

*Introduction*

# Perestroika

## The Demise of the Communist World?

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With the rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, a range of extensive reforms were initiated under the headings of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring). Among other objectives, they sought to make the regime less bureaucratic, to tackle increasing financial woes and to reduce foreign trade imbalances. Given the leading role that Soviet Russia played in bi- and multilateral relations between communist parties on both sides of the Iron Curtain, however, these reforms had important effects not only in the USSR. This book examines both the encounter with Gorbachev's policies by select European communist parties and the historical actors who helped to guide those policies' reception and implementation—topics that the historical literature has hitherto failed to analyze systematically.<sup>1</sup> It is concerned with the parties' responses in two respects: firstly, with regard to their mutual political, cultural, and not least financial connections; and secondly, within the context of their bilateral relationships to the hegemonic CPSU.

While the “export”<sup>2</sup> of Perestroika has been widely acknowledged and extensively described, historians have rarely broached the topic of the independent reformist policies among communist parties that emerged in the 1970s, nor whether and to what extent Gorbachev and his aides may have drawn upon already existing doctrines to buttress their restructuring.<sup>3</sup> Moving beyond the impact of Perestroika on the Soviet Union and its foreign policy (e.g., the abandonment of the Brezhnev Doctrine),

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Notes for this chapter begin on page 17.

the following chapters investigate ideological discussions and more concrete political decisions within and between other communist parties.

As all the chapters in this volume show, party communism had not vanished by the beginning of 1990s—but Soviet-ruled world communism had. The title of this Introduction refers directly to the supposed destiny of party communism following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Empire. Yet it might be helpful to reflect on the term “demise.” It is obvious indeed that Perestroika and Glasnost triggered or perhaps accelerated a vast array of mechanisms that led to the end of a certain form of communism. But was communism, as such, erased and overcome? Would it be more accurate to look at this breakthrough as a major transformation? Or had communism as a cohesive phenomenon already been long dead—possibly since 1968?

Communist ideas would continue to inform and inspire politicians, opinion leaders, intellectuals, students and workers for years to come, both in Eastern and Western Europe. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that the collapse of the Soviet Empire was nothing less than the most disastrous event in communism’s relatively young history. Similarly, it would be absurd to believe that single individuals, as influential and charismatic as they might be, can almost single-handedly end a long-standing, internationally organized power network with deep cultural roots. And yet history definitively proves that they can significantly contribute to the conclusion of an already ongoing process of change. So where does Gorbachev rank as the “terminator” of Soviet communism? As Juliane Fürst, Silvio Pons and Mark Selden put it: “[T]he peaceful demise of communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union should not be seen as inevitable. It involved complex interactions between long-term processes and contingency, resulting in a decline in legitimacy and self-confidence.”<sup>4</sup>

As the historical record shows, Gorbachev and his entourage failed to fully grasp the close connection between market liberalization and the implementation of democratic values and political mechanisms. The consequences of that failure would be manifold and highly unpredictable. It is therefore useful for our work to keep in mind the importance of agency and the impact that personalities can exert on ideas and institutions.<sup>5</sup> With hindsight we can assume that probably nobody could have imagined back in 1985—as Gorbachev was appointed general secretary of the most powerful communist party of the world—that that same party and the nation it had ruled since 1917 would disappear within about six years. However, during the 1980s quite a few people knew and understood that Soviet rule was becoming considerably more volatile, and that any change in political strategy and rhetoric could prove disastrous for the

Soviet federation and all of its satellites. All those involved in communist rule were well aware of the major transformations that all societies were going through during the Cold War. Each and every of them—along with the parties they controlled, belonged to, or solely supported, as well as all communist governments—came up with specific, nationally tailored measures to spot and tackle problems in the future. Some of them cautiously opened up to capitalism, like Hungary and Romania.<sup>6</sup> Others, like the GDR and the French Communist Party,<sup>7</sup> respectively stepped up repression and control to prevent turmoil and politically “deviant” behavior.

### **Perestroika as “Revolution”?**

With the “August coup” of 1991, the most important communist party in the world formally ceased to exist. This of course had immediate consequences. The two biggest West European communist parties, the French PCF and Italian PCI, were shattered by the dissolution of the CPSU. The PCI, the most influential communist organization west of the Iron Curtain, broke apart and was absorbed by other parties, jettisoning its symbols and its long-serving leaders. The PCF, which had been free-falling since at least the mid-1980s, was able to keep its name and organizational structure, yet it very soon faded into political oblivion.

In fact, the end of Soviet rule had repercussions on the political agenda of all communist parties, even those who were rhetorically distant from the “real socialist” ones. After Khrushchev’s endorsement of the so-called “peaceful road to power,” West European communists responded by adapting their policies to parliamentary strategies. Ultimately, this meant meeting the demands of their conservative followers while pursuing dialogue with the established social democratic parties that had been skeptical of communism and socialism since the end of World War II. This dialogue had begun to develop at a relatively early stage—the PCI, for instance, had been seeking it ever since the late 1960s, serving as an intermediary between the West German SPD and the East German SED. Yet this strategy gave rise to a dilemma: how to find a way to stay loyal to Moscow while potentially collaborating with conservative and/or social democratic forces? Not only was Moscow wary of other parties attempting to reach out to “bourgeois” leaders, but the latter were very often inclined to view the former as potential double agents in the service of the Kremlin. It was this dilemma from which Eurocommunism could eventually originate. Yet, as this book will demonstrate, West European CPs (except for some smaller parties like those of Finland, Sweden, Portugal

and Cyprus)<sup>8</sup> were not able to influence, let alone control, national policy making. By the mid-1980s, West European communist parties were on average marginal political forces with only limited impact; the PCI, PCF and PCE constituted the notable exceptions.

Keeping in mind how quickly real communist regimes declined in the second half of the 1980s, and how slowly West European communist parties responded to the need for modernization and reform, we can raise the question of whether Perestroika was the final nail in the coffin for communism, and if so, why. Gorbachev characterized Perestroika as both a reformist and a revolutionary attempt to renew and refurbish—a “revolution” that should be carried out by evolutionary means. Meanwhile, his detractors called it a “counterrevolution” poised to nullify the central tenets of Leninism and Stalinism. So, was Gorbachev able to push through this revolution? It has been argued that he was so wary of the potential turmoil his reforms could have caused that he found himself stuck between the poles of Marxism–Leninism and revisionism à la Eduard Bernstein.<sup>9</sup> Was it his indecisiveness that led to a collapse, rather than to a rebirth? Did he fall prey, like several other West European communist leaders, to the temptation of a third way that not even Enrico Berlinguer or the PCF’s Jean Kanapa had been able to convincingly draw up and implement?

If we take an overall look at how socialist and communist parties responded to Gorbachev’s Perestroika, one thing stands out: while he embodied for many the hope for a better, more democratic, more prosperous future, for others he was a secessionist rebel attempting to sell the Eastern Bloc to the highest bidder. Gorbachev turned out to be a strongly polarizing figure, in that he reinforced and amplified the inherent contrast between specific national contexts and traditional proletarian internationalism. British communists remained loyal to the CPSU and advocated for his reforms while remaining allies of the SED, while the Austrian KPÖ almost uncritically patterned its policy after the East German model. Despite the supremacy of the USSR and its predominant role in both West European communism and the real socialist “family,” nearly every communist party reacted autonomously to the reform impulses from Moscow. It seems reasonable to believe therefore, especially at the international and transnational level, that, borrowing from a book title by Alexander Wendt, “anarchy is what states make of it.”<sup>10</sup>

This holds true especially within the context of the waning Cold War; whereas it is widely agreed that Gorbachev’s reformist zeal was instrumental in the weak economic condition of the USSR, it is important to recall that his foreign policy convictions and objectives were not conceived of as defensive but rather “transformative” measures.<sup>11</sup> Both material and

ideological concerns came equally to bear as the Soviet leader opened up to the West and began advocating universal human rights and disarmament. And yet no other real socialist head of state went as far as to displace class struggle as the sole justification and driving force of politics, nor to promote democracy and international security, even against internal opposition.<sup>12</sup> This would eventually open a Pandora's box, whereby the promotion of self-determination emboldened regime critics and independence seekers, culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the entire real socialist system. As Robert S. Snyder rightly put it: "Gorbachev's counterrevolutionary effort to transform international politics into a new peaceful world in order to remake the USSR unwittingly set in motion the forces that pulled the Soviet Union apart."<sup>13</sup>

### Actors, Ideas, and Transnationalism

In its analysis of the transnational influence of Gorbachev's reforms in both Western and Eastern Europe, this book focuses on three main areas: *historical actors*, and their individual impact on political, cultural, and social developments; *ideas*, in the sense of a shift or abrupt change within the ideological structure of communism; and *transnational activity*, encompassing both material and intellectual transfer and exchange.

To begin with: *Actors*. To understand this aspect, it is first most useful to put the notions of Perestroika and Glasnost into a broader framework, taking into account what they actually meant both in Eastern and Western Europe. There has been over the last twenty-five years an oversimplification of what Perestroika, with all its prospects for change and long-term modernization, signified. Archie Brown, among others, draws our attention to a few fallacies: that Soviet Russia was already near to collapse as Gorbachev took the reins; that the Soviet Empire, and thus the Cold War, was ended by Ronald Reagan and his administration; and that the dismantling of communism in Russia was mainly caused by Boris Yeltsin and his supposed continuation of Perestroika.<sup>14</sup>

The impact Gorbachev exerted as general secretary intensified the differences between supporters and opponents of general reform. In this respect, it must be recognized that the opponents—driven by legitimate concerns about potential destabilization of power and rule in the communist world—by far outnumbered the supporters. As Silvio Pons and Michele Di Donato succinctly put it: "Although Gorbachev's plans went far beyond the failed pattern of 1965, at the same time they were hardly realistic—and unsuitable for facing the mounting crisis—given that direction and enforcement still relied on centralized institutions. The Soviet

reformers were isolated.”<sup>15</sup> In such an account, Gorbachev seems to be the “ultimate culprit.”

True or false, one important theme comes immediately to the fore: the inclination to identify and attribute the responsibility for major political and cultural upheavals to single individuals or a rather small group of actors. Yet political systems, as is known from historical and empirical experience, take quite a long time to disappear. Were seven years and a small group of men enough to end all of that? And how was it even possible in a country like Soviet Russia, which in the 1980s—as historians such as Matthew Wyman and Stephen Kotkin have pointed out<sup>16</sup>—in fact displayed economic and political stability?

Even the manner in which Gorbachev took power in 1985 has left room for speculation as to what extent the inner leadership of the Soviet Communist Party was looking for substantial reform or not—and if they were, whether it was really Perestroika they were looking for. The CPSU included a broad range of very different elites: reformist elements, orthodox communists, and not least military figures who opposed any kind of liberal overhaul until the very end.<sup>17</sup> So again, how did Gorbachev manage to push his reforms through the party’s Central Committee and the Politburo? To start with, he looked to reform the very structure of the party, vocally criticizing it and its approach to policy making. (It was the sort of critique that he extended just as well to the powerful KGB, whose leaders on many occasions openly denounced his visions of a more transparent, more democratic communism.) This was a strategy with transnational implications—due to the multilayered cross-border entanglements the Soviet Union held as a major world power—and yet, at the same time, one dictated by specific Soviet domestic needs.<sup>18</sup> As Alexei Yurchak among others points out,<sup>19</sup> although the attempts to reform communism from within had a long history, their pragmatic implementation had nevertheless repeatedly failed to take place. As Gorbachev pushed reform, the very opposite result ensued: the rapid undermining of equilibrium among the forces that kept Soviet Russia politically stable.

Against this backdrop, much research is still needed to thoroughly assess the individual impact of the Soviet general secretary abroad, and specifically on other communist leaders. If it is true that Perestroika was to a certain extent exported to East European countries—where, in general, communist parties also controlled ministerial functions—how, for instance, was it received in West European, parliamentary democracies? This brings us to our second keyword of *ideas*, along with the institutions in which they were embedded. “Realist” scholars have, since the late 1960s, theorized that the starting point for any political idea, especially in conservative or totalitarian regimes, is power and national interest. Then,

in the early 1980s, neoliberal views emerged that attached great importance to international institutions as an additional element to be taken into account. Yet neither approach ultimately did much to supersede materialist, narrowly causal perceptions of policymaking. Today—and indeed over the last twenty years—there has been a wide consensus over a “new constructivist” approach to ideas: in order to break with the traditional materialism–idealism dichotomy, scholars emphasize that ideas and cultural phenomena can be, and in fact happen to be, just as “real” a political and historical phenomenon as power.<sup>20</sup> Neither realist nor liberal approaches can be completely discounted, but it is advisable to analyze ideology in terms of the actual human beings involved and the contexts of meaning they construct around them.

The guiding idea of the present volume is that Communism, as a heterogeneous complex of ideas, manifestly failed to be successfully transmitted and safeguarded by its highest-ranking representative, the Soviet Union. In other words, State Socialism (at least in Europe) was indeed in large part dominated by Moscow—yet the respective rulers and their fellow politicians differed greatly from each other, both in their cultural-political traditions and their specific objectives.

What Gorbachev had in mind demanded a great deal of psychological adjustment in society, within the party, and across the whole Soviet system through its ramifications both in the Eastern Bloc and beyond the Iron Curtain. The task ahead was monumental, and faced resistance from within the CPSU and, in several cases, from abroad. The French Communist Party, for instance, and the Unified Socialist Party in the GDR, vehemently opposed the winds of reform blowing from Moscow. But what was Perestroika all about, in terms of ideological and pragmatic innovation?

It has been argued that Gorbachev’s own evolution was in the direction of social democracy. This implied, *inter alia*, the opening of domestic finance to a broader market economy. Yet, probably the most significant idea the new rulers in Moscow were seeking to realize was to turn away from the long-standing, entrenched top-down hierarchical organization of the communist party as well as of Russian society—which would, in fact, eventually spark and speed up the process of national emancipation in many member states of the former soviet federation.<sup>21</sup>

With this in mind, was Perestroika therefore a complete failure? It could not prevent the domestic economy from eventually going bankrupt; it was not able to reform and restructure the system it operated in, without ultimately laying the groundwork for its disintegration; and it could not reconcile the many diverging interest groups within the highest echelons of power, nor inspire the public in general, with the exception

of the rather sparse social and cultural movements that drew directly upon it. It remained—as many critics have pointed out—a top-down imposition. Nonetheless it succeeded in fostering and promoting a “New Thinking,” and arguably even brought Soviet Russia closer to the rest of the Western world.

As mentioned above, different analysts theorized that Gorbachev would pattern Perestroika after Western Europe’s social democracies. But what model exactly did they have in mind? Gorbachev very frequently cited Lenin and referred to Marxism–Leninism as an important font of inspiration for his own work and as a basic blueprint for understanding the world. His adherence to Leninism is indeed at odds with any kind of parliamentary framework, and in 1990 the Russian leader made the point in an unpublished book that a one-party system would better serve the objective of buttressing democracy and pluralism.<sup>22</sup> So, how do these positions fit with the social democratic body of thought? Was Gorbachev under the theoretical influence of foreign social democrats? Did transnational entanglements and personal affiliations play a role in molding the new trend toward reform?

This brings me to the third and last aspect: *transnational influences and entanglements*. Even the most conservative socialist countries were not immune to influence from abroad, be it in the fields of economics, agriculture or communist theory. It is true that, apart from a very few exceptions in the Eastern Bloc—Yugoslavia comes immediately in mind; Poland of the 1980s is a much more debatable case<sup>23</sup>—no communist state leaders ever abandoned the tenets of Marxism–Leninism, a political orientation that was in fact controlled and supervised from Moscow. Nonetheless, Hungary and Yugoslavia, for instance, had started to open up their markets at the beginning of the 1980s. This obviously generated new relationships and helped to reshape mutual perceptions; it possibly set the frame for debate over theory and ideology with differently minded partners. So what impact, if any, did West European varieties of communism and social democracy have on Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and most notably on Gorbachev and his “New Thinking”?

The so-called “third wave” of democratization in Europe, which began around the mid-1970s with the end of fascist rule on the Iberian Peninsula and the ratification of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, facilitated contact and exchange across the Iron Curtain, notwithstanding the rather defiant attitude of the Brezhnev leadership. That decade also witnessed the emergence of a communist “third way” doctrine, commonly referred to as “Eurocommunism,” that was strongly endorsed and promoted by the Italian communist leader Enrico Berlinguer and his party, PCI.<sup>24</sup> Even though Perestroika and Eurocommunism share some similarities, there



has been little research on the topic, although several scholars have hinted at the peculiar bond between Gorbachev and Italy. It is known, for instance, that his first visit to Western Europe, in 1971, was to Italy, and that he led the Soviet delegation to Berlinguer's state funeral in June 1984—only a few months before the notorious stopover in Britain where he met Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.<sup>25</sup> The last general secretary of the PCI, Achille Occhetto, acknowledged in an interview for the Italian Newspaper *Il Messaggero* that “Gorbachev had rediscovered Berlinguer,” and added: “Only four men have been able to understand Europe with particular lucidity: Willy Brandt, Olof Palme, Enrico Berlinguer and now Gorbachev.”<sup>26</sup> Even Erich Honecker—the “poster boy” of real socialism who had, since the 1970s, criticized the PCI's policies as being a bad precedent for communist parties—in 1987 told Alessandro Natta, Berlinguer's successor as general secretary of the PCI, that apparently “Eurocommunism had not been in vain.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet we must again be wary of oversimplification. Obviously West European social democracy and Eurocommunism originated from different cultural contexts and entailed different goals than Perestroika. Despite their common features, it was hard for Gorbachev to set up a direct dialogue with the leadership of the PCI, which even in the late 1980s was still refusing to organize international meetings with the CPSU because of the response to the 1968 Prague Spring. At the same time there is no denying that toward the very end of the Gorbachev era, Perestroika looked very much like the platform of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, with support for universal values and human rights. Alexander Yakovlev, the chief theoretician of the CPSU in that period, recollected in a 1988 interview that “[i]f we had spoken then [back in 1985] as we have spoken today, we would have been considered dissidents.”<sup>28</sup>

Understanding Perestroika's influence abroad—how it was developed and implemented, and how it was perceived both by contemporaries and from the perspective of today—also poses problems and raises significant questions. Perestroika undeniably had a major impact on the European communist parties, yet the specifics and the degree of influence varied greatly and without respect to a given party's alignment with West or East. For example, Italy's PCI suddenly fell into a political crisis in June 1984, following the sudden death of Enrico Berlinguer. The crisis resulted from the ideological vacuum that had been growing since the early 1980s and had accompanied the gradual decline of Eurocommunism. Notwithstanding their individual characteristics, the communist parties of France, Britain, Spain, Greece, and other nations had, since around the end of the 1970s but more intensively in the 1980s, developed a more “flexible” communism.<sup>29</sup> The gradual withdrawal of these parties from

the influence of Moscow was at that time linked to the project of a transnational, pan-European peace movement that emerged in opposition to the policies of the two superpowers, especially the 1979 NATO Double-Track decision. And while many West and South European communists showed relative open-mindedness towards Gorbachev, the East German SED leadership categorically rejected his reform efforts.

Perestroika must also be understood in the context of another explicitly transnational phenomenon: the decades-long efforts to achieve European unification. For much of the postwar period, the CPSU's politically propagandistic fight against unification was motivated not only by ideology but also by power politics. The idea of unification not only helped to shape bilateral and multilateral relations among communist parties, but it was also for a long time interpreted as a front against communism.<sup>30</sup> Instead of West European postwar hopes for a federated Europe, the top Soviet communists would have preferred fragmented nation-states, allowing the USSR to assume an undisputed hegemonic position after the withdrawal of the Americans.<sup>31</sup> This view did not change fundamentally until the intensifying crisis of state communism at the end of the 1970s.

From the very beginning, the CPSU was distrustful of and hostile to European unification. It interpreted the integration of Western Europe ideologically, seeing it as a defensive strategy of "state monopolistic and imperialist capitalism" against expanding communism. At the same time, the CPSU disapproved of the consolidation of the "Western Bloc" for pragmatic reasons: the successful emergence and expansion of a system aimed at unifying Europe was seen as a direct threat to the unity of the communist community and thus to Soviet supremacy. On the one hand, the party promoted a variety of integrationism with the aim of forming and expanding a counterforce to the European Communities (EC) in its own sphere of power. On the other hand, it fervently sought to make cooperation with West European states less attractive, often through its "brother parties," by deliberately and propagandistically assailing the "Europe of monopolies" by issuing warnings to and exerting direct influence upon the actors involved.

For the CPSU, however, the conflict with the European Economic Community (EEC) specifically, and the EC as a whole, was never its primary focus. Its perspective was largely determined by the broader context of the Cold War. From this point of view, the EC was allegedly an instrument for NATO or American "imperialism." When Moscow reached out to Brussels during the détente period, it was with the aim of positioning itself as a new protective power. However, given the poor prospects for success, the Soviet Union was never able to commit seriously to this strategy.<sup>32</sup>

The “New Thinking” introduced by Gorbachev, which did not oppose the West unconditionally but perceived it as an enemy par excellence and was oriented towards rapprochement, also put the unification agenda in a completely different light. Although the phrase “Common European Home” was originally formulated as an anti-European slogan, Gorbachev took it up during his visit to London in December 1984 without further elaboration.<sup>33</sup> On 30 May 1985, Gorbachev announced to the Italian prime minister, Bettino Craxi, that he would in the future seek a common language with the EC countries “as a political unit” in order to bring about a “radical change” in European policy.<sup>34</sup> A breakthrough was indeed not long in coming,<sup>35</sup> as a bilateral trade agreement was ratified in December 1989.

The overall process of transformation initiated by Gorbachev’s rise to power also had a direct impact on the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act. Only a few months after the CSCE follow-up meeting in Vienna in 1989 and the signing of the “Charter of Paris for a New Europe” in 1990, both domestic and foreign “orthodox” communists harshly criticized Gorbachev and his policies. He was accused not only of having arranged the “sellout” of Marxism–Leninism and its distinctive socialist values, but also of potentially depriving the Soviet Union of its ideological and political monopoly within the community of socialist states, and left it to the advances of the West. Only a few months later, in 1991, the USSR collapsed.

## Methodology

The chapters in this book draw on the sort of historical-comparative research that has been the subject of intensive methodological and theoretical discussion in recent years. Each contribution deals with relationships, transfers, and interdependencies that took place outside of the primary East–West confrontation that defined the Cold War.<sup>36</sup> They reconstruct and analyze the complex mediation and feedback processes between state and non-state actors with regard to the specific constellations of political parties in European countries. Through empirical evaluation, contributors examine whether and to what extent the cross-border relations between communist parties involved significant transfers or learning processes. To this end, the methods of “entangled” history are combined with traditional comparative methods.<sup>37</sup> In order to avoid the danger of a monocausal interpretation of Perestroika as the “grave-digger” of Socialism and Marxist–Leninism, their effects are explained transnationally. The consequences of Perestroika are examined in terms of not only politics and economics, but also sociocultural processes.

A combination of theoretical approaches from politics, history, social science, and other disciplines is needed to achieve this. In particular, scholarship on the conceptual development of political history has shown since the 1990s that political action—including decision making—is consistently and comprehensively grounded in culture. Contributors thus emphasize processes of definition, communication, and interaction along with perception, representation, and symbolic staging. In this framing, politics are constituted by the social practices and cultural conceptions of specific actors. Rather than assuming a largely autonomous sphere of politics in which influential politicians and their diplomatic relations take center stage, political action is here conceived as the result of social interactions. According to this approach, specific actors can be seen limiting, communicating, and representing policies. They initiate or impede processes of politicization. The boundary between the “political” and the “non-political” is thus a contingent one. At the same time, one can no longer write social or cultural history to the exclusion of politics, and the studies collected here integrate the subjective dimension of the social and political world as well as processes of communication, representation, and symbolic interaction.

The contributions in this book are thus, on the one hand, committed to empirical research, and on the other hand to constructivist historiography, which postulates that human activity, including in the realm of the political, is shaped not only by power and interests, but also by social or normative factors. According to the constructivist model, a “social actor” operates within a network of intersubjective meanings in which he makes “norm- and rule-guided decisions on the grounds of subjective factors, historical-cultural experiences and institutional integration.”<sup>38</sup> The social actors, in this volume, are communist politicians and the people with whom they interacted in specific contexts and constellations. These include representatives of other parties, the media, and public life generally.

## The Chapters of the Volume

Part I of the book is dedicated to Soviet Russia and the Eastern Bloc. Peter Ruggenthaler introduces this topic by providing an overall picture of developments within the European “real socialist” community. Gorbachev’s Perestroika, he argues, meant one thing in particular: that the hitherto valid and regularly reasserted notion of unity of world Communism was no more. It was the historical merit of the Moscow rulers to divine to a certain extent that communist rule was soon bound

to fall and to ensure that the process of disintegration would proceed violence-free. Yet, all circulating hopes that Socialism would rise out of the ashes even stronger were shattered, as is now generally known by later events.

Mark Kramer explores the social context, both in Russia and in the Soviet society outside, in which the political revolution set off by Gorbachev unfolded. He makes the case for an “ethnic” explanation for the unraveling of the Soviet Union, pointing out that its cohesion was not so much endangered by the rise of nationalistic discontent at the periphery of the federation, but rather by the size, cultural and political preponderance of Russia. It was Ukraine though, and its demand for independence after the failed coup in August 1991, that proved to be fatal for the existence of the union.

Tamás Péter Baranyi tackles the popular belief according to which Hungarian reforms constituted in their nature an offspring of the Soviet ones from the second half of the 1980s. As he explains, the latter ones gained momentum over the years and were eminently political in scope, whereas the Hungarian ones pivoted on economic benefit. Nonetheless party leaders like János Kádár and, later, Károly Grósz still publicly championed Perestroika and committed to a further upgrade of Comecon (*grósznoszty*). Yet, the thus triggered reforms, designed to save State Communism, eventually served as fuel for the opposition to call for even more extensive democratization. The author ultimately identifies specific gaps in the research, such as the underexposed role played by the unraveling Comecon in the last years of “really existing socialism” or the inter-relationship between major ideological frames like Eurocommunism and Perestroika.

Petar Dragišić reconstructs and explains the main reasons why the political agony of the Soviet Union so strongly affected the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its Communist Party (League of Communists of Yugoslavia—LCY), eventually causing there the same destiny, even though the latter had officially withdrawn from the Eastern Bloc back in 1948. Likewise, he elaborates on how the dismantling of State Socialism proved to serve as a catalyst for the re-emergence of aggressive nationalism in the Yugoslav federal units.

Wanda Jarzabek takes on the reactions of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PUWP) to Perestroika, and makes the case for a pragmatic interpretation. She correspondingly emphasizes how Polish interests in Soviet reforms were mainly intended to boost the domestic economy. Vice versa, they were not a major factor in triggering Polish-made political or ideological amendments. Nevertheless, they still had a remarkable impact on the pace of transformation and/or disruption of communist rule.

Hermann Wentker examines the rapid evolution in the understanding of Perestroika by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), from general approval in 1985 to skepticism and ultimately firm rebuttal starting from 1987. Whereas the State Party rejected any import of reforms, the SED rank and file increasingly looked at Gorbachev as the model to follow, thus contributing to the undermining of the communist regime.

Stefano Bottoni explores Nicolae Ceaușescu's determined refusal to adhere to Perestroika. He argues that this was mainly due to a misinterpretation of the West's readiness to keep helping stabilize the stagnating Romanian economy. The Romanian Communist Party (PCR) soon had to discover that its own special status as a mediator between the West and the Eastern Bloc was irremediably on the wane, which eventually set the scene for its end and Ceaușescu's execution.

Part II of the book examines West European communist parties. Aldo Agosti elaborates on the impact of Perestroika and Glasnost on the Italian Communist Party, PCI. He points out that the great hopes the Italian communists had put in Gorbachev and his reforms in the second half of the 1980s were offset and ultimately leveled by political doubts. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the PCI focused entirely on the internal debate leading up to the Party Congress set for February 1991, which laid the ground for the relinquishment of the communist tradition. He thus proposes the thesis that both the "refoundation" efforts by the Italian party executive and the demand for a renewal of World Communism from Moscow were parallel paths to demise.

Dominique Andolfatto addresses what impact Perestroika had on the French PCF. He describes the impotence of the party leaders to critically recognize and understand the high topicality of the events that had caused the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 as well as the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. The same blindness was accountable for the gradual estrangement between the party and French society, which had been unfolding since the 1970s. Because of ideological commitments—the PCF remaining staunchly orthodox—it recanted Gorbachev's policies, a decision which did not stop its own downfall.

Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte develop some of the issues posited in this Introduction by looking at how contrasting ideas—such as orthodox Marxist-Leninist and Gramscian—and their social carriers held sway in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) before Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union, and how this influenced its reception of Perestroika itself afterwards. They come to the conclusion—by dint of a fruitful comparison with the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED)—that, despite all sympathy for reformist communism, British reform-oriented communists never abandoned "really existing socialism." This

happened out of loyalty to an array of theoretical tenets that had their roots in the realm of Socialist Internationalism. Because of this strong interdependence with the soviet “Big Brother,” the CPGB eventually collapsed, just like the CPSU after 1989—a prey of its own ideas.

Gerrit Voerman explores the history of the relations of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) with the Soviet Union, and defines them as “paradoxical.” After basically sharing no contacts until the 1980s, the ties between both sides grew tighter because of Gorbachev’s reforms. Yet, the downfall of East European socialism was not the main reason for the dissolution of the CPN after 1989, although it surely accelerated it. On the contrary, the end of Dutch Communism has to be traced back to its “autonomous” endorsement of a whole array of reforms, a “premature Perestroika,” whose side effects it eventually could not cope with.

Andreas Stergiou examines the long agony of Greek Communism during the 1980s, and identifies Gorbachev’s liberalization programs as having had a disruptive influence on it. Confronted with this menacing development, the fragmented Greek left parties engaged in a merger operation, leading up to an electoral alliance and even involvement in a government with right-wing forces. Yet, the end of State Socialism in Europe soon encroached on the unionist experiment and revived orthodox resurgences, like that by the KKE (Communist Party of Greece), which in retrospect firmly rebutted Perestroika.

Maximilian Graf assesses the impact that Gorbachev’s call for restructuring had on the Stalinist-oriented Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ) by implying that Austrian communists’ fate was closely connected to the demise of the Soviet Union. After a short reformist period, he argues, the electorally insignificant party became one of the closest allies of the SED, and often served as an intermediary between East and West.

Walther Bernecker closes this section of studies and the anthology by describing the role played by Perestroika for the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). Strained by an ideological and political crisis, from 1982 the PCE embraced a “policy of convergence” that paved the way for the creation of the left-wing coalition “Izquierda Unida.” The author comes to the conclusion that the rapid evolutions in the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s did have visible repercussions on the PCE, albeit that Perestroika’s impact on it was rather limited.

Of course, the chapters collected here cannot fully encompass the complexity of Perestroika as a cultural and political-ideological turning point in the history of European Communism, and we can be certain that Gorbachev’s controversial policies will remain an object of historiographical inquiry and debate.

“International Communism,” conceived as a monolithic and homogenous historical phenomenon, was always an illusion—a fact that Perestroika made especially evident. Regardless of the degree of loyalty that communist regimes and parties displayed, or of the extent of the interdependence between them and Moscow on different relevant (particularly economic) issues, individual parties were unavoidably affected by national specificities. Notwithstanding cross-border exchange and adherence to international communist principles—ideals that were genuinely valued in the nations under investigation here, both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall—the decisive failure of the Soviet-ruled Communist Bloc was that it was never able to develop a truly functional and supranational body of governance. As political crisis and financial turmoil struck in 1990 and 1991, “parochial” thinking and separatist movements triumphed over transnational solidarity. This is the leitmotif of all the chapters in the present volume.

Gorbachev paradoxically embodied this dilemma: “International Communism” had held together only under conditions of unchallenged Soviet domination—in other words, the imposition of one nation’s will. With the advent of Perestroika and Glasnost, this equilibrium was destabilized in favor of a diversity of transnational entanglements and power relations. The reaction to this was astounding. Communist rulers in Eastern and Western Europe (with the sole moderate exception of the PCI) opposed almost unequivocally the unleashing of such reforms. This harsh rejection was simultaneously an “ultranational” and transnational development. It is in this way that the various reactions to Perestroika and Glasnost explored here need to be understood: as national phenomena that can nevertheless be studied as an integrated whole. Whether this “whole” is best understood as the demise of Communism remains a question for further investigation. This book represents a step in that direction, and is a collective argument for a transnational, actor-oriented approach.

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*Policy-Making* (forthcoming, 2020). Edited books: *Bruderparteien jenseits des Eisernen Vorhangs: Die Beziehungen der SED zu den kommunistischen Parteien West- und Südeuropas (1968 bis 1989)* (Ch. Links Verlag, 2011, with Arnd Bauerkämper); *Kommunismus und Europa: Europapolitik und -vorstellungen europäischer kommunistischer Parteien im Kalten Krieg* (Schöningh Verlag, 2016, with Wolfgang Mueller); *Jewish Minorities between Nationalism and Emigration in Central and Eastern Europe, 1866–1918* (forthcoming, 2020, with Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe).

## Notes

Special thanks go to Arnd Bauerkämper, who helped organize an early meeting at which this project began to take place. That gathering arose from my own research into three European communist parties, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), specifically on how they organized and carried out their own trilateral relations from the late 1960s until the disintegration of “really existing socialism” against the background of—or rather despite—the overpowering “Mother Party,” the CPSU. See, among other works: *Kommunismus und Europa: Europapolitik und -vorstellungen europäischer kommunistischer Parteien im Kalten Krieg*, ed. Francesco Di Palma and Wolfgang Mueller, Paderborn, 2016; Francesco Di Palma, “Europa als transnationales ‘Konstrukt’? Europapolitik und Europavorstellungen bei dem PCI und der SED,” in *Kommunismus und Europa*, ed. Di Palma and Mueller, 52–70; *Bruderparteien jenseits des Eisernen Vorhangs: Die Beziehungen der SED zu den kommunistischen Parteien West- und Südeuropas (1968 bis 1989)*, ed. Arnd Bauerkämper and Francesco Di Palma, Berlin, 2011; Francesco Di Palma, “Eurocommunism and the SED: A Contradictory Relationship,” in *Journal of European Integration History* 20(2), 2014, 219–31; Francesco Di Palma, “Der Eurokommunismus und seine Rezeption durch die SED (1968–1976): Einige theoretische Bemerkungen,” in *Jahrbuch für Kommunismusforschung* 2012, Berlin, 2012, 233–48; Francesco Di Palma, “PCF und SED im späten Kalten Krieg: ein translokales Beziehungsgeflecht?,” in *Die DDR in den deutsch-französischen Beziehungen*, ed. Anne Kwaschik and Ulrich Pfeil, Brussels, 2013, 275–88.

1. Among the many works on Perestroika and Glasnost are: Karner, *Der Kreml und die Wende*; Von Saal, *KSZE-Prozess*; Comte, *La perestroïka de Gorbatchev*; Bozo, *Europe and the End of the Cold War*; Savranskaya, Blanton and Zubok, *Masterpieces of History*; Kramer and Smetana, *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain*; Pons, *The Global Revolution*; Pons and Romero, *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War*; Dallin, “Causes of the Collapse of the USSR”; Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*; Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*; Kramer, “Collapse of East European Communism”; Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*; Aron, “The ‘Mystery’ of the Soviet Collapse”; Gill, *Collapse of a Single-Party System*; Hahn, *1985–2000. Russia’s Revolution from Above*.
2. Hardman, *Gorbachev’s Export of Perestroika*.
3. Initial, fragmentary approaches to this issue can be found in, among others: Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World*, esp. 229–33; Hough, “Gorbachev’s Endgame.”
4. Fürst, Pons and Selden, *The Cambridge History of Communism*, “Introduction to Volume III,” 12–13.
5. On the concepts of “agency” and “performance,” see among others: Wulf, Göhlich and Zirkas, “Sprache, Macht und Handeln,” 9–24, esp. 12.; on the “social construction of politics,” see Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*; Wendt, Albert and Cederman,

- New Systems Theories*; Risse-Kappen, "Introduction," in *Bringing Transnational Actors Back In*, esp. 3–33.
6. See the chapters in this volume by Tamás Baranyi and Stefano Bottoni.
  7. See the chapters in this volume by Hermann Wentker and Dominique Andolfatto.
  8. Dörr, "Die Beziehungen zwischen der SED und den kommunistischen Parteien."
  9. See Brumberg, "Moscow: The Struggle for Reform."
  10. Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It."
  11. Snyder, "Bridging the Realist/Constructivist Divide," 56.
  12. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*; English, "Power, Ideas, and New Evidence."
  13. Snyder, "Bridging the Realist/Constructivist Divide," 67.
  14. Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World*, 4–11. See also Dalos, *Gorbatschow*.
  15. Pons and Di Donato, "Reform Communism," 198–99.
  16. Wyman, *Public Opinion*; Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*.
  17. See among others: Grachev, Blengino and Stievano, *1985–2005: Twenty Years that Changed the World*, 50–59.
  18. See the chapter in this volume by Mark Kramer.
  19. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*.
  20. Realism, the leading paradigm in international relations theory, has over the last twenty years been the object of criticism on the part of constructivist scholars. The seminal work by one of the "founding fathers" of realist–structuralist approaches, Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979), has been especially scrutinized from every conceivable angle. The difference between the two schools of thought is clear-cut. Realists assume that the distribution of power and power itself is the main force behind world politics. Constructivists instead specify that structural realism misses one determinant factor: the intersubjectively (or social) shared core of ideas that leads to a certain behavior and indeed constitutes identities and interests of any involved actors. On this debate, see among others: Hasenclever, Mayer and Rittberger, *Theories of International Regimes*, esp. 158–67; Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism," 172–73; Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem"; Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It."
  21. See, among others: Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*; Brunce, *Subversive Institutions*; Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.
  22. See Brown, *Seven Years*, 139–42; Brown, *The Demise of Marxism–Leninism in Russia*, 70–100.
  23. See the chapter in this volume by Wanda Jarzabek.
  24. On "Eurocommunism," see among others: Weinberg, *The Transformation of Italian Communism*; Priester, *Hat der Eurokommunismus eine Zukunft?*
  25. See Brown, *Seven Years*, 229–33.
  26. Il PCI e il vento di Mosca. Occhetto: "Gorbaciov ha riscoperto Berlinguer," in *Il Messaggero*, 7 November 1987.
  27. Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano (APCI), Fondo Natta, Fasc. 45, *Incontro Honecker-Natta a Berlino*, 12 February 1987.
  28. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia*, 79.
  29. On the British Communist Party (CPGB), see Andrews, *Endgames and New Times*; on the Greek Communist Party (KKE), see Stergiou, *Im Spagat zwischen Solidarität und Realpolitik*; *ibid.*, "Die Europapolitik der kommunistischen Parteien Griechenlands und Zyperns"; on the Spanish PCE, see Baumer, *Kommunismus in Spanien*; on the French PCF, see Andolfatto, *PCF: de la mutation à la liquidation*.
  30. Zubok, "The Soviet Union and European Integration"; Narinski, "La construction européenne"; Rey, "Le retour à l'Europe?"; Mueller, "Die UdSSR und die europäische Integration"; Kansikas, "Room to Manoeuvre?"
  31. Pechatnov, "The Big Three after World War II," 7–8.

32. See the "Einleitung" (Introduction) to Di Palma and Mueller, *Kommunismus und Europa*, 13–26.
33. Brezhnev had coined it in 1981 to exert pressure on the United States. On this, see Rey, "Europe is our Common Home."
34. See Mueller, "Die KPdSU und Europa," 48.
35. Official negotiations began in September 1986, which, despite striking differences over the inclusion of West Berlin, eventually led to a joint declaration and bilateral and multilateral agreements between the EC and the individual CMEA states. Regular contacts between the West European institution and the CMEA were established on 25 June 1988; and diplomatic relations between the EC and the USSR were established in November. See Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn*, 67.
36. Johnston, "Revisiting the Cultural Cold War," 295.
37. Pernau, *Transnationale Geschichte*; Bauerkämper, "Wege zur europäischen Geschichte"; Kocka, "Comparison and Beyond"; Haupt, "Comparative History."
38. Schaber and Ulbert, "Reflexivität in den Internationalen Beziehungen," 143; Zubok, "The Collapse of the Soviet Union," 272–73.

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