Tomáš Vilímek

Oppositionists in the ČSSR and the GDR

Mutual Awareness, Exchanges of Ideas and Cooperation, 1968-1989

'For us, the existence of the Charter and other human rights movements in eastern Europe has been and remains an encouragement and source of inspiration.' This is how the 'Letter to Charter 77' from the 'Initiative for Freedom and Human Rights' (*Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte* – IFM) reads as published in January 1987. This is one of the most well-known pieces of evidence for the awareness in the GDR of the Czechoslovakian opposition.[1] The following essay focuses on this cross-border interaction of regime-critical and oppositionist *acteurs* and groups in both East Germany and the ČSSR. In addition to such perceptions of one another, it asks about the possibilities for and limits on the exchange of ideas and cooperation and places these in a comparative eastcentral European context.

Researching the mutual perceptions of these representatives of eastern European dissidence opens up a comparative perspective and contributes thereby to a deepening of our knowledge of this phenomenon. In this way, the similarities and the differences of actions critical of the regimes in the individual countries of the east bloc can be better understood and the historical development of various ideas of the dissent better followed. What are referred to as the 'steps of the disintegration of the whole system' (György Dalos) of the eastern bloc (meaning the years 1953, 1956, 1968 and not least 1980/81) are especially important in the research of the mutual awareness of the dissidents, as Jaroslav Šabata, a spokesperson for Charter 77 and co-author of the Prague Appeal of March 1985, expressed so succinctly: 'The reciprocal influence cannot be reduced down to the progress of the individual initiatives. We must integrate the larger history into our

[1] 10 Jahre Charta 77, 10. Jan. 1987, Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte 1.1.01 (sheet 1), Matthias-Domaschk-Archiv, Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft, Berlin (hereafter: MDA-RHG).

reflections, both its impacts and how it was processed in the actual countries.' [2]

The 'Prague Spring' and the Rise of Regime-Critical Groups in the GDR

The letter from the IFM quoted at the beginning of this essay was written at a highpoint of mutual East German-Czechoslovak awareness of one another in which both sides were seeking to institutionalise cross-border cooperation. This phase had begun in the middle of the 1980s and reached its climax with declarations of solidarity in 1988/89. It followed two other such moments related to two historical events: the Prague Spring and the publication of Charter 77.

---

[2] Jaroslav Šabata, interview with the author, Brno, 30 Aug. 2007. – This current study draws both on discussions that took place in the course of a project sponsored by the Volkswagen-Foundation entitled 'The Other Eastern Europe' (2007–2009) in which the author participated, as well as on those which he conducted during his earlier research on the Czechoslovak and East German opposition. The conversations were conducted in 2006 with Ulrike Poppe, Ralf Hirsch, Ludwig Mehlhorn, Reinhard Weißhuhn, Wolfgang Templin and Gerd Poppe. The primary focus was on the perception of Czechoslovakia. With the latter two persons, a broader discussion was conducted in the context of the project for the Volkswagen-Foundation. With reference to that, see also Tomáš Vilímek, *Solidarita napříč hranicemi: Opozice v ČSSR a v NDR po roce 1968* (Prague: Nakladatelství Vyšehrad, 2010). In addition, it presents discussions that Alexander von Plato conducted in the framework of the VW-Foundation project, an important source of information. – In addition there are as well the results of biographical research in the Czech Republic which happened primarily at the Institute for Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences (ÚSD AV ČR). One can find an overview of this at www.coh.usd.cas.cz/pages_cz/sbirky.htm (last visited Feb. 2013). In 2005, the first results of this project 'Die politische Elite und der Dissens in der Zeit der sogenannten Normalisierung' was presented at the Centre for Oral History at the Institute for Contemporary History in Prague. In addition to the approximately 120 transcribed conversations, ten studies were also published. Miroslav Vaněk, Pavel Urbášek, eds., *Vítězové? Poražení? Životopisná interview*, 1 vol. (Prague: Prostor, 2005). These are concerned, among other things, with the different aspects of the Czechoslovak dissidence, with its international links, and the repressive methods of the Czechoslovak security services. See Tomáš Vilímek: 'Vnímání mezinárodních souvislostí představiteli komunistických elit a disentu-represivní metody StB a pobyt v komunistických věznicích', in Vaněk et. al., *Vítězové?,* 353-394. – Additionally, a large number of studies, memoirs, published conversations and not least of all archive materials from state and opposition provenance have been used. From among these archives, the following deserve primary reference: the Archive of the Security Services of the Czech Republic (Archiv bezpečnostních složek České republiky), the Archive of the Federal Commissioner for the Documents of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic (Bundesbeauftragter für die Stasi-Unterlagen, BStU), MDA-RHG (see footnote 1) and the Archive of the Prohibited Books (libri prohibiti), Library of Samizdat and Exile Literature (Knihovna samizdatové a exilové literatury).

The Prague Spring played a special role in the development of people critical of the regime in the GDR. In that year, many people came into conflict with the regime for the first time; some were sentenced to terms of imprisonment and not a few lost their belief in the ability of socialism to be reformed. The state propaganda directed against the Prague Spring and the intervention in August 1968 were both markedly rejected in East German society even if open criticism was almost solely expressed at home. The regime forced many people to sign declarations in which they welcomed the intervention. As Stefan Wolle commented, many young people walked into the trap set by the government security service.[3]

Roman Herzog correctly pointed out[4] that the populace of the GDR was the one which was most intensely aware of Czechoslovakia at that point in 1968. The later representatives of East German dissent do not constitute an exception. Reinhard Weißhuhn remembered that 'Czechoslovakia played an important role, which (as was mostly the case with us) was of course probably connected with the Prague Spring, which I had actually followed with the greatest attention.' (Weißhuhn was the co-founder of the IFM and otherwise had been more interested in the developments in Hungary.) Although the invasion had not overly surprised him, it was nevertheless an 'existential experience'. Subsequently he did not want to have anything more to do with the system in the GDR: 'That was an essential moment in my incipient politicization.'[5] As Gerd Poppe, one of the leading figures in the East Berlin opposition scene, also recounted: 'The joining in solidarity with the Prague reformers on 21 August 1968 and the handing over of a declaration at the Czechoslovak embassy became for me the first clear and publicly protest [I] carried out against the Soviet and the SED regime.'[6] As Robert Havemann wrote in his *Biography of a German Marxist*, the year of 1968 was for many 'the year of great hopes and bitter disappointments'.[7]

Roland Jahn, whom the invasion 'sobered up', recounted: 'We knew that what was in the GDR was not socialism, and so we were interested in

---

[3] Stefan Wolle: 'Die versäumte Revolte: Die DDR und das Jahr 1968', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 22-23 (2001), 37-46, at 45.

[4] Doris Liebermann, Jürgen Fuchs, Vlasta Wallat, eds., *Dissidenten, Präsidenten und Gemüsehändler: Tschechische und ostdeutsche Dissidenten 1968-1998* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1998), 245.

[5] Reinhard Weißhuhn, interview with the author, Berlin, 25 Apr. 2006.

[6] Marlies Jansen, *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission 'Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland: Deutschlandpolitik, innerdeutsche Beziehungen und internationale Rahmenbedingungen'*, vol. V/1 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1995), 147.

[7] Robert Havemann: *Fragen, Antworten, Fragen: Aus der Biographie eines deutschen Marxisten* (München: Piper, 1970), 230.

what was happening in the ČSSR.'[8] Something had unfolded in the 1960s in the ČSSR that was totally different than in the GDR. Among friends in Jena, in view of the developments in the ČSSR, they discussed the concept of socialism at length, and often the question was asked whether what was attempted in Czechoslovakia would have been feasible in the GDR as well. As an opposition activist and editor of the important samizdat publication *radix-blätter*, Ludwig Mehlhorn would primarily be interested in the Polish opposition, but the Prague Spring was one of the three most important reference points to Czechoslovakia. 'We followed the coverage in the western media very attentively, and sympathized with the Prague Spring and hoped that this would also further and introduce a parallel development in the GDR.'[9]

For the so-called generation of the *Aufbaukinder*,[10] it was not only typical that they had their first confrontations with the regime as part of the protests against the invasion of Czechoslovakia, but also that they did not fully grasp the real meaning of the defeat of the Prague Spring until the first half of the 1970s. For example, take Wolfgang Templin who was generally being viewed by the regime even in 1968 as a potential party official. As did many others, he had however welcomed the developments in Czechoslovakia in the second half of the 1960s. In 1967/68 he regularly travelled with friends to East Berlin to see Czech films in the Czech cultural centre. The intervention in August 1968 caught him unprepared. He saw himself as unable to participate in the protest actions. 'I did not want to believe that something like this happened,' Templin explained, who at the time was still under the sway of the official propaganda. Although (as he remembers it) he followed the western media and had compared the information, he still believed in the historical necessity of the invasion. By chance, his life experienced a turning point. In the summer of 1971, while returning from Hungary by way of Czechoslovakia, he entered into a discussion with two young Slovakian women. A few days later by chance he met one of them again in a bookstore. For the next three weeks he intensively discussed with her in Jena the ramifications of the intervention. A year later, he visited her in Slovakia and determined that she regarded

[8] Roland Jahn, interview with Alexander von Plato, 11 Jun. 2008.

[9] The second was his active involvement for the 'Aktion Sühnezeichen', which brought him to the Czech town of Terezin. The third was then the founding of Charter 77 and the subsequent 'Central Europe Debate' in the middle of the 1980s. Ludwig Mehlhorn, interview with the author, Berlin, 26 Apr. 2006.

[10] Annabelle Lutz counts among this generation the birth years 1948–1953. See: Annabelle Lutz, *Dissidenten und Bürgerbewegung: Ein Vergleich zwischen DDR und Tschechoslowakei* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus, 1999), 100 and 150.

the intervention as totally illegitimate. She held that 'it was a brutal counterattack', which he did not want to accept. To expand his horizon, she brought him to a street corner in Bratislava and said: 'This is where my classmates died when confronting the tanks.'[11]

After this experience, he gathered more information about the Prague Spring, such as the works of Jiří Pelikán, Karel Kaplan or Jan Pauer (under the pseudonym Jan Skála). While he was studying in Warsaw in 1976, he apparently found out much more through the Polish samizdat. Some thirty years later, Templin said: 'Today I am convinced that if my contacts or my perception of what happened in ČSSR up to 1968 had been more intensive, then my own development on this issue would have been completely different.'[12]

Ludwig Mehlhorn turned his attention to the reform efforts in Czechoslovakia only after the intervention. As a student in Freiberg at the beginning of the 1970s, he participated in the Protestant Youth Group (*Junge Gemeinde*) and the discussion about different aspects of the Prague Spring. By reading western books on this topic, but also through the developments in Poland in 1975/76 and in the ČSSR in 1976/77, he grasped that only those reform efforts had a chance at success when they originate not just from above, but also from below.[13]

It was primarily the generation born during the second world war which reflected on the Prague Spring. People such as Gerd Poppe, Heiko Lietz, Bernd Eisenfeld, Joachim Gauck, Rainer Eppelmann or Christoph Wonneberger joined up in the 1970s and 1980s with various campaigns that were critical of the regime. For this generation, the year 1968 was among the important events in its life. It left, along with the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and then above all the aftermath in 1961 of the building of the wall, an imprint on the paths of their lives. The distinctiveness of 1968 was (in the opinion of Joachim Gauck) the fact that this time the tanks were sent against a socialist model, which presented a significant difference to 1953 and 1956 when no one wanted to have socialism.[14]

For Gerd Poppe, the Prague Spring had awakened the 'hope for more freedom'. Although the event in Prague was more important for him, at the same time he was also following the remarkable social developments in the west. Thanks to his contacts with the west, he could get the books of Jiří Pelikán or Zdeněk Hejzler in order to learn more about the reform effort.

---

[11] Wolfgang Templin, interview with the author, Berlin, 27 Apr. 2006.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ludwig Mehlhorn, interview with the author, Berlin, 26 Apr. 2006.

[14] Joachim Gauck, interview with Alexander von Plato, 6 Feb. 2008.

In addition, for him the Prague Spring was not definitively buried after the intervention, rather it was present for a long time. The 'after effect of the Prague Spring', about which Poppe spoke, is reflected in the memory of Ralf Hirsch (IFM). According to his own statements, he belonged to the generation which had indeed only heard about the Prague Spring, but whose meaning it had nevertheless grasped at least indirectly.[15] Christoph Demke and Markus Meckel responded in a questionnaire that for them Zdeněk Mlynář's *Nightfrost in Prague*[16] was quite important. Demke spent whole nights reading the book, just as he had spent his time in front of the radio ten years earlier in August 1968. Meckel on the other hand, had the book which his friend Reinhard Kähler had given him (who had contacts in Czechoslovakia), taking it as a voucher 'that there are also people in the Communist Party who are capable of learning something'.[17]

So, the Prague Spring did not just help many East Germans have an initial experience of the arbitrariness of the state's power, but it also had a continuing effect after that. In the GDR as well, (in the words of Jaroslav Šabata), as a consequence of the defeat of the Prague Spring, many people recognized that the east bloc actually 'is a space made up of different provinces'.[18] People such as Gerd Poppe had grasped that the Prague Spring had set in motion a search for new forms of opposition, for which (as Jiří Pelikán stated) the initiatives would characteristically come from below.[19]

East German Perceptions of Charter 77

'The publication of Charter 77 was certainly a purely Czechoslovak event. Yet, every word [...] fit the situation in GDR.' This is what Stefan Wolle wrote in his well-known book about the society in the GDR.[20] Despite the

---

[15] Ralf Hirsch, interview with the author, Berlin, 24 Jan. 2006.

[16] Intended is the book by Zdeněk Mlynář, *Nightfrost in Prague: The End of Humane Socialism*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Karz Publishers, 1980); published in German as *Nachtfrost: Erfahrungen auf dem Weg vom realen zum menschlichen Sozialismus*, trans. Bedřich Uttitz (Cologne, Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1978).

[17] Markus Meckel, 'Verbotene Lektüre: Zdeněk Mlynářs "Nachtfrost"', *Horch und Guck* 15, 1 (2006), 22-24, at 23.

[18] Jaroslav Šabata, interview with the author, Brno, 30 Aug. 2007.

[19] Jiří Pelikán, 'Pražské jaro není konec, nýbrž začátek: Ani reforma, ani revoluce – nové cesty ve východní Evropě', *Listy* 8 (Dec. 1978), 44-51.

[20] Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971–1989* (Bonn: BpB, 1999), 51.

societal differences, which lay chiefly in the previously mentioned 'closeness to the west' and in the special position of the East German Protestant church, very similar social problems existed in both countries, addressed by Charter 77 in its January 1977 'Declaration of Principles'. The arbitrariness of the repressive agents, the restrictions on the right to education, the discrimination against people and the constant violation of human rights all belonged to the everyday life of both the Czechoslovak and East German societies. It is no wonder then that this citizens' initiative attracted the attention of some East German dissidents. In this respect, Ladislav Hejdánek (one of the leading thinkers of Charter 77 and the spokesperson for this citizens' campaign from September 1977 until February 1979 and from June 1979 until January 1980) was not wrong when in 1980 he opined 'that the idea of Charter 77 was also transferable to other countries of the eastern bloc'.[21]

The declaration of Charter 77 in January of 1977 represented a 'minimal program of activity within the framework of current laws'. That struck the regime on a sensitive point. According to Pavel Tigrid, the publisher of the exile newspaper *Svědectví* (Witness), the initiative shifted to the fore the struggle for human rights. Differently than the opposition in the first half of the 1970s, it sought simultaneously both an openness and a re-birth of civil society, a 'citizen's movement of self-help'.[22] It was Petr Uhl, the civil liberties activist and the editor of 'Information about Charter 77' and one of the most active of the Czechoslovak dissidents, who regularly called attention to the active methods of the Polish opposition. But he also endeavoured to report on the development of the East German basis groups as well.[23]

Somewhat over-simplified, the reflection on Charter 77 in the GDR can be divided into two periods. The first one began with the 'Declaration of Principles' from Charter 77 and continued up until the middle of the 1980s. This time was characterized predominantly by attempts of individual persons to borrow a few of the ideas of Charter 77 for the GDR as well. In the

---

[21] 'Rozhovor Jiřího Rumla s Ladislavem Hejdánkem' in Ladislav Hejdánek, ed., *Dopisy příteli* (Prague?: s.n., 1980), 39.

[22] Pavel Tigrid, ed., *Vývoj Charty: záznam z konference ve Franken* (Cologne: Opus Bonum, 1981), 129.

[23] He was an actual witness to the second meeting of the preparation group for Charter 77 on 15 December 1976, at which two conceptions for the Charter were discussed. One representative of the reform communists, Pavel Bergman, spoke out for a conception of a committee with firmer membership along the lines of the KOR. However, the supporters of the idea of an open citizens' initiative prevailed Blanka Císařovská, Vilém Prečan, et al., eds., *Charta 77 očima současníků: Po dvaceti letech* (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR and Brno: Doplnék, 1997), 264; Petr Uhl, *Právo a nespravedlnost očima Petra Uhla* (Prague: C. H. Beck, 1998), 26; as well as Petr Uhl, interview with the author, Prague, 30 Jul. 2007.

second period from 1985-1989, the opposition sought to become international and to institutionalize the contacts that it had either created in the first period or to establish some completely anew.

With the tightening of travel restrictions on the leading figures of the East German opposition, it was quite difficult for them starting around 1980 to visit the representatives of Charter 77 in the ČSSR. Personal contacts were as a consequence maintained by post or telephone. An important role was also played by people about whose go-between roles the security service knew nothing or which the service had incorrectly assessed because of sloppiness and ideological blindness.

In addition to this, Czechoslovak expatriates played an extremely important role in the transfer of Charter 77 ideas during both periods. Thanks to their help, information about the citizens' initiatives was published in the western media. German readers, however, could also read the German version of the exile publication *Listy* (Pages) which the Czech expatriate and later politician of the Green Party Milan Horáček began publishing in March 1973.[24] This periodical published both the Declaration of Principles of Chapter 77[25] as well as a letter from West German writers (Heinrich Böll, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Günter Grass and others), who appealed to the Czech embassy in the Federal Republic because of the arrest in January 1977 of Václav Havel, Jiří Lederer, František Pavlíček and Ota Ornest.[26] In 1973, Czechoslovak emigrants founded the 'Socialist Committee for Eastern Europe' (*Sozialistisches Osteuropakomitee* – SOK). It laboured against the repression in Czechoslovakia and in eastern Europe. In its information journal, the SOK reported on the trials in the ČSSR in the first half of the 1970s and on activities critical of the regime that were forerunners of Charter 77. The issue number 22 from June 1977 was completely dedicated to Charter 77.[27]

And finally, West German media were also an important source of information about the activity of Charter 77. Even though a lot of material made its way directly from the ČSSR to the GDR, the state security service was nevertheless still most often able to quickly shut down such avenues.

---

[24] The *Listy-Blätter* did not only report on the repression in the ČSSR, but also on fundamental aspects of normalization. See: 'Die Tradition der "Listy": Zum Erscheinen der deutschsprachigen Ausgabe', *Listy-Blätter* I, 1 (Mar. 1973), 1.

[25] 'Charter 77', *Listy-Blätter* V, 12 (Feb. 1977), 1-2.

[26] 'A Letter to Prague', *Listy-Blätter* V, 12 (Feb. 1977), 8.

[27] 'When we passed out our books about Charter 77 at leftist events, we were often denounced "stooges of the American President Carter," as a member of the editorial team remembers. Mariana Hausleitner, 'Die Stasi hat nicht viel erreicht: Erinnerung an die Arbeit des Westberliner SOK' *Horch und Guck* 10, 2 (2001), 39-41, at 39.

Ludwig Mehlhorn, who himself brought texts out of Poland into the GDR, had, for example, gotten the first of his materials about Charter 77 from the west. At the same time, Rainer Alisch, who was studying theology in Leipzig, provided him directly from Czechoslovakia with the texts of Charter 77. But Alisch was arrested in December 1977; during the search of his home, the state security service found texts from both Rudolf Bahro and Wolf Biermann as well as some material about Charter 77, which he possibly had received from Petr Uhl during his stay in Prague in the summer of 1977.[28] Mehlhorn handed on the material about Charter 77 to Stephan Bickhardt, who made copies of it and distributed them.

As to the genesis of Charter 77, there were several factors that were important.[29] Most authors, however, are of one mind on the fundamental significance of the Helsinki process – the 'Spirit of Helsinki' – in the development of the civil rights campaign in east central Europe. In the opinion of Vilém Prečan, the Final Act from Helsinki contributed to the formation 'of a new basis for the human rights campaigns'.[30] In this respect, the development in the GDR distinguished itself from the situation in the ČSSR. That surely had an effect on the perception of Charter 77.

Comparing the reactions to the Final Act of Helsinki in the ČSSR and the GDR reveals an interesting difference.[31] In the ČSSR, the opposition which was taking form picked up (as a central point in its strategy) on the obligation of the government to take into account questions about human rights. In the GDR, the number of applications for foreign travel rose. 'In the GDR, the people used the Final Act of Helsinki in a rather practical way,' said Ludwig Mehlhorn, in that they appealed to international treaties by which the government had obliged itself to abide.[32] In both countries, however, those in power responded with repressive measures against those challenging the official interpretation of the Helsinki Final Act. In a similar way to how the signers of the Charter 77 were persecuted, many applicants for legal permission to leave the country permanently were persecuted in

---

[28] Staatsfeindliche Hetze, Alisch Rainer, sheet 33, HA IX 18701, Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (hereafter: MfS), Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (hereafter: BStU).

[29] On this topic: Milan Otáhal, *Opoziční proudy v české společnosti 1969-1989* (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, 2011), 116-152.

[30] Vilém Prečan, 'Občanská práva – centrální problém', *Listy* 7, 3-4 (Jul. 1977), 29.

[31] Further on this topic: Tomáš Vilímek, 'Vnímání helsinského procesu v ČSSR a NDR ze strany moci, opozice a obyvatelstva', in Zdeněk Kárník, Michal Kopeček, eds., *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu,* vol. 5 (Prague: Dokořán, 2005), 275-296 and 376-380.

[32] Ludwig Mehlhorn, interview with the author, Berlin, 26 Apr. 2006.

various ways, even with a prison sentence if the application was branded as hostile to the state.[33]

Although Charter 77 was very important for a number of people in the GDR, it did not present any alternative for the existing power relations in East German society. With a massive campaign against the signers of Charter 77 and their supporters, the security organs made it unambiguously clear what fate would befall the sympathizers. The Prague Spring was perceived as an effort to reform the establishment. Yet the oppositional character of Charter 77 could in this regard hardly be overlooked even though Charter 77 several times declined to take on the role of a political opposition. And actually, in the ČSSR, the open support of Charter 77 was also limited to a minority within the society.[34]

The circle of those in the GDR who took notice of Charter 77 was itself relatively small, even if not insignificant. These people were interested not only in Czechoslovakia; in addition to Charter 77, their horizons were being expanded primarily through the events in Poland at the turn of the years 1980/81. 'Those people who had contact with dissidence in eastern Europe were those who were least caught up in ideological thought patterns. That was also the importance of these contacts,' according to Ulrike Poppe, who among other things would later be involved in the activities of Women for Peace (*Frauen für den Frieden* – FfF) and the IFM.[35] 'We marvelled at Charter 77 and Solidarność, regretting that nothing like that was apparently possible among us Germans who were so obedient to authority,' wrote Markus Meckel, the organizer of the 'mobile peace seminar' and former pastor in Vipperow.[36]

The conversations I have conducted plus other sources provide a number of essential features as to how Charter 77 was perceived in the East German milieu of those critical of the regime. For Mehlhorn, Charter 77 was especially interesting in two regards. Firstly, it presented a convenient opportunity to challenge the regime at its word. Secondly, he found it remarkable that in Charter 77, in spite of different world views, varying

[33] More on this topic, for example, in Hans-Hermann Lochen, Christian Meyer-Seitz, eds., *Die geheimen Anweisungen zur Diskriminierung Ausreisewilliger: Dokumente der Stasi und des Ministeriums des Innern, Texte* (Cologne: Bundesanzeiger, 1992).

[34] In the most recent documentation to Charter 77 the authors provide a total of 1889 signatories. See: 'Soupis signatářů Prohlášení Charty 77', in Blanka Císařovská, Vilém Prečan, et. al., eds., *Charta 77: Dokumenty 1977-1989*, vol. 3 (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, 2007), 337-378.

[35] 'Protocol of the 68th session', in *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission,* vol. VII/1, 275.

[36] Markus Meckel, *Opposition in der DDR: Zehn Jahre kirchliche Friedensarbeit – Kommentierte Quellentexte* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1994), 68.

streams of thought could work toward common goals. He spoke about three groups: 'Broadly speaking, there were communist reformers, intellectuals and writers, and then the church people.' In connection with the discussions that accompanied the founding of the new Polish opposition groups in 1975/76, it was clear to him that Charter 77 '[represented] another approach, and this approach came from below; the society was not just drawing on liberal rights imparted to it from above, a bit more liberalization, which could later also be withdrawn, but rather it fought for these open spaces itself.'[37]

Reinhard Weißhuhn spoke in this context of Charter 77 functioning as a 'role-model', which he saw both in its relationship to the role of the opposition as well as in its claim to live in truth. In the second half of the 1980s according to Weißhuhn, the European dimension was added to this, setting a framework for discussions about overcoming the confrontation between the two blocs. From the perspective of Charter 77, the partition of Germany represented a key hindrance to improving the situation in Europe.[38] This was an opinion 'that naturally was especially interesting to us, because questions or opinions were being formulated there, which we as Germans – in this case East Germans – would not have formulated in that way, or in all honesty we would not have dared to formulate in that way'.[39]

Gerd Poppe as well busied himself intensely with Charter 77; up until 1979 he was still permitted to travel to Czechoslovakia. In that period he visited Prague several times. One time he met with Petr Uhl and was surprised by the news that Bahro's programmatic writing, *Die Alternative*,

---

[37] Ludwig Mehlhorn, interview with the author, Berlin, 26 Apr. 2006.

[38] The Prague Appeal addressed to the 4th European Conference for Nuclear Disarmament (Document of Charter 77 from 11 Mar. 1985) stated: 'We cannot dodge some of what have been taboos. One of them is the partition of Germany. […] We acknowledge for the Germans the open right to determine freely whether and in what form whey want the association of their two states in their present borders.' The German version of this (as used here) comes from Gerd Poppe. He received the translation of the Prague Appeal from the west (along with other texts from the END-Conference in Amsterdam. See: Gerd Poppe, 'Begründung und Entwicklung internationaler Verbindungen', in: Eberhard Kuhrt, *Am Ende des realen Sozialismus 3: Opposition in der DDR von den 70er Jahren bis zum Zusammenbruch der SED-Herrschaft* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1999), 349-377, at 375. The response of the East German oppositionists (primarily the East Berlin scene) from 8 Jun. 1985 (also referred to as the 'Position Paper to the Prague Appeal'), accented the agreement with the Czechoslovak opposition that 'we should use more forcefully than heretofore the CSCE Final Act as an instrument to hold our governments to their word'. They also emphasized that the solution to the German question was only possible in agreement with the other European peoples, and indeed as a 'pan-European agreement'. See: Gerd Poppe, 'Begründung und Entwicklung', 376. See to this also the contribution of Kacper Szulecki in this volume.

[39] Reinhard Weißhuhn, interview with the author, Berlin, 25 Apr. 2006.

had been translated into Czech. During his trips to Hungary, Poland, and ČSSR he determined that many oppositionists in these countries had freed themselves from reformist visions of a socialist alternative, even though some of them had formerly been Marxists. He had been astonished that in the GDR, people still believed in such reformist concepts. 'That was, however, totally illusory and pointless; it was only possible to create parallel societal structures, something which was already being discussed intensively in Poland, and fighting in this way to win some political latitude. Such reflections were not new to us, but in the GDR they were by far much less developed,' is how Poppe remembered it.[40] In 2001 he said: 'What I found especially important in the developments in Poland and the ČSSR was the fact that the opposition abandoned being in a closed circle and instead expressed itself publically; something comparable was what I wished for in the GDR.'[41]

This same kind of catching up is what Ralf Hirsch of the IFM wanted. In his opinion, the contacts with Charter 77 came into being so late, because there had been no true opposition for such a long time in the GDR. 'We lacked symbolic figures and structures,' Hirsch said. Further to this, Hirsch answered the question as to what he found especially important in Charter 77 in this way:

> For us the main point was the theme of human rights. There were enough peace discussions among us, and they were also desirable [...], but the topic of human rights violations in our own country...that was what convinced us.[42]

Matthias Domaschk as well later attempted to enter into contact with like-minded people in Czechoslovakia and Poland, because he missed having an effective human rights group in the GDR.'[43] Although Wolfgang Templin said that it was only through a confrontation with the Polish Workers' Defence Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR) during his time of studying in Poland (1976/77) 'that [he] got an idea of how a democratic opposition could and must look like in a dictatorial system',[44] he pointed

[40] Gerd Poppe, interview with the author, Berlin, 22 Nov. 2007.

[41] 'Das freie Wort war die schärfste Waffe der Opposition': Roundtable discussion on 3 April 2001, Matthias Domaschk Archive, Berlin', in Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk and Tom Sello, eds., *Für ein freies Land mit freien Menschen: Opposition und Widerstand in Biographien und Fotos* (Berlin: Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft, 2006), 106.

[42] Ralf Hirsch, interview with the author, Berlin, 24 Jan. 2006.

[43] Gerold Hildebrand, 'Matthias Domaschk: Eine turbulente und unvollendete Jugend in Jena', *Horch und Guck* 12, Sondernummer 1 (2003), 13.

[44] Eckhard Jesse, ed., *Eine Revolution und ihre Folgen: 14 Bürgerrechtler ziehen Bilanz* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2000), 113.

out in a conversation that the influence of Charter 77 on him had in fact been much stronger than that of the Polish opposition.[45]

The leadership of the Protestant Church in the GDR made an effort to channel the human rights debate in the GDR; many of them still had in mind the death of Oskar Brüsewitz, who had set himself on fire in August 1976 as a protest against the GDR regime. Nevertheless, there were also pastors and theologians who were willing to hazard a confrontation with church leadership. They sought to link up the fight over human rights with the one about the freedom of the individual. The activities of Heino Falcke or Hans-Joachim Fränkel witnessed the existence of a 'rights and human rights tradition' as one of two Protestant groundswells, which (in Ehrhart Neubert's opinion) influenced the GDR opposition.[46]

Clearly the best known example for the reception of Charter 77 in the church milieu was the activity of Vicar Günther Schau. He was the one who sought programmatically to get into contact with the human rights movements in east central Europe. In March 1977 he visited the widow of Jan Patočka in Prague to express his condolences. One week after this trip, he was arrested and in autumn 1977 he was deported to the Federal Republic. A group of theology students from Naumburg – Lothar Tautz, Christian Radeke and Bernhard Klose – documented the actions of the MfS and involved themselves in the preparation of the 'Querfurt Paper' of April 1977 in which the demand was raised to abide by the obligations in the Final Act from Helsinki. 'It is only where plurality is kept in mind that people will gladly be citizens of their country,'[47] is how it read in the paper that the MfS designated as 'The Charter of the GDR'.[48] It was in this context that the state security police (*Stasi*) asked the Czechoslovak security organs to keep tabs on a meeting between Günther Schau und Christian Radeke in Karlsbad in January 1978; both persons were 'under the suspicion […] that they would be passing on anti-socialist materials about the arrested persons in the GDR'.[49] Jaroslav Šabata also took note of the

---

[45] Wolfgang Templin, interview with the author, Berlin, 27 Apr. 2006.

[46] The second one is 'Protestant Social Ethics'. See: Ehrhart Neubert, 'Christen, Schutzdächer und der Geist des Protestantismus', in Kowalczuk and Sello, *Für ein freies Land*, 185-192, at 185. In addition: Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989* (Bonn: Ch. Links, 1997), 251-255 and 257-266.

[47] Lothar Tautz, Christian Radeke, "*Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten…": Oskar Brüsewitz, Wolf Biermann und die Protestbewegung in der DDR 1976-1977, Dokumentation* (Halle/Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1999), 137.

[48] Schwerpunkte der monatlichen Berichterstattungen für Juni/Juli 1977, 24 Aug. 1977, sheet 147, HA XX/AKG 116, BStU.

[49] Einleitung politisch-operativer Maßnahmen durch die Sicherheitsorgane der ČSSR, 20 Jan. 1978, sheets 41-42, HA XX/4 Nr. 423, BStU.

'Querfurt Paper' and understood it as an 'attempt to transfer Charter 77 as a model of a proclamation or appeal onto the circumstances in East Germany.'[50] If Bahro's *Alternative* had been a response to the year 1968, then the 'Querfurt Paper' could be seen – as Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk has argued – as 'an early reaction in the GDR to Charter 77'.[51]

As mentioned earlier, Charter 77 had been considered for the most part in connection with the developments in Poland and Hungary. Questions now arose for the East Germans about their own actual situation, about the similarities with and differences of dissidence in the GDR in comparison to their east central European colleagues. According to Gerd Poppe, the power structures in all the individual countries of the east bloc were generally similar; what was special for the residents of the GDR, however, was the existence of a second German state. Reinhard Weißhuhn saw

> a specifically German phenomenon on account of the permanent, direct face-off with the Federal Republic. […] We had great difficulties in going quite so far, even to think about going so far, which in Prague or Budapest or Warsaw was not such a problem. We would have landed in Bonn, been in Bonn immediately, and we could not want that, because that is what the SED wanted.

He mentioned (just as Ralf Hirsch or Gerd Poppe had) the significantly sharper judgments concerning activities critical of the regimes in east central Europe and he named specifically the negative consequences of the deportation practices of the East German bodies, because of which there was never 'a continuity in the opposition' in the GDR.[52] A few Czechoslovak dissidents recognized this specific aspect of the GDR. Anna Šabatová said: 'It must have been very difficult to have to start over again and again.'[53]

The emergence of citizens' movements in east central Europe starting in the middle of the 1970s had, as a result, awakened in some East German oppositionists the need to think more carefully about their own methods and goals. Wolfgang Templin, for example, had noted that in Poland there were substantially more people who had left a leftist ideology behind. The societal situation, a certain 'paralysis of the society', in his opinion, was typical for the ČSSR and GDR, whereas the Polish society had shown a greater viability and a longing for freedom.[54]

---

[50] Jaroslav Šabata, interview with the author, Brno, 30 Aug. 2007.

[51] Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, 'Der Prager Frühling in der DDR 1969-1989: Ein Essay', *Horch und Guck* 16, 2 (2007), 6-9, at 7.

[52] Reinhard Weißhuhn, interview with the author, Berlin, 25 Apr. 2006.

[53] Roland Jahn, interview with Alexander von Plato, 11 Jun. 2008.

[54] Wolfgang Templin, interview with the author, Berlin, 27 Apr. 2006.

The combination of the 'continuing impulses from outside' strongly influenced Reinhard Weißhuhn, who sought to convey the outlines of the Hungarian debate to the GDR, without however always being successful in doing so. Not everyone shared his conviction that 'socialism [was] out'. He admired the analyses of György Konrád, Miklós Haraszti or György Dalos, who turned the socialism that really existed on its head in that they conducted its ideological claim to an *ad absurdum*. Comparing the Hungarian texts with Bahro's *Alternative*, Weißhuhn said: 'Bahro as it were has always analysed only in a system-immanent fashion and his book is therefore nothing more than a pleasant, totally romantic utopia.' In addition to the Hungarian texts, he was influenced by Václav Havel's essay 'The Power of the Powerless', which took up the theme of life in truth. Weißhuhn meant that 'in Czechoslovakia, what dominated most likely – just as it was with us – was a continuous, practical schizophrenia' in which one was challenged to discover the false in the correct, the true in what was lied about. In this sense, Havel posed the 'existential question'.[55]

Ralf Hirsch, Ludwig Mehlhorn and Gerd Poppe also alluded to a certain learning process. 'It was only with the help of the *Grenzfall* [an East German samizdat journal, P.J.] that we tried to build up an oppositional public sphere in the GDR,' is what Hirsch said, who in his visit to Prague at the end of December 1985 had spoken with Petr Uhl and Anna Šabatová about the form of this samizdat newspaper and about the possibility of adopting the institution of spokesperson (used by Charter 77) for the emerging IFM as well. They had counselled him to publicize succinct information about the repression in the GDR. According to Hirsch, the inspiration for open letters (as, for example, an appeal to the United Nations Year of Peace from January 1986) also came from the ČSSR. Hirsch recollected:

> What I quite clearly understood in my conversations with Uhl and Šabatová was that we had to find a language which the people would understand. If we wanted to achieve solidarity from below, we also had to name in short and concise and precise ways what and why, and not to publish texts which no person could understand.[56]

Because direct and personal contacts with people who thought differently in the east bloc countries were only possible with great difficulty, Mehlhorn rejected the term 'collaboration' to characterise his relations with the Czechoslovak opposition. In his opinion the above-mentioned 'learning process' was more important anyways. 'We were truly the ones learning,

[55] Reinhard Weißhuhn, interview with the author, Berlin, 25 Apr. 2006.

[56] Ralf Hirsch, interview with the author, Berlin, 24 Jan. 2006.

transferring something to their own situation' is what Mehlhorn said, for whom, however, the most intense inspiration was coming from Poland.[57]

It was at the end of the 1970s (at the latest) that there were people in the GDR who were delving into the possibilities for the opposition, considering among them the ideas of Charter 77, of KOR and later of Solidarność. Robert Havemann was one of the most important advocates of this new orientation. Furthermore, the emergence of the IFM showed the clear influence of Charter 77.

> This [the IFM, T.V.] was quite in the style of the Charter, even if with a much smaller flame. There were three spokespersons and communiqués about the important political events, which were done with the help of journalists or good friends in the west, as well as the release of underground publications which were produced in archaic ways,

is how Gerd Poppe recounted it during a panel discussion. In his opinion, the civil rights activists from the ČSSR and Poland contributed importantly to the fact that 'we distanced ourselves from the "boxes" of left and right.'[58] As the international collaboration of opposition groups in east central Europe intensified, this had an impact on the East German opposition too. In 1985 a 'contact group for Charter 77' came together.[59] The MfS dated the formation of this group to October 1985 and emphasized Bärbel Bohley's special role.[60]

At a meeting of the political underground in the GDR on 9 October 1985 – according to a different report of the MfS – suggestions from Prague were discussed, for example, the preparation of a joint paper on the question of conscientious objection and a discussion of the goals for an independent peace movement in the GDR.[61] According to the historian

---

[57] Ludwig Mehlhorn, interview with the author, Berlin, 26 Apr. 2006.

[58] 'Der Prager Frühling 1968 und seine Folgen in der ČSSR, in den sozialistischen Nachbarländern, insbesondere in der DDR und der VR Polen, sowie im Ost-West-Verhältnis', in Jansen, *Materialien*, 148 and 182.

[59] This group is mentioned in Neubert, *Geschichte,* 596. Gerd Poppe commented that this had to do with different meetings with varying groupings instead of a continuous working group, which the MfS apparently assumed. Subsequently, it was primarily the IFM that concerned itself with contacts with Charter 77. Gerd Poppe, interview with the author, Berlin, 22 Nov. 2007.

[60] Aktuelle Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse bei der Bekämpfung feindlich-negativer Kräfte und Gruppierungen politischer Untergrundtätigkeit in der Hauptstadt, 15 Sept. 1986, OV 'Blauvogel' Ralf Hirsch, Volume 4-6 Sections 1/85-6/87, 22 sheets, here sheet 11, MDA-RHG.

[61] There one also finds a list of people who were supposed to belong to what was called the Contact Group – GDR for collaboration with Charter 77: Stephan Bickhardt, Martin Böttger, Gerd Poppe, Ludwig Mehlhorn, Thomas Klein, Wolfgang Templin, Wolfram

Thomas Klein, the majority of the participants in this project in the following years built the main 'human rights wing' of the East German opposition. At the turn of the year in 1985/86, the IFM finally emerged, making no secret of the influence on it of Charter 77.

It is appropriate to conclude that the human rights question in the GDR gained in importance thanks to contacts with the opposition in the neighbouring countries. A part of the East German opposition drew near to the oppositional spectrum in the ČSSR or Poland. From the middle of the 1980s, the regime critics in the east bloc discussed topics with one another and attempted to protect one another from repression through actions of solidarity.

Czechoslovak Perceptions of the Regime-Critical Forces in East Central Europe and the Soviet Union: Poland as the Most Important Partner

Jan Tesař wrote in his analysis of the activity of Charter 77 at the beginning of 1978:

> We must become aware of how enormously important it is to internationalize our struggle. It is surely the most important thing of all. [...] The principle direction of our interests should be the Poles.

Tesař was a Czech historian, a signatory of Charter 77 and co-founder of the Committee for the Defence of Those Unjustly Persecuted (*Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných, VONS*).[62] For the Czechoslovak dissidents, the relationships with their Polish colleagues were among the most important and stable. What played a positive role in that were their kindred languages, the massive reach of the Polish underground press called the 'second circulation', but also the fact that the Czechoslovak side was much better informed about the Polish opposition, which it considered as fundamentally stronger and more active. So it was not a surprise that dissidents from both countries met one another for the first time in the summer of 1978 on the Czech-Polish border. In a joint statement following the meeting (which was broadcast in August of the same year on Radio Free Europe), they declared their solidarity with all the civil rights activists in eastern Europe.

Tschiche and others. See: ZOV (Zentraler operativer Vorgang) 'Zirkel' Gerd und Ulrike Poppe, Ordner 4, vol. 21, 133-134, MDA-RHG.

[62] Jan Tesař, 'Analýza Jana Tesaře, jak dále rozvíjet činnost Charty 77 a intenzivní komunikaci s veřejností, březen 1978', in Císařovská and Prečan, *Charta 77*, vol. 3, 256.

Among the political prisoners listed was also Rudolf Bahro. The statement ended with the words:

> Today our peoples are linked more strongly than ever by a common fate. It is, therefore, all the more important that those who have campaigned for a betterment of that fate should attempt to join up their forces.[63]

Interest in opposition movements in the states of the Warsaw Pact grew among the majority of the Czechoslovak dissidents out of a desire to be informed about the developments in all the countries of the east bloc. In this way the 'provincial naïveté' could be averted, something which Zdeněk Mlynář had warned against in April 1979.[64] Many people compared the situation of their neighbours with the one in their own country and thought about the possibility of cooperating. Petr Pithart, who was inspired primarily by British conservatism, recounted: 'I have always compared and sought to grasp why it was different for us than in Poland or Hungary.'[65] Contacts were for the most part random, but always served to provide information, too. Whether someone preferred one country depended mostly on his language abilities. What also played a role was whether the contacts were made during the time when the border was not yet closed for the persons involved.

What was also important was naturally the extent to which the dissidence in a country was viewed as inspiring or even as a role-model. In the ČSSR, the Polish opposition was in the key position. Other contacts were made with the Hungarian and East German opposition. The Soviet dissidents were perceived primarily through the texts of say Andrei Sakharov, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn or Lev Kopelev. Relatively well-known as well were the 'Seven Courageous Ones',[66] who had to serve prison sentences because they had protested in Moscow in August 1968 against the intervention.

---

[63] Společný dopis Charty 77 a polského Výboru společenské sebeobrany (KSS-KOR) obráncům lidských práv ve východní Evropě a SSSR, 27.7.1978, in Císařovská and Prečan, *Charta 77*, vol. 1, 161.

[64] Pavel Tigrid, ed., *Vývoj Charty*, 54.

[65] Petr Pithart, interview with the author, Prague, 6 Jun. 2007.

[66] On 25 August 1968, the Soviet citizens Konstantin Babicky, Vadim Delaunay, Vladimir Dremliuga, Viktor Fainberg, Natalya Gorbanevskaya, Pavel Litvinov, Larisa Bogoraz and Tatiana Baeva staged a protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia carrying banners with slogans like 'Long live free Czechoslovakia!' or 'Hands off Czechoslovakia!' Although they demonstrated peacefully and even made a conscious effort not to disturb the public peace the protestors were arrested and seven of them (the seven courageous ones) – all but Gorbanevskaya who had recently given birth – were sentenced to 2-3 years in prison, life-long exile or had to undergo therapy in a psychiatric ward.

Asked about his relationships with the independent initiatives in the east bloc, the representative of the Catholic dissidence, Václav Malý, responded:

> We followed it, but it must be said that contacts to the peace movements, for example, in the GDR were quite sporadic. Their attention was primarily turned in the direction of the Federal Republic, naturally, sharing the same language as they did. So, at the time there was no closer connection with the initiatives in the GDR. An intensive collaboration, however, came about with the Poles. People who were not known to the state security service travelled to Poland, and they then brought back literature. […] In the 1980s there was also official contact between the representatives of Solidarność and Charter 77 and also the well-known border meetings. The contacts with Hungary were just sporadic.[67]

This assessment confirms not only the importance of the Polish opposition for the regime critics in the ČSSR, but also at the same time shows how differently the opposition in the east bloc states were perceived individually. Malý had plainly not belonged to those circles who maintained contacts in the GDR; moreover, he had not noticed that in Slovakia, for example, good relations existed between the representatives of the Hungarian minority located there and Hungary itself. Nor were the regime critics in East Germany fixated on the Federal Republic, even though the presence of the stronger, democratic neighbour certainly influenced the opposition in the GDR. Being moulded by one's own experience was natural.

Interest in the opposition in the east bloc influenced as well the estimation of their strengths and their social importance. The activities of the KOR and later of Solidarność, as well as the continually palpable readiness for resistance by the Polish population, drew the attention of the Czechoslovak opposition toward Poland. In the GDR, many opposition members were confident in the strengths of both the Polish and Czechoslovak opposition. Looked at today, one can say that the strength of the Czechoslovak opposition was overestimated in the GDR, whereas the opposition in the GDR was underestimated in the ČSSR. Ladislav Hejdánek recounted: 'The Poles were quite inspiring for us, and now and then, they did things which we could emulate.'[68] Dana Němcová, the spokesperson of Charter 77 in 1989 and who through her husband, Jiří Němec, had had contacts back in the middle of the 1950s with Poland, recounted:

> But Poland meant a lot to us. Not just what had to do with the free culture that dominated there back in 1955/56, where Camus would be performed, but it was

[67] Václav Malý, interview with David Weber, 13 Apr. 2004, Sbírka Rozhovory, Center for Oral History, Institute for Contemporary History, Prague (hereafter: COH, ÚSD).

[68] Ladislav Hejdánek, interview with the author, Písek, 28 Aug. 2007.

> there that we saw the first films from Fellini and it was from there that we brought back all kinds of things, because in Poland you could buy émigré journals at kiosks.[69]

As already mentioned, meetings on the Polish-Czechoslovak border in the Karkonosze/Krkonoše Mountains between the representatives of the opposition movements from both countries had taken place in the late 1970s. At the beginning of the 1980s, these relationships were even institutionalized with the founding of the Polish-Czechoslovak solidarity, which intensified its activity after 1984. The arrest of Petr Pospíchal and the subsequent wave of solidarity in Poland contributed critically to the emergence of the Circle of Friends of the Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity (*Kruh přátel Polsko-Československé solidarity*) on 6 June 1987. Participating in the collaboration on the side of Charter 77 were, among others, Anna Šabatová, Petr Uhl and not least of all Tomáš Petřivý and Ján Čarnogurský.[70] In the opinion of Čarnogurský, the social conditions in Poland compared most closely with those in Czechoslovakia. What was certainly reflected in this regard of the Polish society was the Catholic character of the Slovak dissidence for which the stance of the Polish Catholic church represented a natural reference point. Čarnogurský participated many times in the border meetings with the Polish regime critics. He reported: 'We met once a year, [and] talked about the projects we could undertake together. They [the Poles, T.V.] now and then came up with suggestions that simply went too far for us.' As an example, toward the end of the 1980s, the Polish side offered a device with which official radio transmissions could be interrupted and be replaced with one's own critical explanation and commentary.[71] The Czech side received a similar offer from Miroslav Jasińsky and Jarek Broda.[72] 'The Poles did not really know what was actually going on for us,' is what František Mikloško said. At the same time he pointed out the Polish help for religious orders in Czechoslovakia.[73]

People like Alexandr Vondra or Petr Pospíchal, who were active in the Polish-Czechoslovak solidarity, also regarded as very important the technical help from Poland on the production of the Czech samizdat. František Stárek, the publisher of the underground newspaper *Vokno* (Window), made contact with the Polish newspaper *Puls* and attempted to set up a link

---

[69] Dana Němcová, interview with Ilona Christl, Sbírka lidé Charty 77, COH, ÚSD.

[70] Beginning in July 1988, this circle of friends published an information bulletin. See: *Informační bulletin Polsko-Československé solidarity* 1, 1 (1988), 1-3.

[71] Ján Čarnogurský, interview with the author, Bratislava, 27 Jun. 2008.

[72] Petr Uhl and Anna Šabatová, interview with the author, Prague, 4 Jan. 2010.

[73] František Mikloško, interview with the author, Bratislava, 26 Jun. 2008.

among the underground papers of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania. The state security service foiled his attempt.[74] Huge amounts of literature were acquired from Poland. Civil rights activist and political prisoner Rudolf Battěk read sociological treatises of American authors that had been translated into Polish.[75] In Czech samizdat periodicals, there were texts from Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuroń, and even the spokesperson for Charter 77 from 1980, Miloš Rejchrt, admitted that it was indeed the translations of the books of Adam Michnik or Tadeusz Konwicki ('A Small Apocalypse') which expanded his horizons, although he otherwise by his own account followed the events in Poland only out of 'a dissident's obligation'.[76] The priest, Rudolf Smahel, who had studied theology in Erfurt in 1985, remembered that he was able to import into the ČSSR religious texts that were intended 'for church use only'. Similar literature could be brought back either from Poland (Catholic) or from the GDR (Protestant).[77]

Forces Critical of the Regime in the DDR from the Perspective of the Czechoslovak Opposition

The claim is controversial that in the eyes of the Czechs, the East Germans were all similarly 'pig-headed, naïve, patriotic, religious and – not just ideologically – a bit dumb'.[78] Adolf Müller wrote in *Listy* (Pages) about 'a deep antipathy of almost all Czechs and Slovaks toward the Prussian socialism in the GDR,' an attitude that was significantly strengthened by the participation of the GDR in the intervention of August 1968. These *Dederonáci* (something like GDRers), in Müller's words, were unpopular

[74] František Stárek, inteview with the author, Prague, 21 Apr. 2008.

[75] Rudolf Battěk, interview with the author, Prague, 3 May 2007.

[76] Miloš Rejchrt, interview with the author, Prague, 12 Feb. 2008.

[77] Rudolf Smahel, interview with Pavel Urbášek, 5 May 2003, Sbírka Rozhovory, COH, ÚSD.

[78] Jan Faktor and Annette Simon, eds., *Fremd im eigenen Land?* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2000), 43-44. The Czech writer Jan Faktor who lived in the GDR from 1978 on pointed out that he and the Czechs had tremendously erred in this assessment of the GDR. One of the errors (in his opinion) was about the co-existence of the peoples. Faktor had participated in many home readings of the underground literature scene in East Berlin (for example, in the flat of Gerd Poppe). He was married to Annette Simon, the daughter of the writer Christa Wolf. The dossier of the StB and state security service for Faktor and Wolf, 'double tongued' (*Obojetník*), had the goal 'of preventing their efforts to unite the opposition forces in the ČSSR and the DDR'. Přehled agenturně operativních opatření k zájmovým osobám na léta 1987–1990, December 1986, sheet 3, No. 232, fond SB/MS, Archiv bezpečnostnich složek (hereafter: ABS ČR).

everywhere, probably for the reason 'that they held up a mirror to every little Czech citizen'.[79] The modest level of information which most citizens had about the happenings in the GDR – with the exception of a relatively small group of people with personal relationships, language abilities, or the conviction that the east central European dissidents had to cooperate with one another – stood in contrast to the interest with which the events in Czechoslovakia (1968 or 1977/78) were followed in East Germany.

'The oppositionist forces in every country in the east bloc were burdened with local problems' is what the historian Vilém Prečan said at the meeting about the collaboration of democratic forces in east central Europe at the beginning of November 1989 in Warsaw.[80] Such 'preoccupation with one's self' certainly strained the contacts. Some representatives of the opposition, who engaged themselves with all their strength in various actions in their own country, (for example, Petruška Šustrová, the active member of VONS) had little time left over. 'We could not let ourselves be inspired from just anywhere, we had enough inspiration at home,' commented Jiří Dienstbier, who however followed the developments in the other east bloc states, primarily in Poland, Hungary and in the Soviet Union.[81]

In Czechoslovakia, primarily those East German dissidents gained attention who between 1977–1978 and 1987–1989 got into conflict with the regime. Surely the best known case was Rudolf Bahro, whose *Alternative* even appeared in two editions of Czech samizdat.[82] This was a work that Charter 77 in July 1977 designated as a 'critical analysis of the social system of the GDR and of eastern European countries'.[83] The book generated discussions in the west and east, but it was not received just positively. One could even argue that the book awakened more interest among the euro-communists in the west than in the east.[84] For instance, Rudi Dutschke

[79] Adolf Müller, 'Co se děje v Německu', *Listy* 8, 2 (Apr. 1978), 38-42, at 38.

[80] Vilém Prečan, *V kradeném case: Výběr ze studií, článků a úvah z let 1973-1993* (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR and Brno: Doplnék, 1994), 170.

[81] Jiří Dienstbier, interview with the author, Prague, 26 May 2008.

[82] In the 'Libri prohibiti', one finds two versions of Bahro's *Alternative* from the Czech samizdat. In the first one, there is an almost two hundred page abstract. Jaroslav Suk translated more than two thirds of it. The second, an almost five hundred page version, is complete and came from the Brno circle around Jiří Müller. Milan Jelínek did the translation.

[83] 'Sdělení o odsouzení východoněmeckého filozofa a ekonoma Rudolfa Bahra, 22.7. 1978', in: Císařovská and Prečan, *Charta 77*, vol. 1, 160.

[84] Yet in the GDR, reading circles arose in which the *Alternative* was discussed from various points of view.

criticized Bahro for underestimating the importance of human rights.[85] He judged as unrealistic the way that Bahro proposed a better communism by way of what was called the 'League of Communists', just as Jiří Pelikán had in his review of *Die Alternative* in October 1979.[86] Although Pelikán saw the book more positively and shared above all Bahro's assessment 'that the sensitive point of any oppositional conception lies in national limitedness,' he at the same time criticized Bahro's belief in the 'mystical calling' of communists.[87] 'The book ran counter to the Czech oppositional milieu that set itself more and more clearly in opposition to the socialist alternatives' was what Jaroslav Šabata said, for whom Bahro had been an 'age-old socialist'.[88]

More than the book itself, what aroused attention in Czechoslovakia were the reports about the repressive measures taken against Bahro. Shortly after his arrest, a 'Committee for the Freeing of Rudolf Bahro' was established in West Berlin. In November, what was called the 'Bahro Congress' took place there, where (among others) Jiří Pelikán and Ludvík Kavín represented the Czechoslovak side. Almost 2000 interested parties heard presentations in three sections.[89] At the beginning of November 1978, Charter 77 and VONS wrote a joint letter to the congress in which, in addition to expressing their outrage at the conviction of Bahro, they also expressed their belief 'that the repression, which intended to isolate the one who had freely expressed an idea, will ultimately be turned against those who wanted to muzzle him'.[90] Above all, it was Petr Uhl who took part in the Czechoslovak solidarity action for Bahro. The development of Bahro's case was also followed in the later issues of *Listy* (Pages).

The Czechoslovak dissidents also gave special attention to Robert Havemann. But differently than with Bahro, none of his books had been translated into Czech. Only those who knew German could discuss his writings. Yet all the more were the reports attended to about the harass-

---

[85] Guntolf Herzberg and Kurt Seifert, eds., *Rudolf Bahro: Glaube an das Veränderbare – Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2002), 229.

[86] Jiří Pelikán, 'Možnosti a cesty změn reálného socialismu: Nad knihou "Alternativa" Rudolfa Bahra', *Listy* 9, 5 (Oct. 1979), 21-26, at 25.

[87] Ibid., 24.

[88] Jaroslav Šabata, interview with the author, Brno, 30 Aug. 2007.

[89] Of the former GDR citizens who participated in the congress, Wolf Biermann or Jürgen Fuchs can be mentioned. The complete program appeared in the information booklet of the Socialist Eastern Europe Committee. 'Umbruch in Osteuropa – die sozialistische Alternative: Internationaler Kongreß für Rudolf Bahro', *Sozialistisches Osteuropakomitee – Zeitschrift für sozialistische Theorie und Praxis* 30 (1978), 21-23.

[90] 'Dopis Charty 77 a VONS mezinárodnímu kongresu v západním Berlíně na obranu Rudolfa Bahra, 6.11.1978', in Císařovská and Prečan, *Charta 77*, vol. 1, 181.

ment to which he was exposed. Anna Šabatová remembered a meeting with Havemann's daughter, Sibylle Havemann, in Petruška Šustrová's flat when she informed those present about the house arrest of her father. 'Thanks to this meeting, we knew about the regime that had been imposed on Havemann,' Šabatová said, who was aware that these repressive measures were similar to those which she and her husband had been exposed to between September 1977 and May 1979. Back then, two uniformed policemen sat in front of the door of her flat, checking every person who wanted to visit the Uhl family.[91]

The 'Socrates from Grünheide' – as Havemann was called – was primarily perceived as an intellectual who made no secret of his criticism of the social conditions in East Germany. 'The texts from Havemann had no real relevance for me, nevertheless, he was (along with Milovan Đilas) one of those authors who belonged in the library of dissidence,' is what Jaroslav Šabata said.[92] Yet, it was Havemann especially who would have been the desired discussion partner about overcoming the bloc if he could have lived to see the time of the Prague Appeal in March 1985. Jiří Dienstbier, who in his book *Träumen über Europa* refers to Havemann multiple times, saw him as 'an example of dissent within the SED, and that was what interested us so much, because after 1956 it was quite clear to us that we could accomplish something only within the framework of the party'.[93]

Naturally, many Czechoslovak dissidents also paid attention to the songwriter Wolf Biermann, who had his GDR citizenship revoked in November 1976 while in the FRG. It is difficult to reconstruct the extent to which his story was known in the ČSSR. His criticism of the intervention in August 1968 and above all his songs (which in comparison to the complicated and theoretical texts of Bahro or Havemann were much more accessible) created some interest. In Petr Uhl's room hung a poster of Biermann as well as his song lyric about a red Prague, which Uhl had received as a present from Sibylle Plogstedt.[94] In Uhl's opinion 'with

[91] Anna Šabatová, interview with the author, 10 Aug. 2007 and Oct. 2006.

[92] Jaroslav Šabata, interview with the author, Brno, 30 Aug. 2007.

[93] Jiří Dienstbier, interview with the author, Prague, 26 May 2008.

[94] As a West German student of sociology, Plogstedt had come to Prague in the summer of 1968. She was a close friend of Uhl. Together they participated in the founding of the 'Movement of Revolutionary Youth' (Hnutí revoluční mládeže - HRM) for which she was arrested in 1969 and sentenced to two and a half years in prison. More on this interesting story can be found in her book: Sibylle Plogstedt, *Im Netz der Gedichte: Gefangen in Prag nach 1968* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2001).

Biermann it was about a person who was quite close to me politically'.[95] As to the reaction of the East German intellectuals to the news of Biermann's being exiled and the massive wave of arrests in Jena, the Uhl family was informed by Renate Ellmenreich und Mathias Domaschk. Ellmenreich remembered: 'We sat there then for three days and nights, recounting the severe repression that we had experienced in Jena, and Petr and Hanka took turns writing the whole history down in order to make a Charter document out of it.'[96]

Awareness of the GDR in Czechoslovakia remained limited to a relatively small circle. The events of June 1953 or the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 evoked only sporadic interest. However, at the latest, from the middle of the 1970s on, the developments in the GDR were attended to more closely. What contributed to that was a conviction as to the importance of mutual solidarity and the exchange of information. The refugee movement then of 1989 also elicited greater response in the ČSSR. For the majority of the affected, the thousands of East Germans in the vicinity of the West German embassy proved that the system in the GDR had major problems. 'Undoubtedly, the actual political situation in the GDR had caused this disruption of normalcy. The disappointed hopes for reform and the uncertainty about leaving the country had resulted in spontaneous reactions from the citizens that often were not well considered,' was what Charter 77 wrote in September 1989 about the wave of those leaving the country.[97]

In Czechoslovakia some specific aspects of the East German dissidence received particular attention. Anna Šabatová described one of them succinctly:

> It was not common in Czechoslovakia (as it was in the GDR) that a political prisoner, after signing a declaration of consent to emigrate, would be shipped off immediately with the whole family to the west. It was in this way that the East German opposition was being virtually liquidated.[98]

Šabatová saw quite clearly the missing continuity in the East German dissidence and the deportation policy of the SED regime which was using the Federal Republic as 'a form of an upscale Siberia' in order to gag its opponents. 'Today there are more peace activists from Jena in West Berlin

---

[95] Petr Uhl, interview with the author, Prague, 5 Nov. 2006.

[96] Liebermann et al., *Dissidenten*, 40.

[97] 'Dokument Charty 77 Nr. 56, 14.9.1989: K otázce východoněmeckých uprchlíků', *Informace o Chartě 77*, 17 (1989), 2.

[98] Anna Šabatová, interview with the author, Prague, 10 Aug. 2007.

than there are in Jena,' is what Timothy Garton Ash wrote in 1986.[99] According to information from the MfS, Gerd Poppe, in connection with an action that Anna Šabatová had painstakingly organized, tells of a telephone conversation in which Šabatová complained about the lack of perseverance on the part of the East German activists. It concerned a 'Joint Declaration about Repression in the GDR' in February 1988 which had been prepared in reaction to a wave of arrests after a demonstration in East Berlin in January 1988. 'A week in a frenzy, all we did was make telephone calls, and when we finally went public with the declaration, we discovered that they [Werner Fischer, Bärbel Bohley, Ralf Hirsch, the married couple Templin and other members of the IFM T.V.] had left the country,' is how Šabatová remembered it.[100]

Petr Uhl was certainly one of the best informed Czechoslovak dissidents as to what had to do with the situation in the GDR. Although, in his opinion, the GDR had only gained in importance for the Czechoslovak side as a consequence of the intervention in August 1968, he worked to set up information networks.[101] He had arranged with Ralf Hirsch that the 'Information about Charter 77' be sent by way of the Federal Republic into the GDR. In order to enhance the exchange of information, a distribution list was created in agreement with Prague, which Hirsch was to re-direct to Roland Jahn. People in Czechoslovakia would be included on the distribution list if they were interested in learning more about the samizdat periodical *Grenzfall*.[102] But *Grenzfall* did not come just by way of the Federal Republic to Prague (which protected the continuity), but rather was also (according to Petr Uhl and Anna Šabatová's recollection[103]) sent by regular post from the GDR to the address of Pavel Seifter in the ČSSR.[104]

One can assume that 'Information about Charter 77' was also sent in the same two-tracked way to the editors of *Grenzfall*, something which Peter

---

[99] Timoty Garton Ash, *Ein Jahrhundert wird abgewählt: Aus den Zentren Mitteleuropas 1980-1990* (Munich: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1990), 78.

[100] Anna Šabatová, interview with the author, Prague, 14 Oct. 2006.

[101] Petr Uhl, interview with the author, Prague, 5 Nov. 2006.

[102] Ralf Hirsch, interview with the author, Berlin, 24 Jan. 2006.

[103] Both remembered the poor quality of the East German envelopes in which *Grenzfall* was mailed. Petr Uhl and Anna Šabatová, interview with the author, Prague, 4 Jan. 2010.

[104] The MfS registered the contacts between Ralf Hirsch and Pavel Seifter. However, Seifter's name and address appeared, for example, totally wrong in a report about the contacts of oppositionists in the ČSSR and GDR: 'Pavel Seifter, Prag 7, Verakowa 9, 120 00'. Pavel Seifter lived on Veverkova Street with the postal code 170 000. See: Informace ze spolupráce s MStB NDR – opozice v NDR, 20.1.1988. Anlage 1, 'Verbindungen oppositioneller Kräfte der DDR in die ČSSR', No. 1080, fond X. správy SNB, ABS ČR.

Grimm confirmed.[105] 'The GDR, the opposition gave us a lot, we were a source of inspiration for one another, at various times in various ways,' recounted Uhl, who was one among few who had observed an important difference between the oppositions in both countries.[106] In his view, there was a greater variety of alternative groups in the GDR, who nevertheless each focused for the most part on just one main issue. As a result, there was the independent peace movement, whose development he followed with interest in the second half of the 1980s. Yet as well he was inspired by the ecological activists and not least of all the women's groups. Together with his wife he thought about the fact that the women's movement in the GDR distinguished itself in many respects from its West German equivalent. 'In the GDR, the struggle of women was not in the first instance against the dominance of the men, but rather against dominance as such, so it was against the prohibition on freedom of opinion, against bureaucratization and against militarization', was how an article in Charter 77's samizdat journal characterized the peace activities in the GDR.[107]

The Uhls followed the political developments in the GDR attentively, but in their estimation what was missing among the individual initiatives was an awareness of what was common among them. Anna Šabatová picked up through conversations with visitors from East Germany that 'our movement [Charter 77, T.V.] was more broadly rooted and more closely connected within itself'.[108] Moreover, almost all the generations were represented in Charter 77, which Šabatová, moreover, saw as being absent in the GDR. Ralf Hirsch, on the other hand, mentioned that the distinctiveness of the IFM lay in its representation of different generations that did not stand in competition with one another.[109] This aspect was in addition to its goal-oriented thematic focus on human rights, its constructive distance to the church, and not least its readiness to speak to the western media.

Among the east central European countries, it was the GDR that primarily interested Jaroslav Šabata. Nevertheless, he was convinced that Charter 77 by comparison had developed a structure that had a greater ability to develop. In this way, toward the end of the 1980s, new initiatives emerged in direct relationship to Charter 77: 'In the GDR, the opposition had more focal points, but none were in a position to take over the function

---

[105] Peter Grimm, telephone interview with the author, Prague-Berlin, 15 Sep. 2010.

[106] Petr Uhl, interview with the author, Prague, 5 Nov. 2006.

[107] 'Mírové aktivity v NDR: Mírové hnutí v NDR', *Informace o Chartě 77* 8, 8 (1985), 12.

[108] Anna Šabatová, interview with the author, Prague, 10 Aug. 2007.

[109] Ralf Hirsch, interview with the author, Berlin, 24 Jan. 2006.

of an umbrella organisation.'[110] Basically, in the GDR 'another kind of dissidence was present, for which an internal development was lacking,' is how Šabata expressed it.[111]

In the ČSSR, two further specific characteristics of the East German development were perceived. This is how František Stárek recounted it: 'What bothered me especially about the East Germans was that they always flirted with communism, they simply said things which among us not even ex-communists would have said.'[112] Jaroslav Šabata noticed in a conversation with Bärbel Bohley in Petr Uhl's flat 'a specific leftist nuance in the GDR opposition'.[113] Miloš Rejchrt had information about the movement 'Swords into Ploughshares' and was surprised that certain critical attitudes were always still linked with a fundamental loyalty toward the regime. The uniqueness of the GDR existed as well in its critical attitude toward some aspects of western democracy:

> None of us believed that the egoism in the west was greater than the egoism which we were experiencing here. We were convinced that the elbow society, the desire for consumption was considerably more broadly present among us.[114]

The 'leftist leaning'[115] of the East German dissidence was, however, in essence more complex than many Czechoslovak oppositions thought. Gerd Poppe aptly pointed out that it was in fact the different experience of the defeat of the Prague Spring and the consequences of it in both societies that constituted the main reason for the diverse interpretations of the concept of socialism. At a roundtable discussion in April 2001, Poppe said that 'the doubts about the reformability of the system led there [in the ČSSR, T.V.] in the end to a strengthening of the opposition. We did not experience that until much later'.[116]

As Thomas Klein commented, in the ČSSR (as a result of the normalization policies of Gustáv Husák) there was less and less debate about socialist models. On account of the arrests and repression, it was the defence of civil and human rights that moved to the forefront. By contrast, in the GDR

---

[110] Jaroslav Šabata, interview with the author, Brno, 30 Aug. 2007.

[111] Jaroslav Šabata, interview with the author, Prague, 15 May 2006.

[112] František Stárek, interview with the author, Prague, 21 Apr. 2008,.

[113] Jaroslav Šabata, interview with the author, Brno, 30 Aug. 2007.

[114] Miloš Rejchrt, interview with the author, Prague, 12 Feb. 2008.

[115] Kuhrt, *Am Ende*, 794.

[116] 'Das freie Wort', 109.

among the opposition minorities, deliberating about this 'socialist alternative' and its corresponding economic system continued on into the 1970s.[117]

In this respect, the Czechoslovak opposition was really totally different from the East German. Yet, in the GDR (beginning in the 1980s) a process took place that involved a gradual emancipation from the concept of socialism and it increased in intensity in the second half of the 1980s. From that point on, the ideal of democracy was one of the guiding ideas of the opposition groups in the GDR. Karsten Timmer called attention to the specifically 'direct democratic character' of the GDR groups for whom it was valid that: 'the less the state is present, the greater the possibilities which the citizens have and the more democratic the society.'[118] The critique of the western style of consumption, about which the East German oppositionists (in comparison with the other east bloc states) were best informed, was always linked with a criticism of the conditions in the GDR. A few western observers and also Czechoslovak dissidents were convinced (on account of certain anarchistic tendencies and a striving for an East German identity) that the East German basis groups were fundamentally leftist; but they were not recognizing that a socio-critical accent was present in it.

In a letter written in the summer of 1977, Ladislav Hejdánek came closer to the view of Edelbert Richter, according to whom the main problem lay in the fact that the west was not totally democratic and the east not totally socialist. 'Now it has to do with whether we will succeed in socializing western Europe or democratizing eastern Europe,' was what Hejdánek wrote.[119] However, in his criticism of the 'political and economic servitude' Richter went significantly further. In May 1985, he wrote:

> We have a choice just between these evils, because both (liberal or socialist) have long ago naively made the choice of a form of production which from the very start stood in contradiction to their principles. This naïveté has today become obvious: in a deep environmental and motivational crisis.[120]

It can hardly be a surprise that a certain aspect of the works of Václav Havel was thought about intensely in the GDR, namely, the determination

---

[117] Thomas Klein, *'Frieden und Gerechtigkeit!' Die Politisierung der Unabhängigen Friedensbewegung in Ost-Berlin während der 80er Jahre* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 298.

[118] Karsten Timmer, *Vom Aufbruch zum Umbruch: Die Bürgerbewegung in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000), 69.

[119] Ladislav Hejdánek, letter no. 17 (7 July 1977), in Ladislav Hejdánek, *Dopisy příteli I* (Prague: s.n., 1977), 161.

[120] Edelbert Richter, 'Zu den inneren Ursachen der Blockkonfrontation in Europa' [written in May 1985], *Spuren*: *Zur Geschichte der Friedensbewegung in der DDR* (= *radix-Blätter,* 6 Jan. 1988), 22.

that the democratic regimes had not fully grasped the actual essence of the totalitarian system. These regimes presented in reality a distorting mirror for all of modern civilization, according to Havel, 'a challenge for a general revision of the self-conception' of the western democracies.[121] The criticism of 'production fetish' was more marked in the GDR than in the ČSSR, but it was also perceptible there.

Attempts by a few East German basis groups to view the United States and the Soviet Union as equal to one another, evoked reactions from the dissidence in Czechoslovakia. Part of the Czechoslovak dissidence consequently refrained from collaboration with the peace movement. It was not until the cross-border debates in the middle of the 1980s that the prejudices against the independent peace movement were partially overcome. Many Czechoslovak oppositionists did not grasp until later that the East German peace movement first and foremost was a 'homemade event', a reaction to the pressure of militarization.

Some Czechoslovak authors insinuated that the opposition in the GDR was aimed primarily at improving socialism. With Gerd Poppe, one can assert to the contrary that it '[was] only a minority in the opposition who primarily had that goal, "improving socialism"'.[122] An element of the reticence in the East German dissidents to publically appear against the SED regime was probably more so a rather pragmatic reaction to the existing conditions, something strengthened by the existence of the second German state rather than a sign of a belief in socialism. Because whoever did not want to run the risk of being deported to the Federal Republic, had to engage in self-censorship. 'For tactical reasons, fixed boundaries are part of an opposition in a dictatorship. One could of course demonstratively say that we will act in such a way, as if we were living in a totally different system; however, one cannot actually do that in a dictatorship,' is how Poppe expressed it.[123] In the eyes of Czechoslovak oppositionists, the behaviour of the East German basis groups could appear as mildly conformist or reformist. Nevertheless, the images of reform did not diverge from one another all that much; they differed as to the extent of the reforms that were viewed as necessary and in the readiness to include the experiences of the democratic west in the considerations.

Above all in the perspective of the Czech Protestant church – and not just there – there was an awareness of the strongly divergent position of the Protestant church in the GDR. Protestant pastor and signer of Charter 77,

---

[121] Václav Havel, 'Politika a svědomí' (Feb. 1984), in his *Do různých stran: Eseje a články z let 1983-1989* (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1990), 41-59, at 49.

[122] 'Das freie Wort', 133.

[123] Ibid., 135.

Jan Šimsa, admired the youth work that a few of the youth pastors in the GDR were doing. He learned about the church schools at which ex-matriculated students or young people could study who had been refused a regular education. And he heard about the conscripts doing construction work. Yet, in his opinion his son who was a conscientious objector for Christian reasons, was influenced more so from Poland. Anna Šabatová saw 'a latent oppositional function' for the Protestant church in the GDR, which in her opinion had contributed to that fact that the border between those who thought differently and the rest of the society in the GDR did not run with the same sharp edge as in Czechoslovakia.[124]

Conclusions

One can conclude that the East German side was overall substantially better informed about the ČSSR than conversely. The Czechoslovak expatriates fostered that. Many texts and declarations were very quickly translated into German, which facilitated that perception. In the ČSSR, it was primarily the *Information about Charter 77* which published things about the developments in the GDR. Although the cooperation of state security services of both countries made direct contacts more difficult, it was nevertheless possible in the second half of the 1980s to internationalise the dissidence. That then contributed importantly to the collapse of the communist regimes. For, the mutual solidarity and support put pressure on the rulers. The meaning of the joint actions was to be found, however, not mainly in the creation of political contacts. Much more so, as Ladislav Hejdánek expressed it, it was about 'bringing things into the light of day: we knew of each another and were ready to work with one another in the future'.[125]

[124] Anna Šabatová, interview with the author, Prague, 10 Aug. 2007.

[125] Ladislav Hejdánek, interview with the author, Písek, 4 Sep. 2007. This work came about in the context of the research project GAP 410/12/2287.