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The German Democratic Republic, Gorbachev, and the INF Treaty

Erich Honecker was not a friend of nuclear weapons in Europe. If war broke out, it was clear that the GDR would be part of the battlefield and would suffer devastating consequences. At the beginning of the 1980s, with the discussion about NATO's Double-Track Decision and the threatened deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in West Germany and other West European countries, Honecker's anxiety grew. It came to a peak when, after the deployment decision of the Bundestag in November 1983, the GDR had to accept the deployment of Soviet SS-12 and SS-23 missiles on its own territory. In an interview with the West German weekly paper *Die Zeit* in January 1986 he clearly stated that these weapons would vanish from East German soil if the United States and the Soviet Union reached an agreement on a zero option on INF weapons.¹ Several months later, on November 21, he became even more explicit in a speech delivered to the SED Central Committee: "If the INF-question is solved it will no longer be necessary to have tactical missiles (under the range of 1,000 km) in the GDR. Then it would be possible to remove this devil's stuff (*Teufelszeug*) from the territory of the GDR."² With this statement—which was printed in *Neues Deutschland*, the paper of the Socialist Unity Party (SED)—Honecker stated publicly that the GDR was adversely affected by the deployment of missiles with nuclear warheads on its own territory and that he wanted to see them removed. Shortly before this event, on October 11 and 12, U. S. President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev had almost agreed to scrap all ground-launched INF at their meeting in Reykjavik.

But it was not only general concern about the effects of a nuclear war on the GDR and tactical support for the Soviet leader that induced Honecker to make

- 1 Wir sind für den Frieden auf der Erde und im Kosmos. Interview des Chefredakteurs der BRD-Wochenzeitung *Die Zeit*, Dr. Theo Sommer, January 24, 1986, in: Erich Honecker, Reden und Aufsätze, Vol. 11, Berlin (East) 1987, p. 239.
- 2 Mit Initiative, Schöpfertum und Tatkraft verwirklichen wir die Beschlüsse unseres XI. Parteitag. Aus dem Schlußwort auf der 3. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED, November 21, 1986, in: Erich Honecker, Reden und Aufsätze, Vol. 12, Berlin (East) 1988, p. 203. According to Oliver Bange, Honecker had spoken repeatedly about "nuclear suicide" since 1981, and had used the term "devil's stuff" to characterize Western and (from 1983 onwards) Eastern nuclear weapons, but he does not substantiate this with any sources, see Oliver Bange, *Sicherheit und Staat. Die Bündnis- und Militärpolitik der DDR im internationalen Kontext 1969 bis 1990*, Berlin 2017, p. 224.

this statement. For a deeper understanding of GDR politics with regard to INF and the INF Treaty, first it is necessary to look back briefly to 1983, when the Soviets decided to deploy SS-12 and SS-23 in East Germany. Secondly, East German politics with regard to the INF Treaty have to be seen in the context of Soviet–East German relations, on which Gorbachev’s accession to power in 1985 had a decisive influence—and this means the relationship between the leaders in Moscow and East Berlin as well as that between Gorbachev and the East German people. As the GDR could not influence Soviet–U. S. negotiations directly, Honecker had to concentrate on supporting the Soviet position *indirectly*, through his contacts with West German politicians. Furthermore, he tried to impress Moscow with his power to influence West German politics. So the third part will be devoted to East German support of Gorbachev in the context of relations between Bonn and Moscow. As this essay will not restrict itself to high-level politics, the fourth and last part will be concerned with the important question of how the East German public responded to the negotiations and the INF Treaty in 1987.

1. A Brief Look Back: Soviet Reactions to the Bundestag’s Arms Upgrade Resolution and the GDR

On December 12, 1979, the NATO Foreign Ministers decided, on the one hand, to deploy new American nuclear weapons in Western Europe, in order to restore the balance in nuclear deterrence after the deployment of SS-20 missiles in the European parts of the Soviet Union from 1976. On the other hand, they made an offer that both superpowers should negotiate a restriction of their INF, thus opening the possibility of reducing Soviet SS-20 missiles and of deploying fewer Pershing II missiles and ground-launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM) than stated in the first part of the Decision.³ Although Moscow at first declined to talk as long as NATO stuck to its Decision, it eventually agreed to negotiations in Geneva, which began on November 30, 1981. As it became clear in the course of 1983 that these talks would remain inconclusive, the probability increased that the Bundestag would pass a vote in favor of the deployment of Pershing II missiles and GLCM in West Germany.

Already on May 12, 1983 the Politburo of the CPSU decided that, in this case, more than the intended number of SS-20 would be deployed and that operational-tactical missiles would be transferred further to the west, especially to the GDR and the ČSSR. Without giving details, the Soviet government announced on May 28 that if U. S. weapons were deployed, it would take effective countermeasures.⁴

3 For the Dual-Track Decision, see the Communiqué of NATO’s special meeting, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27040.htm.

4 Cf. Gerhard Wettig, Die Sowjetunion in der Auseinandersetzung über den NATO-Doppelbeschluss 1979–1983, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (VfZ) 57 (2009), p. 252; Julij A. Kwizinskij, Vor dem Sturm. Erinnerungen eines Diplomaten, Berlin 1993, pp. 322, 325.

Honecker did not favor this increase of nuclear weapons in the GDR. This was mainly for economic and financial reasons. To a large extent, the GDR was dependent on the Soviet Union for the supply of cheap raw materials, especially crude oil. When, in the fall of 1981, Moscow let its East German ally know that it would cut the delivery of crude oil in the future by two million tons, from 19 to 17 million tons per year,⁵ it became clear to the East German leadership that economic support from the Soviet Union would in future decrease. This would make the GDR more and more dependent on economic cooperation with the Federal Republic of Germany, even though its *raison d'état* called for delimitation from its West German rival. Since the normalization of relations between the two German states in the Basic Treaty of 1972, the GDR also profited from West German loans and payments, especially for the use of East German traffic routes. In order not to endanger favorable trading conditions and other financial advantages from the Federal Republic, Honecker had to maintain a policy of détente between both German states at almost any price.⁶ And last, but not least he dreaded the costs which would be incurred in the preparation of the deployment sites.⁷ Honecker also knew from a visit to Moscow made in early October 1983 by Herbert Häber, Head of the so called "West Department" in the Central Committee, that the Soviet leadership did not have any idea how to react politically if there was a West German decision in favor of deployment. Afterwards Häber visited the Federal Republic and, after talks with numerous government and opposition leaders, reported: "In all discussions one notices that the term 'damage limitation' was being used as a central theme."⁸ Although Honecker learned from this report that only the West German Social Democratic Party and the tiny Green Party would reject the deployment of missiles and that the Parties of the governing Christian-Liberal coalition would support the move, he became

- 5 For Soviet-East German communication on this matter between August, 27 and October, 21 1981 see Hans-Hermann Hertle, Die Diskussion der ökonomischen Krisen in der Führungsspitze der SED, in: Theo Pirker, M. Rainer Lepsius, Rainer Weinert, and Hans-Hermann Hertle (eds.), *Der Plan als Befehl und Fiktion. Wirtschaftsführung in der DDR. Gespräche und Analysen*, Opladen 1995, pp. 321 f.
- 6 Cf. Hermann Wentker, Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen. Die DDR im internationalen System 1949–1989, Munich 2007, pp. 477–480, 500–506; on German–German relations during the controversies over the NATO Double-Track Decision see Hermann Wentker, NATO's Double-Track Decision and East–West German Relations, in: Christoph Becker-Schaum, Philipp Gassert, Martin Klimke, Wilfried Mausbach, and Marianne Zepp (eds.), *The Nuclear Crisis. The Arms Race, Cold War Anxiety, and the German Peace Movement of the 1980s*, New York/Oxford 2016, pp. 87–103.
- 7 Cf. Heiner Bröckermann, Landesverteidigung und Militarisation. Militär- und Sicherheitspolitik der DDR in der Ära Honecker 1971–1989, Berlin 2011, pp. 536 f.
- 8 Häber's report on his sojourn in the FRG from 9–16 October, 1983, in: Detlef Nakath and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan (eds.), *Die Häber-Protokolle. Schlaglichter der SED-Westpolitik 1973–1985*, Berlin 1999, p. 148.

convinced that Bonn had an interest in maintaining détente in East-West German relations, just as he did.⁹

So, after the Bundestag's arms upgrade decision of November 22, Honecker believed he could develop his own strategy with impunity. Three days later, he announced the counter-deployment of Soviet operational-tactical missiles in the GDR (SS-12 and SS-23) at the meeting of the SED's Central Committee. But he added: "Of course, these measures which were indispensable to prevent the strategic military superiority of the U.S. are not producing cheering and jubilation throughout our country." He affirmed his set intention to prevent a nuclear world war, to end the arms race, and to continue the policy of détente. With respect to East-West German relations, he added that he was anxious to "control the damage as much as possible."¹⁰ Against the backdrop of what he had heard from Bonn, this was meant as a message to the West German leaders that they need not fear a deterioration in these relations. As became clear in a letter from the Central committee of the CPSU to the SED Politburo sent at the end of November, Moscow expected East Berlin to pursue a "walls up" policy towards Bonn.¹¹ But Honecker did not give in. Economic dependency on the West German rival was increasing, as can be seen from the negotiations about two loan pledges of over a billion DM each, the first of which was settled on July 1, 1983 and the second a year later on July 25, 1984.¹² Honecker simply could not afford to antagonize Bonn.

He was therefore very pleased when Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl applauded his statements to the Central Committee in a letter, and confirmed his own commitment to East-West German dialogue. Kohl concluded, "The two states in Germany find themselves, with respect to each other, in a unique association of responsibility towards Europe at large and the German people in particular." Honecker took up the term "association of responsibility" in his subsequent phone conversation with Kohl and emphasized that "realism and reason" should

- 9 Hermann Wentker, *Zwischen Unterstützung und Ablehnung der sowjetischen Linie: Die DDR, der Doppelbeschluss und die Nachrüstung*, in: Philipp Gassert, Tim Geiger, and Hermann Wentker (eds.), *Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung. Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss in deutsch-deutscher und internationaler Perspektive*, Munich 2011, pp. 147 f.
- 10 *In kampferfüllter Zeit setzen wir den bewährten Kurs des Parteitagés für Frieden und Sozialismus erfolgreich fort. Aus der Diskussionsrede von Erich Honecker, Generalsekretär des Zentralkomitees der SED*, in: *Neues Deutschland*, November 26/27, 1983, p. 3.
- 11 On November 28, 1983 three secret letters from the CC of the CPSU reached the SED Politburo. The second of these contained thinly veiled instructions that the GDR should make clear to the FRG how much the situation had changed after the deployment of the missiles, in "the persistent raising of political problems—the question of borders, of citizenship etc., by intensified controls of West German citizens when entering the GDR and more". Quoted after Michael Ploetz and Hans Peter Müller, *Ferngelenkte Friedensbewegung. DDR und UdSSR im Kampf gegen den NATO-Doppelbeschluss*, Münster 2004, p. 179.
- 12 Stephan Kieninger, "Niemand will einen Rückfall in den Kalten Krieg". Franz Josef Strauß, Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski und der Milliardenkredit für die DDR 1983, in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft (ZfG)* 65 (2017), pp. 352–371.

“truly gain the upper hand” in East–West relations, despite criticism of Western deployment of nuclear weapons.¹³ From the end of 1983 onwards, East–West German relations took an unexpected upward surge. Honecker kept his word to Bonn, and Moscow did not intervene. This not only secured the financial and economic support needed, it also provided the GDR—in contrast to the Soviet Union—with the profile of being a “peace-loving state.”¹⁴

Stasi sources and indirect West German opinion polls indicate that the East German public to some extent appreciated Honecker’s attitude and willingness to maintain relations with Bonn intact. But there was also widespread criticism against the quick deployment of Soviet missiles in the GDR, which for many in the population did not fit in with the protests being made against Western rearmament. In early 1984, the Stasi counted over 400 “pseudo-pacifist” and “neutralist” petitions—including over one hundred collections of signatures with about 4,000 participants—criticizing the Warsaw Pact’s reaction.¹⁵ Even if Honecker managed to maintain the image of the GDR as a “peace power” at an international level, he obviously failed to boost his popularity within his own country. According to Jens Gieseke, even in this time, “the lack of legitimacy of the East German regime was always present.”¹⁶

2. Soviet–East German Relations and Gorbachev’s Accession to Power

The estrangement between the Soviet Union and the GDR continued throughout the years 1983 and 1984. Although the Soviet leadership did not have the power to force the GDR to leave its course of conducting “business as usual” with the FRG, it was still strong enough to prevent Honecker from visiting Bonn in 1984. On August 17, 1984 the East German leadership had had to endure severe criticism of its “Westpolitik” by CPSU General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko. Honecker, who had stressed that it was for the SED leadership to decide on his visit to Bonn, in the end gave in, so as to prevent an open breach between Moscow

13 Kohl to Honecker, December 14, 1983; Telephone conversation between Honecker and Kohl, December 19, 1983, in: Detlef Nakath and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan (eds.), *Von Hubertusstock nach Bonn: Eine dokumentierte Geschichte der deutsch-deutschen Beziehungen auf höchster Ebene 1980–1987*, Berlin 1995, pp. 155–159 (first quotation p. 155), pp. 159–170 (second quotation p. 165).

14 Wentker, *Zwischen Ablehnung und Unterstützung*, pp. 151–153.

15 Jens Gieseke, *Whom Did the East Germans Trust? Popular Opinion on Threats of War, Confrontation and Détente in the German Democratic Republic, 1968–1989*, in: Martin Klimke, Reinhild Kreis, and Christian Ostermann (eds.), *Trust, but Verify. The Politics of Uncertainty and the Transformation of the Cold War Order, 1969–1991*, Washington, D.C./Stanford, Cal. 2016, pp. 158–160.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 159; on the East German peace movement see Rainer Eckert, *The Independent Peace Movement in East Germany*, in: Becker-Schaum et al. (eds.), *Nuclear Crisis*, pp. 207–221.

and East Berlin.¹⁷ The relative weakness of the Eastern superpower with respect to the GDR was mainly due to imperial overstretch:¹⁸ on the one hand its costly worldwide engagements increased, not only in Africa but also in Afghanistan; and on the other hand, the Soviet economy was weakening, especially with the fall in prices of crude oil after 1981. Another cause for this weakness was that, from the end of the 1970s, the Soviet Union was led by ill and aged leaders: Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. This changed with the death of Chernenko, when Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary on March 11, 1985.

The effects on Soviet-East German relations have to be analyzed in three fields of action. First, because of Gorbachev's commitment to disarmament (which culminated in his resolve of January 15, 1986 to abolish all nuclear weapons until the year 2000),¹⁹ the GDR lost its special role as "peace power". But, by supporting such initiatives,²⁰ the GDR leadership showed it was once more in line with the Soviet Union. On the whole, this was a more comfortable position than what had prevailed before.

Second, with regard to Honecker's yearning for a visit to Bonn, nothing initially changed. In his first meeting with Kohl in Moscow on March 14, 1985, Gorbachev was anything but charming. He implicitly accused the Chancellor of "standing at attention" before the U.S. leadership.²¹ Gorbachev stuck to the Soviet line that the Federal Republic had to be punished for the deployment decision of 1983. Therefore, in 1985 and 1986, he pursued a strategy of circumventing the West German government in Western Europe.²² Moreover, he clearly demonstrated a preference for the oppositional SPD by receiving, as early as 1985, Party chairman Willy Brandt, Egon Bahr and Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia Johannes Rau (who was to challenge Kohl in the next national election). On a lower level, Moscow also courted the Green Party. After an invitation by the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Greens sent a

17 Fred Oldenburg and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, Honecker kam nicht bis Bonn. Neue Quellen zum Konflikt zwischen Ost-Berlin und Moskau 1984, in: *Deutschland Archiv* 28 (1995), pp. 791–805.

18 Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev. An Analysis Based on New Archival Evidence, Memoirs, and Interviews*, Baden-Baden 1998, especially pp. 133–190.

19 Erklärung des Generalsekretärs des ZK der KPdSU, Michail Gorbatschow, January 15, 1986, in: Michail Gorbatschow, *Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze*, Vol. 3, Berlin (East) 1988, pp. 146–159.

20 E.g. UdSSR zeigt den Völkern Europas Perspektive des Friedens, in: *Neues Deutschland*, January 17, 1986, p. 1.

21 Ambassador Kastl, Moscow, to Auswärtiges Amt, March 15, 1985, in: *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1985*, ed. by Michael Ploetz, Mechthild Lindemann, and Christoph Johannes Franzen, Munich 2016, Dok. 68, pp. 378–381.

22 Hans-Peter Schwarz, Helmut Kohl. Eine politische Biographie, Stuttgart 2012, p. 454. See also Tim Geiger's essay in this volume.

delegation to Moscow and Leningrad in April 1986.²³ Gorbachev seems to have set his hopes on a victory of the West German Social Democrats in the federal elections on January 25, 1987. Only when these hopes were dashed by the victory of the CDU/CSU-FDP coalition did he change his course. On February 2, 1987 Gorbachev instructed the Soviet foreign office to intensify contacts with the West German government, which should not be “left to Honecker”²⁴—for the SED General Secretary was also preparing his visit to Bonn, at first independently of Gorbachev. Because Gorbachev now wanted to intensify his relations with Bonn too, a certain rivalry ensued. But after Moscow’s change of course in its politics towards the Federal Republic it was, once more, in line with East Berlin, so that, after consultations between members of the SED and CPSU Party Executives in July, Honecker could visit the Federal Republic from September 7 to 11, 1987, with Gorbachev’s (grudging) consent.²⁵

Third, after having initially welcomed Gorbachev as a relatively young and dynamic leader, the East German leadership’s perception changed in the course of 1986 and 1987. As long as he only seemed intent on economic reforms, the SED (which claimed that the Soviet Union was merely catching up with the GDR) could live with the new Soviet course. The SED leadership could also feel fairly secure that the new Soviet leader would not interfere in the internal affairs of the GDR, because at a Party and State Leaders’ meeting of the COMECON states on November 10 and 11, 1986 in Moscow, Gorbachev had committed himself to the autonomy of each ruling Party.²⁶ At their meeting on October 3, 1986 Honecker had, for the first time, openly reproached Gorbachev for being too liberal with Soviet writers who had publicly denied the existence of a West and East German literature and had pronounced themselves in favor of German reunification.²⁷

23 For Gorbachev’s contacts to Brandt see e.g. Wilfried Loth, Willy Brandt, Michail Gorbatschow und das neue Europa, in: Andreas Wilkens (ed.), *Wir sind auf dem richtigen Weg. Willy Brandt und die europäische Einigung*, Bonn 2010, pp. 413–432; Stefan Kreuzberger, Willy Brandt und Michail Gorbatschow. Bemühungen um eine zweite “Neue Ostpolitik”, 1985–1990, Berlin 2015; for the Soviet contacts with the Green Party see Hermann Wentker, *Die Grünen und Gorbatschow. Metamorphosen einer komplexen Beziehung 1985 bis 1990*, in: *VfZ* 62 (2014), pp. 481–514.

24 M. S. Gorbačevs orders concerning the German question, February 2, 1987, in: Aleksandr Galkin and Anatolij Tschernjajew (eds.), *Michail Gorbatschow und die deutsche Frage. Sowjetische Dokumente 1986–1991*, Munich 2011, pp. 26 f.

25 For the preparation of Honecker’s visit see Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, p. 515; Heike Amos, *Die SED-Deutschlandpolitik 1961 bis 1989. Ziele, Aktivitäten und Konflikte*, Göttingen 2015, pp. 491–500.

26 Memcon of meeting of leading representatives of the fraternal parties of the socialist countries of COMECON on November 10 and 11, 1986, in Moscow, in: Daniel Küchenmeister and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, *Gorbatschows Entfernung von der Breshnew-Doktrin. Die Moskauer Beratung der Partei- und Staatschefs des Warschauer Vertrages vom 10./11. November 1986*, in: *ZfG* 42 (1994), pp. 719 f.

27 Memcon of meeting between Honecker and Gorbachev, October 3, 1986, in: Daniel Küchenmeister (ed.), *Honecker-Gorbatschow Vieraugengespräche*, Berlin 1993, pp. 160–165.

But, whereas he uttered this point of criticism behind closed doors, he felt compelled to go public after Gorbachev's speech to the CPSU Central Committee on January 28, 1987, which clearly aimed at a partial democratization of the party and the state. In a consultation with the SED *Kreissekretäre* (District Secretaries) on February 6, he implicitly distanced himself from Gorbachev with the words: "If the GDR's socialist democracy is involved, it is irreplaceable."²⁸ On April 9 the SED leadership took this distancing further with an interview given by the SED Secretary for Culture, Kurt Hager, in the West German magazine *Der Stern*. When asked if the GDR would follow the course of *Perestroika* in the Soviet Union he answered: "Would you, if your neighbor changes his wallpaper, feel obliged to change your wallpaper, too?"²⁹ This reaction was so sharp because Honecker and his entourage realized that, if transferred to the GDR, Gorbachev's reform policy would threaten not only their power but the very existence of the East German state. Though the leadership saw the risks of Gorbachev's reforms, this did not apply to the East German population. Indirect opinion polls from the West German polling agency *Infratest* and from Stasi reports show that most East Germans not only supported Gorbachev's disarmament policy, but also would welcome the transfer of Soviet reforms to the GDR. According to the *Infratest* report, Gorbachev stood "among the GDR population primarily for the hope of internal reforms."³⁰

GDR politics with regard to the INF negotiations have to be seen in the triple context of relations with the Soviet Union, of domestic policy and of the implementation of East German policy towards West Germany. East Berlin had to perform a difficult balancing act between supporting Soviet foreign policy while disapproving of its domestic politics. Because of his rejection of Soviet reforms, it became even more important for Honecker to support Gorbachev's peace moves. This was for domestic reasons, because he knew that the peace moves were popular among East Germans. His support could best be shown in the field of East–West German relations. Here Honecker continued talks with leading West German politicians, aiming to secure their support for the Soviet position. In this way, he hoped, first, to persuade Gorbachev of the value of his East German ally; second, to demonstrate to the public his intent to secure peace and get rid of the "devil's stuff" in the GDR; and, third, to maintain continuous good relations with the FRG on which the East German state depended economically.

28 Schlußwort auf dem Plenum des Zentralkomitees der KPdSU, January 28, 1985, in: Gorbatschow, *Ausgewählte Reden*, Vol. 4, pp. 394–401; Erich Honecker vor 1. Kreissekretären (Auszüge), in: *Deutschland Archiv* 20 (1987), p. 442.

29 Kurt Hager beantwortet Fragen der Illustrierten *Stern* in: *Deutschland Archiv* 20 (1987), p. 656.

30 *Infratest*, *Deutschlandpolitik und innerdeutsche Situation. Einstellungen und Verhaltensweisen von DDR-Besuchern und DDR-Bewohnern (I. und II. Welle)*, Zusammenfassender Berichtsband 1987, Vol. 4, p. 49, *Infratest-Archive*, Berlin.

3. East German Support of Soviet policy in the Context of Relations with Bonn and Moscow

On February 28, 1987, Gorbachev announced on Soviet television that the Soviet Union was no longer making the realization of the zero option on INF dependent on the abolition of SDI.³¹ By untying the package discussed at Reykjavik, he hoped to bring the chance of progress back to the stagnant INF negotiations. Honecker had been informed shortly before the announcement and had promised his support. Indeed, he was so quick in making a supporting declaration in *Neues Deutschland*³² that, on March 3, the SED Politburo was able to acknowledge Gorbachev's "great gratitude for the quick and prudent reaction of comrade E. Honecker and the GDR in support of the Soviet proposals."³³ In accordance with the Politburo's decision he went ahead and communicated with Helmut Kohl, writing a personal letter as well as informing him via the West German representative in East Berlin, Hans Otto Bräutigam, and via the East German representative in Bonn, Ewald Moldt. He told Kohl that the GDR would follow an INF Treaty with an agreement that the Soviet Union should withdraw its missiles from the GDR, and Bonn should also engage with its Allies to make the proposals happen. Honecker suggested that representatives of both states should meet to discuss how to support the Soviet initiative.³⁴

Kohl reacted positively with a verbal message on March 12, and promised to send Minister Wolfgang Schäuble to East Berlin.³⁵ Before this visit took place, the Warsaw Pact Committee of Foreign Ministers met in Moscow on March, 24

31 Erklärung des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der KPdSU, Michail Gorbatschow, March 1, 1987, in: Gorbatschow, *Ausgewählte Reden*, vol. 4, pp. 492–494. This date is that of the publication in *Pravda* of Gorbachev's earlier announcement. For the background to this decision, see Elizabeth C. Charles, Gorbachev and the Decision to Decouple the Arms Control Package: How the Breakdown of the Reykjavik Summit Led to the Elimination of the Euromissiles, in: Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie Pierre Rey, and Bernd Rother (eds.), *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War*, Washington, D. C./Stanford, Cal. 2015, pp. 66–84.

32 Gemeinsame Stellungnahme des Politbüros des ZK der SED, des Staatsrates und des Ministerrates der DDR, March 1, 1987, in: *Neues Deutschland*, March 2, 1987, p. 1; see also *Diese große Chance muß genutzt werden*, *ibid.*, p. 1.

33 Minutes of the Politburo meeting, March 3, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30, J IV, 2/2/2208, TOP 2. The draft minutes ("*Arbeitsprotokoll*") of the Politburo session contains a submission by Honecker, dated February 28, 1987, in which the measures to support Gorbachev's announcement are listed: SAPMO, DY 30 J IV, 2/2A/2985, fol. 15 f.

34 Honecker's letter to Kohl, March 1, 1987, in: Nakath and Stephan (eds.), *Von Hubertusstock*, pp. 293 f.; Non-paper, in: Draft minutes of Politburo meeting, March 3, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30 J IV, 2/2A/2985, fol. 17 f.

35 This can be gathered from the report about the sojourn of the Federal Minister for Special Tasks and Head of the Federal Chancellery, Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble, in Berlin, March 26 and 27, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30, J IV, 2/2A/2995, fol. 78.

and 25, 1987, and agreed that their most important common task was to achieve a Treaty for the elimination of INF in Europe.³⁶ East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer was keen to present Honecker's policy towards Bonn as successful. So after praising Gorbachev for having shaken "the image of supposedly aggressive socialism, of the so-called evil Russian," he went on to commend Honecker's initiatives towards Kohl which had "compelled the FRG government to move" and to adopt the zero-option as well.³⁷ His aim was to underline the GDR's role as a prominent and successful supporter of Gorbachev's peace policy, especially vis à vis his Soviet colleague Shevardnadze.

Immediately after this meeting, the Minister from the Federal Chancellery, Schäuble, came as promised to East Berlin, where he met with Fischer on 26 and with Honecker on 27 March.³⁸ Fischer asked Schäuble to support the zero option "without fuss or quibble" (*"ohne Wenn und Aber"*). As the GDR leadership knew that the West German government had reservations with regard to the zero option, this addendum became a standard formula in all conversations with the West Germans on this topic. Fischer declared that, in accordance with Gorbachev's declaration, if the zero option were adopted, the missiles deployed in the GDR in 1983 would immediately be withdrawn.³⁹ He also handed a non-paper over to Schäuble containing thoughts about parallel steps both states could take in Europe. Among them was the suggestion that they should discuss "the idea of a nuclear-free corridor in Central Europe."⁴⁰ This was a theme on which the SED had negotiated and come to an agreement with the West German Social Democrats on October 21, 1986, when Egon Bahr (SPD) and Hermann Axen

36 Report on the 14th meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers of the Warsaw Treaty Organization's member states on March 24 and 25, 1987, in Moscow, SAPMO, DY 30, J IV, 2/2/2212, fol. 14–18. See also Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne (eds.), *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1991*, Budapest/New York 2005, Doc. 121, pp. 554–556.

37 Speech by Comrade Minister Oskar Fischer during the meeting of the Committee of Foreign Ministers in Moscow, March 24 and 25, 1987, in: SAPMO, DY 30, J IV, 2/2A/2995, fol. 62–64.

38 The meetings are well documented: Conversations between Federal Minister Schäuble, Federal Chancellery, and Foreign Minister of the GDR, Fischer, and the General Secretary of the CC of the SED, Honecker, in East Berlin, March 26 and 27, 1987, in: AAPD 1987, Dok. 86, pp. 416–422; Conversation Schäuble-Honecker, March 27, 1987, in: Heinrich Potthoff (ed.), *Die "Koalition der Vernunft". Deutschlandpolitik in den 80er Jahren*, Munich 1995, pp. 515–525; Report on the Sojourn of Federal Minister for Special Tasks and Head of the Federal Chancellery in Berlin on March 26 and 27, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30, J IV, 2/2A/2995, fol. 78–83; Note about the conversation between Foreign Minister of the GDR, Oskar Fischer, and Federal Minister for Special Tasks and Head of the Federal Chancellery, Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble, on March 26, 1987 in Berlin, in: *ibid.*, fol. 98–105.

39 These words can be found in the East German note, but not in the West German record of conversation.

40 Non-Paper: Überlegungen für gemeinsame oder parallele Schritte der DDR und der BRD, um dazu beizutragen, die Chancen zu einem gesonderten Abkommen zur Beseitigung der Mittelstreckenraketen in Europa zu nutzen, SAPMO, DY 30, J IV, 2/2A/2995, fol. 115–117.

(SED) had presented their “Principles for a nuclear-free corridor” in Bonn.⁴¹ As this idea was rejected by the governing parties in Bonn, Schäuble did not mention the subject in his replies to Fischer and Honecker. He stated that, with respect to disarmament, both states should concentrate on feasible steps, including a treaty on the zero-option for INF. After that, negotiations should immediately shift to short-range nuclear forces (SNF), where the Federal Republic assumed there was a huge imbalance to the disadvantage of the West. Here, like the GDR, the Federal Republic was prepared to aim at a zero option too, but only if the imbalance of conventional weapons was redressed at the same time. Moreover, both sides should stand up for those aims in their respective alliances—a point on which they concurred. Schäuble thus avoided succumbing to demands which he knew were anathema to his government; but, with his consent to pursue the zero option with regard to INF, the East German leadership had achieved its main goal.

On March 10, in support of the Soviet initiative, the SED Politburo had decided to carry on politically and diplomatically with the struggle for Europe’s liberation from INF. This resolve played a major role in a planning paper drawn up by the East German Foreign Ministry for GDR–FRG relations on April 7 in preparation for Honecker’s visit to Bonn. This paper declared it a central aim to achieve a zero option for INF “without fuss or quibble.” Furthermore, the GDR stated its intention of counteracting any inclusion of the FRG in the confrontational situation the United States was provoking, appealing to the population’s desire for peace.⁴² In subsequent conversations between East and West German politicians at the top level, every GDR official tried to secure the consent of his dialogue partner to the zero-option, and always “without fuss or quibble.” When a West German politician used these magic words himself, as happened at the end of March, in Bonn, in a conversation between Genscher and Otto Reinhold, Director of the Academy of Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the SED, this could be touted as evidence of East German success.⁴³ Such could not be claimed in the case of Günter Mittag’s conversation with Helmut Kohl on April 1, however. The SED Secretary for Economics not only stressed how important it would be for the GDR and the FRG to remove the INF missiles from Europe without fuss or quibble, but also repeated much of what had been said to Schäuble some two weeks before. The Chancellor did not take up the words, but only spoke in general

41 Negotiations had taken place in an SPD–SED working group between December 1985 and September 1986. See Frank Fischer, “Im deutschen Interesse”. *Die Ostpolitik der SPD von 1969 bis 1989*, Husum 2001, pp. 190–193.

42 Minutes of Politburo meeting on March 10, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30, J IV, 2/2/2209, TOP 3; Planning paper by the Foreign Ministry on GDR–FRG relations, April 7, 1987, in: Nakath and Stephan (eds.), *Von Hubertusstock*, pp. 307–310.

43 Information by Otto Reinhold to Erich Honecker about a meeting with Hans-Dietrich Genscher, end of March 1987, in: *ibid.*, pp. 294–296.

terms about the favorable situation in world politics and the Federal government's "key position" in exerting influence in NATO.⁴⁴

The situation changed somewhat when, in a speech delivered in Prague on April 10, Gorbachev proposed beginning negotiations on the reduction of short-range INF—i. e. missiles with a range between 500 and 1,000 km.⁴⁵ This led to a split in the Federal government in Bonn, where Genscher was prepared to accept Gorbachev's offer but Defense Minister Manfred Wörner was not.⁴⁶ Honecker was well informed about the Soviet move, as became clear in his conversation with Parliamentary Group Chairman Wolfgang Mischnick (FDP) on the day of Gorbachev's speech in Prague. He not only stated once more "that it was a decisive question that the GDR and FRG should be in favor of eliminating INF in Europe without fuss or quibble," but, full of praise, he also referred to the proposal on short-range INF which Gorbachev was going to make in Prague the same day. Mischnick, who belonged to the same Party as Genscher, expressed West German interest in reaching an agreement on INF—the aim being a zero option—and suggested starting negotiations about the other missiles within six months, and discussing conventional weapons as well.⁴⁷

A few days later, on April 14, Gorbachev went even further with his proposals in a conversation with U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz in Moscow. Not wanting to give Washington a pretext for increasing American SRINF, he had suggested a zero option for these weapons too.⁴⁸ When Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh informed Honecker about Shultz's visit, six days later, he stated that the U. S. Foreign Secretary had not reacted to this new suggestion, but he had clearly said to Shevardnadze: "We absolutely want such a treaty." According to information available to the Soviets, Shultz had informed the NATO Allies accordingly. All this had led to a dispute between some West European states and the U. S. on how far the NATO doctrine of "flexible response" had to be changed under such new conditions. In his reply, Honecker supported the Soviet position and drew attention to the conversations he had had with West German politicians about the earlier Soviet initiatives—especially his conversation with Wolfgang Mischnick of the FDP. Honecker stressed the fact that Mischnick concurred with Genscher in his support of the zero option and, according to the

44 Memcon of conversation between Günter Mittag and Helmut Kohl, April 4, 1987, in: *ibid.*, pp. 297–303.

45 Rede auf der Kundgebung der tschechoslowakisch-sowjetischen Freundschaft, April 10, 1987, in: Gorbatschow, *Ausgewählte Reden*, Vol. 4, pp. 523–542.

46 Cf. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, Munich 1997, p. 564. See also the essays by Philipp Gassert and Tim Geiger in this volume.

47 Conversation Mischnick–Honecker, April 1, 1987, in: Potthoff (ed.), *Koalition der Vernunft*, pp. 526–533, the quotations pp. 527 f.

48 Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition. American–Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*, Washington, D. C. 1994, p. 312; George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph. My Years as Secretary of State*, New York 1993, pp. 889–891.

information available to him, Genscher had then “played a constructive role at the Foreign Ministers’ conference in Brussels.” This was important for Honecker, who also referred to positions taken up in the CDU/CSU, especially that of Defense Minister Manfred Wörner, who rejected the double zero option. Honecker not only displayed detailed knowledge of West German politics, but also stressed the fact that the GDR had “taken an active influence on the FRG’s attitude, especially to the elimination of INF without fuss or quibble.” This, he believed, would not remain without influence on the other Western governments.⁴⁹

Although Honecker was exaggerating enormously when he ascribed Genscher’s and others’ support for the double zero option to the influence of the GDR, he was right in his analysis of the political scene in Bonn. While Genscher supported a double zero option, Wörner wanted the zero option to be restricted to missiles with a range between 1,000 and 5,000 km.⁵⁰ As Genscher later wrote in his memoirs, there were concerns in the CDU/CSU that, after a second zero option for SRINF, a third one would follow for short-range nuclear weapons (those with ranges under 500 km). This could leave Western Europe denuclearized and open to threat by the Warsaw Pact’s overwhelming conventional forces. Genscher stood out for the double zero option, however, and felt certain that Reagan and Shultz were determined to enforce this solution on the Western Alliance. He believed this because Shultz had reported back on his conversations in Moscow at a NATO Foreign Ministers’ meeting on April 16.⁵¹ The coalition in Bonn was heading for disagreement, which became visible in a Bundestag session on May 7, when the Greens, the SPD and the FDP declared themselves in favor of the double zero option, leaving the CDU/CSU isolated.⁵²

On May 15, Honecker congratulated the SPD Parliamentary Group Chairman, Hans-Jochen Vogel, for his speech in the Bundestag, and supported his remark that the CDU/CSU was beginning to take up an anti-American position. Clearly, Honecker wanted to exploit the split in the Federal government between the CDU/CSU and the FDP, and he encouraged Vogel to persevere in full-hearted support of the double zero option.⁵³ Against the backdrop of 80 to 83 per cent of West Germans favoring concrete disarmament steps, he was perhaps hoping for a change of government, which would enable the GDR to realize agreements that had been reached by the SED-SPD disarmament group. But on the whole

49 Memcon about a conversation between Erich Honecker and Alexander Bessmertnykh in Berlin, April 20, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30/2384, fol. 62–80, the quotations fols. 68, 77.

50 Federal Minister Wörner to Federal Chancellor Kohl, April 19, 1987, in: AAPD 1987, Dok. 116, pp. 581–584.

51 Genscher Erinnerungen, pp. 565 f.; on the NATO Council of Ministers’ meeting see Ambassador Hansen, Brussels (NATO), to Auswärtiges Amt, April 16, 1987, in: AAPD 1987, Dok. 115, pp. 575–581.

52 Deutscher Bundestag, Stenographischer Bericht 11. Wahlperiode, 10. Sitzung, May 7, 1987, pp. 524–565.

53 Conversation H.-J. Vogel-Honecker, May 15, 1987, in: Potthoff (ed.), *Koalition der Vernunft*, pp. 535, 537 f., 549 f.

Honecker stuck with the government Parties; the opposition was only second in importance, and this flirtation was just an interlude. In the mid-1980s, the Green Party was also a partner of the SED leadership against the ruling coalition in Bonn, but that relationship was greatly reduced after 1986, and in April 1987 the SED Politburo decided that a precondition for a GDR visit by members of the Green Party was the recognition of GDR laws. The Greens no longer accepted these, as quite a number in their Party criticized the human rights situation in the GDR and had close ties with East German oppositional groups.⁵⁴

On June, 1, 1987 Genscher prevailed and the Federal Government decided to support the double zero option. The following day, Genscher told an SED official, Otto Reinhold, that this decision was a great success, paving the way for the West European countries' consenting to this solution in NATO. But, as the CDU and CSU were still in confusion, he declined to meet Honecker and Fischer during a forthcoming private visit to his birthplace, Halle in the south of the GDR.⁵⁵ And now a new problem was looming: Gorbachev was also demanding that the Federal Republic should get rid of 72 (older) Pershing IA missiles. As these were not U. S. missiles but were at the disposal of the *Bundeswehr*, they were not part of the INF deal. The demand provoked a new split within the Federal Government along the established lines: Genscher was prepared to abolish these missiles, but the CDU and CSU were not. Promptly, on June 24, Moscow accused Washington of wanting to exclude the Pershing IA missiles from the negotiations and the Treaty. During President Richard von Weizsäcker's state visit to the Soviet Union, Shevardnadze called these weapons "the obstacle No. 1" on the road to an INF Treaty.⁵⁶

The GDR again saw a chance to demonstrate its importance to the Soviet leadership. An opportunity arose when Klaus Wedemeier (SPD), the Mayor of Bremen, visited Honecker on July 1. After reiterating the fact that both German states had reached agreement on the elimination of INF in Europe "without fuss or quibble," Honecker pointed out that there was now a danger a Treaty could not be sealed because of the Pershing IA: "It would be bad," he said, "if the Federal Republic of Germany played a negative role in this context." His wording was very similar to Shevardnadze's, when he had described the refusal to include these missiles in the negotiations as the main obstacle to concluding a Treaty. Wedemeier agreed, following the well known position of his Party, thus provoking a protest from Hans Otto Bräutigam, who was accompanying him:

54 Regina Wick, *Die Mauer muss weg—Die DDR soll bleiben. Die Deutschlandpolitik der Grünen von 1979 bis 1990*, Stuttgart 2012, pp. 231 f.; Minutes of Politburo meeting, April 7, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30 J IV, 2/2/2213, TOP 4.

55 Information by Otto Reinhold to Erich Honecker about a meeting with Hans-Dietrich Genscher on June 2, 1987, in: Nakath and Stephan (eds.), *Von Hubertusstock*, pp. 312 f.

56 Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 567–570; the quotation in: Ministerialdirektor Freiherr von Richthofen, currently Moscow, to Secretaries of State Ruhfus and Sudhoff, July 9, 1987, in: AAPD 1987, Dok. 204, p. 1021.

Bräutigam defended the Federal government's point of view.⁵⁷ Although this conversation had no effect on the West German government's position, Hermann Axen, the Secretary of International Affairs of the SED's Central Committee, who visited Moscow on July 27, relayed it to Alexander Dobrynin and Vadim Medvedev, who were Secretaries of the CPSU Central Committee, the former of its International Department, the latter of its Department for Relations with the Socialist Countries. The aim of Axen's journey was to obtain Moscow's consent for Honecker to visit the Federal Republic in September. Although he referred to West Germany's insistence on keeping the 72 Pershing IA missiles, thereby postponing the INF Treaty, Axen also stressed the fact that there was a shift of power in the Federal Republic because of East German efforts and pressure. In the Bundestag, the SPD, the Greens, and the FDP formed a majority, and the CDU and CSU had no alternative but to take this into account. Axen's self-congratulatory words culminated in the sentence: "Our pressure has forced the ruling circles in the FRG to accept the documents of Reykjavik and the unequivocal positive statement proposed by comrade Erich Honecker concerning the conclusion of a treaty about the elimination of the INF without fuss or quibble."⁵⁸ Once more the East German leadership was seeking to convince its Soviet counterparts of the GDR's value for achieving the INF Treaty. This seemed even more important at a time when Honecker was preparing his visit to Bonn, which Gorbachev had not regarded favorably.

Before this event could take place, the last stumbling block on the path to the Treaty was removed—but not because of any moves by the GDR. The main reason why Kohl had once more to line up with Genscher was that he knew he had no chance of going on if he pursued a policy that was neither in line with public opinion nor with the NATO Allies. The final initiative in this matter came from the Soviet side. Instructed by Shevardnadze, Yuliy Kvitsinky, the Soviet Ambassador to Bonn, called on Genscher (who was on holiday in France) telling him that a treaty on the basis of the double zero option could be signed immediately if only Bonn would give up the Pershing IA. Returning to Bonn, Genscher managed to persuade Kohl, so that the Chancellor publicly declared the FRG's waiver of the 72 Pershing IA missiles on August 26.⁵⁹ The GDR's influence on this decision was non-existent. Nonetheless, the SED Politburo proudly declared that Kohl had been compelled to make his declaration on the Pershing IA even before Genscher's visit and continued: "The unanimity in supporting the global double

57 Permanent Representation to Auswärtiges Amt, July 1, 1987, PA AA, B2 (Ref. 014), Vol. 512962 (I thank Tim Geiger for providing me with this document.) The East German record of this meeting in: Potthoff, *Koalition der Vernunft*, pp. 559–563, is much less detailed on this point.

58 Memorandum of consultation between Hermann Axen and the Secretaries of the CC of the CPSU, Alexander Dobrynin and Vadim Medvedev on June 27, 1987 in Moscow, (extracts), in: Nakath and Stephan (eds.), *Von Hubertusstock*, pp. 315–319, the quotation p. 317.

59 Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 571–576.

zero option by both German states which has thus become possible is a decisive result of comrade Erich Honecker's visit to the FRG."⁶⁰

Although the GDR leadership publicly supported the Soviet position in the INF negotiations, there are indications that its military leaders were not so convinced. At the Warsaw Pact's meeting of the Defense Ministers' committee in Bucharest from November 24 to 26, Minister of Defense Heinz Keßler praised the agreement reached in the negotiations as "a great success of the peace policy of socialism over the most aggressive circles of NATO;" the Soviet Union's "persistent struggle for the conclusion of this Treaty" once more underlined "the defensive character of socialist military power." But nuclear disarmament, he went on, was only one side of the coin. So, looking at the military situation "soberly and without illusions," he pointed out "how intensely NATO is increasing and training the capability for aggression of its armed forces in big maneuvers."⁶¹ Here he was specifically referring to the autumn exercises of NATO, during which U. S. forces had carried out the biggest transport of troops to Europe since 1944, and to an exercise that had demonstrated the increasing military reintegration of French forces into NATO. Keßler's comment shows the anxiety the Eastern military felt on account of the conventional and nuclear "revolution in military affairs" in which NATO was ahead of the Warsaw Pact because of Western technological superiority. In this context the double zero option—among other factors—also contained new potential dangers.⁶²

Honecker was of a different opinion. On December 9, 1987, he hailed the INF Treaty as "a historical milestone on the road to a world without nuclear weapons," and he referred to his statement of November 1983 when he had said: "We have never made a secret of the fact that the deployment of additional nuclear weapons in East and West has for us never been a cause for rejoicing."⁶³ Moreover, on November 26, well before setting off for Washington, Gorbachev had made a phone call to Honecker suggesting a meeting of the General Secretaries of the ruling Communist Parties, after the Summit. It would be in East Berlin. Honecker was delighted with this proposal, and promised to arrange the meeting which was to take place on Gorbachev's journey back from Washington to Moscow.⁶⁴

60 Report about Honecker's visit to the Federal Republic, September 7 to 11, 1987, in: Potthoff (ed.), *Koalition der Vernunft*, pp. 564–575, the quotation p. 572.

61 Statement by the Minister of National Defense on the 20th meeting of the Committee of Ministers of Defense on the 1st item of the agenda, in: http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/kms2.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/PHP/21971/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/a622de25-3972-4d18-b6b4-c587f226abfd/de/871124_2_east_g_statement.pdf, fol. 70.

62 Cf. Bange, *Sicherheit und Staat*, especially p. 434. For the revolution in military affairs also see Oliver Bange, *SS-20 and Pershing II: Weapon Systems and the Dynamization of East-West Relations*, in: Becker-Schaum et al. (eds.), *Nuclear Crisis*, pp. 70–86.

63 Erklärung Honeckers: Historischer Meilenstein auf dem Wege zu einer kernwaffenfreien Welt, in: *Neues Deutschland*, December 9, 1987, p. 1.

64 Honecker to all members and candidates of the Politburo, November 26, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30/2385, fols. 122 f.

This was a great chance for Honecker to present himself once more as a—if not *the*—most important supporter of Gorbachev’s peace politics in the Eastern bloc.

The meeting of the Party leaders took place on December 11, 1987. The Foreign and Defense Ministers were also invited. Gorbachev gave a lengthy report of the Summit talks. Although he bestowed enough praise on himself, when speaking about grasping the initiative and following up on it, he also talked of changes he had perceived in Ronald Reagan: Reagan had come to the conclusion “that this Soviet government does not aim at world domination.” Honecker welcomed the INF Treaty as “the introduction to disarmament.”⁶⁵ After the meeting, a treaty was publicly signed between the Soviet Union, the GDR, and Czechoslovakia about inspections to be made according to the INF Treaty’s terms. This treaty was needed because the withdrawal of Soviet missiles deployed in the GDR and ČSSR since 1983 also had to be monitored.⁶⁶ The meeting made an impression on the Swiss Ambassador to East Berlin, Franz Birrer. At the end of his report he wrote that “for the GDR and especially for Honecker [the conference had been] a very successful and prestigious matter.”⁶⁷ The meeting, the signing of the treaty, and surrounding events received extensive press coverage, especially by *Neues Deutschland*. The East German public was urged to realize that not only Gorbachev, but Honecker too, had had a significant share in the outcome of the negotiations.

The treaty between the Soviet Union, the GDR and the ČSSR reminded onlookers of the fact that SS-12 and SS-23 missiles were still deployed on six bases in the GDR—an appendix to the INF Treaty detailed a total 97 launchers.⁶⁸ In February and March 1988, well before the ratification of the INF Treaty, the Soviet Union withdrew these weapons. In its information to the rank and file of the Party, the

65 For the preparation of the meeting, see Minutes of Politburo meeting, December 1, 1987, SAPMO, DY 30, J IV, 2/2/2250, TOP 2; for a report of the meeting SAPMO, DY 30, J IV 2/2/2252, fols. 10–13; for protocol of internal meeting see Stenographic minutes of the meeting of leading representatives of states of the Warsaw Treaty on Friday, December 11, 1987, in Berlin, SAPMO, DY 30/2355, fols. 8–63, quotations fols. 14, 61.

66 Abkommen zwischen der DDR, der UdSSR und der ČSSR über Inspektionen im Zusammenhang mit dem Vertrag zwischen der UdSSR und den USA über die Beseitigung ihrer Raketen mittlerer und kürzerer Reichweite, December 11, 1987, in: Gipfeldiplomatie. Ausgewählte Dokumente und Chronik zu den sowjetisch-amerikanischen Verhandlungen und Gipfeltreffen Januar 1985-Juni 1988, Teil II: Dezember 1987-Juni 1988, Berlin (East) 1989, pp. 284–287.

67 Franz Birrer to Head of the Political Secretariat, December 17, 1987: Ostblock-Gipfel nach Washingtoner Gipfel, in: Bernd Haunfelder (ed.), Die DDR aus Sicht schweizerischer Diplomaten 1982–1990. Politische Berichte aus Ost-Berlin, Münster 2017, Dok. 51, pp. 204–206, the quotation p. 206.

68 Memorandum Of Understanding Regarding The Establishment Of The Data Base For The Treaty Between The Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics And The United States Of America On The Elimination Of Their Intermediate-Range And Shorter-Range Missiles, in: <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm#mou>. Swiss ambassador Birrer in his report of December 17, 1987 spoke about 50 launchers and 171 missiles (including missiles for exercises): see Haunfelder (ed.), DDR aus Sicht, p. 205.

SED Central Committee once more emphasized the success of Honecker's flanking support for the Soviet Union during the negotiations.⁶⁹ However, this did not mean that now there were no missiles of this type on East German territory. As late as March 1990 a spokesman of the GDR Defense Ministry admitted to *Neues Deutschland* that the National People's Army still had 24 of its own SS-23 missiles, and four launchers at its disposal; however, these did not have nuclear warheads.⁷⁰ Being at the disposal of the East German army, these missiles were similar to the 72 Pershing IA weapons, about which the Soviet Union had made such a fuss in the summer of 1987.

4. The East German Public and the INF Treaty

In 1987 there was no longer any institution for conducting opinion polls in the GDR, but the Stasi collected information on people's opinions on a number of different topics. The so-called Central Analysis and Information Group in the Ministry for State Security (MfS) often aggregated single reports into one central report, which was sent to selected political leaders, Honecker and Stasi Minister Erich Mielke always among them.⁷¹ One of these reports surveys popular opinion on the INF Treaty. When looking at the central reports, we have to bear in mind that they were written for the political leadership; but as the following is based not only on the central report⁷² but also on a large number of single reports,⁷³ it seems possible to draw a fairly accurate picture of public opinion, even if this is based only on Stasi documents.

The main message contained in the broad Stasi coverage of how the East German population responded to the Washington Summit and the INF Treaty was that their consent and approval was unanimous. Besides this observation, the documents contain the following five key elements.

First, according to almost all the reports, people stated that it was Soviet peace policy that had made the Summit and the Treaty possible. The historical significance of the Treaty was acknowledged: a whole system of weapons would be destroyed, and this was the first time such a thing had happened. In the single

69 Bröckermann, *Landesverteidigung und Militarisierung*, pp. 708 f.

70 Sprecher des Verteidigungsministeriums: Kein Geheimnis um Raketen der NVA, in: *Neues Deutschland*, March 3, 1990. I thank Tim Geiger for this information.

71 Cf. Daniela Münkel, *Die DDR im Blick der Stasi. Die geheimen Berichte an die SED-Führung 1953 bis 1989. Vorwort*, in: *Die DDR im Blick der Stasi 1988. Die geheimen Berichte an die SED-Führung*, redacted by Frank Joestel, Göttingen 2010, pp. 7–11.

72 Information about the general public's first reactions to course and results of the Summit meeting between the General Secretary of the CC of the CPSU, Comrade Gorbachev, and the President of the U. S. A., Reagan, from December 7 to 10, 1987, in Washington, BStU, MfS, ZAIG Nr. 4234 fols. 2–7.

73 All reports can be found in the archives of the BStU. If in the following a sentence or passage is quoted directly, a footnote will indicate the document out of which it is taken.

reports—but, interestingly, not in the general report—Gorbachev was personally credited for the meeting and its results: in one report he was called “man of the century” (*Jahrhundertmann*).⁷⁴ For the most part, Reagan came off badly: often he was called an actor who was simply putting on a show. But some reports quoted people saying that he wasn’t such a bad guy after all, and that you couldn’t just dismiss him as an actor. One single voice—that of an East German wanting to leave the GDR—even said that it was important for the East Germans that the U. S. President had addressed human rights in the Eastern bloc.⁷⁵

Second, there was widespread skepticism towards the U. S. Some people were uncertain whether Congress would ratify the INF Treaty, or whether the U. S. would adhere to its conditions, as Reagan had not given up on SDI. Despite the renewed détente in East–West relations, most people’s assessment of the character of the U. S. and of the “imperialist” states had not changed. Only one person was reported to be suspicious of the Soviet Union itself, thinking that it might not destroy its INF but hide them in some place within its vast territory.⁷⁶

Third, in spite of this continued skepticism towards the U. S., hopes were high that the INF Treaty would be just a first step and that further disarmament treaties on nuclear and conventional weapons would follow. The Christian churches even saw in the meeting of Gorbachev and Reagan a “hopeful beginning for a world characterized by Christian charity.”⁷⁷

Fourth, the East Germans projected many more wishes onto the results of the Summit. Some hoped that, with disarmament, enormous funds would become available to improve the social and economic situation—especially of people in the GDR. In the National People’s Army, conscripts hoped that the Summit would affect structure and length of service, and they hoped that fewer reservists would be called for military exercises. And, last but not least, others hoped that, with this improvement in the superpowers’ relations, the dialogue between the FRG and the GDR would improve as well. This would result in better traveling possibilities and enhanced economic and cultural relations with the Federal Republic.

Fifth, praise for Gorbachev as a champion of disarmament went hand in hand with praise for him as a reformer. The Stasi reported that discussions often began with the Washington Summit and the changes in Soviet foreign policy, but from there they went on to changes within the Soviet Union, and they ended with

74 Information about the atmospheric picture and opinions [in the National People’s Army and the border troops], December 11, 1987, BStU, MfS, HA I, Nr. 15162, fol. 341.

75 Report on mood and reaction of the general public, December 15, 1987, BStU, MfS, BV Berlin, Abt. XIX, Nr. 11219, fol. 221.

76 Information about reactions and expressions of opinion by employees of central departments of the transport and communications sector to the results of the Soviet–American summit and other political questions of the day, December 18, 1987, BStU, MfS, HA XIX, Nr. 4816, fol. 190.

77 Reactions by the general public of the district [Potsdam] to the meeting of the General Secretary of the CC of the CPSU Comrade Gorbachev and U. S. President Reagan, December 8, 1987, BStU, MfS, BV Potsdam, AKG Nr. 914, fol. 66.

demands for a more open and critical approach to problems in the GDR. Other discussions dwelt on the statement Gorbachev made in East Berlin on December 11, asserting that changes in the international arena were connected with an improvement in cooperation among socialist countries and with “the perfection and the renewal of socialism.”⁷⁸ The obvious inference people drew was that more democratization, openness and honesty were needed in the GDR too.

All in all, the Stasi reports yield ambivalent results. On the one hand, we can see how popular Gorbachev was in the GDR as a harbinger of peace. The fact that the INF Treaty was primarily seen as a result of Gorbachev’s policy, and not as that of Reagan, and the widespread skepticism of the U. S. were not necessarily the result of GDR propaganda alone, or due to the fact that these reports were written for the SED leaders. These opinions may also be traced back to the influence of West German media. On the other hand, it is clear that Gorbachev functioned as a screen for the projection of the many wishes and hopes of large parts of East German society. People especially craved for inner reforms, and for improved East–West German relations and chances to travel. These latter concerns seem to have been at least as important to them as their esteem for Gorbachev’s peace politics.

5. Conclusion

1. Honecker supported Gorbachev’s disarmament politics with regard to INF because he himself wanted to remove Soviet missiles from the territory of the GDR, and also because he wanted to demonstrate to the world and to the East Germans that he concurred with Gorbachev in this field, even if he rejected Gorbachev’s politics of internal reform.

2. The only way in which he could effectively be of help in this process was by using his contacts with West German politicians. Here he tried to kill two birds with one stone. His first aim was to promote his politics of détente towards the Federal Republic so that he could visit Bonn and maintain good relations with the FRG for economic and financial reasons. His second aim was to convince Gorbachev that East German influence was needed to make the Federal Government support the double zero option “without fuss or quibble.”

3. In assessing Honecker’s success, we have to differentiate what he achieved with respect to West Germany, Gorbachev, and the East Germans. Honecker was at last able to visit the Federal Republic and there receive the maximum recognition for the GDR that it had enjoyed in the whole forty years of its existence. Whether he convinced Gorbachev of his indispensable qualities in making the

78 Information about reactions and expressions of opinion by employees of central departments of the transport and communications sector to the results of the Soviet–American summit and other political questions of the day, December 18, 1987, BStU, MfS, HA XIX, Nr. 4816, fols. 191 f.

Federal Government accept the double zero option and waive the 72 Pershing IA missiles we do not know. But at least Gorbachev let Honecker put himself in the limelight by calling the meeting of the General Secretaries in East Berlin, after the Summit. Although Honecker concurred with the majority of East Germans in his wish to eliminate INF missiles in East and West, his popularity seems not to have benefited from this identity of views. Popular opinion was definitely on Gorbachev's side. Praise was heaped on the new Soviet leader, not only for having achieved the INF Treaty but also for his politics of internal reform. Gorbachev was the person on whom the hopes of GDR citizens were pinned. In the end, this contributed greatly to the downfall of the East German state.