–306, 408–423, 431–442. On the support for the GDR in the Labour Party, see Stefan Berger/Darren G. Lilleker, 'The British Labour Party and the German Democratic Republic During the Era of Non-Recognition, 1949-1973', in: *HJ* 4 (2002), pp. 440–444; idem, 'Blutrünstige Diktatur, das bessere Deutschland oder Stolpersteine auf dem Weg zu einer friedlichen Koexistenz? Die DDR im Blick der britischen Labour Party, 1949-1973', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 244f., 249. On the Berlin crisis, see John P.S. Gearson, *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis, 1958-62. The Limits of Interests and Force* (London 1998); Victor Mauer, 'Macmillan und die Berlin-Krise 1958/59', in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 44, (1996), pp. 229–256; Daniel Gossel, 'Die Berlinkrisen 1948/49 und 1958/62: Wendepunkte britischer Deutschlandpolitik?' in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 117f., 121f.; idem, *Briten*, esp. 225; Lee, 'Perception', pp. 49-54, 65-68. Also see Marianne Howarth, 'Die DDR-Präsenz in Großbritannien vor und nach der diplomatischen Anerkennung', in: *DA* 4 (1999), pp. 591–595, 600; idem, 'Großbritannien und die DDR. Beziehungen und Nicht-Beziehungen', Heiner Timmerman (ed.), *Die DDR – Erinnerungen an einen untergegangenen Staat* (Berlin, 1999), pp. 515–518; idem, 'Einheit', p. 51; Larres, 'Britain', pp. 73–83. On Gaitskell, see Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen, Vol. 2: Deutsche Geschichte vom „Dritten Reich" bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Munich 2000), pp. 193f.

disagreements after the suppression of reform socialism in Prague in August 1968 deepened disenchantment among the leading functionaries of the SED. The British Communists were therefore largely irrelevant as a possible ally to the East German rulers. By contrast, contacts between left-wing members of the Labour Party like Richard Crossman and the trade unions were more important. But few of the Labour politicians who demanded a more flexible policy vis-à-vis the GDR were in high office. Moreover, the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party rejected proposals to recognize the East German state. Nevertheless, left-wing advocates of a rapprochement between Britain and the GDR were severely criticized by West German Social Democrats. Some high-ranking members of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) also sympathized with East Germany, but most trade union leaders stuck to the pragmatic official attitude of Labour Party.[10]

All in all, it was less the unofficial contacts between British and East German parties and organizations than Adenauer's government which set the pace of the change in British policy vis-à-vis the GDR. By 1957, West German *Ostpolitik* had been intensified and assumed a new quality. The more flexible policy affected relations to the Soviet Union and the GDR in particular. As early as December 1957, Adenauer even declared his intention to start direct negotiations with the USSR. In January 1959, State Secretary Hans Globke proposed a referendum on the unification of Germany. In the interim period, the GDR was to be recognized as a sovereign state. Although it was not published, the Globke Plan relaxed the tensions between the Federal Republic and the GDR in the mid-1960s. With spreading détente in that decade, British official policy followed suit. Friendship organizations such as BRIDGE (British Democratic Germany Information Exchange) and its East German counterpart, Debrig (*Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft*) were founded in the mid-1960s in order to establish closer links between the two states. In the GDR, the leadership of the ruling SED used the unofficial organizations as a tool of its continuous efforts to achieve diplomatic recognition throughout the 1960s. Some individual sympathizers of the East German regime also supported their political claims. Thus, former Reuter journalist John Peet, who had moved to East Berlin in 1950, intensified his propaganda for the GDR in the *Democratic German Report*, and organizations like the *Friedensrat der DDR* and the *Liga für Völkerfreundschaft* mobilized support for the recognition of the GDR under the

10 Golz, *Völkerfreundschaft*, pp. 85, 102f.; Hoff, *Großbritannien*, pp. 115–126, 131–163, 254–275, 375–386; Berger/Lilleker, 'The British Labour Party', pp. 444–446, 456f., 458.

guise of peace and 'anti-fascism'. After the Federation of British Industries had agreed to act as the British contact partner of KfA Ltd. and an unofficial trade agreement had been concluded in 1959, economic exchange also expanded. The public relations agency Lex Hornsby & Partners, which was set up in 1960 in London, promoted trade between Britain and the GDR. 'GDR Committees' in the Confederation of British Industry (which had succeeded the FBI) and the London Chamber of Commerce also contributed to the expansion of economic exchange until the Berlin Wall was built in 1961. In 1965, 40 MPs established the All-Party British GDR Parliamentary Group, which aimed at breaking down trade barriers between Britain and the East German state and countering West German pressure on the Allied Travel Office to reject GDR passports and to refrain from issuing visas which would have allowed East Germans to enter the British Isles. However, Britain officially adhered to West Germany's policy of non-recognition.[11]

After the government of the GDR had been allowed to join the American-Soviet Test Ban Treaty signed in 1963 and the International Olympic Committee had decided to register two German teams for the Olympic Games of 1968, the official recognition of the GDR was on the political agenda. Although the activities of unofficial organizations had arguably contributed to the general mood of détente in the late 1960s, a political change in the Federal Republic, once again, triggered off the decision to official recognize the GDR. After he had inaugurated his *Ostpolitik* in 1969, Chancellor Willy Brandt entered into negotiations with the East German government. In the Basic Treaty, which was finally signed in December 1972, the Federal Republic recognized the GDR as a sovereign and independent state. Although Labour MPs and Liberal leader and MP David Steel had set up a Committee for the Recognition of the GDR in 1971, the British government agreed to establish diplomatic relations with the East German state as late as February 1973. In December 1973, the governments

11 Bert Becker, *Die DDR und Großbritannien 1945/49 bis 1973. Politische, wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Kontakte im Zeichen der Nichtanerkennungspolitik* (Bochum 1991), pp. 248–265; Hoff, *Großbritannien*, pp. 189–192, 275–279, 361–364, 386–407, 424–430; idem, 'Die Politik der DDR gegenüber Großbritannien 1949–1973', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 277–289; idem, 'Prisoners of Dr. Adenauer's Policy', pp. 194-196; Golz, *Völkerfreundschaft*, pp. 163-200; Howarth, 'DDR-Präsenz', pp. 587f.; Larres, 'Britain', pp. 84–90. On the Globke Plan, see Winkler, *Weg*, p. 196. For an autobiographical account, see John Peet, *Der Spion der keiner war* (Vienna, 1991), esp. pp. 211–254. On Adenauer's new *Ostpolitik*, see Lee, 'Berlin Crisis', pp. 54–56, 63f. On economic and technological exchange, see Raymod Stokes, 'A Singular Attraction: Economic and Technological Relations between Great Britain and the GDR in the 1950s and 1960s', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 325–338.

of Britain and the GDR concluded agreements on economic, scientific and technological co-operation. As Britain also joined the EEC in 1973, her governments could no longer threaten to recognize the GDR if Bonn did not support British demands to enter the community of European nations. Germany's ruling parties, for their part, were no longer obliged to stick to a policy of non-recognition which had ultimately lost its credibility. Tied together by the 'Hallstein Doctrine' in the 1950s, recognition of the GDR relieved both the Federal Republic of Germany and Britain from a political burden.[12]

By contrast, trade and the envisaged transfer of knowledge did not meet the high expectations. While exports from the GDR increased substantially in the 1970s and 1980s, Britain's trade with the GDR expanded only slightly. Political relations between the two states also staggered. Although a consular agreement was signed in May 1976, the invasion of Soviet troops into Afghanistan in December 1979 triggered off a decline in political relations which was not reversed by Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe's talks in East Berlin in 1985 and the return visit by his East German counterpart, Oskar Fischer, a year later. Erich Honecker, who had replaced Walter Ulbricht as political leader in May 1973, did not therefore succeed in paying an official state visit to London. Although the Britain-GDR Society, which had succeeded BRIDGE in 1973, strenuously attempted to improve the image of the East German state, relations between the two countries remained underdeveloped. In fact, the role of the bilateral friendship organizations diminished after diplomatic relations between Britain and the GDR had been established. Although the leading functionaries of the SED continuously strove to improve the image of the East German state in Britain, they objected to unorganized contacts between citizens of the two states. Obsessed by their fear of losing their grip of the population, the leadership of the SED suspected spontaneous initiatives of ultimately undermining their political rule in the GDR. Moreover, as unofficial organizations proved difficult to control, they could possibly interfere with diplomacy. Thus, only academic exchange and co-operation thrived in the 1970s, as the upsurge of GDR studies in Britain indicated. Although the institutional basis of research on the GDR remained weak in Britain, German Departments of universities, in particular, initiated some exchange between academics. Even prominent East German authors like Christa

12 David Childs, 'The Changing British Perception of the GDR: a Personal Memoir', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 381–383; Larres, 'Britain', pp. 90–93; Howarth, 'Großbritannien', pp. 520f.; Glees, 'British', pp. 46–49. Also see Golz, *Völkerfreundschaft*, p. 108.

Wolf, Volker Braun and Ulrich Plenzdorf visited Britain. Many contributions on the second German state were published in the 'GDR Monitor', which was established by Ian Wallace in 1979. In academia, David Childs, Mike Dennis, Martin McCauley, John Sandford and Roger Woods also entertained contacts to the GDR in the 1980s. Altogether, however, only a minority of academics in the two states promoted common endeavours like conferences and exchange programmes.[13]

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher applauded the collapse of the dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party in the autumn of 1989, but she vigorously rejected a unification of Germany. Even after Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd had officially committed Britain to support the unification of the two German states on 6 February 1990, Thatcher did not abandon her reservations about a supposedly dominant new German nation-state in Central Europe. In fact, her conversation with experts in Chequers on 24 March 1990 revealed deep-seated stereotypes about 'the Germans' who were supposedly ridden by '*angst*, aggressiveness, assertiveness, bullying, egotism, inferiority complex, sentimentality'. Even in its demise, the GDR related Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany to each other. The West German state had always been a hidden 'third player' in the political arena. In the last resort, relations to the Federal Republic always took priority for British governments, as the unification of the two German states amply demonstrated.[14]

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13 Hans-Georg Golz, 'Von East Germany zur GDR. DDR-Forschung in Großbritannien vor 1990', in: *DA* 36 (2003), pp. 19f. As a detailed analysis, see Axel Bachmann, 'Die Beziehungen der DDR zu den angelsächsischen Ländern', in: Hans-Joachim Veen/Peter R. Weilemann (eds), *Die Westpolitik der DDR. Beziehungen der DDR zu ausgewählten westlichen Industriestaaten in den 70er und 80er Jahren* (Melle, 1989), pp. 112–131; Golz, *Völkerfreundschaft*, pp. 141–162, 201–272. On relations in the 1970s and 1980s, also see Wallace, 'DDR-Forschung', pp. 141–143; Marianne Howarth, 'Freundschaft mit dem Klassenfeind. Die Image-Politik der DDR in Großbritannien nach der diplomatischen Anerkennung', in: *DA* 36 (2003), 25–34; idem, 'Einheit', pp. 52–57; idem, 'Dreieck', pp. 963–966; Childs, 'Perception', pp. 383–386.

14 Norbert Himmler, *Zwischen Macht und Mittelmaß. Großbritanniens Außenpolitik und das Ende des Kalten Krieges* (Berlin, 2001), pp. 82–163; Lothar Kettenacker, 'Britain and German Unification, 1989/90', in: Larres/Meehan (eds), *Allies*, pp. 99–123; Yvonne Klein, 'Obstructive or Promoting? British Views on German Unification 1989/90', in: *German Politics* 5 (1996), pp. 404–431; Gordon A. Craig, 'Die Chequers-Affäre von 1990. Beobachtungen zum Thema Presse und internationale Beziehungen', in: *VfZ* 39 (1991), pp. 611–623; Günther Heydemann, 'Die britisch-deutschen Beziehungen und das Deutschlandbild Großbritanniens zwischen Margaret Thatcher und Tony Blair – Eine kritische Rückblende', in: Karl Eckart/Jens Hacker/Siegfried Mampel (ed.), *Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands. Festschrift zum 20jährigen Bestehen der Gesellschaft für Deutschlandforschung* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 629–632; Klaus Larres, 'Ein englisches Dilemma', in: *Die Zeit*, No. 40, 28 Sep-

British Views of the GDR: 'Better Germany' or 'Old Germany'?

British perceptions of the GDR had a profound impact on her policy vis-à-vis the East German state. Like the political relations between the two states, British images of the GDR were influenced by perceptions of the Federal Republic. The rearmament of West Germany enabled the Socialist Unity Party to tap British fears of German revisionism and expansion. Similarly, the political accusations against high-ranking officials like State Secretary Hans Globke (1953-1963) and Theodor Oberländer, who served as Minister for the Refugees from 1953 to 1960, left the impression of half-hearted denazification in the Federal Republic. In the early 1950s, the upsurge of neo-Nazi parties like the Sozialistische Reichspartei and the Deutsche Rechtspartei also caused some concern in Britain. Although it proved unfounded, the fear of a nazified West Germany provided the GDR with political support in Britain. For example, the *Braunbuch Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik*, which was published in East Berlin in 1965, struck a chord among British politicians and intellectuals.[15] Official West German foreign policy also caused concern in Britain. As the Federal Republic officially refused to drop territorial claims on the lost provinces east of the rivers Oder and Neisse, the GDR appeared as a peaceful bulwark against supposedly militaristic and revanchist West Germany. In general, the experience of the Second World War, which was deeply engrained in British collective consciousness, proved to be fertile ground for GDR propaganda against West Germany. Memories of 'Their Finest Hour'[16] fuelled pride in British stubbornness and determination. As Britain was clearly superseded as a world power by the United States of America and the Soviet Union in the 1950s, the meteoric rise of the Federal Republic as an economically successful state raised British fears of decline. The quick recovery and ascent of the new West German state also nour-

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tember 2000, p. 76. For press publications on the unification of Germany, see Harold James/Marla Stone (eds), *When the Wall Came Down. Reactions to German Unification* (New York, 1992), pp. 221–223, 240f.

15 Childs, 'Perception', pp. 377f. On the debate about the Nazi past in the Federal Republic, see Bernd Stöver, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Darmstadt, 2002), pp. 61–74; Peter Reichel, 'Zwischen Dämonisierung und Verharmlosung: Das NS-Bild und seine politische Funktion in den 50er Jahren. Eine Skizze', in: Axel Schildt/Arnold Sywottek (eds), *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau. Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn, 1998), pp. 679–692; Detlef Garbe, 'Äußerliche Abkehr, Erinnerungsverweigerung und "Vergangenheitsbewältigung": Der Umgang mit dem Nationalsozialismus in der frühen Bundesrepublik', ibid., pp. 693–716.

16 Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. 2 (London, 1949).

ished suspicions about the unification of Europe, allegedly under the auspices of the omnipotent Federal Republic. Against this background, support for the GDR as the underdog seemed to comply with traditional doctrine of 'balance of power' on the European continent. All in all, a divided Germany seemed to prevent the resurgence of a daunting threat to Britain's position in Europe and in the world.[17]

Beyond this political pragmatism, which was linked to underlying self-perceptions and fears, some political parties and groups in Britain genuinely saw the GDR as the 'better Germany'. Left-wing politicians, in particular, fervently admired the supposedly unwavering 'anti-fascist' stance and policies of the East German rulers. Some leading members of the Socialist Unity Party like Wilhelm Koenen as well as historians Jürgen Kuczynski and Alfred Meusel had fled to Britain after the Nazi seizure the power but returned to the Soviet zone of occupation after the Second World War. To take another example, the Vice-President of the East German *Liga für Völkerfreundschaft*, Horst Brasch, had lived in Britain from 1939 to 1946.[18] Conservative MPs, church leaders and sports officials also supported the GDR's political claims. However, the majority of them were by no means fellow travellers of the East German dictatorship, but genuinely committed to détente, peace and improving contacts between the citizens of the two states. For instance, the group of young volunteers who helped to rebuild an Evangelical Church hospital in Dresden in 1965 were inspired by their wish to reconcile the British and all German people and make restitution of war damage inflicted by British bombers two decades earlier. As Dresden was twinned with Coventry, the project had emanated from the latter's Cathedral. British governments, however, repeatedly refused to become officially involved with these initiatives, as they were cautious not to damage the relationship to the West German state. At least

17 Lothar Kettenacker, 'Zwangsläufige deutsche Dominanz? – Über Konstanten britischer Europaperzeptionen', in: *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 26 (1997), pp. 235–249; David Childs, 'British Labour and Ulbricht's State. The Fight for Recognition', in: Birke/Heydemann (eds), *Großbritannien*, p. 103; Hoff, *Großbritannien*, pp. 307–314.

18 Mario Keßler, *Exilerfahrung in Wissenschaft und Politik. Remigrierte Historiker in der frühen DDR* (Cologne, 2001), pp. 50–145; idem, 'Jürgen Kuczynski und Alfred Meusel im britischen Exil', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 199–233; Childs, British 'Labour', p. 100. Also see Gerhard Hirschfeld, 'Durchgangsland Großbritannien? Die deutsche "Academic Community" und die wissenschaftliche Emigration aus Deutschland', in: Charmian Brinson (ed.), *"England? Aber wo liegt es?" Deutsche und österreichische Emigranten in Großbritannien 1933-1945*, (Munich, 1996), pp. 59–70; Howarth, 'Großbritannien', p. 514; Howarth, 'DDR-Präsenz', pp. 592, 597. Wilhelm Koenen was instrumental in founding DEBRIG in 1963. See Becker, *DDR*, p. 251.

to some extent, sympathy with the GDR corresponded to re-sentment of a boisterous West Germany.[19]

Yet British views of the GDR were by no means uniform and homogeneous, but multifarious, ambivalent and even ambiguous. Perceptions of the East German state varied over time and differed between particular social and political groups. While left-wing politicians and intellectuals, in particular, saw the GDR as an antidote to a revanchist and nazified Federal Republic, admiration gradually subsided to disillusionment in the course of the 1970s and 1980s. Even in the preceding decades, the GDR was mostly portrayed as a grim and frightening place in literature and in films. John Le Carré's and Len Deighton's novels and spy thrillers, for instance, depicted repression and incarceration symbolised by the Berlin Wall. If it was dealt with at all, East German society appeared as the antithesis of westernised everyday life with its emphasis on casualness, informal behaviour, extensive leisure activities and consumerism. As opposed to this ideal, the GDR seemed to represent traditional German militarism, assertiveness as well as authoritarian values like submissiveness and subservience. Moreover, the Wall and the border installations represented the abhorred German orderliness and efficiency. Perceptions of the East German state as the harbinger of freedom and prosperity were overshadowed by images of the GDR as 'old Germany'. Depictions of East Germany thus tied traditional anti-German stereotypes to the new anti-communism in the Cold War. Degradations of the GDR neatly corresponded to much more positive perceptions of the Federal Republic, a full-fledged parliamentary democracy. The new West German state had committed itself to western liberalism. Political and social values like tolerance and pluralism also took root, though the decisive breakthrough of western liberal democracy was achieved only in the 1960s. These predominant perceptions of the Federal Republic contrasted to representations of the GDR as a dull and dreary state. Yet this image reveals as much about British self-perceptions as about views of the East German state. Shaken by their declining status in international politics from the 1950s onwards, the GDR seemed to give notions of British superiority a new lease of life. Portrayals of the East German state were therefore characterized by paternalistic attitudes and a

19 Merrilyn Thomas, 'Idealism as a Political Tool. The Coventry-Dresden Relationship 1963-1965', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 305–324, idem, 'The evangelical church in the German Democratic Republic', in: Patrick Major/Jonathan Osmond (eds), *The Workers' and the Peasants' State. Communism and society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-71* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 221–223. Also see Berger/Lilleker, 'Labour Party', p. 457.

sense of a civilizing mission. As British self-images were projected on the GDR, the East German state assumed a compensatory role.[20]

However, the GDR was generally little known in Britain until it was officially recognized in 1973. As in the realm of international relations, the Federal Republic was in the forefront of debates about Germany throughout the era from 1945 to 1990. The GDR peace movement, for example, aroused little interest among British peace activists. Despite the activities of European Nuclear Disarmament in Britain in the 1980s, the need to choose or mediate between the 'official' and 'independent' peace movements in East Germany confronted British activists with an almost insoluble dilemma. With the meteoric rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, whose reform policies gained considerable clout in the West from 1985 onwards, the GDR lost political support in Britain, particularly because of the stubbornness of the communist leaders who clung to their orthodox doctrines and resisted any change. Altogether, the image of the GDR was continuously marred with contradictions. East German obsession with hierarchical organization was confronted with British liberal pragmatism. This clash of political cultures repeatedly caused anger and frustration on both sides. By contrast, the Federal Republic of Germany was not only an indispensable political partner, but also a state with a political system similar to British parliamentary democracy. Although the West German state was not always attractive to Britons, political and social bonds between the two countries clearly outmatched contacts between the British Isles and the GDR. However, British perceptions of the East German state and the Federal Republic closely interrelated.[21]

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20 Patrick Major, 'Coming in from the Cold: The GDR in the British Spy Thriller', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 339–352. On the coalescence of anti-communism and anti-German resentments in British perceptions of the GDR, see Golz, 'East Germany', p. 14.

21 Golz, *Völkerfreundschaft*, pp. 214, 219, 239, 272, 276f. The lack of a coordination between East German state and party authorities as a source of friction and inefficiency has been emphasized by Hoff, *Großbritannien*, pp. 393, 429, 448, 475. On relations between the peace movements in Britain and the GDR, see John Sandford, 'Mutual (Mis-)Perceptions: The GDR and the British Peace Movement in the 1980s', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 353–373. On the impact of Gorbachev's policies, see Martin McCauley, 'Gorbachev, the GDR and Germany', in: Gert-Joachim Glaeßner/Ian Wallace (eds), *The German Revolution of 1989. Causes and Consequences* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 163–170; idem, 'British-GDR Relations: A See-Saw Relationship', in: Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain*, pp. 56–58.

The Third Player: The Role of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Relationship between Britain and the GDR

Historical studies of the multifarious contacts between Britons and citizens of the GDR as well as their respective states have to take the relationship between Britain and the Federal Republic into account. Tied together in the alliances of western democracies, in particular NATO and – since 1973 – the European Community / European Union), Britain and the Federal Republic shared important political convictions and objectives. British governments did not therefore bow to pressure to abandon their support of the West German policy of non-recognition towards the East German state, which was largely seen as a puppet of the Soviet Union in the 1950s. It was only after the Basic Treaty had been concluded by the two German governments in 1973 that Britain officially recognised the GDR. However, the leading circles of the Socialist Unity Party, for their part, tried to exploit British fears of West German pre-eminence in Europe. Due to the rise of the Federal Republic as a major economic power, in particular, the SED rulers successfully tapped anxiety over Britain's relative decline. Contacts to state organizations of the GDR as well as to the SED rulers were therefore repeatedly used as a demonstration of British independence vis-à-vis the Federal Republic. Not least, the persisting division of Germany secured Britain its status as an occupying power and thus as a major player in the arena of international politics. British uneasiness about the daunting prospect of German unification therefore even shook official circles in early 1990.

From the perspective of British governments, Anglo-GDR relations were always embedded in a triangle which comprised the Federal Republic. They were also an integral element of European politics. Although not openly admitted, German division had become a safeguard against a resurgence of a dominant power in Central Europe, which would have endangered the cherished 'balance of power'. Finally, the 'German question' has to be related to Britain's global role. In the late 1950s and in the 1960s, an accommodation with the Soviet Union seemed to pave the way for disarmament and to ease the strain on British resources. Beyond this prospect, a de facto recognition of the GDR as a result of an accord with the USSR promised to promote Britain's trade and increase her exports. Economic relations were therefore high on the British political agenda, as she tightened relations with the East German rulers. But obligations towards

the Federal Republic almost continuously took priority in British politics. In the last resort, the GDR was always the second German state.[22]

As regards methodology, this contribution points to the need to combine the perspectives of diplomatic and cultural history. Foreign relations between Britain and the GDR were influenced by their mutual perceptions and misunderstandings. Ideas, institutions and culture (i.e. representations, interpretations and incorporations of the world by the historical actors) have to be closely interrelated.[23] Thus, images of the GDR had a profound impact on perceptions of the Federal Republic and vice versa. The Federal Republic was always the third player in Anglo-GDR relations. In fact, contacts between the Britons on the one hand and citizens as well as official representatives of the GDR on the other were continuously subordinate to relations between Britain and the Federal Republic. Perceptions of the East German state were also in the shadow of views of the Federal Republic. Altogether, it took three to tango.

22 Hoff, '"Adenauer's Policy"', p. 206; Gossel, *Briten*, pp. 224, 228; Howarth, 'Großbritannien', pp. 509, 512, 525; Larres, 'Britain', pp. 63, 97f. On the role of trade in Anglo-GDR relation, see Bachmann, *Beziehungen*, pp. 113, 123, 131; Howarth, 'DDR-Präsenz', pp. 592, 600; Larres, 'Britain', pp. 75, 79.

23 Ursula Lehmkuhl, 'Diplomatiegeschichte als internationale Kulturgeschichte: Theoretische Ansätze und empirische Forschung zwischen Historischer Kulturwissenschaft und Soziologischem Institutionalismus', in: *GG* 27 (2001), pp. 416f.; Lee, 'Perception', p. 69.