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THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE NAZI PAST

Periods of change connected with a transition from dictatorship to democracy are characterized by intensive search for a new binder of national unity and identity. Communities which have been affected by totalitarianism in order to build a new order have to define their attitude towards the old one. As it has been demonstrated by the two German states in their process of abandoning the Third Reich's policy and system of values, factors such as the defence of one's own history, and seeking an answer to the question of what should be retained in the memory and what should be eradicated, have shaped the political identity of German society of the political turn era in a significant way. The reunification of Germany in 1990 confirmed the truth that the process of democratization is accompanied by a social crisis which is also a crisis of the criteria determining what is remembered and what is forgotten, the integral elements of every history.

The way of perceiving National Socialism and positioning it in German history has played a fundamental role in the development of political cultures, first of two different German states, and then of a reunified Germany*. National consciousness and community spirit is shaped by reference to history, which can be glorified, sacralised, or pushed to the margins of public life. Establishing two separate German states with different ideological foundations brought far reaching consequences for the cultural memory of the divided community. In post-war Germany the discrepancy between the negative discredited past and the need to have its acceptable image in order to build a positive identity for the new state was a contradiction inherent from the very beginning in the construction of the new order .

The Nazi past was a burden for Germany. Contrary to the majority who hoped that with time the present will eradicate the past, the victims of the Third Reich' policy guarded the nation's memory and pressure from an international public did not allow to forget the past. For that reason both German states had to relate to the

*For a wider account see: A. Wolff-Powęska, *Pamięć – brzemień i uwolnienie. Niemcy wobec nazistowskiej przeszłości (1945-2010)* [Memory – burden and liberation. Germans towards the Nazi past (1945 – 2010)], Poznań 2010, 583 pages.

national-socialist past, reject all of the legacies of the Hitler state, and at the same time try to integrate the society on firm ideological principles and acceptable political values.

They had to combine different strategies and tactics of reckoning with the past, which were all meant to serve two basic functions: to legitimize the state and to build a new sense of community spirit. The challenges Germany had to face after World War II were various in nature. The partition of Europe and of Germany meant that both German states were in victorious camps. Initially, under pressure and with help of other victorious powers post-totalitarian cultures were seeking their own way of tackling the incriminating testimony of the nation's past. A significant impact on how the history of the Third Reich was perceived was exerted by the cold war. The ideological confrontation between the East and the West made it easier to escape from acknowledging the criminal nature of the war.

An additional problem appeared when two German states were established. Namely, the nation's history was also divided and without a common history it is not possible to define national self-identification. Thus, instead its prostheses, or fragmented identities based on two ideological homelands came into being. The only difference was that West Germans felt victims of National Socialism whereas East Germans felt victims of fascism. Members of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands – SED) declared themselves to be German patriots who regarded the “Americanization” and western integration of the Federal Republic of Germany as the gravest betrayal of the national interest. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was to function as a “bastion of the national struggle for liberation”. However, the attempt to create a socialist version of the German nation between the Elbe and the Oder did not succeed despite making references to the revolutionary tradition, the labour movement and claiming property rights to the anti-fascist resistance movement.

The reunification of Germany brought a new wave of literature reckoning with the past. An intensified interest in the evaluation of the so far reckoning with the national-socialist past resulted in numerous studies. The end of the cold war and the collapse of the GDR created new conditions which allowed to show the true face of the East German struggle with history and their strategies of breaking free from guilt without the veil of censorship.

IN THE SHADOW OF ANTI-FASCISM

Social democracy, that is the new political system introduced by the victorious Soviet power, being at the same time a new dictatorship decided about the way GDR citizens handled their recent past. In the GDR the assessment of war had its origins in a straight line from Marxism and Leninism. According to the principles formulated by Lenin in his work, *War and revolution*, every war is connected with the political order of the state created by a given social class. War has a class character and demonstrates the contradictions of the era: between imperialism and socialism. So-

cialism is a synonym of peace. Contrary to "bourgeois pacifism" the working class does not condemn every war. A just war is, among others a war in defence of the socialist homeland whereas the wars of the imperialist bourgeoisie were regarded by Lenin as unjust wars. He, on the other hand excluded the possibility of a war between socialist countries¹.

War as an instrument of the Nazi state policy occupied a prominent position in East German foreign policy and their internal political rituals. It fitted well into the frame of SED's binding doctrine and the confrontational cold war policy towards the closest enemy, West Germany and the other countries of the western block. The attitude of the party rule and executive elites of East Germany towards the Third Reich was founded on the definition of fascism taken over from Georgi Dimitrov, according to which the Nazi regime was defined as "the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most imperialist and most chauvinistic elements of finance capital"². This approach allowed only for a class interpretation of the criminal regime and by the same token excluded any individual guilt and responsibility. Hence, the agricultural reform and deprivation of private property was in the GDR treated as an important step towards "overcoming" the past. The complementary tool was the employment policy which allowed to remove the old elites and employ the new ones in line with the criteria of the social background and the represented ideology. In the process the property was also taken away from the "bourgeois" representatives of the anti-Hitler resistance movement and social democrats, who did not express their willingness to blend into one party together with the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands - KPD) and SED³. In this way they were being degraded to the role of fascist collaborators. Despite the fact that denazification was much more radical in the Soviet occupation zone than in the western zones, the situations in which many former Nazis could continue their careers in the new state were not avoided.

Jürgen Danyel, who devoted a substantial part of his research to analyzing the anatomy of the East German historical and political identity, distinguishes several fundamental features of the political profile of the ruling party in the GDR in the context of its attitude to fascism⁴. They include among others:

¹ B. Blanke, *Kriegs- und Feindbild der Nationalen Volksarmee*, in: H.-A. Jacobsen, G. Leptin, U. Scheuner, E. Schulz (eds.), *Drei Jahrzehnte Außenpolitik der DDR*, Oldenburg 1979, p. 325-332.

² *Protokoll des VII. Weltkongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Moskau 25. Juli – 20. August 1935, vol. II, Stuttgart 1976, p. 985.

³ See, among others, W. Müller, *Die DDR in der deutschen Geschichte*, "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte" 28, 2001, p. 43-53; For a comprehensive analysis of literature on the topic see, *Die Nacht hat zwölf Stunden, dann kommt schon der Tag. Antifaschismus. Geschichte und Neubewertung*, ed. C. Keller und der literatur WERKstatt Berlin, Berlin 1996.

⁴ J. Danyel, *Die Opfer- und Verfolgtenperspektive als Gründungskonsens? Zum Umgang mit der Widerstandstradition und der Schuldfrage in der DDR*, in: J. Danyel (ed.), *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten*, Berlin 1995, p. 31-46.

- thinking in the framework of enemy-friend categories and the ensuing irrational sense of being encircled and endangered. The anti-fascist ideology seemed to have been determined by the experience and mentality of a specific political generation in the German communist movement. The SED executives were an amalgam of people with experiences of the Weimar Republic, persecutions by the Nazis and from Stalin's gulags.
- being doubly obstructed by the experience of the persecutions from National Socialism and by being entangled in Stalin's policy of purge within the communist circles on emigration in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the communist elite felt endangered and this was reflected in the way they perceived their ideals and organization above the life of an individual. On the other hand, the situation brought about a mixture of fear, opportunism, the need to defend oneself, to resort to denunciation and cynical pragmatism. This is well attested by numerous psychographic records of the Moscow immigrants in their autobiographic literature⁵.
- the consciousness of the elites and their sense of moral superiority resting on the conviction that they not only suffered persecutions from the Nazis but that they from the very beginning were also actively involved in fighting Nazism. The Politburo of the Communist Party of Germany even declared to be a part of the USSR's victorious military rule. This consequently led to building hierarchies of various categories of victims and to excluding some of them from the GDR's consciousness.
- distrust towards majority of the German people, who between 1933 and 1945 lived a "happy and content" life and allowed themselves to be corrupted by the right to "acquire a *Volkswagen* and buy some public shares". In this way "the dictatorship of upbringing" came into being, which by using political strategies of pedagogical and propaganda practice, served the purpose of permanent mobilization of the masses.
- a symbiosis between the proletariat and lower-middle class view of the world which allowed to combine in the communist ideology typical resentments towards particular social groups and anti-Semitic attitudes.

Anti-fascism as the ideology which legitimized East Germany provided a specific platform for reckoning with the past. Mainly it served as an element of integrating society and as an instrument of excluding ideological enemies. On 26 February 1948, together with the denazification commission being dissolved in the Soviet occupied zone, the takeover of power was considered an accomplished act. Several months before that Walter Ulbricht explained the sense of denazification and made it clear that it is not about judging what a person was doing in the times of National Socialism but about where the individual is standing at the moment and how intensively the person is engaged in the "democratic" construction of the SED state⁶.

⁵ R. Müller (ed.), *Georg Lukács/Johannes R. Becher/Friedrich Wolf i inni. Die Säuberung - Moskau 1936: Stenogramm einer geschlossenen Parteiversammlung*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1991.

⁶ W. Ulbricht, *Zur Auflösung der Entnazifizierungskommissionen*. "Neues Deutschland" 28. 2. 1948.

Antifascism fitted into the doctrine of socialist progress and signified the intention to level the past with the present. The aim was to highlight the role of the Communist Party in the anti-Nazi resistance movement and to use it for the current propaganda of the GDR as the successor of the movement. This stretching of the experiences of the pre-war communists as an ideological construction over the whole of East German society was the greatest swindle, and at the same time the most stable founding myth behind the establishment of the East German state. The principle, according to which the future belonged to East Germany while the past belonged to West Germany functioned as a smoke screen for the activity of party executives. The term "fascism" and "fascist" was reserved for political enemies. Hence, the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 was regarded as an act of "erecting an anti-fascist rampart". Any internal unrest, riots, any protests were interpreted as "fascist coup attempts". The terms "anti-fascism" and "anti-capitalism" were treated as synonyms of "loyalty towards the GDR".

Anti-fascism as the most important component legitimizing the new order attached special meaning to the victim and the communist resistance towards Nazism. "We in East Germany learnt our lesson from the incurable past. The legacy of the dead (...) and the great ideals of the anti-fascist struggle for freedom have become here a reality". The nationalized anti-fascism had as its attribute a wide range of political rituals for the victims of fascism, which were repeated according to the same script every year in the East Berlin *Babelplatz*, and which constituted an element of the anti-fascist socialization⁷.

The anti-fascist ideology was promoted to the moral rank of the GDR's only interpretation not just by the wide circles of East German intellectuals. Contrary to the common belief in West Germany that anti-fascism was only a manipulative instrument of power for the SED state, it provided a representative costume for many East German citizens. The anti-fascist consciousness was an important element which stabilized loyalty towards the state and which was a source of a programme for the later civil movements. Yet, the communist theory aided by anti-fascism was still unable to interpret all the problems of National Socialism. The churn of ideology of work and capital could not swallow anti-Semitism and racism and it soon contributed to universalizing National Socialism.

Antifascism fulfilled primarily a political function. It also led to the social integration of the former members of NSDAP, Wehrmacht soldiers and the majority of the East German citizens who had supported Hitler's Third Reich. In the process of implementing various strategies to overcome the past, the particular memory of individuals was replaced by antifascism as an ideological credo in the early stages of GDR. The presence of the other German state forced a quick integration of East

⁷ M. Maron, *Ich war ein antifaschistisches Kind*, in: M. Maron, *Nach Maßgabe meiner Befreiungskraft. Artikel und Essays*, Frankfurt a. M. 1993, p. 9-29; B. Wittich, *Initiationen zum Antifaschisten. Folgenreicher Antifaschismus*, in: B. Rauschenbach (ed.), *Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten. Zur Psycho-Analyse deutscher Wenden*, Berlin 1992, p. 180-188.

German society. Especially during the cold war, the SED propaganda by decreeing that West Germany was only an extension and a successor of the Third Reich, created a favourable climate for exonerating their own ranks. The last barrier on the way to the full integration of the perpetrators and victims within the East German state was removed in November 1949, right after the establishment of the GDR, by adopting a “Resolution lifting punishment for the former members and supporters of NSDAP and for Wehrmacht officers”. Three years later this was supplemented by the “Regulation about civil rights for former officers of the fascist Wehrmacht and former members and supporters of NSDAP”. This strategy of condoning trespasses in return for collaboration in the creation of the socialist East Germany was meant to strengthen loyalty towards the new political rule and bring internal political stability.

Although the programme of the Association of Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – VVN), established in 1947 and later transformed into the Association of Female and Male Anti-fascists (Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten - VVN – BdA) made room for some elements of individual forms of activities for the sake of commemorating the past, with the establishment of the GDR commemoration was fully monopolized by the institutes of Marxism and Leninism. The nationalization of memory and anti-fascist socialization led to the omnipresent ritualization of commemoration in the form of mass staged mobilization carried out by Committees of Anti-fascist Resistance, which in 1953 replaced the dissolved organization VVN. They had their local branches all over the country.

On 1 April 1951 Franz Dahlem, a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, who was later persecuted as a “Zionist”, spoke in this spirit at a meeting of the central executive of VVN and pointed out the need to re-orientate the work done by the organizations of the persecuted and direct it against the former advocates of the Nazi regime. As the central task of East German policy he regarded “hampering the remilitarization of West Germany and halting American military plans. Now the main aim is to attract people who, for whatever reasons, are for peace”⁸.

Together with dissolving VVN the stage of transformation of individual memory into a commemorative policy based on the ideological foundations of the party ended. Commemorative practices became an empty formula stripped of any facts, diversity and individuality and then replaced by official symbols. This let the average citizen to get rid of the conflict of conscience, and by being granted a new political mentality to join in the construction of the new socialist state. In fact, not only the working class was included into the “anti-fascist resistance forces” but all the citizens of East Germany. In this way the anti-capitalist continuity was implied and it allowed to regard East German citizens as victims of Nazism and to fashion them into victors of history. The personal share people had in the Nazi crimes remained until

⁸ After J. Danyel, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

the end of the GDR a taboo subject⁹. The auto portrait painted in this way assessed Hitler's Third Reich as a temporary stage of foreign rule. The status of the victims gave measurable privileges; it at least allowed to reject demands for reparations.

The policy towards the past adopted in the Soviet zone led to universalizing National Socialism as fascism¹⁰. The Soviet occupation created premises for a selective perception of the recent past. This was further facilitated by the fact that many of the party executives were communists who had been persecuted as early as before 1933. The fact allowed to create a myth of historical continuity and to relate it to the democratic tradition of 1848 as well as the revolutionary experiences of 1918. Following this approach the GDR could free itself in two ways from the Nazi past; through making reference to the renewed state authorities and through demonstrating distance towards West Germany as a bourgeois imperialist or post-fascist society. The existing situation meant that West Germany, which made endeavours to be regarded as the only representative of Germany on the international arena, was in a way forced to integrate the heritage of the recent past, and that became one of the main topics for their internal disputes.

From the very beginning a conflict of commemorating the past and priorities towards the past accompanied the ideological confrontation first in the western occupied zones and in the eastern zone, and later in both German states. The resistance movement came to the foreground. While in East Germany the legacy of the communist heroes and the anti-Hitler resistance movement were cherished, in West Germany the focus was on individual and military resistance. Still, neither the East German policy towards the Third Reich based on dual morality, nor the theory of totalitarianism created later in West Germany, which equated the Nazi dictatorship with that of SED, served well a rational reckoning with Hitler's policy¹¹.

Peter Reichel, an experienced researcher whose studies focus on the collective memory of Germans evaluates this situation as a gain in the case of East Germany, but as a burden in the case of West Germany¹². The state authorities of East Germany, retreated into history and used it in a selective way for their internal political

⁹ See, among others, K. Stephan, *Erinnerungen an den Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zum Zusammenhang von kollektiver Identität und kollektiver Erinnerung*, Gießen 2006; A. Blänsdorf, *Die Einordnung der NS-Zeit in das Bild der eigenen Geschichte: Österreich, die DDR und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Vergleich*, in: W. Bergmann, R. Erb, A. Lichtblau (eds.), *Schwieriges Erbe. Der Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus in Österreich, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Frankfurt a. M., New York 1995, p. 18-45.

¹⁰ H. Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, München 1985.

¹¹ L. Niethammer (ed.), *Der gesäuberte Antifaschismus. Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald. Dokumente*, Berlin 1994; Ch. Kleßmann, *Das Problem der doppelten „Vergangenheitsbewältigung“ in der früheren DDR*, in: R. Eckert, W. Küttler, G. Seeber (eds.), *Krise – Umbruch – Neubeginn. Eine kritische und selbstkritische Dokumentation der DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft 1989/1990*, afterword by J. Kock, Stuttgart 1992.

¹² P. Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, München, Wien 1995, p. 37, 40.

benefits, and contrary to West Germany, which at least in the first two decades made successful attempts to free itself from the corset of the past by concentrating on contemporary problems. Nearly until the end of the functioning of the SED state the memory concerning National Socialism was rationed from the top and controlled with the help of many institutions of the system between the Elbe and the Oder. The binding arguments were based on the reasoning that the new socialist social order, which overpowered capitalism, was in itself a premise to breaking free from Nazism and its consequences. The SED state by connecting National Socialism with a “bourgeois society” managed to treat Hitler’s state in two ways as a contrast: with respect to the Third Reich and also with respect to every order of a “bourgeois state”¹³.

In the first years after the war the fashioning of the communist anti-fascist movement as the only anti-Nazi opposition was supported by the conviction that the Communist Party gathered the most consistent fighters. Historical truth was conducive to this thesis and it was difficult to reject; the extent of persecutions suffered by the communists and the number of victims provided a strong argument in the hands of the successors of the communist movement. This fact, however, was the basis of manipulation and political abuse. It allowed, among others, to spread the belief about the undisturbed continuity of the communist resistance against the Third Reich and to present the East German state as the only successor of the movement, and to perceive its representatives as “the best forces of the German nation”.

The complex content and functions of anti-fascism made it difficult for East German society to recognize the traps contained in the state’s ideology. The fact that the first government and party leaders in the GDR were opponents of Nazism frequently persecuted by Hitler’s regime, made their political programme and beliefs credible. This fact was also the source of idealism oriented towards the future and the conviction that East Germany represents a new and better Germany. In particular this was symptomatic of the left-wing writers returning from their immigration. The idealistic anti-fascism had a strong impact on the general public. The effectiveness of the party propaganda was corroborated by the fact that the East German public was not reached by the news of crimes committed due to Stalinism in the Soviet Union and in Spain¹⁴.

The central aspects of Nazism were eradicated from official commemorative places for quite a long time while censorship and monopoly held by the party effectively paralyzed every attempt at a discussion. Then it was easier to accredit the assumption of power by Hitler in 1933 to the “chauvinist part of imperialism and the

¹³ M. R. Lepsius, *Das Erbe des Nationalsozialismus und die politische Kultur der Nachfolgestaaten des „Großdeutschen Reiches“*, in: *Kultur und Gesellschaft. Verhandlungen des 24. Deutschen Soziologentags, des 11. Österreichischen Soziologentags und des 8. Kongresses der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Zürich 1988*, ed. M. Haller, H.-J. Hoffmann-Nowotny, W. Zapf, Frankfurt a. M., New York 1989, p. 252.

¹⁴ U. Herbert, *Zweierlei Bewältigung*, in: U. Herbert, O. Groehler (eds.), *Zweierlei Bewältigung*, Hamburg 1992, p. 21.

aggressive part of the German finance capital”, the view which had to lead to a specific interpretation of history. Academic and school textbooks carried information which was meant to convince people that Hitler's regime was directed against the working-class movement, proletarian revolution and the Soviet Union. The victims of the Dresden bombing could then in this context be used as a political argument in the cold war. In 1953 Lothar Bolz, the head of the National Democratic Party of Germany (National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands - NDPD) said, “We owe the ruins of our cities and corpses buried beneath them to America and England. What has sustained our nation (...) and gave strength to rebuild the country we owe to the Soviet Union”¹⁵.

The German nation, and in particular the working class, became victims of Nazism and the perpetration was attributed to the elites of great industry. In such a context the extermination of the Jews was entirely pushed to the margins and regarded as a result of German imperialism. This view freed East German citizens from the responsibility for the consequences of the Holocaust. The attractiveness of such a view of history meant that a group of perpetrators was pointed out and the others were cleared of guilt. The advocates of such an interpretation were immediately placed on the right side of history. Thus, National Socialism was becoming in the eyes of East German people a history of West Germany. The West German disputes around denazification, prosecution of the war criminals and reparations were treated by East German propaganda as evidence for the existence of the nationalist tradition carried on by the revanchists and neo-Nazi followers.

The cold war strengthened the belief that East Germany belonged to the most progressive, oriented towards the future nations which cherish peace. In this way Germany came out of the shadow of a nation of perpetrators. In 1949 Walter Ulbricht said in his speech:

“At present the criteria of who is a peace loving citizen and wants the unity of Germany do not include the question of what party membership somebody ascribed to earlier on, or whether somebody belonged to Hitler's party but the question of: Whether or not you are for the peace treaty and against the Atlantic Pact which wants to make West Germany into a war base?”¹⁶.

Having accepted anti-fascism as the representative reason of the state in the GDR had determined the consequences for the historiographic accounts of the Holocaust. Subordinating the research into the Holocaust to communist ideology must have led to false conclusions which, among others were a product of accepting false assumptions. In fact communist history education treated fascist anti-Semitism as of

¹⁵ After J. Danyel, *Die Erinnerung an die Wehrmacht in beiden deutschen Staaten. Vergangenheitspolitik und Gedenkrituale*, in: R.-D. Müller, H.-E. Volkmann (eds.), *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, München 1999, p. 1144.

¹⁶ W. Ulbricht, *Warum nationale Front des demokratischen Deutschlands?* Aus dem Referat auf der Parteikonferenz der SED Groß-Berlin, 17 Mai 1949, in: idem, *Zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*. Aus Reden und Aufsätzen, vol. 3: 1946-1950, Ost-Berlin 1954, p. 491.

secondary importance to anti-communism. The status of a victim was first of all reserved for the communists who had been freed from camps. Also, the Jews who were connected with communism and located in the eastern occupation zone, including among others Alexander Abusch, Albert Norden, Hanns Eisler, Walther Felsenstein, Anna Seghers and Arnold Zweig, did not play a significant part in the discussion of the Nazi genocide. The communist rhetoric from the 1930s was still binding in the later East Germany. Oskar Fischer, East Germany foreign minister as late as in 1988 said:

“The GDR is a German anti-fascist state in which racism, anti-Semitism and fascism have been eradicated with their roots. The East German government and the nation pay respect to the memory of the victims of Nazi barbarity including the six million murdered Jewish citizens. The young generation in our country has been consistently educated in the anti-fascist spirit, and everything in our capacity is being done so that the young generation will never forget the evil of Hitler’s fascism, as well as the immeasurable suffering of Jewish citizens and the heroic deeds of the anti-fascist resistance movement”¹⁷.

However, the declaration of the membership in the victorious camp, and especially of the fraternity with the Soviet power, required a mythology. Even the German catastrophic defeat at Stalingrad was used to create a legend. That is to say Stalingrad became for East Germany a starting point towards a better new future for Germany. In the official rhetoric the catastrophe was perceived as the source of the East German and Soviet friendship. Stalingrad was functioning as a “triumph of the just war” against the fascist invaders, and a “great lesson” for the nation¹⁸.

With the beginning of the 1950s history education in the GDR was made uniform. On 5 July 1952 the “Museum of German History” was opened in Berlin and it was meant to function as a centre for coordinating East German historiography. The opening date of the Museum almost coincided with the 2nd party conference of SED (9-12 July 1952) during which *Aufbau des Sozialismus* was established. The party devoted a lot of time and space to history education. This considered not only the institutions but the ideological and political dimension of the studies.

“The history of Germany has shown to the entire nation the pernicious route of imperialism and the necessity of peaceful coexistence with other nations in Europe, and in particular the need for friendship between the German nation and the nations of the powerful Soviet Union. History also proves how necessary it is to grant the working class a leading role in the struggle of the German nation to reinstate the unity of Germany”¹⁹.

¹⁷ After P. Reichel, op. cit., p. 39. See also, among others: H. Schmid, *Antifaschismus und Judenverfolgung. Die „Reichskristallnacht“ als politischer Gedenktag in der DDR*, Dresden 2004.

¹⁸ M. Kumpfmüller, *Die Schlacht von Stalingrad. Metamorphosen eines deutschen Mythos*, München 1996, p. 175. Cf. also J. Herf, *Zweierlei Erinnerung. Die NS-Vergangenheit im geteilten Deutschland*, Berlin 1998.

¹⁹ *Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)*, vol. III, p. 581.

The resolutions of the Politburo from 5 July under the innocent title "Improvement of the research and education in GDR history education" clearly specified the task of historians. "Our history education can fulfill its national objectives only when it makes references to the only scientific theory of social development of the greatest sons of our nation, Marx and Engels, namely to historical materialism..."²⁰. The recommended topics focused not on the Third Reich but on the "social and national liberation movements", starting with the "fight for liberation against the Roman owners of slaves waged by the Germans". German historians at the conference on 12 January 1956 did not unanimously accept the party's directives. Some historians did not agree to the ideological primacy of SED and defended the science of history against making it completely political.

East German historiography was engaged in the construction of a new model of history in total opposition to West German research culture. Works by Alexander Abusch were a leading example of systematizing the entire German past according to the class criteria. The writer from the very beginning worked for communist journals. Between 1935 and 1939 while in exile he was the chief editor of "Rote Fahne", and after his return to Germany in 1946 he quickly made his way up, and in 1956 started his career in the Central Committee of SED to become the minister for culture in 1958. His publications belonged to exemplary and the most frequently cited literature. In his most popular publication from 1946 entitled *A nation on the wrong path (Irrweg einer Nation)* he described Hitler as an agent of the "monopolists of steel, coal and chemical industry", and regarded National Socialism as an outcome of the erroneous development of German history since the Middle Ages. His historical writings became political manifestos. The national route of mistakes committed by Germany started with Martin Luther, "the undertaker" of German freedom. In his opinion the most brutal enemy of the 20th century Germany was "the reactionary trust of the Junkers and capitalists", and he regarded the opposition between the "reactionary powers" versus "the progressive working classes" as the fundamental contradiction throwing a long shadow on the course of history²¹. Abusch's interpretation was tailored to the party programme.

"It is not possible to talk about the responsibility of Germans without at least mentioning the role of their closest environment. Namely the reactionary and capitalist primacy of the political interest of England and France, the victorious countries after World War I, helped to strengthen the reactionary forces in Germany after 1918. The West European countries saw the young Soviet Union as their enemy and they believed that they could target it with the bastion of the German Republic"²².

²⁰ After U. Neuhäuser-Wespy, *Geschichtswissenschaft unter der SED-Diktatur. Die Durchsetzung der Parteilinie in den fünfziger Jahren*, "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte" 39/1996, s. 18. Cf. also, *Der Verband der Historiker Deutschlands und die Historiker der DDR*, in: W. Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, München 1989.

²¹ A. Abusch, *Irrweg einer Nation. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis deutscher Geschichte*, Berlin 1946, p. 215.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 260.

Walter Ulbricht, in the same vein as Alexander Abusch, interpreted National Socialism as a derailment within capitalism. In 1945 he wrote, "Hitler's party turned out to be a party of war waged by the German owners of the arms industry and banks (...) Hitler's imperialism emerged as the darkest reactionary force"²³. For Abusch the German route of mistakes and weaknesses ended in 1945 and the new socialist objective was to overcome the chain of false actors and replace them with progressive German forces. In a similar way for the First Secretary of SED together with the new order the great tradition of a revolutionary struggle would be revived. On 9 July in 1952 during SED's 2nd party conference Ulbricht made it clear how the fight for the past can become an important element of the confrontation between both adverse systems saying, "Everybody understands the great importance of the scientific study of German history for our struggle for national unity and for cherishing the whole great traditions of the German nation. This gains special importance in the face of the endeavours of the American occupant to bury the great achievements of our nation"²⁴.

Ideological deformation made the historiographic reckoning with the Holocaust impossible and identifying Jews with capitalism and the West added further difficulty. A specific philosophy of history was not without significance. Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, the leaders of German communism in Moscow attached primary attention to the suffering and triumph of the Soviet Union. There was no room for the Holocaust in the communist manifesto to the German nation from June 1945 and in a work by Ulbricht entitled, *The legend of German socialism* published in 50,000 copies; until January 1947 and a further 300,000 copies were printed, and from 1952 a new edition was published under the title, *The Fascist German Imperialism*. In the "Communist Party Manifesto" from June, which was referred to in the 1950s, one could read:

"The working people of Berlin!... You had failed to notice the warning from anti-fascists (...) and you had taken the Nazi poison of the ruffian imperialist ideology. You had become the instrument of Hitler's war and by the same token you had accepted the responsibility and joint blame. Now you will have to gradually free yourselves from the blame and clear the German name from the dirt left by Hitler's disgrace"²⁵.

The obligatory reading of the work by Ulbricht was freeing the masses from guilt. His analysis of anti-Semitism was consonant with the interpretation adopted in the 1930s and 1940s. After 1933 he wrote that Hitler's fascism started with the destruction of the Communist Party and SPD, as well as the trade unions and the pogrom of Jews²⁶.

²³ W. Ulbricht, *Die Legende vom „deutschen Sozialismus“*. Ein Lehrbuch für das schaffende Volk über das Wesen des deutschen Faschismus, Berlin 1945, p. 90.

²⁴ After E. Wolfrum, *Geschichte als Waffe. Vom Kaiserreich bis zur Wiedervereinigung*, Göttingen 2001, p. 69.

²⁵ After J. Herf, „Hegelianische Momente“. *Gewinner und Verlierer in der ostdeutschen Erinnerung an Krieg, Diktatur und Holocaust*, in: Ch. Cornelißen, L. Klinkhammer, W. Schwentker (eds.), *Erinnerungskulturen Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004, p. 198-209.

²⁶ W. Ulbricht, *Der faschistische deutsche Imperialismus (1933-1945)*, Berlin 1952.

The reckoning with the past in the sense of individual diverse investigation of the nature and consequences of Hitler's regime was made impossible by the ideology which deprived people of civil rights in the understanding of western democracies. The East German statehood was built on collective class sovereignty with a limited right for interaction. The GDR's peculiarity was manifested by the fact that contrary to other countries of the communist block it could not refer to the nation's ideals and use national sovereignty to compensate for the deficit inherent in legitimating class sovereignty.

The East German symbols and rituals did not have much in common with the real victims of Nazism and the war. They all served the "struggle for peace". Every year in September an "International Remembrance Day of the Victims of Fascism" was celebrated. In the VVN Manifesto from 1951 the remembrance day was announced as "a day of fighting against war and fascism". The remembrance did not focus on the victims who were led into the gas chambers, shot and transported to work as forced labourers in the Third Reich but on those who were described as "11 million men and women from all European countries who were fighting against Hitler's fascism for the peace of mankind. (...) All those who then opposed fascism and resisted the regime (...) were above others fighters for peace"²⁷. In such rhetoric there was no room for German blame and responsibility since the term victim was justly ascribed only to "martyrs and heroes" murdered for political beliefs. The essence of the commemorative policy formulated by the communist dictatorship was contained in the text of a telegram sent by Stalin on the occasion of establishing the German Democratic Republic which said that "the greatest sacrifices in the war were made by the German nation and the Soviet nation", and that "both nations have the greatest potential in Europe to carry out great actions of international significance"²⁸. In this context the years between 1933 and 1945 were perceived as the time of foreign rule by a different class. The situation was made worse by the fact that East German historiography started to investigate the Nazi past more thoroughly only as late as in the 1960s. After 1945 "middle-class" historians did not have their say. There was no objective discipline dealing with history since historians were replaced by interpreters of history from communist executive circles.

The centrally controlled cultural policy in the GDR was subject to their own vision of history. While in western zones the term "West" was synonymous with values, and at the same time considered a bulwark against communism, in East Germany the discussed issues included cherishing the "great patriotic traditions and national cultural heritage". The "Cultural Federation for the Democratic Revival of Germany" (*Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands*) created in 1945 by the Russian administration from the very beginning aimed at "awakening the great German culture, the pride of our homeland, and justifying the new spiritual

²⁷ After J. Herf, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

²⁸ After H. Weber, *Kleine Geschichte der DDR*, Köln 1980, p. 53.

life". In 1949 the same organization regarded itself as a movement of spiritual restoration and made references to the "liberating, humanistic and truly national tradition of our culture. The Cultural Federation is in all spiritual capacities a fighter for an objective truth, humanistic measures and values, and an unfalsified view of history for the ideals of progress and freedom"²⁹. The East German authorities throughout all the decades of their existence cared for extending the infrastructure of carriers of memory. The directives issued in September 1970 which defined the "anti-fascist and humanistic foundations" of cultural policy spoke with pride about the achievements in a number of museums; The German Democratic Republic has 553 museums and places of commemoration which are annually visited by 18 million people. With respect to the density of the network of museums, the large number of visitors and the intensity of work, East Germany occupies the first place in Europe"³⁰.

SED also wanted to be a party for the revival of German culture and it is how it called itself in their 1946 manifesto. The intention was to associate socialism with humanism. The history of the class struggle of the working masses became synonymous with the history and the development of humanism. This constituted the real Germany, not the one signified by the swastika. The East German writer and politician, Werner Eggerath was asking about the German nature in the times of contempt, "Was it Germany which in hobnailed boots bashed the streets and disgraced humanity? Was it Germany which scattered our nation's blood across the battlefields of half of the world and let it rot? Was it Germany?". At the same time he provided an answer, "No, that was not Germany. The real Germany is a country of peace and human progress and cooperation of fraternal nations. Humanism must be won and not awoken"³¹.

The dominance of anti-fascism and the focus on the communist resistance movement meant that memory became an abstract amalgam, detached from particular people, places and events. The monumental nature of the commemorative topography in the places of torment led to the loss of historical consciousness. Martin Schönfeld in his study investigating the plaques commemorating the Nazi dictatorship in East Berlin pointed to the tendency to establish such a form of commemoration in which "the individuals and their biographies sunk in the normalized mesh" in which "their individuality was levelled and degraded to the sole representation of the resistance movement"³².

The East German commemorative places had their blade pointed in two directions: first against the culprits of the criminal war, and also against the West German state. The centre of the East German historical policy was dominated by the

²⁹ Kulturbund 1949: Grundaufgaben des Kulturbundes, in: E. Schubbe (ed.), *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur-, und Kulturpolitik der SED*, Stuttgart 1972, p.121.

³⁰ After E. Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948-1990*, Darmstadt 1999, p. 298.

³¹ W. Eggerath, *Nur ein Mensch*, Weimar 1947, p. 187.

³² M. Schönfeld, *Gedenktafeln in Ost-Berlin*, Schriftenreihe Aktives Museum, vol. 4, Berlin 1991, p. 22.

command to “uproot militarism and fascism” in all areas of life. Each exposition commemorating the Nazi terror also needed to remind who is the continuator and successor of the militarist doctrine. This confrontational character of the East German memory towards their compatriots across the Elbe deprived it of credibility. The divided memory was expressed in the competition of victims which was most clearly exhibited in the former concentration camps. The camp in Buchenwald was a commemorative place which was the most suitable for such a confrontation. The nearby Weimar, the birthplace of the Republic and the heir of the humanistic tradition of Goethe and Schiller, and Buchenwald with the mass graves expressed the brilliance and misery of German history. Thus, the official propaganda instituted the Buchenwald concentration camp as a national memorial of liberation from fascism, as the “red Olympus”, essential for the construction of the GDR founding myth. Other East German camps, in Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück shared the same fate.

In the early German Democratic Republic a few types of political memorials could be distinguished: “to the anti-fascist resistance movement”, “to victims of fascism”, and the monuments serving as socialist models for the working-class movement and for the development of the GDR. The initial commemorative character with time gave way to the imperative function. The statues which dominated the memorials in the former concentration camps did not portray the suffering victims but the fearless victorious revolutionary activists³³. While the beaten West Germans commemorated their fallen soldiers, victims of air raids and of the resistance movement, East Germans exhibited symbols of the international victory over fascism. Their aim was also to demonstrate the dominance of the socialist community over imperialism and solidarity of the anti-fascist forces. The memorial in Buchenwald, the work of Fritz Cremer is distinguished by its huge expressiveness; a child and ten men create not a group of people sentenced to death but a group set in a combat pose with guns and a flag. It is not the overwrought victims but the victors with their clenched fists who constitute the dominant structure³⁴. Maoz Azaryahu, a historian from Tel Aviv brought it to attention how an artistic mode of expression can falsify history. The clenched fist raised in protest in the representative memorial in Buchenwald loses its subjectivity. The victims remain anonymous³⁵.

The area of the concentration camp became the place commemorating the anti-fascist resistance movement and liberation. In 1985, on the 40th anniversary of liberating the camp, a museum was opened which was supposed to fulfill primarily the educational functions with a clearly marked ideological opponent in the background. The verbal and visual messages were directed towards the Red Army, the Commu-

³³ H. Adam, *Erinnerungsrituale – Erinnerungsdiskurse – Erinnerungstabus. Politische Denkmäler der DDR zwischen Verhinderung, Veränderung und Realisierung*, „kritische berichte“ 3, 1992.

³⁴ P. Reichel, *op.cit.*, p.131.

³⁵ M. Azaryahu, *Vom Wilhelmplatz zum Thälmannplatz. Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR*, Schriftenreihe des Institut für Deutsche Geschichte der Universität Tel-Aviv, vol. 13, Gerlingen 1991, p. 189.

nist Party and the working class. Yet, the problematic question which remained was how to agree this image with the mass graves discovered in 1984 from the time of the special Soviet camps which existed between 1945 and 1950, which according to expert estimates contained the remains of 6,000 to 13,000 victims³⁶.

The dual history of the camp-museum expressed the dual memory; of the victims of Nazism and Stalinism. The reunification of Germany brought new features into the commemorative culture. Starting in 1991 a committee of experts headed by the historian, Eberhard Jäckel and established by the government of Thuringia prepared recommendations. The exhibition presenting the history of the concentration camp should account for the current research and free itself from the so far propaganda of East German historiography. A lot has been done to secure the documentation of the early commemorative places in East Germany as well as to weaken the monumental dimension of the political symbols.

The confrontation of memory on the level of pure propaganda assumed various forms. When in early 1965 the Federal Republic of Germany was facing a decision whether or not to extend the period of expiration of validity concerning war crimes, the East German parliament issued in February 1965 a "Statement to the Parliaments of the World" which said, "According to the will of the West German government and as enacted by the resolution of the Federal Cabinet from 5 November 1964, the date 8 May 1965 (...) is supposed to be the day of general amnesty for the thousands of Nazis and war criminals. This hideous plan is a blow to the sense of justice among nations. It also constitutes a serious threat to peace and security. (...) It is a constituent of the revanchist policy of the West German government"³⁷.

The dual heritage of Nazism and communism, that was revealed after the reunification, brought complex consequences. In the 1990s the media got interested in a particular case. In 1994 a former camp warden from Ravensbrück, Germany received 65,000 German marks in damages because she had spent 10 years in camps and prisons in East Germany. The Soviet war tribunal had sentenced her to 25 years in a penal labour camp. As one of the journalists commented the SS camp warden received 550 German marks for each month in prison, whereas the former camp prisoner from Ravensbrück can according to the federal law be awarded only 150 German marks for each month spent in the camp³⁸.

On the break of the 1960s and 1970s East Germany introduced some corrections in their view of history. In 1967, after the 7th party congress a lot of effort was made to position history closer to the nation's executive authorities. In response to the change of government in West Germany and the eastern policy of the SPD/FDP coalition the East German authorities made an unsuccessful attempt to construct a vision of a "socialist nation". The conception of a nation and the portrayal of his-

³⁶ Among others, M. Klonovsky, J. von Flocken, *Stalins Lager in Deutschland, 1945-1950*, München 1993.

³⁷ "Neues Deutschland" 4. 02. 1965.

³⁸ A. Schneider, *Alles Opfer, oder was?*, "taz" 1. 12. 1994.

tory constitute two categories which were continuously mutually dependant in East Germany. The primary aim of teaching history was the formation of the socialist consciousness, which in domestic policy was to result in developing socialist patriotism and abroad to be expressed as a class struggle.

When in May 1971 Erich Honecker came to power a new era began. The central research plan for historians for the years from 1972 to 1975 dictated the credo for history as a discipline which was determined by the conclusion that the international socialist system focused around the Soviet Union had developed as a result of the course of world history, and that "The Democratic Republic of Germany is a legitimate successor of the revolutionary, progressive and humanistic tradition of German history, and first of all of the German working-class movement"³⁹. The new East German conception assumed that the two German states represent two nations, whereas in 1968 the constitution of East Germany still admitted to national unity, "The German Democratic Republic is the socialist state of the German nation". The elements of national unity were erased from the 1974 constitution. Since then the GDR functioned as a "socialist state of workers and peasants". The adjective "German" was removed from the official language. The radio stations which in their names included the word "German" became thus "the voice of GDR", the German Academy of Science was renamed as the "The GDR Science Academy". The national anthem because of the words, "Germany - one homeland" could no longer be sang but only played as music.

However, it was not possible to mould the conception of the nation and its history completely according to the party's directive. The state could not be entirely separated from the nation. The wave of the renaissance of interest in history in West Germany could not remain without an impact on historical consciousness in East Germany. The 30 year anniversary of GDR provided an occasion to open a new historical perspective under the heading, "Heritage and Tradition". Prussia became the centre of attention but the historians had to make acrobatic efforts to select only these aspects from the Prussian heritage which were in line with class ideology. The public in both German states were overcome by a wave of nostalgia. The discussion around the Prussian legacy raised new questions about the national unity of Germans and their interpretation of history. The Prussian legacy had for East Germany dual significance. The negative image of Prussia as the homeland of militarism was in the 1980s complemented by the partially rehabilitated images of some Prussian personalities like, for example Karl von Clausewitz, Gerhard von Blücher and Gerhard von Scharnhorst, who were raised to the rank of "servants of progress" as they "stimulated the activity of the masses". The great reformers, Freiherr vom und zum Stein, Karl August von Hardenberg, and the general Ludwig Graf Yorck von Wartenburg, who in 1812 signed the neutrality Convention of Tauroggen and provided arguments for the camaraderie of arms with Russia, could be used to extend the historical

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 299.

argumentation for the present friendship with the Soviet Union. Both German states needed founding myths, positive elements together with maintaining a bond with their own history. They both corrected and verified the past in various ways. In 1948 when the anti-fascist ideology became the basis for the historical narrative of the German Democratic Republic, the classical statue of the reformer, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, the work of Christian Daniel Rauch, was removed as a symbol of Prussian militarism only for it to return 15 years later. The general was needed as a reformer, who had modernized the Prussian army, to legitimize the people's army in East Germany⁴⁰.

In a way the commonly shared German history returned to East Germany through the backstairs. Together with the sense of belonging to a nation with a shared culture came the awareness of history, which the state managed to divide only on the façade. The rehabilitation of the Prussian-Protestant tradition and the huge interest in Martin Luther, especially in 1983, the "Year of Luther", showed the shared German emotions which were running underground and which paved the way for the reunification of Germany. Although for all the 40 years both German states competed with one another in all areas of life, also in the domain of history which had to fulfill the external as well as internal political functions, the collapse of the Berlin Wall exposed the false glitz of ideology. East German historiography became overnight a museum exhibit demonstrating the role of political doctrine in shaping the vision of the past.

In the final stage of the GDR, that is in the short history of the democratic East Germany together with the declaration of independence came the delayed admission of guilt. On 12 April 1990 the democratically elected East German parliament announced a resolution which said, among others, "In the times of National Socialism the Germans caused immeasurable suffering to the nations of the world. Nationalism and racial madness led to genocide, especially on the Jews from all European countries, on the nations of the Soviet Union, the Polish nation, Sinti and Roma". The resolution expressed "on behalf of German men and women their shared responsibility for humiliation, expulsion and the murder of Jewish, women, men and children. (...) We ask all the Jews in the world for forgiveness. We ask the nation of Israel to forgive the hypocrisy and hostility towards Israel in East German policy as well as to forgive the persecutions and deprivation of dignity that Jewish citizens suffered also after 1945 in our country"⁴¹.

REMEMBRANCE DAYS

The East and West Germans in various ways tried to handle historical anniversaries. They all from the very beginning had a problem with how to call the 8 /9 May. Should it be "the end of war", "May 1945", "catastrophe", "capitulation", "collapse",

⁴⁰ G. Wolff-Bonekämper, *Schinkels Neue Wache Unter den Linden. Ein Denkmal in Deutschland*, in: Akademie der Künste (Hg.), *Streit um die Neue Wache. Zur Gestaltung einer zentralen Gedenkstätte*, Berlin 1993, p. 35.

⁴¹ After "Der Tagesspiegel" 14. 4. 1990.

“the zero hour”, or “the new beginning”? None of the terms was satisfying and each was evoking divergent associations, different vision of history, different memories, constructions of identity and a different ideology. The term “catastrophe” suggests that the outcome of war was in a way a stroke of fate, and that perspective weakens human responsibility. The word “capitulation” needs to be specified as “capitulation for whom? Before whom? What emotions come with the term? On the other hand, the term “the zero hour” and “the new beginning” are intended to define the caesura of an era. Declaring “the zero hour” signifies an attempt to erase time and thus means concealing the truth. “The unconditional capitulation as the new beginning is an absurd since the idea of the thousand-years-old Reich cannot disappear overnight, it is still alive. Such a manifestation is equivalent with an attempt to put the facts *ad acta*, for example the German annihilation strategy. Then the perpetrators and the onlookers would have to recognize how much they had been submitted to a mad leadership”⁴². In the recent past the question, “who was freed in 1945?” has become an object of reflection. Freed from what and what for? How many Germans interpreted capitulation as liberation? And then was it liberation only from the inhumane war, or from Hitler, who several years earlier had been worshipped as a providential spirit? Or was it liberation from one’s pangs of conscience?

What did the end of war mean? This question has remained disputable for many decades and as a result a peculiar mythology of the war ending emerged. It was not only that the two states differed in their interpretation but also internal German differences occurred. They concerned the communist resistance movement, the “self-liberation” of the concentration camp in Buchenwald and the role of the Red Army understood as an armed organ of the communist forces. In the early years after the war West Germany did not work out a commemorative tradition referring to the war ending. The date 8 May was not treated as an occasion for collective learning. Politicians ignored this day and the public did not see any reason why remembering about the defeat should be promoted to the rank of a celebration. Time was needed to make this anniversary the subject of a deeper and more profound reflection. For a long time this anniversary was treated in the Bonn Republic as a demonstration of political difference from East Germany, which treated this day as “liberation day”

From the very beginning in East Germany this day was an element of the anti-fascist reason of the state as ensured by the communists in the Soviet zone. The monumental memorial in Treptower Park was the most prominent symbol of liberation and the place of annual ceremonies in East Berlin. It was also the central commemorative site which marked the appropriation of the Soviet victory. As early as in 1946 the Soviet authorities announced a competition for the most important commemorative site in Berlin. On 8 May 1949 marking the 4th anniversary of the war ending a memorial to the Soviet soldiers was officially unveiled. The triumphal

⁴² A. Eckstaedt, *Nationalsozialismus in der „zweiten Generation“. Psychoanalyse von Hörigkeitsverhältnissen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1989, p. 496.

arch at the entrance to the park honours the soldiers who according to the inscription “died for the freedom and independence of our homeland”. The route to the major memorial is lined with 16 white marble sarcophaguses ornamented with reliefs from the civil war of the Soviet nations and with inscriptions of citations from Joseph Stalin. The main memorial placed on an elevation shows a thirty-metre tall statue of the “Liberator”, a soldier with a sword in one hand, as an archetype of the angel of vengeance, and a child in the other arm, who with his boot squashes the swastika. The visiting route is similar to the Way of the Cross⁴³.

On 8 May 1945 a memorial of “The Camp Prisoner and Liberator” was unveiled in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The memorial shows a relief of a Red Army soldier with a camp prisoner in his arms. The dominant message is a reminder of to whom the Germans owe their liberation. On 8 May 1960 the reconstructed from the war debris building of *Neue Wache* (The New Guard House) at *Unter den Linden*, work of K. Friedrich Schinkel, was rededicated as a memorial to the victims of fascism and militarism. On the 20th anniversary of the GDR the symbolism of *Neue Wache* was changed, namely a grand stone national emblem of East Germany was added and urns with soil from concentration camps and battlefields were placed before the eternal flame.

The 8 May served the purpose of monumentalizing and canonizing the heroics of the Soviet soldiers. The commemorative sites in East Germany were created on the Soviet initiative and according to their pattern. It was the representatives of the Red Army who in November 1967 opened the “Museum of the Unconditional Capitulation of Nazi Germany in the War of Independence 1941-1945”. In 1972 a commemoration site was opened on the Seelow Hills (Seelower Höhen). It was supposed to remind about the “The Victor’s Fighting Route”, that is of The Red Army, which in early 1944 lost 30,000 soldiers, as well as it was meant to confirm the “camaraderie of arms” between the East German and Soviet soldiers. The celebrations on the 8 May created favourable conditions to strengthen the East German interpretation of history; highlighting that the major glory of victory and the burden of losses are accredited to the Soviet Union while the role of the western allies was marginalized. The year 1945 was ascribed a role of a caesura of an era just as it was with the year 1917. Socialism finally overcame the fascist tyranny and the German guilt obliges to eternal gratitude and friendship with the liberator. Thus, the 8 May as a celebration of victory was simultaneously a celebration of socialism⁴⁴. The Nazi racist policy and its victims did not constitute a point of reference. The centre of attention was on the suffering of the civilians in the last months of the war and the bombed Dresden. These facts were used as political arguments. As in 1953 Lothar Bolz, the head of the East German National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD) assured, “We owe the

⁴³ For a wider account see, H. Adam, op.cit., p. 10-35.

⁴⁴ B.-A. Rusinek, *Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs lokal, regional, international. Forschungsstand und Perspektiven*, in: idem (ed.), *Kriegsende 1945. Verbrechen, Katastrophen, Befreiungen in nationaler und internationaler Perspektive*, Göttingen 2004, p. 7-26.

ruins of our cities and corpses buried beneath them to America and England. What has sustained our nation (...) and gave strength to rebuild the country we owe to the Soviet Union"⁴⁵. When in 1965 Günter Paulus, a German historian took the courage to say that "liberty came to us Germans not as a friendly goddess with a palm twig in her hand" but "it drove in tanks into our streets", "it knocked on our door with the butt-ends of guns", the text was rejected by state censorship as "historically inappropriately formulated" and "politically unacceptable"⁴⁶.

In April 1950 the interim house of parliament established the 8 May and the 7 October to be official national holidays in East Germany. The May celebrations in East Germany, similar to the entire historical policy of the SED state, were a manifestation of friendship with the Soviet Union, and at the same time a performance condemning the political reality of West Germany. To illustrate, for example, on 8 May 1955 a demonstration took place in which 200,000 people participated and whose aim was to condemn West Germany which became a NATO member on the 5 May. The celebration of Liberation Day were always an occasion for a political update of the past. When in 1970 on the occasion of the anniversary of the war ending Willy Brandt spoke in the Bundestag, "Neues Deutschland" saw "pure revanchist ideology in all fragments of his speech"⁴⁷. Several years later, on the 28th anniversary of the German capitulation, it was yet again stressed that East German citizens are the victors of 1945. That is to say "the wheel of history has been turning forward on East German territory and it will keep turning forward"⁴⁸. In 1965 on the occasion of the 8 May the American war in Vietnam was condemned. Historically thus, anniversaries were an occasion to mobilize the masses and gain support for the SED, its "peace mission in the world", as well as to express opposition to the western powers, which were a threat to peace.

Ritualized celebrations enriched with the current elements of political conflicts between the East and the West were becoming a ceremony in which National Socialism was a marginal attachment devoid of content. Anti-fascism solved everything without explaining anything. It was an ideology of compensating, legitimating and separating from the past. Shame, guilt, sorrow were not suitable for the feelings of the victor. The 8 May had a strong position in the political calendar of the GDR and it contained the whole of East German mythology. In both German states metaphors were used to obscure the real meaning of the past. While on 8 May 1965 Walter Ulbricht spoke of the "swampy growth of German imperialism", Gustav Heinemann in 1970 spoke of the "dark hours of the gloomy era".

⁴⁵ After M. Sabrow, *Den zweiten Weltkrieg erinnern*, "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte" 36-37, 2009, p. 15.

⁴⁶ After M. Sabrow, *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs. Der Fall Günter Paulus*, "Initial" 4/5, 1995, p. 60.

⁴⁷ After J.-H. Kirsch, "Wir haben aus der Geschichte gelernt". *Der 8. Mai als politischer Gedenktag in Deutschland*, Köln, Weimer, Wien 1999, p. 66.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

It was as late as on the 40th anniversary of the war ending that a change of climate could be felt in East Germany⁴⁹. Again the memories of the allied air raids on Dresden, forgotten for some time, came to the fore. The anniversaries were celebrated apart from the state also in Christian churches, despite the fact that the sermons and public appearances of the more important church officials were censored. The public could watch documentaries which in a more realistic way showed the end of the war. There was also a new international perspective and the celebrations were accompanied by appeals for peace. In Torgau on the River Elbe a “coalition of reason and realism” was presented in which sixty US war veterans met with one hundred former Red Army soldiers to exchange their war memories forty years later.

In the whole history of East Germany efforts made to maintain the progressive tone and victorious atmosphere remained in sharp contrast with the authentic tenor of the day of German capitulation. The celebrations did not call up for grieving over the victims of National Socialism. They imposed an atmosphere of pompous triumph which was not consonant with the authentic feelings of the older generation which remembered the burden of the defeat and its consequences.

The real credibility test for the memory of the recent past was for East German citizens the anniversary of the *Kristallnacht* (Cristal Night). Today, remembering about the Holocaust is an important element of German identity but the route to integrate the memory of the Holocaust in German consciousness, first in a divided and then in a reunified state, was long and filled with difficulties. As it was put by Friedrich Nietzsche, “I did it – so says my memory. I could not have done it – says my pride and remains relentless. Eventually memory gives in”⁵⁰. Christian von Krockow writes about a double person and the split conscience in the Third Reich. After the war the situation was similar. In Germany there was deep silence.

Initially, those Jews who had survived the Holocaust could not imagine returning to German soil. It seemed that after Auschwitz the Jewish communities in Germany would be something unnatural. Robert Weltsch spoke on behalf of many when in 1946 after his visit to the defeated Germany he wrote, “We cannot expect that there will be some Jewish people who would want to live in Germany. Here it smells of human bodies, gas chambers and torture rooms. Yet, there are still a few thousand of them living in Germany. (...) These remaining Jewish quarters need to be liquidated as soon as possible. (...) Germany is not the land for Jews”⁵¹. Similar words full of resignation were spoken by Rabbi Leo Beck after he was liberated from the

⁴⁹ For an analysis of the press coverage on the 8 May celebrations see, M. Mederacke, W. Schaff, *Der „Tag der Befreiung“ in der DDR 1985. Die Berichterstattung des „Neuen Deutschlands“*, “deutsche studien“ annual XXIV, March 1986, p. 88-94.

⁵⁰ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond good and evil*, translated into Polish, edited and supplied with afterword by P. Pieniążek, Kraków 2005, p. 71.

⁵¹ After M. Richarz, *Juden in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik seit 1945*, in: M. Brumlik, D. Kiesel, C. Kugelmann, J. Schoeps (eds.), *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, Frankfurt a. M. 1986, p. 14.

Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1945, "For us, Jews from Germany a certain epoch in history came to an end. Such epoch ends when hope, faith and trust need to be buried for good (...) The epoch of Jews in Germany has ended for good"⁵².

November in East Germany was reserved as a month of commemorating the October resolution (1917) and the November revolution (1918). Jews did not fit into any of the official definitions of victims of fascism. However, the consecutive anniversaries of the *Kristallnacht* which followed were used as an occasion to launch attacks on western imperialism and the revisionist West Germany. The political interdependencies in East Germany and lack of contact with the ecumenical circles abroad limited the necessary change of reasoning and reckoning with the past. The very few Jewish communities which still functioned in East Germany were ascribed the role of "Zionist agencies". The Israeli-Palestinian conflict had a negative impact on the attitude towards Jewish people. The commemorative culture was determined by the propaganda of the SED state. For example, on the anniversary of the Jewish pogrom there was more information about anti-Semitic incidents and "fascist elements" in the neighbouring West Germany. The celebrations were limited to local ceremonies organized by the Jewish communities and participated by the local authorities. They were accompanied by assurances that racism, militarism, imperialism and anti-Semitism were "eradicated with their roots" in the "state of workers and peasants". When in 1955 the Museum of German History was opened in Berlin the SED's Politburo entered the Jewish pogrom in the official calendar of state commemoration.

The GDR authorities emphasized that their attitude to Israel described as an "aggressive state" had nothing in common with their attitude towards Jews. The East German media frequently stressed that they would not allow to be blackmailed by references to Auschwitz⁵³. The responsibility for Auschwitz and Majdanek was accredited to the ruling class of West Germany. Thus, the reports from the opening of Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem were considered as referring to the other German state. "The collaborators and henchmen of Eichmann enjoy today in the Bonn state even higher positions than they did once in the Nazi state"⁵⁴.

From the beginning the GDR authorities ignored the religious and racist nature of the Jewish persecutions. The directives laid out, among others in a circular of the Berlin Municipality social department from 25 June 1945 stated, "Jews, cross-breeds, Bible scholars, the majority of those who compromise the defensive capability of our country and critics cannot be enlisted in the narrowly defined frame as "victims of fascism"⁵⁵.

⁵² After T. Gidal, *Die Juden in Deutschland von der Römerzeit bis zur Weimarer Republik*, Gütersloh 1988, p. 426.

⁵³ This opinion of Albert Reisz from September 1975 is quoted by P. Dietmar, *DDR und Israel (I) Ambivalenz einer Nicht-Beziehung*, "Deutschland Archiv" 7, 1977, p. 738.

⁵⁴ *Der Henkersknecht des deutschen Imperialismus*, "Neues Deutschland" 2. 6. 1962.

⁵⁵ After A. Timm, *Der politische und propagandistische Umgang mit der „Reichskristallnacht“ in der DDR*, in: J. Danyel (ed.), op.cit., p. 214-215.

However, this view had to be soon verified since it was quickly remembered that 160,000 Berlin Jews had been deported to concentration camps and only 6,000 returned, including 87 children.

The first anniversary ceremonies took place in a narrow circle of the Jewish communities with the participation of the Central Committee for Victims of Fascism and the Association of the Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (VVN). Frequently Jewish communists including, Juliusz Meyer, Leon Löwenkopf, Leo Zuckermann took part in the events. The binding formula was defined by the historian, Walter Bartel, who belonged to the executive authorities of the Berlin VVN. In his 1948 speech delivered in the German Theatre he interpreted the Jewish pogrom from 9 November 1938 as an event which can be understood only in reference to 9 November 1918. "The underlying cause for the Cristal Night lies in the fact that in 1918 they had failed to break the rule of the generals, Thyssen and Krupp"⁵⁶.

Only as late as 1956 on the initiative of the Evangelical Church more attention was paid to the memorable anniversary. On the 18th anniversary of the Jewish pogrom Rector Heinrich Grüber, the deputy head of VVN, and since 1949 a representative of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the East German government, appealed to the German youth to clean the Jewish cemeteries and in this way to wash off at least a fraction of the "great German guilt". However, the initiative was not taken on and put into action for various reasons. Until 1978 the "Cristal Night" remained on the margin of the commemoration of the Bolshevik revolution. On the 50th anniversary of the pogrom, and a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall representatives of Israel were invited to the anniversary celebrations for the first time.

In November 1956 the prime minister Otto Grottenwohl spoke of the reparations paid by West Germany as the "so called compensation which Israel is using in their fight against the independence movement in the Middle East". He also demanded that West Germany should not support the "bulwark of imperialism"⁵⁷. The same year on the anniversary of the pogrom "Neues Deutschland" reported that "hundreds of faithful soldiers of Hitler and fascist murderers and arsonists manipulated the navigation equipment of Bonn's NATO machinery"⁵⁸. The responsibility for the pogrom belonged to the fascists whose descendants lived in Bonn and Munich, and it was them who "profaned the good name of Germany".

In the 1960s the commemorative culture in real socialism developed its own dynamics. Commemorative sites were opened in the former concentration camps. They were meant to authenticate the "aura of the anti-fascist martyrdom", and they constituted a conscious act of the offensive propaganda against West Germany, seen as their ideological enemy⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 216.

⁵⁷ I. Deutschkron, *Israel und die Deutschen. Das schwierige Verhältnis*, Köln 1983, p. 190.

⁵⁸ *Das Unkraut rechtzeitig jäten*, "Neues Deutschland" 10. 11. 1956.

⁵⁹ *Klage und Ausweg. Matinee zum 30. Jahrestag der "Kristallnacht"*, "Neues Deutschland" 11. 11. 1968.

Despite the difficulties and constraints imposed on the Jewish communities, the East German Evangelic Church managed to gradually earn a narrow margin of freedom for commemorating the anniversary of the November pogrom and for reconciliation with the Jewish community. The Synod of the National Church in Greifswald made appeals to the media for moderation and restraint in informing about the current problems concerning Israel and Jews.

An opportunity for a wider debate on difficult topics was provided by the regional *Kirchentag* in Leipzig in 1978, on the 40th anniversary of the "Cristal Night", and in 1983, the Year of Luther. The topic "Luther and Jews" became a subject of a statement issued by the East German Evangelical churches, in which it was stated, among others that, "there is no reason to worship Luther as a hero. (...) His critique of the Jewish religion amplified, against his intentions, contempt for Jews, which has had calamitous consequences for our nation"⁶⁰. In the last decade before reunification there was room for a wider dialogue of the churches with Judaism and its representatives.

When after Stalin's death the political climate improved in East Germany people of Jewish origin, among others Alexander Abusch, Albert Norden, Gerhard Eisler, Hilda Benjamin, Hermann Axen and Friedrich Karl Kaul assumed high positions in the party and in the state. Since that time as "victims of fascism" they received support in maintaining their religious practices and caring for their cemeteries⁶¹. The East Berlin Jewish community received annually 150,000 German marks to maintain the Berlin-Weißensee cemetery, the largest cemetery in Europe. For example, in 1980 when 800 Jews lived in East Germany and about 27,000 in West Germany, there were 115,000 graves in the cemetery. The Jews in East Germany expressed support for the official policy of the state. The East German attitude towards Israel defined the position of the modest East German Jewish community towards Jews in the world. A representative of the Jewish community explained the lack of contact with the international Jewish Diaspora and Israel saying, "Obviously, it is a painful issue for us. Most of us have friends and relatives there. But we also have relatives and friends in the USA, and the relations between East Germany and the USA are disheartening for us. After all, we are a socialist state and Israel is capitalist and this makes harmonious relations difficult. We have to be realistic and support the policy of our state"⁶².

INTEGRATION OF MEMORY?

Because of reunification Germany for the second time in the 20th century faced the challenge of "overcoming the past". However, the circumstances and the ideological climate by the end of the 20th century were fundamentally different from the

⁶⁰ H.-D. Peter, O. Schröder (eds.), *Vertrauen wagen. Kirchentage in der DDR im Lutherjahr 1983*, Berlin (Ost) 1984, p. 65.

⁶¹ L. Mertens, *Juden in der DDR. Eine schwindende Minderheit*, „Deutschland Archiv“ 11, 1986, p.1192.

⁶² Herbert Singer quoted by L. Mertens, op. cit., p. 1196-1197.

situation after 1945. The new conditions stimulated parallels between the attitudes of West Germans towards National Socialism and the attitudes of East Germans towards communism. A question about the consequences of the ideological interpretation of the past had to appear. Yet, the SED state differed from the NSDAP state in a comparable degree to the abyss which lies between the *Stasi* (Ministry of State Security of German Democratic Republic) records and the Auschwitz crematoria. The Third Reich lasted 12 years, it claimed an invasive war and genocide. The German Democratic Republic lasted for 40 years. It is not burdened with the consciously implemented policy of extermination against other nations. The Third Reich was a permanent state of emergency, while East Germany was a homeland for the normal living of millions of its citizens. While Hitler could count on the support of the nation because National Socialism was a native product, in East Germany communism was an imported article.

The way the past was treated by the general public in both German states was strongly influenced by the nature of the collapse of the Third Reich and of the East German "real socialism". The fate of post-war Germany was decided by the victorious powers and therefore the end of the war was not treated by Germans as liberation. In contrast the fall of the GDR was instigated by its citizens themselves. Also, the aims of National Socialism and the party establishment in East Germany were different. The former had the nationalist-racist programme, the latter, at least in the official version, the internationalist-fraternal-egalitarian one. The motifs for the acceptance of the system were different. While after 1945 both German states were facing the task of handling the Nazi past, after 1989 the reckoning with communism was a necessity only for the former East Germany. The reproach for adopting the "victor's mentality" does no longer refer to the foreign occupying powers, as it was the case after World War II, but it is *Wessis*. Contrary to the situation after 1945, when the old Third Reich elites out of life necessity were included quickly into the lifeblood of the new social and economic reality, after 1989 the positions of GDR officials dismissed from public life because of the communist past were filled by elites imported from the western part of Germany⁶³.

The reactions to fascism in West Germany and to communism in East Germany also had many tangent points. Both ideologies, of Nazism and communism although so different in their intentions, were directed against democracy and western values, and had an authoritarian character. Both kinds of dictatorship rejected pluralism, promised security instead of freedom, full harmony and community of interests instead of accommodation of conflicting interests. Their practice of authority was based on a peculiar seduction of society, repressions and terror. They both owed

⁶³ For a wider account see among others, P. Eisenmann, G. Hirscher (eds.), *Bilanz der zweiten Diktatur*; München 1993; B. Faulenbach, M. Meckel, H. Weber (eds.), *Die Partei hatte immer recht – Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur*; Essen 1994, A. von Plato, J. Schütrumpf (eds.), *Wendezeiten – Zeitwende. Zur „Entnazifizierung“ und „Entstalinisierung“*; Hamburg 1991; H. Orłowski, M. Tomczak (eds.), *Elity w jednoczących się Niemczech* [Elites in reunifying Germany]; Poznań 1999.

their stability to a large extent to a specific Prussian tradition of political culture which was expressed in various forms of adaptation, political passivity and trust in the authority of power.

The post-fascist and post-communist societies were confronted with similar problems. After 1989 the judiciary system faced the same dilemma as after 1945; how using the means available in a state of law can crimes that were committed in a state of lawlessness be tackled? In both cases it was equally difficult to solve the problem of legal and political responsibility and effectively document the charges imposed on the elites without excluding them altogether from life in a democratic state.

The acceptance of "quiet" integration of those burdened with cooperation with the regime was present after the end of World War II, as well as after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The practice of transformation has demonstrated that at least in transitory stages integrating people who had been involved in cooperation with the NSDAP state and the SED state turned out to be more important for the political consolidation of society than a moral renewal through radical exclusion of the group from the rest of society. The difference in the treatment of the guilty elites concerned the fact that after the war Germans could not afford a total exchange of the elites because of the large number of people entangled in the Nazi system. After the reunification of Germany an efficient and almost complete exchange of the executive management could be introduced in all areas of life since the discredited GDR elites were replaced by West German experts.

Both, after the end of World War II and after the collapse of the GDR the community of interests of the losers and the rejected proved to be strong. The experience of denazification and destasification did not help much in recognizing by Germans their role in the old system. For many Germans Nuremberg became a symbol of criminal pathology which, after all did not refer to normal citizens. After 1989, alike after 1945 it was difficult to come to terms with the whole scale of the change. In the assessment of the past system the same patterns of excusing people's attitudes occurred. I was either too young to bear responsibility, or I was only doing my duties for my state and my home country.

In both cases an emotional void prevailed. There was a lack of acceptance of the new order, which in its initial stage proved to be a democracy without democrats. It was common to vindicate one's own biography and defending it became more important than defending the collective community. It seemed that questioning an entire life as false in a false era, taking away the sense from the life effort caused the greatest resistance and was not favourable to the democratic turn.

Both German states, West Germany and the new Federal Republic of Germany needed founding myths, that is positive experiences. The choice between quick democratization and integration or ruthless treatment of the guilty ones proved to be ultimately an unsolvable problem. After 1945 as well as after 1990 individual reckoning with the past did not follow a public debate. Each call for drawing a "thick line" caused a new wave of discussions and an opposite reaction.

After the reunification in 1990 West Germans, enriched by forty years of wrestling with the past, did not want again in the same century to sweep the history under the carpet. Therefore, legal redress for the victims of Stalinist and communist repressions in East Germany became one of the priorities of the unified Germany. However, it proved extremely difficult to bring to justice those responsible for the SED dictatorship. Just as it was in Nuremberg where none of the war criminals pleaded guilty before the Tribunal, the attempt to settle the scores with the people responsible for the crimes and deviations of the communist system in the former East Germany disappointed all those who were awaiting long prison sentences for the political and economic elite.

To illustrate, a trial which took place between 1996 and 1999 against six members of the Politburo of the SED concerning responsibility for deaths during the attempts of citizens at escaping from East Berlin on the East German-West German border and the Berlin Wall showed difficulties encountered by a democratic state when settling accounts with an undemocratic system. Similar to the situation after 1945 the part of society which was put on trial assessed the efforts of the prosecutors as *Siegerjustiz*, and revenge of those who won the cold war over the defeated ones. All those who were charged pleaded not guilty and saw the court trial as illegal. Kurt Hager, the main ideologist of SED turned defence into prosecution saying, "Your aim is to make me into a criminal"⁶⁴. Erich Mückenberger, a trained metal worker claimed that "Moscow is responsible" for everything that was bad in the GDR. Egon Krenz, a teacher by occupation and the successor of Honecker, saw himself as a victim, "I have been accused because I opted for an anti-capitalist alternative on German soil". When he was opposing people fleeing East Germany he was only "defending the territorial integrity of the GDR state". In his opinion in East Germany "no order was given to shoot people (...) I have never ordered a soldier to kill (...) I am not a murderer" (...). It was West Germany that had an interest in casualties on the border, they organized such cases"⁶⁵. His defence lawyer claimed that the fact that E. Krenz handed over his power in a peaceful manner, preventing in this way larger numbers of victims, was to his advantage. With reference to that he compared him to the national heroes of the anti-Hitler resistance movement from 20 July 1944. Karin Schmidt, the auxiliary prosecutor, whose husband was killed during his attempt to flee the country in 1987, was of a different opinion⁶⁶. Horst Dohlus, a hair dresser by occupation, explained that his activity was always task oriented and always "in the interest of our society". Günther Kleiber, an electrician understood the grief of the

⁶⁴ R. Grafe, „Die Politbüro-Beschlüsse waren Bedingungen der tödlichen Schüsse“ *Der Prozess gegen sechs Mitglieder des SED-Politbüros (1996-1999)*, „Deutschland Archiv“ 1, 2000, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 20.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 22. See also P. J. Winters, *Das Urteil gegen Krenz und andere*, „Deutschland Archiv“ 5, 1997, p. 693-696; *Auszüge aus dem Plädoyer der Staatsanwaltschaft, dem Schlusswort von Egon Krenz und der Urteilsbegründung*, „Deutschland Archiv“ 5, 1997, p. 697-699. P. J. Winters, *Der letzte Politbüro-Prozess*, „Deutschland Archiv“ 5, 2004, p. 752-757.

victims' families but "He had nothing to do with it all". Only Günter Schabowsky, the head of "Neues Deutschland" between 1978-1985 admitted to moral guilt and asked for forgiveness. The trials made an impression of party meetings and no sentence would satisfy the victims. In 1993 Erich Mielke, the head of the much hated Ministry of State Security (The *Stasi*) received a 6-year prison sentence only for complicity in the murder of two police officers in Berlin in 1931. Because of his old age (85) he was released in 1995. In most trials the sentences were symbolic, and most often suspended.

In the reunified Germany the lustration fervour was maintained within the framework of law. The first federal commissioner, Joachim Gauck who was implementing the resolution from 1991 concerning *Stasi* records, had at his disposal a staff of qualified specialists (3, 400 jobs were planned) and a budget of over 200 million German marks to verify the files measuring 178 km in length. The major aim was the defence of freedom and democracy. Despite the attacks launched mainly by the Democratic Socialist Party (PDS), the work of Gauck's commission ran smoothly, and it took into account primarily the perspective of the victims and the need to know the full truth about the GDR⁶⁷. Yet, in many cases the victims of the secret police and repressions from the former GDR communist state were disappointed. They soon found out that the legal guarantees in a democratic state refer not only to the victims but also to the perpetrators. Bärbel Bohley, the initiator of a civil movement, New Forum, and one of the first people to demand having the files opened expressed a view held by many when she said, "We expected justice and we received the state of law".

The turn of 1989/1990 changed the perspective of evaluating National Socialism. The collapse of the dictatorship in Eastern and Central Europe and the reunification of Germany did not bring "the end of history"⁶⁸. Quite on the contrary, the past reminded about itself with double force. West Germans expected that their compatriots from the east, who had not been involved in public debates concerning their part in the policy of Nazi Germany and their responsibility for the past, will make up for the history lesson they have missed with interest. However, the Former GDR citizens did not agree with the situation that their compatriots from across the Elbe should have the right to dictate the rules for reckoning with the past. Yet, international circles expected that the reunification of Germany would consequently bring a reunification of guilt and responsibility.

The new caesura opened a new chapter in the work on the past. The generation of witnesses and participants of the National Socialist state was bid farewell to. The "Children of war" came to have their say. The memory crossed all borders. The scope and the course of overcoming the past is determined by such factors as, among

⁶⁷ See among others, *Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz auf dem Prüfstein. Urteil des Bundesverwaltungsgerichtes vom 23. Juni 2004*, „Deutschland Archiv“ 5, 2004, p. 770-775.

⁶⁸ For a wider account of the significance of turns in German history see among others, D. Papenfuß, W. Schieder (eds.), *Deutsche Umbrüche im 20. Jahrhundert*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2000.

others: the way in which the system is changed (whether one deals with the continuation of elites or a sudden revolutionary turn), the length of dictatorship and the manner of diverging from dictatorship. Democracy imposes certain practices and gives voice to all citizens. After 1989 in the post-communist countries the struggle with the past was supplemented with a new element. It was no longer the problem of political culture and historical enlightenment but of a concrete decision: open the records or not? It is a battle for one's own image. Contrary to some worries, the reunification of Germany did not weaken the research into the Nazi past. Quite the opposite, dealing with the past itself became an object of studies. Finally, it was discovered that the problem of reckoning with the past after the end of tyranny, civil wars and any armed conflicts is a topic with a long tradition.

A comparative analysis of the struggle with the past in both German states shows that one memory can be won against another⁶⁹. The time distance intensifies the process of building historical records of the Nazi past, whereas the GDR past is now a current political problem. The debate concerning the self-determination and self-identification of Germans with reference to German history is open and in progress. Both pasts are slowly becoming an integral element of the political culture of Germany.

⁶⁹ See among others, B. Faulenbach, *Probleme des Umgangs mit der Vergangenheit im vereinten Deutschland: Zur Gegenwartsbedeutung der jüngsten Geschichte*, in: W. Weidenfeld (ed.), *Deutschland. Eine Nation - doppelte Geschichte. Materialien zum deutschen Selbstverständnis*, Köln 1993, p. 175-190; idem, *Probleme einer Neuinterpretation der Vergangenheit angesichts des Umbruchs 1989/91*, in: W. Weidenfeld, M. Stadelmaier (eds.), *Diktatur und Emanzipation. Zur russischen und deutschen Entwicklung 1917-1991*, Essen 1993, p. 9-18.