

The Withdrawal of the GDR from the Warsaw Pact - Expectations, Hopes, and Disappointments in German-Soviet Relations During the Dissociation Process

Maslanka, Susanne

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Maslanka, S. (2022). The Withdrawal of the GDR from the Warsaw Pact - Expectations, Hopes, and Disappointments in German-Soviet Relations During the Dissociation Process. *Historical Social Research*, 47(2), 53-76. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.16>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

The Withdrawal of the GDR from the Warsaw Pact – Expectations, Hopes, and Disappointments in German-Soviet Relations During the Dissociation Process

Susanne Maslanka *

Abstract: »Der Austritt der DDR aus dem Warschauer Pakt - Erwartungen, Hoffnungen und Enttäuschungen in den deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen während des Dissoziationsprozess«. At first glance, the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) dissociation from the Warsaw Pact or Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) appears as a success story. Even though the stakes were high, the process remained peaceful and relations between Germany and the Soviet Union/Russia were not plunged into crisis immediately afterwards. This article argues, however, that this seemingly successfully managed dissociation sowed the seeds for later conflicts between Russia and the West, as the GDR's withdrawal from the WTO and transition to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) served as a blueprint for other WTO member states. Moreover, the dissociation led to internal political tensions within the Soviet Union. The internal conflict crystallised around ideational issues, among others the USSR's status as a superpower. However, negotiations between the governments of Germany and the Soviet Union focused on material issues. The Soviet government was offered money to cover the more technical aspects of the dissociation process but, by and large, the ideational dimension was addressed only in the form of vague promises of a "common European security structure," which ultimately never came to be established. This led to disappointments and accusations that persisted and were, for example, repeatedly used as a justification for Putin's attacks on Ukraine.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Federal Republic of Germany, NATO, Warsaw Treaty Organization/Warsaw Pact, dissociation, security interests, GDR, German Reunification.

* Susanne Maslanka, Berlin Center for Cold War Studies, Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History Munich, Berlin, Germany; maslanka@ifz-muenchen.de.

1. Introduction – The GDR’s Withdrawal from the Warsaw Treaty Organization as a Blueprint for NATO’s Eastward Expansion

On 24 February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a speech justifying Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine. However, Ukraine did not in fact play a large role in Putin’s demagogic diatribe – during its first half, following a brief comment on the situation in the Donbas region, Putin only talked about the USA, the West, and their behaviour towards Russia after the Cold War. Right at the beginning of his speech, he recalled the “fundamental threats” to Russia that, in his view, stem from the “expansion of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) bloc to the east.” Putin only mentioned Ukraine, the target of his war, after a full 15 minutes, stating that Ukraine had already been militarily appropriated by NATO and claiming that the West wanted to establish an “anti-Russia.” In order to stop this alleged development, Putin had ordered a “special military operation” to achieve the “denazification” and “demilitarisation” of Ukraine.¹

Putin had already cited his experiences with the West as a justification for Russia’s actions in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and supported separatists in the Donbas region: “[Our colleagues in the West] have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed us before an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO’s expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders.”² Here, Putin was recalling the myth of the NATO countries’ broken promise at the end of the Cold War, questioning the legality of NATO’s eastward expansion by admitting former members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO). All of the Soviet Union’s former WTO allies are now on the side of the “West” – they are members of either NATO or the European Union (EU).

Although the WTO’s dissociation process was peaceful, tensions regarding the alliance structure in Europe have a huge impact today (Polianskii 2022, this issue). The “no-NATO-enlargement myth” has been highly politicised in the East and West ever since the 1990s, even though archival research has shown that in 1990, no written commitments were made not to expand NATO eastwards (Kramer 2009; Nünlist 2018; Sarotte 2010, 2014a, 2014b). Nevertheless, the narrative of broken promises has continued to resonate within Russia’s political elites and society, and even in Western societies. This narrative states that during the negotiations on German reunification, Western leaders promised their Soviet counterparts that NATO would not expand eastwards.

¹ <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843> (Accessed 16 July 2022). Original quote in Russian.

² <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (Accessed 16 July 2022).

Later on, however, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia was weak, the US took advantage of Russia's situation and admitted the former WTO allies into NATO, proponents of this narrative hold (Radchenko 2020, 769-70). Some scholars dismantle the betrayal myth, but nevertheless argue that Russia might actually have perceived the negotiations and talks on German reunification differently in the sense that *implicit* promises were made (Spohr 2012; Sarotte 2010).

The much-discussed question of enlargement began with the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) withdrawal from the WTO. In fact, fundamental decisions on the alliance structure in Europe were made by the political actors during the 1990 negotiations on the question of Germany (Sarotte 2014a, 5): in the period from February to July 1990, West Germany and the Western allies, especially the US, lobbied for Germany's full membership in NATO. In July 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union and CPSU General Secretary, agreed on the GDR's withdrawal from the WTO and the subsequent membership of unified Germany's territory in NATO. The discussions at the top political level, which led to Gorbachev's agreement, have been studied in depth (Biermann 1998; Plato 2015; Sarotte 2014a; Spohr 2012). The GDR's withdrawal from the WTO can be seen as a blueprint for the other Warsaw Pact member states: by 1990, the Eastern military alliance had already become unstable due to liberalisation and democratisation in the Central Eastern European countries (CEEC). In 1991, after all the CEEC announced their intention to withdraw from the alliance, the WTO dissolved.

The reunification negotiations between West Germany and the Soviet Union are usually celebrated as a major achievement of international diplomacy (Savranskaya, Blanton, and Zubok 2010). However, Gorbachev achieved the agreement only because he was able to skilfully assert himself against or sidestep those who opposed his foreign policy (Zubok 2014, 641). Sharp criticism of the political treaties concerning Germany was voiced in the Soviet Union as early as 1990 and 1991, but the treaties were ultimately ratified nonetheless (Mueller 2021, 200).

This article outlines the West German-Soviet negotiations concerning the issue of alliance, enquiring into the way the GDR's dissociation from the WTO was managed. Since it had become clear by March 1990 at the latest that the GDR would be integrated into the Federal Republic, the West German government negotiated the conditions under which the GDR was released from the Eastern alliance. This essay argues that the West German government accommodated the Soviet Union on both an ideational and a material level. However, it was material concessions involving both security issues and monetary payments to the Soviet Union that were key to resolving the dissociation process. Accordingly, the political actors treated the conflict over the GDR's dissociation from the WTO as a distributional conflict, which could thus be resolved peacefully (Dembinski and Peters 2022, in this issue). A

distributional conflict is characterised by the fact that during a given dissociation process, debates revolve primarily around material issues, around some kind of compensation for the departure from the common institution (Dembinski and Peters 2022, in this issue). Nevertheless, this article shows that the West German politicians and negotiators were well aware of the various currents in Soviet politics and society that feared the Soviet Union's loss of its status as a superpower, and thus grasped the ideational component. The essay traces how West German diplomats and politicians succeeded in countering Soviet decision-makers' concerns about the loss of the GDR. The Soviets were presented with the prospect of improved cooperation not only with Germany, but also with Western states in general, as well as the expansion of a collective security system. However, expanding the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) into an all-encompassing security system failed, disappointing Soviet expectations.

2. The Warsaw Treaty Organization, Mikhail Gorbachev's Eastern European Policy, and the "Common European Home"

The fall of the Berlin Wall put the question of Germany's alliances on the international agenda because the GDR, as part of the WTO, was strongly integrated into the military structures of the Eastern Bloc. After the political sea change in the GDR brought reunification within reach, leaving the alliance seemed only natural. Although the WTO was officially held together by common values, by a shared ideological foundation, and by commitment to defend the "socialist fatherland," the alliance was in reality based on coercion: there was a hegemony of the Soviet Union within the Organization, and for a long time attempts to break ranks with the WTO were met with force (Brezhnev Doctrine), as illustrated by the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968 (Aust 2019, 33).

A shift within the WTO bloc occurred after Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985. Gorbachev made it clear that cooperation with the socialist brother states was one of his top priorities (Altrichter 2009, 329). His goal was to create a community founded on voluntary membership and equality rather than an alliance that existed solely on the basis of coercion (Pravda 2014, 306). In the long term, the aim – which aligned with earlier Soviet propaganda – was for the military blocs to merge into a common European security architecture (Gorbachev 1987, 251). Gorbachev illustrated this vision with his image of the "Common European Home," which he hoped would also win over the Western European states (Rey 2004, 39).

Part of the reason the General Secretary wanted to focus more strongly on the Eastern alliance was that he saw integration proceeding rapidly in the Western part of the continent. Gorbachev recognised the danger of being left behind by these integration processes and believed that his concept of the “Common European Home” could offer a constructive complement and thus counteract any further marginalisation of the Soviet Union in Europe (Altrichter 2009, 330). At the July 1988 meeting of WTO state party leaders, he admonished that the East for far too long had overlooked the “new giant” emerging on its borders, a giant that was both economically and technologically more advanced than its Eastern neighbours. “By now,” Gorbachev said, “the year 1992 is not far off, when the formation of the single market for goods, services, and capital will lead to a [...] qualitatively new structure of Western Europe not only in the economic, but also in the political sphere, and possibly in the military sphere as well.” Gorbachev’s idea was that the Warsaw Pact states likewise should offer a “European action programme.”³ However, this idea never took on concrete shape, although Gorbachev set great hope on developing the CSCE further.⁴

However, the liberalisation trend initiated by Gorbachev threatened the cohesion of the Eastern alliance. From 1989 onwards, social discontent in all non-Soviet member states of the WTO⁵ led to the overthrowing of the communist parties’ monopolies on power, starting with Poland. As a result, the WTO, too, was criticised, but initially all non-Soviet member states emphasised their continued interest in the military alliance (Umbach 2005, 471).⁶ Even the fall of the Berlin Wall did not lead to a complete public abandoning of this stance, neither in the Soviet Union nor among its allies. In Poland in particular, the fall of the Wall reaffirmed the country’s interest in continued membership of the military alliance, because the WTO was seen to guarantee protection against the revanchist Germany Poland feared would emerge following reunification (Multan 1992, 45). After the fall of the Wall, the continued existence of the WTO was thus still a realistic scenario within its member states (Kramer 2009, 42).

Nevertheless, political developments from 1989 onward led the situation in the Warsaw Pact to become increasingly fragile, since the change in policy had deprived the alliance of its ideological foundation. The West German ambassador in Moscow described this aptly in a report to the Foreign Office in February 1990:

³ Speech held by Mikhail Gorbachev at the WTO meeting in Warsaw, 15-16 July 1988, 9, in *Bundesarchiv (BArch) DY 30/11728*, 1-32, here 10. (Unless stated otherwise, all the following quotations are cited from sources in German).

⁴ Gorbachev’s Report to the People’s Deputies, 30 May 1989 (Gorbachev 1990, 29-30).

⁵ Besides the Soviet Union and the GDR, the WTO included Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia in 1989.

⁶ Cf. Memo Dept. 213, 29 January 1990; in *Political Archive of the Foreign Office (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, PAA) B 41-ZA/151690*.

The conceptual shift is dramatic: from an end in itself “to defend the socialist achievements of its members”, the *raison d’être* of the W[arsaw Pact] has degenerated into that of an institutional vehicle on the way to a new European security architecture (devoid of any ideological purpose).⁷

This HSR Forum assumes that dissociation processes are particularly tense when the negotiation process is not just about material problems of distribution, but “the ideational dimension” is brought to the fore (Dembinski and Peters 2019, 100). Even though West Germany and the USSR in the end were able to solve the issue of the GDR’s withdrawal from the WTO – which was necessary for the reunification of Germany – on a material level in particular, the ideational dimension played an important role during the WTO dissociation process. For the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 ultimately came about because its non-Soviet member states rejected socialism as the foundation of the defence alliance, thus abandoning the values they previously had shared – at least officially – and turning away from the Soviet Union as a hegemon. While it is true that the USSR, too, renounced these values after the failed coup attempt against Gorbachev and the CPSU’s subsequent rapid decline in power, this does not alter the fact that the Soviet Union and then its legal successor Russia found itself without allies and deprived of the role as a major power that had been so important for its self-image and national identity as well as the legitimization of its rule during the Cold War (Radchenko 2020, 774). East Germany, however, withdrew from the WTO in September 1990, before the military alliance dissolved altogether in July 1991.

3. The Question of United Germany’s Membership in NATO

3.1 Initial Positions (November 1989 – March 1990)

The GDR’s withdrawal from the WTO had been preceded by domestic developments, i.e., mass demonstrations, the peaceful revolution, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Initially, there had been some concern that Moscow might intervene by force to reverse events. However, these fears subsided once Gorbachev publicly welcomed the opening of the Wall on 15 November 1989. Although significant disagreements arose between Bonn and Moscow in November and December (Sarotte 2014a, 75-6), the positive signals from Moscow regarding developments in Germany outweighed the negative ones. In a memo of 12 January 1990 sent to West Germany’s Foreign Minister Genscher, the head of the Soviet Union Department in the West-German Foreign Office

⁷ Cable of the West German Embassy to the Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt, AA), 27 March 1990, 2; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151690*.

summed up the Soviet position on the German question, saying that the USSR no longer completely ruled out reunification.⁸ However, he indicated that the Soviets were concerned about the speed at which matters were developing: “The pace should not allow the development in the WP [Warsaw Pact], which is already rapid, to get (even more) out of control. Modalities should not violate Soviet political and security interests.” Moreover, he wrote, the Soviet Union had made it clear that the CSCE must be expanded in such a way that “it [could] be used as a framework for the S[oviet Union] to shape processes throughout Central and Eastern Europe that otherwise would be more or less uncontrollable.” Gorbachev’s proposal to bring the CSCE summit meeting planned for 1992 forward to 1990 also pursued this aim (Möller et al. 2015, 129, fn. 21).

West Germany’s Foreign Office was correct in its assessment that the Soviet Union was afraid of losing control. On 26 January, Gorbachev discussed the issue of Germany in a meeting with his close foreign policy advisers. He concluded that there was no way of stopping German unification, but insisted on the need to keep control of the development, suggesting playing for time as a strategy so as not to be overwhelmed by events (Sarotte 2014a, 101). The question of alliance was also a topic in this first substantive discussion of the situation in Germany within the leadership. Gorbachev himself stressed that “no one [should] expect a united Germany to join NATO,” for “the presence of our armed forces” would not allow this. He said that a withdrawal would only be possible “once the Americans withdraw their forces as well.” Aleksandr Yakovlev, an important political adviser to Gorbachev, also spoke out on the alliance issue, advocating the “neutralisation [and] demilitarisation” of Germany as a condition of reunification.⁹ The demand that Germany be neutral built on a long tradition in Soviet propaganda: as early as the Stalin Note of 1952, the Soviet leadership made an offer of reunification, but the precondition would have been that Germany adopt a neutral status (Laufer 2004).

Accordingly, in January, Moscow still categorically ruled out Germany’s NATO membership, but considered reunification a likely scenario. As a result of this conversation, in late January 1990 Gorbachev also publicly announced that Germany’s reunification was inevitable (Amos and Geiger 2015, 21). However, while the General Secretary’s domestic opponents had initially kept a low profile, in February “conservative”¹⁰ voices opposing Gorbachev’s reforms now began to make themselves heard with regard to the developments in Germany and Eastern Europe.¹¹

⁸ Memo, 12 January 1990; in Hilger 2011, 209–11.

⁹ Debate on the question of Germany in the Staff of Advisors to General Secretary Gorbachev on 26 January 1990, in Galkin and Chernyaev 2011, 286–91.

¹⁰ “Conservative” refers to those communists who were critical of the reforms and wanted the status quo to continue.

¹¹ Among other sources, cables from the West German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 30 January 1990, 20 February 1990, 1 March 1990, 21 March 1990, in *PA AA B 38-ZA/198443*.

In an off-the-record conversation of 30 January 1990 with Vyacheslav Dashichev, a staff member of a foreign policy institute at the Academy of Sciences who was also one of Gorbachev's advisors, Dashichev stated he was confident that the General Secretary would be able to overcome the resistance of his "conservative" opponents. In Dashichev's opinion, however, they would still take a lot of convincing.¹² He also referred to developments within the WTO, stating that it was "very important" [...] to refute the argument that developments in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in Germany, proved that perestroika had done considerable damage to the S[oviet Union] in foreign policy terms before the CC [Central Committee] plenum." The question of Germany in particular worried "conservative" representatives in the elite, "who remained convinced that the division of Germany was in the Soviet interest." Moreover, Dashichev pointed out that "[i]n the Soviet debate [...] the question of whether NATO should extend to the Oder in the future plays a major role." He added: "There is definitely a debate about what point the WP [Warsaw Pact] could actually have in the future and whether it would not be better to dissolve it [...]."¹³ The future of the WTO and NATO in Europe thus featured on the agenda of foreign policy actors in the Soviet Union early on, and dissolving the WVO was a conceivable scenario.

At the CC plenum, it became clear just how much potential for tension the developments in Germany held within the CPSU: "[Politburo member, S.M.] Ligachev's speech of 6 February and Shevardnadze's responding speech of 7 February show that the German question has now become a significant issue within the domestic political debate here," the Moscow embassy reported. The embassy noted that the issue was being used by "conservatives [...]" to mobilise Russians' deep-seated emotions associated with the struggle against Hitler's Germany – a struggle won by dint of the greatest effort and suffering – against the foreign policy of perestroika.¹⁴ Despite these misgivings about reunification among the Soviet leadership, at a meeting with Chancellor Helmut Kohl in Moscow on 10 February, Gorbachev agreed that the right of self-determination of peoples also applied to the Germans, and that they themselves should be allowed to determine the "time and manner" of reunification (Sarotte 2014a, 113). Once German reunification had been agreed on in principle, the terms of the process became the focus of debate. Besides the mode of accession, the security policy implications were particularly controversial.

As the United States and its Western partners would only agree to the reunification of Germany if the entire united country became a member of NATO

¹² Cable from the West German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 30 January 1990, 1; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151629*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1-3.

¹⁴ Cable from the West German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 7 February 1990, 1; in *PA AA B 38-ZA/198443*.

(Sarotte 2021, 77), an international debate about the alliance membership of a future reunified Germany arose in February. Talks took place between Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and their Soviet counterparts, and the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, travelled to Moscow as well. Together, the Western partners tried to sound out which settlement the Soviet Union would agree to regarding the issue of alliance (Sarotte 2014a, 107-15). Baker was able to coax Gorbachev into revealing what he considered an acceptable solution to the issue. Gorbachev stated that he would prefer a united Germany to be a member of NATO to German neutrality if NATO's military sovereignty did not extend eastward (Sarotte 2014a, 110). However, Gorbachev's remarks on the possibility of united Germany's NATO membership contradicted his own previous statements in the Soviet leadership. Moreover, on 6 March, he spoke out publicly for the first time on the alliance issue, declaring NATO membership for a unified Germany to be generally "unacceptable."¹⁵ He thus showed himself willing to negotiate in confidential talks with his Western counterparts while still taking a different stance in public.

The West German leadership, by contrast, wanted united Germany to be a member of NATO, but stressed the importance of "respecting the justified security interests of our partners and neighbours, particularly the S[oviet Union]."¹⁶ Accordingly, West Germany's goals in the negotiations with regard to the NATO issue were contrary to those publicly expressed by the Soviet leadership. Gorbachev's publicly stated position, however, continued to be watered down in diplomatic channels, with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin, for example, suggesting on 2 March that it might be possible for the USSR to tolerate Germany's NATO membership if the other conditions were right. But Adamishin also pointed out the biggest obstacle: the psychological effect that united Germany joining NATO would have on the Soviet population, who had suffered so dreadfully in World War II.¹⁷ It did not help that ever since its founding, NATO had been demonised by the USSR as an "aggressive bloc" and had for years been accused of preparing for another world war (Mueller 2009, 71). The reports of the West German Embassy clearly reveal the fears that the Soviet leadership associated with the question of alliance. Firstly, it feared strong domestic opposition. Secondly, it suspected that if the GDR left the WTO to join NATO, the Soviet Union would lose control, become isolated, and be left behind in the European integration process, thus losing the ability to (co-)control events. The West German diplomats were aware of these fears and tried to take Soviet security interests into account in their negotiating objectives (Hilger 2011, 11).

¹⁵ Cable from the West German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 8 March 1990; in *PA AA B 38-ZA/198443*.

¹⁶ Interim Report of the Foreign Office [...], 5 March 1990; in Möller et al. 2015, Doc. 66, 329-39, 330.

¹⁷ Memo, 5 March 1990; in Möller et al. 2015, Doc. 64, 328.

However, two events in March 1990 showed just how quickly the dynamics of this period narrowed the Soviet Union's room for manoeuvre and how difficult it was for both the Soviets and the West Germans to control events: first, the WTO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Prague on 17 March, and second, the East German People's Parliament elections on 18 March. The meeting in Prague did not go according to the Soviet plan. When the subject of the possible NATO membership of a future unified Germany came on the agenda, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia did not raise any objections, contrary to Soviet wishes. Instead, they "held that NATO membership could be useful [and] neutrality was harmful [...]." Only the GDR's Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer joined the Soviet Union in arguing for a neutral Germany.¹⁸ Now a nightmare scenario had come to pass: the USSR was no longer able to count on the support of its allies concerning the issues important to it. This was the first shock, but not the last: against all expectations, in the People's Parliament elections of 18 March the East German population voted overwhelmingly in favour of a rapid reunification by voting for representatives who supported this position (Amos and Geiger 2015, 30). Thus, the Soviet Union was no longer able to rely on the GDR to support its position.

3.2 The Path to Soviet Agreement to a Free Choice of Alliance (March – July 1990)

The outcome of the People's Parliament elections deprived the Soviet Union of a lever for controlling the unification process. The West German ambassador in Moscow reported that the mood was correspondingly dismal:

Based on our impressions of the last few days, the election result in the GDR came not just as a surprise, but as a shock here. [...] Besides this shock at the futility of decades of effort, there is an underlying heightened concern, familiar to us from the warnings against "faits accomplis", that now even more leverage has been lost in the 2+4 talks and the forthcoming negotiations connected with them. [...] The question of NATO membership is thus becoming a tactical instrument – and, after the [Warsaw Pact Foreign Ministers Meeting], an increasingly transparent one – for imposing a collective security system, even though the Soviets have themselves not yet decided the concrete way this system is supposed to function.¹⁹

According to the assessment of the West German diplomats, the Soviets' continued refusal was no longer a matter purely of conviction, but of tactics. Viktor Kremenjuk, a foreign policy expert, argued in a similar fashion in an off-the-record conversation with the Moscow Embassy. Kremenjuk held that the issue of alliance firstly was a question of domestic politics, as the leadership would not be able to communicate not just the imminent "loss" of the

¹⁸ Cable from the West German Embassy in Prague to the AA, 17 March 1990; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151690*.

¹⁹ Cable of Ambassador Blech, Moscow, 21 March 1990; in Möller et al. 2015, Doc. 75, 377-80.

GDR, but its simultaneous accession to the “aggressive NATO bloc” to the public. Secondly, the Soviet Foreign Office, steeped in “old ways of thinking,” was trying to sow “discord” within NATO by refusing to resolve the alliance issue and “had hoped to gain time for a temporary consolidation of the [Warsaw Pact].” Thirdly, by doing this the Soviet president was attempting to achieve a better negotiating position in the ongoing 2+4 talks and to regain greater influence over the process, while at the same time obtaining a commitment to a collective security system.²⁰

The leadership, however, was correct in its assessment of the mood among the population. A Foreign Ministry poll leaked to the West German Embassy by a journalist showed that the leadership’s categorical “No” to NATO membership had struck a chord among the population. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents from nine Soviet republics favoured a neutral status for Germany.²¹ Readers’ letters to the editor of the party organ *Pravda* also expressed concern about a possible NATO accession (Sokolov 2021, 109). One letter to the editor, for example, demanded that in addition to Germany’s neutrality there should be no resurgence of militarism and revanchism.²² Accordingly, the alliance issue was certainly a highly emotional and explosive topic among the population, and the long-standing Soviet demand that Germany adopt a neutral status was widespread.

In the Politburo of the CPSU likewise, the question of NATO membership was a matter of significant controversy. The hardliners insisted that Gorbachev must prevent Germany becoming a member of NATO (Savranskaya 2014, 350). Germany expert and CC member Valentin Falin, for example, sent Gorbachev a forceful memorandum, criticising that the “West has decided to fight a deciding battle in this regard.”²³ Moreover, he warned that “[m]any efforts are being made [...] to prepare the ground for NATO’s plans regarding the GDR and the Warsaw Pact [...]”²⁴

Despite these warnings, Gorbachev concluded during May that he would have to come to an agreement with Kohl on the alliance issue (Zubok 2014, 638). Firstly, Western-oriented representatives in the bureaucracy, who believed that NATO membership was inevitable following reunification, advised him to take this step (Zubok 2014, 636). Secondly, by the spring of 1990 the Soviet Union had fallen into a severe economic crisis and was unable even to guarantee its food supply. Gorbachev therefore was in desperate need of money and asked Chancellor Kohl for financial assistance. The USSR was subsequently granted a loan of 5 billion DM. This further weakened the

²⁰ Cable from the West German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 21 March 1990, 3; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151629*.

²¹ Cable from the West German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 18 April 1990; in *BArch B 136/34459*.

²² *Pravda*, 25 May 1990, 5.

²³ Note by Falin, 18 April 1990; in Galkin and Chernyaev 2011, 368-78, 371.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 373.

negotiating position of the Soviets, who had already been at a disadvantage due to domestic pressure on the Soviet president and the many crises (Amos and Geiger 2015, 34). Furthermore, the Soviet Union's position on this issue had already been watered down in numerous personal conversations. The West German government knew that under the right conditions, united Germany's accession to NATO was conceivable for Gorbachev and his entourage.

Gorbachev already gave in on the NATO matter at the end of May during his summit with U.S. President George H. W. Bush at Camp David. To the surprise of his advisers present, of whom Falin was one, he declared that Germany had the right to choose its alliances freely. In doing so, he relinquished one of the Soviet Union's most important negotiating positions without much debate, disregarding instructions from the Politburo (Zubok 2014, 639). However, the exact terms of Soviet approval had yet to be negotiated with the West German government. The fact that NATO was willing to respond to Soviet concerns had a positive impact on these talks. During the NATO summit held in London on 5 and 6 July, the heads of government of the NATO countries adopted a policy statement on the alliance's shift from confrontation towards cooperation. In addition, the NATO countries advocated institutionalising the CSCE.²⁵ Gorbachev was able to sell this to the Soviet public as a concession by the West (Spohr 2019, 396).

Gorbachev set out to the CPSU Party Congress in July 1990 strengthened both by the West's concession regarding NATO's shift in policy as well as by the financial assistance received from West Germany. At the Congress, both he himself and his confidants, especially Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, were subjected to ferocious attacks from opponents within the party (Altrichter 2009, 393). Nevertheless, Gorbachev was able to prevail and cut his opponents down to size once more. This gave him more room for manoeuvre in the negotiations with Kohl on 15 and 16 July in Moscow and Arkhyz in the Caucasus. There, the Soviet president gave his approval to united Germany's NATO membership. The negotiations took place on a small scale with only a few experts. Neither critical Politburo members nor Foreign Ministry staff were involved in the talks, so Gorbachev was able to push the agreement through over the heads of critical elites (Zubok 2014, 641).

Kohl was prepared to make commitments in return: for a transitional period of three to four years, Soviet soldiers would still be stationed on the territory of the former GDR, and only German combat units that were not integrated into NATO would be allowed to be stationed on this territory. After that, German NATO soldiers would be permitted to be stationed on the territory, but not foreign troops and nuclear weapons. In addition, it was agreed to limit the Bundeswehr to 370,000 soldiers (Amos and Geiger 2015, 43-4). Moreover, Kohl and Gorbachev agreed on a comprehensive German-Soviet

²⁵ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23693.htm (Accessed 16 July 2022).

treaty package, which was to regulate material issues associated with the withdrawal of troops among other things. During the talks, Gorbachev made it clear that the Soviets' final approval concerning troop withdrawal and the entire treaty framework would be given only if the Germans made sufficient "financial concessions." The Germans were willing to do so, wanting to compensate the Soviet Union to some extent for the loss of its ally; their aim was for the Soviet Union, too, to benefit from German reunification (Amos and Geiger 2015, 44).

The German diplomats and politicians, in cooperation with their Western partners, had thus responded to the needs of the Soviet leadership, and Kohl was able to achieve his historic negotiating success. As a result, the free choice of alliance was enshrined in the 2+4 Agreement. Now the way was clear for reunited Germany's membership in NATO and thus for reunification. Subsequently, the GDR's membership in the military alliance had to be formally terminated. Since the alliance treaty itself did not provide for the withdrawal of any partner, it was decided, on the basis of general conventions of international law, to inform all parties to the treaty in advance of the GDR's intention to withdraw.²⁶ They accepted the withdrawal, and the GDR thus left the WTO at the end of September 1990.

4. Managing the Dissociation Process

4.1 Material Concessions: The German-Soviet Treaty Package

In the aftermath of the withdrawal, some commitments arising from the former military cooperation still needed to be clarified. First of all, this involved special equipment that the GDR possessed because of its cooperation in the WTO, which it undertook to return in part without compensation. The GDR's claims were to be offset against the general costs for withdrawal from its territory financed by West Germany.²⁷ In the early 1990s, however, the question of the real estate owned by the Western Group of the Soviet Armed Forces (WGF) on the territory of the GDR still led to major disagreement with Russia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Russian delegation initially demanded a lump sum of eight billion DM for what the German negotiators considered to be worthless real estate, which furthermore had been severely environmentally damaged.²⁸ After a long haggling process, the dispute was

²⁶ Foreign Policy Special Information of the East German Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, MfAA), 11 September 1990, in Möller et al. 2015, Doc. 150, 696-7.

²⁷ Working minutes, 8 September 1990, 2; in *BArch DVW 1/84001*.

²⁸ Memo, 4 February 1992, Visit of Russian government delegation to the Federal Ministry of Defence 3-5 February 1992; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/158 782*.

resolved by Germany providing a further half a billion DM for the troop withdrawal, and Russia renouncing any financial claim to the WGF real estate in 1992. In return, Russia committed to completing the withdrawal of its troops six months earlier.²⁹

The German-Soviet treaty package agreed at Arkhyz contained the most significant material concessions. In the Transition Agreement (Überleitungsabkommen), which was finalised in August and September 1990, the German government committed to paying the Soviet Union 12 billion DM. These costs were related to the agreements on troop withdrawal, which was governed by the Treaty on Stationing and Withdrawal (Aufenthalt- und Abzugsvertrag). However, the negotiations on the amount to be paid were no longer as harmonious as the talks in Arkhyz. Ultimately, it was not until September that an agreement was reached in two dramatic telephone conversations between Kohl and Gorbachev (Amos and Geiger 2015, 46). The 12 billion DM were intended, among other things, for subsistence and transportation costs associated with the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. The largest part of this sum went towards subsidising the Soviet housing construction program for returning officers. In addition, Germany granted the Soviet Union an interest-free loan of 3 billion DM. The Foreign Office later assessed this sum not as the “price of Germany’s unification” but as an “investment in the future in the interests of the West.”³⁰

In addition to the Transition Agreement and the related Treaty on Stationing and Withdrawal, West Germany and the Soviet Union concluded a so-called “comprehensive treaty” or “Treaty on Partnership” and an agreement on cooperation in the fields of economics, industry, science, and technology. The economic agreement in particular came about at the USSR’s request.³¹ The Soviet Union’s interest in cooperating more closely with Germany and Europe in the economic sphere had already been evident throughout 1990 in embassy reports. Thus, the foreign policy expert Kremenyuk already called for improved cooperation in March, saying that while there was an interest in a better relationship with the United States, “for the S[oviet Union], the real potential for cooperation in economic, technological, and cultural terms lies in (Western) Europe.”³² He stated that the Soviet Union was particularly keen on improved economic cooperation, especially with Germany. For the Soviet Union’s future development, “a fundamental change in the economy of the S[oviet Union] and a *drastic* increase in the standard of living [was needed].”

²⁹ Memo, 11 November 1992, Relationship Germany-Russia; in *BArch B 136/34230*, 372. Memo, 11 December 1992, Economic and financial issues, 66-73; Memo, 19 December 1992, Conversation between Kohl and Yeltsin, 232-233; both in *BArch B 136/42613*.

³⁰ Summary of the current state of the German-Soviet treaties, 3 April 1991, 7; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151633*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³² Cable from the West German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 21 March 1990, 2; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151629*.

He also noted that “on its own, even if the reform measures were to take hold, the S[oviet Union] would be able to do this only to a *marginal* extent. The current generation already is scarcely willing to accept its plight.”³³ The importance of economic cooperation was also noted in the Foreign Office in talks held in May 1990 with Soviet counterparts, who demanded that economic relations with Germany, the Soviet Union’s “future ‘number one business partner,’” be expanded.³⁴ By drawing up the economic agreement, Germany complied with this request.

The “Treaty on Partnership”³⁵ likewise promised good future prospects and a special relationship between Germany and the USSR – this was the first time the term “partnership” was used in a German-Soviet treaty. It also contained agreements on regular government consultations and among other things established the framework for scientific, youth, and cultural exchanges. The Foreign Office saw the treaty as the “basis for a forward-looking cooperation between us and the Soviet Union” and judged it “important” to “cement the S[oviet Union’s] confidence in its German partner following the end of the GDR.”³⁶ With the German-Soviet treaty package – which, in combination with the 2+4 Agreement, was what made reunification possible – the German government fulfilled some of the Soviet government’s wishes, even if its financial commitments remained below the expectations of the Soviet decision-makers: material and financial concessions on the one hand and the promise of a privileged partnership in the future, especially in the economic sphere, on the other.

In the Soviet Union itself, however, the treaty package did not meet with uniform enthusiasm. Admittedly, in a survey conducted in the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1990, 57 per cent of respondents viewed the reunification of Germany positively, and only 9 per cent negatively. Fifty-four per cent rated a politically and economically strong Germany as advantageous to the Soviet Union.³⁷ However, political “conservatives” inveighed against the agreements. This was clearly evident, for example, in the discussion about the ratification of the German-Soviet treaties in the Supreme Soviet, which dragged on until the spring of 1991 (Mueller 2021, 202). Although the treaties ultimately were ratified, the German Embassy sent a concerned cable in January

³³ Ibid., 4.

³⁴ Memo, 8 May 1990, “German-Soviet consultations in Bonn 7-8 May 1990”; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151629*.

³⁵ Treaty on Good Neighbourship, Partnership and Cooperation (Vertrag über gute Nachbarschaft, Partnerschaft und Zusammenarbeit). Available online at <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/bulletin/vertrag-ueber-gute-nachbarschaft-partnerschaft-und-zusammenarbeit-zwischen-der-bundesrepublik-deutschland-und-der-union-der-sozialistischen-sowjetrepubliken-788564> (Accessed 23 May 2022).

³⁶ Summary of the current state of the German-Soviet treaties, 3 April 1991, 1-2; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151633*.

³⁷ Survey commissioned by the Federal Press Office, September/October 1990; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/151629*.

1991, noting that “in recent days critics have often publicly argued that the financial contributions we have made are considerable but insufficient in view of the Soviet Union’s deplorable economic and financial situation.”³⁸

During these debates, those in support of the treaties stressed that, although the treaties were a compromise, they were nevertheless in the best interests of the Soviet Union. One point of fierce contention in the Foreign Affairs Committee had been the NATO issue, Chairman Aleksandr Dzasokhov reported.³⁹ This is reflected in a letter sent by a veteran to the Foreign Affairs Committee, holding that reunified Germany should have at least adopted a neutral status. While the author states that now it is propagated that “NATO is no longer an aggressive bloc, but a peace-loving union,” he clearly does not consider this credible. He goes on to criticise Gorbachev, saying that good relations with Kohl, Bush, and Thatcher are more important to him than “taking an interest in the opinion of his own people.”⁴⁰ Despite voices such as this among the population, the treaties on Germany were adopted on 4 March and 2 April 1991, and thus the Arkhiz agreements came into force. It should be noted that the treaties in the end were recommended unanimously by the Foreign Affairs Committee, despite the loud criticism.⁴¹

4.2 The Promise of Integration within the Framework of the CSCE as an Ideational Concession

The CSCE summit that took place in Paris from 19 to 21 November 1990 also needs to be seen in the context of the 1990 international agreements on the reunification of Germany. That increasing the importance of the CSCE was in Gorbachev’s strong interest became evident in many talks held over the course of 1990. The foreign policy expert Kremenyuk already got to the heart of the matter in March 1990:

For G[orbachev], a further aspect probably was to achieve [...] an *accelerated* and *effective* orientation of Germany and NATO as a whole towards *legally binding* CSCE structures. [...] Up until now the CSCE had been “a child of the Cold War and the East-West antagonism.” It needed to shake off this status. It would need to become viable, and this viability would have to be guaranteed [...] and have a legal foundation [...] Such a scenario would allow G[orbachev] to renounce the demand for a non-NATO G[ermany].⁴²

³⁸ Cable from the German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 7 January 1991, 2; in PAAA B 41-ZA/147136.

³⁹ Verchovnyi Sovet SSSR, Piataia Sessiya, Biulletin No.13, Sovmestnogo Zasedaniia Soveta Soiuz a i Soveta Natsional’nostei, 4 marta 1991 g. [Supreme Soviet of the SSSR, Fifth Session, Bulletin No. 13, Joint Meeting of the Soviet of the Republic and the Soviet of Nationalities], 93-102; in *Stenograficheskyi otchet*, Moskva 1991.

⁴⁰ Gosudarstvenyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, f. R9654, op.7, delo 259, 113. Original quote in Russian.

⁴¹ Cable from the German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 14 February 1991, 2; in PAAA B 41-ZA/147136.

⁴² Cable from the German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 21 March 1990, 3; in PAAA B 41-ZA/151629.

This piece of information, given in an off-the-record conversation, was emphasised in numerous further talks at the political level, for example by Vladislav Terekhov, the Soviet ambassador in Bonn. The ambassador told Dieter Kastrup, political director of the West German Foreign Office, that “at the present stage [i]t was psychologically very important for the S[oviet Union] [to] take steps toward a united Europe,” but that “the continued existence of the ‘blocs’ would run counter to this development.” A “continuation of NATO as a closed alliance,” Terekhov continued, “would necessarily immediately ‘poison’ the atmosphere in the new Europe.” He advocated dissolving both NATO and the WTO “in the longer term.”⁴³ Terekhov’s statements refer to the dissolution of the military blocs, which had been called for in Soviet policy since the 1960s and which Gorbachev, too, took up again in his vision of a “Common European Home.”

Although the Soviet Union’s ideas about the CSCE clearly went further, the Paris Summit marked a step in the direction of a pan-European security system. It was there that the 35 heads of government of the CSCE member states adopted the “Charter of Paris for a New Europe.”⁴⁴ The Charter documented the member states’ willingness to build a new peaceful order beyond the division of Europe into East and West. Moreover, the Charter set out the first steps toward institutionalising the CSCE, as the Soviet Union had wanted (Amos and Geiger 2015, 48).

Accordingly, 1990 was the year the division of Europe was overcome. From the perspective of the USSR, however, its own system of alliances continued to disintegrate. At the June 1990 meeting of defence ministers, the WTO member states agreed that “even under present conditions [...] [the Warsaw Treaty] continues to be an instrument ensuring stability and advancing the pan-European process.”⁴⁵ Later that year, however, all states called for the dissolution of at least the military structures of the WTO, even though they initially wanted to retain it as a political organisation that would act as a stabilising force during the transitional period (Umbach 2005, 509).

This prospect gave rise to considerable frustration in Moscow, as the German ambassador reported in October 1990:

In this situation, with the S[oviet Union] lacking both the political and the economic means to further bind its neighbours, there is growing concern about possible efforts to expand NATO. Experts from the institutes here seismographically record not only the development of their neighbours’ contacts with NATO, but also every Western, and particularly American, statement that contrasts NATO, as a pre-existing, established, and flourishing organization, with the institutionalisation of the CSCE, which is still in its infancy, thus making NATO the real place to guarantee European

⁴³ Memo, 1 August 1990, on a conversation held on 31 July 1990, 5; in *PA AA B 41-ZA/ 151629*.

⁴⁴ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/6/39516.pdf> (Accessed 22 June 2022).

⁴⁵ Ministry of Disarmament and Defence, Official Consultation Basis Outline 02/90, 18 June 1990, 3; in *BArch DWW 1/44502*.

security. The concern about this potential development has led a highly knowledgeable scholar, who has also closely followed the domestic debate with conservative security politicians, to issue this warning to the West: if NATO is expanded, the W[arsaw Pact] destroyed, and the CSCE stifled, then in the Soviet view the Paris Summit would be a “Peace of Versailles.”⁴⁶

The dissolution of the WTO was not long in coming: at a meeting of Warsaw Pact foreign and defence ministers in Budapest on 25 February 1991, the dissolution of all military structures was sealed and a date for the Organization’s complete dissolution already discussed. In a statement, the WTO member states declared that the Charter of Paris made the Organization redundant (Matějka 1997, 62-3). This led to further intense debate about the threat of NATO expanding into former WTO territory in the fierce disputes raging within the Soviet Union in 1991 (Kramer 2005, 54). Some foreign policy advisors even advocated using force to gain control of the situation and prevent the Soviet Union’s allies from drifting away (Umbach 2005, 479). However, Gorbachev let the Central Eastern European states go, and the WTO was dissolved at a meeting in Prague at the beginning of July 1991. The Soviet president did not travel to Prague himself but sent his vice president, Gennadiy Yanayev, instead. Yanayev stated quite openly at the meeting that in return he would like to see NATO dissolved, too, as envisaged in the idea of a common security system after the blocs had been overcome (Matějka 1997, 62-4).

Following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July, “conservative” hardliners attempted to usurp power in August 1991, including the signatory of the WTO’s declaration of dissolution, Vice President Yanayev. The putschists’ goal was to reverse some developments in order to preserve the Soviet Union (Kramer 2005, 67). This attempt failed, the CPSU was banned on the territory of the Russian Soviet Republic, and the rise of Boris Yeltsin began. Only half a year after the dissolution of the WTO, the Soviet Union itself disintegrated (Umbach 2005, 557-63). It was unable to benefit from the integration processes on the European continent, nor was its legal successor Russia, for the transformation of the CSCE into a long-term European security system failed as well. While the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was founded in 1995, it did not play a significant role, as the developments in the 1990s would show (Teltschik 2019, 58-68). In the end, it was precisely here that the hopes of the Soviet actors at the time were disappointed.

5. Conclusions

The GDR’s withdrawal from the WTO, the terms of which had been negotiated over the course of the international talks on reunification, was relatively free

⁴⁶ Cable from the West German Embassy in Moscow to the AA, 31 October 1990, 3-4; in *B 41-ZA/151691*.

of tension and did not lead to any subsequent major resentment between Germany and the Soviet Union and its legal successor, Russia. This succeeded mainly because Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, the main Soviet actors, wanted a peaceful solution and were in favour of reunification in principle, probably also because of their good personal relations with their German counterparts (Biermann 2005). Moreover, the German negotiators did a great deal to address the Soviets' concerns. They intimated that the Soviet Union would likewise benefit from overcoming the division of Europe. In addition, Germany provided loans and aid in the form of food deliveries. Despite disputes over the amount of the monetary payments, German-Soviet relations after reunification initially were positive, as underscored by the ratification of the German-Soviet treaty in March 1991 by the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union (Hilger 2011, 10).

The relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union had never been as well secured by treaty as it was by the new agreements, particularly the "Treaty on Partnership." This recalibration of relations compensated the Soviet Union to some extent for its lost close relations with the GDR. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia took over the international treaties with third countries. The agreements concluded in Arkhyz continued to apply. But soon the first crises in this seemingly harmonious relationship ensued. Sharp disputes arose over the amount of money to be paid in connection with the withdrawal of troops, but these were eventually resolved. On 31 August 1994, the last soldiers of the WGF left Germany.

The WTO's dissolution in 1991 was also surprisingly free of tension, something that had seemed unthinkable a year earlier (Matějka 1997, 64). Tensions were all the more evident within the Soviet Union itself, however, and primarily concerned the ideological conflict over the USSR's position in the world and the direction it should take. It was this that ultimately led to the coup against President Gorbachev in August 1991. The question of the Soviet Union's dignity as a superpower was taken up in the putschists' "Appeal to the Soviet People," with which they tried to mobilise support for their attempted coup d'état:

Yesterday, the Soviet citizen abroad felt himself to be the dignified citizen of an influential and respected state. Today, he is often regarded as a second-class foreigner and treated with contempt or pity. The pride and honour of the Soviet citizen should be restored to their fullest extent.⁴⁷

Yeltsin and his supporters managed to foil the coup with peaceful protest. The attempt to halt the processes eroding the Soviet Union by force failed.

The year 1990 was marked by great expectations for a new security system in Europe, on which the Soviet Union in particular was building. The USSR

⁴⁷ Appeal to the Soviet People, 18 August 1991, in *1000 Schlüsseldokumente zur russischen und sowjetischen Geschichte*. https://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_ru&dokument=0050_gkc&object=translation&st=&l=de (Accessed 23 June 2022).

also hoped to benefit, especially economically, from overcoming the division in Europe. But in many cases, the 1990s were a traumatic period for the populations of the Soviet Union's successor states. In Russia, there was one domestic crisis after another: the 1993 constitutional crisis in which the parliament building was shelled was followed by the outbreak of the First Chechen War in 1994. In addition, Russia's population had to cope with the consequences of the economic "shock therapy" that caused the country's GDP to drop by 50 per cent between 1990 and 1996. Many people were cast into poverty, and crime was rampant (Klein 2015). For most of the Russian population, the promises of the market economy thus remained unfulfilled. Putin referred to this period in a 2021 television documentary, claiming that at that time he had hired himself out as a cab driver to support his family.⁴⁸ Whether this is true, or whether he simply wanted to present himself as sharing his electorate's experiences, is anyone's guess.

The disintegration process also continued where foreign policy was concerned: after the GDR, the Soviet Union's other former allies likewise turned to NATO. Although there were no written commitments not to expand NATO, embassy reports and ministerial discussions show that government officials were already well aware that this was an explosive issue in 1990 and 1991 (Hilger 2011, 11). Unlike Germany, however, the Central Eastern European states did not have to negotiate their alliances with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had gained the right to have a say in Germany's status through its victory over Germany in the Second World War. No such obligation applied to the Central Eastern European states, which for their part had been liberated by the Soviet Union after the Second World War but subsequently oppressed. At the urging of the Central Eastern European states, which saw themselves threatened by both the unstable situation and revisionist currents in Russia, NATO decided to make them an offer of membership. In 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary joined NATO, with other states following in 2004. Although Germany had already anticipated the disappointment this development would entail thanks to detailed reports from Moscow, the Western alliance decided in favour of enlargement in order to accommodate the legitimate security interests of the Central Eastern European countries.

Despite the commitments made to a new order of peace and security in the "Charter of Paris," this order ultimately failed to materialise. In the 1990s, there were some Western initiatives that attempted to integrate the Russian Federation into the Western order. The G7 became 8, the NATO-Russia Council was established, and the CSCE evolved into the OSCE, but this did not result in a security zone from "Vladivostok to Vancouver." It was not possible to consolidate the structures created in the 1990s, and the idea of a Partnership

⁴⁸ <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/vom-taxifahrer-zum-praesidenten-wie-putin-in-den-90ern-geld-verdiente-17681663.html> (Accessed 22 June 2022).

for Peace, which the United States initially presented to Russia as an alternative to NATO's eastward expansion, came to nothing, also due to a shift in US foreign policy (Radchenko 2020; Sarotte 2021; Savranskaya and Blanton 2018). Under Putin, Russia came to act in an ever more authoritarian manner, and gradually abandoned the European security structures (Polianskii 2022, this issue).

Thus, the expectations of 1990, which had been marked by new values and ideals, were ultimately disappointed. It had been hoped that overcoming the East-West division would lead to a security system in a new Europe. However, the integration-focused notions of that time lost their vitality in the years that followed. For the Soviet Union and its legal successor, the dissociations in the former Eastern alliance system and the turning of its former partners to the West gave rise not just to material problems, but to major ideational problems as well: not much remained of the fraternity and partnership that had existed between the WTO states – if only on paper. This was largely because the WTO had been a coercive organization – member states had joined not by choice, but under the (military) pressure of Soviet hegemony. Following the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, Russia was left without allies and faced severe domestic problems, which it soon began to counter with military force – during the First Chechen War, for example, which broke out in 1994. Russia's demands that it be allowed to co-determine the security status of the Central European states and Ukraine with the “West” are remnants of the imperialist worldview that prevailed during the Soviet era. The fact that over the years these demands were echoed by relevant political actors in the West made it easier for Russia to infantilise these states.

References

- Altrichter, Helmut. 2009. *Russland 1989: Der Untergang des sowjetischen Imperiums*. München: Beck.
- Amos, Heike, and Tim Geiger. 2015. Einleitung. In *Die Einheit: Das Auswärtige Amt, das DDR-Außenministerium und der Zwei-plus-Vier-Prozess*, ed. Horst Möller, Ilse D. Pautsch, Gregor Schöllgen, Hermann Wentker, and Andreas Wirsching. 1st ed., 7-56. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht.
- Aust, Martin. 2019. *Die Schatten des Imperiums: Russland seit 1991*, 1st ed. München: C.H.Beck.
- Biermann, Rafael. 1998. *Zwischen Kreml und Kanzleramt: Wie Moskau mit der deutschen Einheit rang*. Studien zur Politik, 30, 2nd ed. Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Biermann, Rafael. 2005. Zur Bedeutung freundschaftlicher Verbundenheit in der Politik: Eine Annäherung am Beispiel des deutschen Einigungsprozesses. In *Gefühl und Kalkül: Der Einfluss von Emotionen auf die Politik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Birgit Aschmann, 197-230. Stuttgart: Steiner.

- Dembinski, Matthias, and Dirk Peters. 2019. Dissoziation als Friedensstrategie? *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, 26 (2): 88-105. doi: [10.5771/0946-7165-2019-2-88](https://doi.org/10.5771/0946-7165-2019-2-88).
- Dembinski, Matthias, and Dirk Peters. 2022. Drifting Apart: Examining the Consequences of States' Dissociation from International Cooperation – A Framework. *Historical Social Research* 47 (2): 7-32. doi: [10.12759/hsr.47.2022.14](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.14).
- Galkin, Aleksandr, and [Anatoly Chernyaev] Anatolij Tschernjajew, eds. 2011. *Michail Gorbatschow und die deutsche Frage: Sowjetische Dokumente 1986-1991. Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.
- Gorbachev, Michail. 1987. *Perestroika: Die zweite russische Revolution. Eine neue Politik für Europa und die Welt*, 3rd ed. München: Droemer Knaur.
- Gorbachev, Mikhail, ed. 1990. *Das gemeinsame Haus Europa und die Zukunft der Deutschen*. Düsseldorf [u.a.]: Econ-Verl.
- Hilger, Andreas, ed. 2011. *Diplomatie für die deutsche Einheit: Dokumente des Auswärtigen Amtes zu den deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen 1989/1990*. München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Klein, Eduard. 2015. *Die 1990er Jahre*. <https://www.dekoder.org/de/gnose/die-1990er> (Accessed 22 June 2022).
- Kramer, Mark. 2005. The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 3). *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7 (1): 3-96. doi: [10.1162/1520397053326185](https://doi.org/10.1162/1520397053326185).
- Kramer, Mark. 2009. The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia. *The Washington Quarterly* 32 (2): 39-61. doi: [10.1080/01636600902773248](https://doi.org/10.1080/01636600902773248).
- Laufer, Jochen. 2004. Der Friedensvertrag mit Deutschland als Problem der sowjetischen Außenpolitik. Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952 im Lichte neuer Quellen. *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 52 (1): 99-118.
- Matějka, Zdeněk. 1997. How the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. *Perspectives* (8): 55-65.
- Möller, Horst, Ilse Dorothee Pautsch, Gregor Schöllgen, Hermann Wentker, and Andreas Wirsching, eds. 2015. *Die Einheit: Das Auswärtige Amt, das DDR-Außenministerium und der Zwei-plus-Vier-Prozess*, 1st ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht.
- Mueller, Wolfgang. 2009. The Soviet Union and Early West European Integration, 1947-1957: From the Brussels Treaty to the ECSC and the EEC. *ZGEL*, 15 (2): 67-86. doi: [10.5771/0947-9511-2009-2-67](https://doi.org/10.5771/0947-9511-2009-2-67).
- Mueller, Wolfgang. 2021. Die deutsche Wiedervereinigung als sowjetische Niederlage? Der Wandel des Geschichtsbildes in Russland 1990-2020. In *Zwei plus Vier: Die internationale Gründungsgeschichte der Berliner Republik*, ed. Tim Geiger, Jürgen Lillteicher, and Hermann Wentker, 199-228. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.
- Multan, Wojciech. 1992. Polish Perceptions of the Future Development of Poland and of the Role of Poland within Europe. In *Integrated Europe? Eastern and Western perceptions of the future ; a publication of Research Unit Gottstein in the Max Planck Society*, ed. Klaus Gottstein, 42-50. Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verl.
- Nünlist, Christian. 2018. Krieg der Narrative – Das Jahr 1990 und die NATO-Osterweiterung. *SIRIUS – Zeitschrift für Strategische Analysen*, 2 (4): 389-397. doi: [10.1515/sirius-2018-4007](https://doi.org/10.1515/sirius-2018-4007).

- Plato, Alexander von. 2015. *The End of the Cold War: Bush, Kohl, Gorbachev, and the Reunification of Germany*. Palgrave studies in oral history. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Polianskii, Mikhail. 2022. The Perils of Ruxit: Russia's Tension-Ridden Dissociation from the European Security Order. *Historical Social Research* 47 (2): 77-108. doi: [10.12759/hsr.47.2022.17](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.17).
- Pravda, Alex. 2014. Moscow and Eastern Europe, 1988-1989: a Policy of Optimism and Caution. In *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945 - 1989*, ed. Mark R. Kramer and Vít Smetana, 305-334. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Radchenko, Sergey. 2020. 'Nothing but humiliation for Russia': Moscow and NATO's eastern enlargement, 1993-1995. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 43 (6-7): 769-815. doi: [10.1080/01402390.2020.1820331](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2020.1820331).
- Rey, Marie-Pierre. 2004. 'Europe is our Common Home': A study of Gorbachev's diplomatic concept. *Cold War History*, 4 (2): 33-65. doi: [10.1080/14682740412331391805](https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740412331391805).
- Sarotte, Mary Elise. 2010. Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990. *Diplomatic History*, 34 (1): 119-140. doi: [10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00835.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00835.x).
- Sarotte, Mary Elise. 2014a. *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*. Princeton studies in international history and politics, 3rd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Sarotte, Mary Elise. 2014b. A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow About NATO Expansion. *Foreign Affairs*, 93 (5): 90-97. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483307>.
- Sarotte, Mary Elise. 2021. *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*. ProQuest Ebook Central. New Haven, London: Yale University Press.
- Savranskaya, Svetlana. 2014. The Fall of the Wall, Eastern Europe, and Gorbachev's Vision of Europe After the Cold War. In *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945-1989*, ed. Mark R. Kramer and Vít Smetana, 335-354. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Savranskaya, Svetlana, and Thomas S. Blanton. 2018. NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard. nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-03-16/nato-expansion-what-yeltsin-heard (Accessed 04 May 2022).
- Savranskaya, Svetlana, Thomas S. Blanton, and Vladislav M. Zubok, eds. 2010. *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989*. National Security Archive Cold War readers. Budapest, New York: Central European University Press.
- Sokolov, Artem P. 2021. Ob"edinenie Germanii na stranizach gazety "Pravda" (1989-1990 gg.) [The German unification reflected in the Newspaper "Pravda" (1989-1990)]. *Voprosy Istorii* (7): 101-112.
- Spohr, Kristina. 2012. Precluded or Precedent-Setting? The "NATO Enlargement Question" in the Triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow Diplomacy of 1990-1991. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 14 (4): 4-54. doi: [10.1162/JCWS_a_00275](https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00275).
- Spohr, Kristina. 2019. *Wendezeit: Die Neuordnung der Welt nach 1989*. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt.

- Teltschik, Horst. 2019. *Russisches Roulette: Vom Kalten Krieg zum Kalten Frieden*, 1st ed. München: C.H.Beck.
- Umbach, Frank. 2005. *Das rote Bündnis: Entwicklung und Zerfall des Warschauer Paktes 1955 bis 1991*. Militärgeschichte der DDR, 10, 1st ed. Berlin: Links.
- Zubok, Vladislav. 2014. With his back against the Wall: Gorbachev, Soviet demise, and German reunification. *Cold War History*, 14 (4): 619-645. doi: [10.1080/14682745.2014.950251](https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2014.950251).

All articles published in HSR Forum 47 (2022) 2:

Drifting Apart: The Dissociation of States from International Cooperation and its Consequences

Matthias Dembinski & Dirk Peters

Drifting Apart: Examining the Consequences of States' Dissociation from International Cooperation – A Framework.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.47.2022.14](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.14)

Frank Bösch & Daniel Walter

Iran's Dissociation from Cooperation with the West between the 1960s and 1980s.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.47.2022.15](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.15)

Susanne Maslanka

The Withdrawal of the GDR from the Warsaw Pact – Expectations, Hopes, and Disappointments in German-Soviet Relations During the Dissociation Process.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.47.2022.16](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.16)

Mikhail Polianskii

The Perils of Ruxit: Russia's Tension-Ridden Dissociation from the European Security Order.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.47.2022.17](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.17)

Sinan Chu

Dissociation via Alternative Institutions: The Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and US-China Conflict.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.47.2022.18](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.18)

Dirk Peters

Brexit: The Perils of Dissociation by Negotiation.

doi: [10.12759/hsr.47.2022.19](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.47.2022.19)