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The post-Stalinist mode of Chekism: communist secret police forces and regime change after mass terror

What is "Chekism"?

The centenary of the founding of the Soviet secret police known as the "Cheka" gives rise to a closer examination of the extensive research on the "Soviet-type" of secret police in terms of their long-term development. Secret police forces were evidently of constitutive importance to the communist regimes. At the same time, their role was subject to considerable change and variation with respect to their role in the fabric of the communist power apparatuses, their methods, and the groups in society against which they were directed.

The following text outlines five phases in the development of the Soviet secret police and its "brother organs" in the Eastern Bloc. In the second part of this chapter, continuity and change will be exemplified by the transition to the third, "post--Stalinist" phase, focusing on the cases of the Soviet Committee for State Security (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, KGB) and the East German Ministry of State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, MfS).

Political police are not an exclusive feature of Soviet communism, but a general feature of modern statehood. The Soviet type of secret police forces, however, have some specific characteristics: they saw themselves as an armed domestic power organ that aimed to secure the rule of the Communist Party and its state. As "organs of state security" they took up a stable but also "extraordinary" (in the literal sense of the word) institutional position in Soviet-style societies.[1]

In doing so they referred to the tradition of the Cheka as a revolutionary power organ and the bearer of a canon of values and principles that made up the special spirit of these organs. They also built their own legitimacy with respect to practices of persecution and surveillance. This spectrum of practices covered five broad areas: 1. the killing of opponents; 2. the use of other forms of physical violence or mental pressure directly aimed at physical suffering; 3. arrests and temporary or permanent

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1   For a general overview see PERSAK, Krzysztof – KAMIŃSKI, Łukasz (eds.): *A Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus in East Central Europe 1944/45–1989*. IPN, Warsaw 2005; additional chapters by HILGER, Andreas: Sowjetunion (1945–1991), pp. 43–141, and UNGVARY, Krisztian – TABAJDI, Gabor: Ungarn, pp. 481–554, In: KAMIŃSKI, Łukasz – PERSAK, Krzysztof – GIESEKE, Jens (eds.): *Handbuch der kommunistischen Geheimdienste in Osteuropa 1944–1991*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2008; FARALDO, José M.: *Las redes del terror. Las policías secretas comunistas y su legado*. Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona 2018.

detentions; 4. interfering in the lives of opponents but stopping short of direct arrests; and 5. the preventive surveillance of people and the associated obligation of wider sections of the population to participate in this surveillance or further measures in some cases.

The self-conception of the secret police forces includes a very extensive, in principle unlimited legitimacy of the application of such measures. This self-understanding was articulated in words and deeds; partly secret, partly in public. It corresponded with promoted images of the secret police and the ways that broader layers of the population perceived them as a factor in their personal lives. This ensemble of positionings in the political system, references the overarching political agenda, the definition of enemies and their relation to other parts of the population, and the public, half-public, or secret legitimation of the range of practices referred to here as "Chekism".

"Chekism" (as an "ism") was not a term used by the secret police forces during Soviet times, but in the sense it is used here, it has its roots in the self-designation of the Soviet secret police as "chekists", as cultural historian Julie Fedor used it in her analysis of the Dzerzhinsky cult in the Soviet Union. As Fedor puts it, the self-image of "chekists" was *unique and unprecedented* in contrast with other police forces or state institutions in general.[2] Conversely, the term "Chekism" for the overall structure of this self-image was simply a twofold product of the post-Soviet era: on the one hand, the term was established in the 1990s as a self-designation; on the other hand, the term also made its way into public analyses of the inner life of the communist secret police.[3]

The core elements of the role and self-image of a "Soviet-style secret police" stand for continuity over the decades and different eras of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, they were subject to repeated changes in each of these fields. Therefore, "Chekism" is not just an abstract set of ideological principles but has changed along with political and social dynamics.

– The relationship with communist parties and their leaderships was subject to considerable modifications, which were related to the changing function of the communist parties in the political systems of the Eastern Bloc, e.g. from more personal, client-based forms of rule under Stalin, to a bureaucratized elite.

– Associated with these changes were different functions of the "Dzerzhinsky cult", public appearance and popularized images, etc.

– The toolkit of practices and the groups targeted by specific methods also underwent change, as shown by the number and composition of those killed and detained over the course of the century. Behind this were different policies and demands of the political leadership regarding the intended threat through persecution in their policy as a whole.

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2   FEDOR, Julie: *Russia and the Cult of State Security: The Chekist Tradition, From Lenin to Putin*. Routledge, London 2011.

3   See GIESEKE, Jens: Ideologie, Tschekistische. In: ENGELMANN, Roger et. al.: *Das MfS-Lexikon*. Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin 2011, pp. 152–154. The Chechen historian Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov used the term "Chekism" as early as in the 1950s, but in a different sense. He claimed that "Chekism" was a "universal force" that even outstripped the role of the Communist Party. See URALOV, Alexander (pseudonym): *The Reign of Stalin*. The Bodley Head, London 1953, pp. 13–14.

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– Finally, the references to communist ideology and Utopia were subject to change, responding to the socio-political goals of the communist parties. This included theoretical self-locations on the way from a "dictatorship of the proletariat" to "communism", but also references other ideologies such as nationalism or statism.

While all the Eastern Bloc secret police forces understood themselves as being communist, it is debatable to what extent they explicitly referred to the concept of being "chekists". This was evidently different from case to case and was dependent on two factors: the question of how useful it seemed to be to identify with the Russian--Soviet colouring of this tradition on the one hand; and, on the other, the strength and mobilizability of competing national traditions. For the Soviet Union itself, this mythology and its transformation was clearly outlined.[4] Bulgarian and the East German state security placed themselves in this tradition in a relatively explicit manner, which in turn was rejected by representatives of the KGB as presumptuousness.[5] Moreover, even in these cases, the "Cheka tradition" always competed with other lines of tradition and self-understanding that helped to shape identity. For example, anti--fascist resistance and the partisan struggle played a major role in the Soviet case, but especially in the East German case as well. These traditions proved to be historically closer after 1945 and were represented directly in the biographies of some top-brass officers. Anti-fascism could at least potentially generate a certain degree of legitimacy beyond the communist milieu in the strictest sense. In the other Eastern Bloc countries, there were distinct mixtures in relation to the "Cheka-Dzerzhinsky" tradition. National motives could be added to the self-images, or even allowed the explicit references to the "Chekist" tradition to disappear completely. In Poland, Dzerzhinsky's Polish origins added their own facets to the Dzerzhinsky myth. In Czechoslovakia, the Interior Ministry propagated the Dzerzhinsky and Cheka tradition to a certain extent, which has to be explored in more detail in future research. This also applies in the cases of Hungary and Romania.[6]

Five stages of "Chekism" – towards a periodization

With regard to the previously outlined dimensions of the political role, the self--understanding, and the practices of persecution, five phases can be hypothetically distinguished in the history of "Chekism". They can only be roughly sketched here:

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4   FEDOR, Julie: *Russia and the Cult of State Security*.
5   For more on Bulgaria: NEHRING, Christopher: *Die Zusammenarbeit der DDR-Auslandsaufklärung mit der Aufklärung der Volksrepublik Bulgarien. Regionalfilialen des KGB?* (Dissertation thesis). University of Heidelberg, undated; on East Germany: GIESEKE, Jens: Die Sichtbarkeit der geheimen Polizei. Zur öffentlichen Darstellung und Wahrnehmung der Staatssicherheit im DDR-Alltag. In: HEIDEMEYER, Helge (ed.): *"Akten-Einsichten". Beiträge zum historischen Ort der Staatssicherheit. Festschrift für Roger Engelmann zum 60. Geburtstag*. BStU, Berlin 2016, pp. 100–117. Czech version: Otevřená a skrytá přítomnost tajné policie. O veřejné prezentaci a vnímání státní bezpečnosti v každodenním životě NDR. *Securitas Imperii*, 2017, No. 31, pp. 114–130.
6   SOMMER, Vítězslav: Druhý život Felixe Dzeržinského. In: *Aktivity NKVD/KGB a její spolupráce s tajnými službami střední a východní Evropy 1945–1989*, II. ÚSTR, Prague 2009, pp. 93–104; BLAŽEK, Petr: „Chladnou hlavu, planoucí srdce a čisté ruce." Rozkaz ministrů vnitra k 100. výročí narození zak-

– Revolution and post-revolution, 1917 to 1929:

The founding of the Cheka and its development in the 1920s was marked by the construction and legitimization of a sharp, largely out-of-court system of persecution aimed at eliminating all political and social counterforces against Bolshevik rule. It was legitimized as a ruthless struggle for the survival of Soviet power. Under the New Economic Policy there was an at least gradual restriction of this persecution; the excessive killing of the civil war came to an end. The secret-police camp system had already been established in this phase, with tens of thousands of camp inmates. As recent research emphasizes, the Cheka's actions cannot be understood simply as the repression of opponents of the Bolshevik revolution. The use of force was based on "cleansing" them from society and creating a "healthy body politic". Here, Marxist and Leninist ideas of class struggle mixed with totalitarian concepts of social hygiene.[7] And already in this phase, the Cheka established itself not only as an instrument of the party, but also as an actor with its own interests and strategies.[8]

– Stalinism, 1929 to 1953:

This period was marked by the direct subordination of the secret police under the personal rule of Stalin and the unlimited expansion of terror as an instrument for shaping Soviet society. These included the waves of mass murders in the 1930s and the expansion of the camp system to its peak in the early 1950s. Secret policing at this stage still followed the logic of chekist "cleansing" and expanded it to include waves of systematic mass terror.[9] It not only targeted actual opponents of Soviet power and social and ethnic groups who were considered "objective" enemies, but also degenerated into an arbitrary and unpredictable persecution system, which virtually anyone could fall victim to, including hundreds of thousands of communists.[10]

ladatele sovětské tajné služby Felixe Edmundoviče Dzeržinského. In: *Sborník Archivu bezpečnostních složek*, 2007, No. 5. OABS MV ČR, Prague 2007, pp. 255–270.

7   HOLQUIST, Peter: State Violence as Technique. The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism. In: WEINER, Amir (ed.): *Landscaping the Human Garden. Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework*. Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, pp. 19–45; RYAN, James: *Lenin's Terror: The Ideological Origins of Early Soviet State Violence*. Routledge, London 2012; LAUCHLAN, Iain: *Young Felix Dzerzhinsky and the Origins of Stalinism*. Edinburgh Research Explorer – see http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/young-felix-dzerzhinsky-and-the-origins-of- stalinism%282fbef31b--b770-40aa-8a5a-252c06ca2134%29.html (quoted version dated 30. 11. 2020). For more on the Cheka in general, see: LEGGETT, George: *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police: the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-revolution and Sabotage, December 1917 to February 1922*. Clarendon Press, New York 1981; WERTH, Nicolas: Soviet Union (1917–1945). In: PERSAK, Krzysztof – KAMIŃSKI, Łukasz (eds.): *A Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus in East Central Europe 1944/45–1989*, pp. 13–35.

8   See, for instance, MELANCON, Michael: Revolutionary Culture in the Early Soviet Republic. Communist Executive Committees versus the Cheka, Fall 1918. *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 2009, Vol. 57, No. 1, pp. 1–22.

9   HOLQUIST, Peter: *State Violence as Technique*, p. 30.

10   For my understanding of Stalinism see in particular BABEROWSKI, Jörg: *Scorched Earth. Stalin's Reign of Terror*. Yale University Press, New Haven 2017. On the NKVD mass terror GETTY, J. Arch – NAUMOV, Oleg V.: *The Road to Terror. Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939*. Yale University Press, New Haven – London 1999; KHLEVNIUK, Oleg: *The History of the Gulag. From Collectivization to the Great Terror*. Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2004.

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And this phase included the successive expansion of the persecution system to the new territories of Soviet hegemony: in the Baltic region from 1939 to 1941, and in eastern central Europe and south-eastern Europe from 1944 onwards. This was again accompanied by far-reaching waves of mass persecution according to political, social, and ethnic criteria.[11] At the same time, the Soviet secret police initiated the establishment of secret police forces in these regions, trained the forces there, and conveyed to them the spirit of their actions.[12]

– Post-Stalinism: 1953 to the mid-to-late 1970s.

This phase will be discussed in more detail below. It is marked by the departure from mass terror with millions dead or incarcerated in camps, and by a partly forced, somewhat consciously designed, repositioning of the secret police forces as actors in society. They thus became a crucial factor in political and social stability based on a broad surveillance presence. The post-Stalinist mode of "Chekism" included a shift from shaping Soviet society as a body politic by means of cleansing through executions and expulsions to using instruments of preventive control and "prophylactic" interventions. And it led to a new fusion of old and new, "modern" professional understandings in the ranks of the secret police.

– Late Socialism: 1979 to 1989/1991.

It is difficult to differentiate this extensive surveillance of – and broad intrusion into – social life from the creeping transition to a new phase, in which the secret police forces still had extensive power resources, but in the face of increasing socio-economic difficulties could no longer maintain and defend the stability of the entire system and successively lost their ability to act. Violent actions (as in Poland in 1980–1981) no longer led to lasting stabilization, and the pressure of persecution declined noticeably as compared to the post-Stalinist phase. This was reflected, for example, in much lower arrest figures.

At the same time, a subtle change in the value system of "Chekism" can be observed at this stage: the "revolutionary", in the narrower and broader sense "communist", value orientations played a declining role, while the focus on self-understanding as a large "statist" actor in society gained increasing relevance.

The year 1977 can perhaps serve as a provisional point of reference for this shift: it stood for the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the founding of Cheka and the 100th birthday of Dzerzhinsky. The demonstrative emphasis on this tradition was accompanied by its transition into a "mere" historical reference point. The revolutionary spirit of a deep, formative penetration into society by violent means was still there, but finally "museumized". It had nothing to do with the daily performance of duties except as a historical legitimation for its own position of power.

11   WEINER, Amir – RAHI-TAMM, Aigi: Getting to Know You: The Soviet Surveillance System, 1939–1957. *Kritika*, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 5–45; WEINER, Amir: Why Memory Counts. War Genocide and Post-war Soviet Jewry. In: WEINER, Amir (ed.): *Landscaping the Human Garden*, p. 167–188; GROSS, Jan T.: *Revolution from Abroad. The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*. Princeton University Press, Princeton 2002; TISMANEANU, Vladimir (ed.): *Stalinism Revisited. The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe*. CEU Press, Budapest 2009.

12   PUCCI, Molly: *Security Empire. The Secret Police in Communist Eastern Europe*. Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2020.

More visible turning points were the medium-term failure of violent stabilization in Poland after 1981, which became tangible in the unsuccessful attempt to conceal the murder of Catholic priest Jerzy Popieluszko by sentencing subordinate secret police officers. The ambivalent roles of the KGB in the Soviet Union are especially characteristic of this phase: here, interpretations and understandings competed as well-informed pioneers of the necessary renewal (represented by Andropov's role as Gorbachev's patron[13]), as guardians of the communist legacy, and as a new, extremely power-conscious elite, which asserted continuity into the post-communist era.[14]

– Post-Communist demise and revival, 1991–present:

This led to the (for the time being) last phase, the existential crisis of Chekism during the dissolution of the Soviet empire and the transition to post-communist disorder. In the central European countries, the "chekist" secret police institutions were dissolved and continuity was established first and foremost in terms of personnel in some branches like the intelligence services or in the privatization of the security sector in the 1990s. In the Russian or post-Soviet case, we see – after a period of uncertainty – the renaissance of "Chekism" as an aggressive, power-conscious Great Russian state ideology, which is part of the ambition to compensate and overcome the "humiliation" brought about by the decay of Soviet power. From the second half of the 1990s, former KGB officers gained more and more important positions in the political and economic life of the post-Soviet sphere. And at the same time, a return to practices of persecution can be observed which reached and exceeded the level of the late communist period of the 1980s. These include the gradual elimination of constitutional barriers established in the meantime, as well as a return to the killing of "enemies" and "traitors" as a half-obscured, half-staged political practice. It would be a worthwhile goal to write such a history of the trajectory of "Chekism" over the course of 100 years and to classify the diversity of individual regimes' paths into such a panorama. That is not possible here. But in the following, the reorganization and subsequent stabilization of "Chekism" in the Soviet Union and East Germany from about 1956–1957 to the mid-1970s will be examined as examples for such an approach to the history of "Chekism".

Was there a new mode? Dimensions of change

It is quite controversial to understand the time after Stalin's death until the middle of the 1970s as a separate stage in the history of communism. On the one hand, it stands in contrast to a reading that emphasizes the continuities, especially the continuities of repression. On the other hand, it distinguishes itself from interpretations

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13   See, for example, the chapter Andropov's Ally in: MEDVEDEV, Zhores: *Gorbachev*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1986, pp. 119–136.

14   For example KOTKIN, Stephen (with GROSS, Jan T.): *Uncivil Society. 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*. The Modern Library, New York 2009; ALBATS, Jevgenia: *The State Within a State*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1994; KNIGHT, Amy: *The KGB. Police and Politics in the USSR*. Unwin Hyman, Boston 1988; SOLDATOV, Andrei – BOROGAN, Irina: *The New Mobility. The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB*. Public Affairs, New York 2010.

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that take the entire communist history after Stalin as progressive decline.[15] Rather, it focuses on the argument that, after the end of the Stalinist terror, Communist Party leaders succeeded in achieving a new, relatively stable mode of communist rule based on an ever-present, but contained, repressive threat. However, this was also based on an offer of improved social and economic living conditions. Amongst the supporting milieus of Party rule in society, this new mode contained a renewed understanding of the historical mission, which was based partly on the idea of a "return to Lenin", and partly on the Utopias of technical modernity.[16] Especially in the first years, this phase was characterized by a movement among the Party leadership to conduct a political search, which aimed at not losing control of society, but still giving room for new dynamics. This search for a new mode created intense challenges for the secret police forces and their role as repressive instruments.

This period began with de-Stalinization, the declared end of mass terror, and the rehabilitation of its victims – and, if they had survived: their release into the (relative) freedom of state socialist societies. At this stage, the communist leaders felt themselves faced with the task of redefining the role of repression and persecution, and thus the role of the secret police in their respective societies

Even contemporary observers quickly understood that Stalin's successors had taken a qualitatively new socio-political course and that conditions in the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence had changed substantially. For example, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt stated in 1966 in her preliminary remarks to a new German edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: *Obviously, the end of the war did not mean at the same time the end of totalitarian rule in Russia. On the contrary, it was followed by the Bolshevization of Eastern Europe, the spread of total rule.* [...] *Not the end of the war, but Stalin's death eight years later brought the change. In retrospect, it seems as if his death has not just caused a succession crisis and a "thaw" that lasted until a new leader prevailed, but a real, albeit never unequivocal, dismantling of total rule.*[17]

The Soviet leaders, who themselves were deeply involved in the Stalinist killing, set a new course in place of the mass terror as an omnipresent factor in the everyday life of broad sections of the population and not least the higher ranks of the socialist elites. The German historian Jörg Baberowski labelled this as the *reliability of expectations*[18] – a peace offer to society that had nothing to do with the rule of law or even

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15   FURET, Francois: *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1999.

16   For more on the concept, see KOLÁŘ, Pavel: *Der Poststalinismus: Ideologie und Utopie einer Epoche*. Böhlau Verlag, Cologne – Weimar – Vienna 2016; KOLÁŘ, Pavel: Post-Stalinist Reformism and the Prague Spring. In: NAIMARK, Norman – PONS, Silvio – QUINN-JUDGE, Sophie (eds.): *The Cambridge History of Communism. Vol. II: The Socialist Camp and World Power 1941–1960s*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017, pp. 170–195.

17   ARENDT, Hannah: Preface to *Elemente und Ursprünge, Teil III. Totale Herrschaft*. Ullstein Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1975, p. 475. All translations in this study are the author's.

18   BABEROWSKI, Jörg: Nikita Khrushchev and De-Stalinization in the Soviet Union 1953–1964. In: NAIMARK, Norman – PONS, Silvio – QUINN-JUDGE, Sophie (eds.): *The Cambridge History of Communism. Vol. II*, pp. 113–138.

democracy, but nevertheless established a novel relationship between the Communist Party, its repressive organs, and the broader population.

The most important stages of this change are well known: the arrest and execution of former State Security head Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria, the rehabilitation of murdered victims of Stalinism, and the reintegration of hundreds of thousands of surviving Gulag prisoners in the second half of the 1950s.[19]

A plethora of questions arose from this new course – for the Party leadership, the secret police, and its officers, because, at first, it was by no means clear how far these changes should go, whether this would bring about a renewed stabilization of Communist Party rule, and what concrete role the repressive apparatus should have in the future. In the following text, three dimensions of this search for a new role for the "Chekists" in post-Stalinist times shall be discussed: the role of the secret police in respect to the Communist Party and its leaders; the definition of target groups of repression and surveillance as part of positioning within society; the change in the means of repression, and the role played by public images of the secret police forces.

Relations between the Communist Party, the secret police, and society

The most important prerequisite for the definition of a new role was the clear subordination of the secret police to the Party leadership as a collective.

This included the replacement of top-brass officials and some initiatives for staff cuts, the exchange of secret policemen now classified as "inappropriate", the recruitment of a new generation of young officers, and the proclamation of a new, "modern" self-image, symbolized by the famous change towards a less militant appearance in dress code, from leather coat and uniform to business suit.[20]

It depended on the circumstances in the respective countries how "anti-Stalinist" this impulse actually happened to be. In the Soviet Union, real change was symbolized only after the departure in December 1958 of the head of the KGB, Ivan Serov, who had been at the helm since March 1954, and the arrival of the external and young, former consecutive Komsomol first secretaries Alexander Shelepin and, from 1961, Vladimir Semichastnyi.[21] In East Germany it was the other way round: the new Stasi head, Ernst Wollweber, appointed on Soviet orders in the summer of 1953, initiated several steps in this direction until he failed in a power struggle with the leadership of the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) in

19   DOBSON, Miriam: *Khrushchev's Cold Summer, Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca – London 2009.

20   UHL, Matthias: Vom Instrument des Massenterrors zum Verfassungsschutz? Versuche sowjetischer Geheimdienstreformen 1945–1967. In: DIEDRICH, Torsten – SÜSS, Walter (eds.): *Militär und Staatssicherheit im Sicherheitskonzept der Warschauer-Pakt-Staaten*. Ch. Links, Berlin 2010, pp. 55–76; HILGER, Andreas: Sowjetunion (1945–1991). In: KAMIŃSKI, Łukasz – PERSAK, Krzysztof – GIESEKE, Jens (eds.): *Handbuch der kommunistischen Geheimdienste in Osteuropa 1944–1991*, pp. 53–69.

21   See SEMICHASTNYI, Vladimir: *Bezpokoinoye Serdtse*. Vagrius, Moscow 2002; NN: Die sowjetischen Sicherheitsorgane. Ihre Wandlungen von Dsierzynskij bis Schelepin. *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 1959, No. 49, pp. 665–679.

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1956–57, and was replaced by Erich Mielke, probably the most Stalinist secret police head of the post-Stalinist era.[22]

What is striking about all these variations, however, is that the actual change in personnel remained clearly limited: there was a certain disciplining of "wild" apparatus, but the much-discussed educational offensive remained a more or less superficial phenomenon.[23] In the Soviet Union, the generation of "young Komsomolzy" quickly and intensively appropriated the esprit de corps of the secret police apparatus, which was still based on defining and persecuting "enemies" and defending their institutional status. This resulted in one of the reasons for the participation of the KGB in the coup against the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, in 1964.[24] In that sense, the secret police represented continuity as one of the columns of communist statehood.

Part of this ambivalent relaunch was the clear commitment to continue to see themselves as "chekists". In the context of de-Stalinization, this commitment had an enormous stabilizing function for the apparatus, which initially felt insecure about its future. As Julie Fedor has shown, it was also possible to flexibly redesign the contents of "Chekism" with the renaissance of the Dzerzhinsky cult as a myth of both "extraordinary" and "clean and pure" combat against the enemy.[25] For example, the erection of the Dzerzhinsky monument in front of the Lubyanka building and the newly established children's shop "Detskiy Mir" at Dzerzhinsky Square in Moscow, and the publicly announced closure of the prison in Lubyanka in 1958 obviously had an important impact on calming the KGB's poor expectations about its future.

However, at this stage of the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was by no means fixed which role the secret police would play along with the other maxims of post-Stalinist policy, such as improving living and consumption standards, allowing private spaces for retreat and happiness, and generating a certain amount of trust in the predictability of state action.[26]

22   ENGELMANN, Roger – SCHUMANN, Silke: Kurs auf die entwickelte Diktatur. Walter Ulbricht, die Entmachtung Ernst Wollwebers und die Neuausrichtung des Staatssicherheitsdienstes 1956/57. *BF informiert*, 1995, No. 1. BStU, Berlin 1995; on Mielke: OTTO, Wilfriede: *Erich Mielke – Biographie: Aufstieg und Fall eines Tschekisten*. Dietz Verlag, Berlin 2000.

23   For more on East Germany: GIESEKE, Jens: Die hauptamtlichen Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit. Personalstruktur und Lebenswelt 1950–1989/90. Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin 2000, pp. 197–222, 274–292.

24   For more on Shelepin: SNIEGON, Tomas: Vlastolyubivnye Komsomolzy. Konflikt politicheskich pokolenyi v kommunisticheskom rukovodstve SSSR v seredinye 1960-ch. In: *Posle Stalina. Reformy 1950-ch godov v kontekste sovietskoy i postsovietskoy istorii. Materialy VIII mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoy konferencii Yekaterinburg, 15–17 oktabrya 2015 g.* Rosspen, Moscow 2016, pp. 238–246.

25   FEDOR, Julie: *Russia and the Cult of State Security*.

26   FITZPATRICK, Sheila: Introduction to the English Edition: Popular Sedition in the Post-Stalin Soviet Union. In: KOZLOV, Vladimir A. – FITZPATRICK, Sheila – MIRONENKO, Sergej V. (eds.): *Sedition: Everyday Resistance in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and Brezhnev*. Yale University Press, New Haven 2011, pp. 1–24.

Changing images of the enemy

The decisive field of change for post-Stalinist "Chekism", however, lay in the images of the enemy of the secret police – on the one hand, the question of who should be regarded as a (potential or manifest) enemy in socialist society and, on the other hand, how to legitimately deal with these enemies. From the point of view of Party leaders, it was important to focus the image of the enemy on actors beyond the socialist elites (including the Party apparatus and the security apparatus itself) and the broader population, and define hostile activities as something that could be found at the social, political, and religious margins of society.

Thus, the concentration of "chekist" work shifted from the search for omnipresent "spies" to the more general concept of "enemies". This shift included the perception of a less direct connection to external imperialist forces and, at the same time, a finer gradation of socio-political groups and their respective "hostile" behaviours.

Figure 1: Word counts of "spy/spies" and "enemy/enemies" in *Neues Deutschland*, 1946–1975[27]
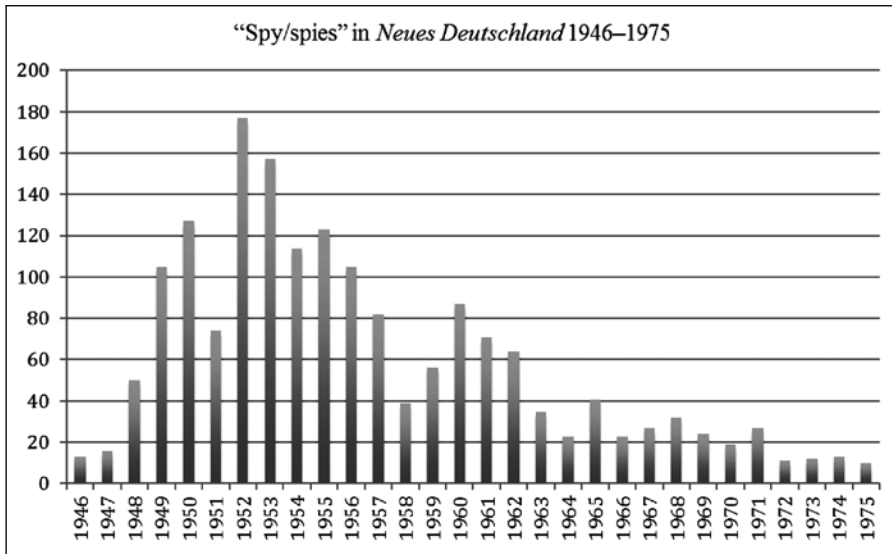
One example of this shift can be seen in the frequencies of the terms "spies" and "enemies" in the East German Party newspaper *Neues Deutschland*. The term "enemies" was strongly present in the newspaper when Stalinism was at a high level, from 1950 to 1953, and remained present with more or less constant numbers after de-

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27   Calculations based on the digital newspaper database *Zeitungsportal DDR-Presse* – see http://zefys. staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ (quoted version dated 30. 11. 2020).

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"Enemy/enemies" in *Neues Deutschland* 1946–1975
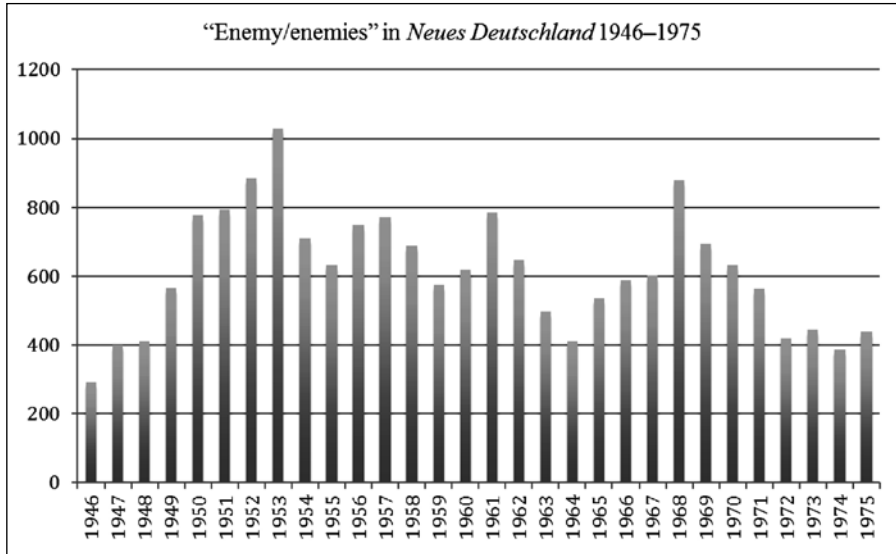
-Stalinization until 1971. Within this period, the ups and downs of SED repressive policy can be read clearly: the peaks can be found in the years of confrontational climaxes, i.e. the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. During the period of reform policy and a certain relaxation of regime-society-relations in 1963–1964, the term lost its significance in the Party newspaper. On the other hand, "spies" had been important as impersonations of the evil and the direct connection between internal enemies and external hostile forces for the Stalinist mode of legitimizing persecution. The frequency of this term reached its first low during the wave of de-Stalinization in 1956–1958, and more or less lost its role as a marker of hostile activities after another peak in 1960–1961.

In the internal language of the security services, this shift turned into a number of varieties of the term "ideological subversion" as the concept of the main threat.[28] This "subversion" was seen as being inspired by Western-capitalist ideas, but was not classified as direct espionage. In this way, religious and nationalist actors and groups, liberal dissidents from the intelligentsia, as well as all groups of the population who were approachable by influences from the West, such as youths influenced by pop culture, were the focus of attention.

Linked to this was the diversification of the binary friend-foe concept into a more diversified perception of society, which saw the broader population as a "middle" group exposed to the dangers of "ideological subversion", but at the same time loyal

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28 ENGELMANN, Roger: Politisch-Ideologische Diversion. In: ENGELMANN, Roger et. al.: *Das MfS--Lexikon*. Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin 2011, p. 68; GIESEKE, Jens: *The History of the Stasi. East Germany's Secret Police, 1945–1990*. Berghahn, New York – Oxford 2014, pp. 51–59.

and benevolent. This resulted in a three-part action strategy: first, preventive control to curb subversion as a potential threat; second, the paternalistic concept of direct but measured intervention with a mixture of threats of sanctions and warnings of the dangers of a "wrong" way; and, thirdly, the further integration of the broader population into these monitoring and control concepts through the use of recruited informers and state and Party officials.

In the Soviet Union this was in keeping with the explicit propagation of the paternalistic and medical-biologistic concept of *profilaktika*,[29] which means (again in the words of Julie Fedor), that *Chekists were merciful with regard to those whose misdemeanours stemmed from insufficient political consciousness, and made wide use of preventive and educational (vos'pitatel'nye) measures with regard to such citizens, as opposed to simply punishing or repressing them.*[30]

The number of persecutions in the USSR for political reasons had been continuously decreasing since 1957 and reached an annual level of around 100 to 350 in the early 1960s.

Table 1: Annual sentences for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda (Article 58-10) 1956–1964[31]

Year	Sentences
1956	384
1957	1,964
1958	1,416
1959	750
1960	162
1961	207
1962	323
1963	341
1964	181

Over the same period, the number of cases handled with prophylactic measures had been steadily rising, reaching around 15,000 cases in the second half of the 1960s. This level was maintained until 1985.

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29 Reshenie prezidiuma CK KPSS ob usilenii borby s „brzhdebnymi projavlenjami antisovietskich elementov", 19. 6. 1962. In: KOKURIN, A. I. – PETROV, Nikita V. (eds.): *Lubjanka. VChK – NKVD – NKGB – MGB – MVD – KGB, 1917–1991. Spravochnik.* MFD, Moscow 2003, pp. 702–710.
30 FEDOR, Julie: *Russia and the Cult of State Security.*
31 HORNSBY, Robert: *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 116. Citing: O Massovych Besporjadkach s 1957 goda... *Istochnik. Dokumenty russkoi istorii*, 1995, No. 6, pp. 146–153.

Table 2: Cases of KGB profilaktika measures[32]

Year	Number of cases
1967–1970	14,574 on average p.a.
1971–1974	15,777 on average p.a.
1978	15,580
1985	15,274
1986	10,275
1989	338

The concept of prophylactic measures covered several components: the public promotion of the associated value norms, the increased involvement of communal policing, and direct approaches by KGB officers through subpoenas or informal talks. With the medical-biopolitical implications of the term, it followed the Cheka traditions of "cleansing". Now, however, it was no longer killing or segregation in prisons, camps, or remote regions that had precedence, but the warning talk. This conversation reminded the delinquent that sanctions could still be imposed without applying them. Individually, it was often perceived as a deep cut, and, at the same time, it had a strong, generally preventive effect.[33]

Thus, the concept of *profilaktika* comprised different elements: first, the deliberate or at least implicit threat of direct persecution by the secret police (the opportunities for this were still not reliably limited by constitutional guarantees); second, the use of a graded escalation and "education" program, and third, the systematic pursuit of linking state persecution and cooperation with the population. The aim was to convey common, more or less ideological or traditional values, which, for example, were meant to be directed against adolescent troublemakers or the elitist dissident intelligentsia. This was accompanied by the systematic expansion of cooperation with Party and state officials as well as recruited informers in all sectors of economic, social, and political life.[34]

In East Germany, the concept of *profilaktika* never featured explicitly, while a number of steps read quite similarly in terms of the relationship between state power, the population, and potential dissenters. The strongest period in this respect was after the completion of agricultural collectivization in 1959–1960 and the wave of arrests immediately after the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. The

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32 HILGER, Andreas: *Sowjetunion (1945–1991)*, p. 125.
33 COHN, Edward D.: A Soviet Theory of Broken Windows. Prophylactic Policing and the KGB's Struggle with Political Unrest in the Baltic Republics. *Kritika*, 2018, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 769–792; COHN, Edward: Prophylactic Policing and the Epidemiology of Dissent in the Soviet-Era Baltic States. In: FAHS, Breanne – MANN, Annika – STAGE, Sarah – SWANK, Eric (eds.): *Transforming Contagion: Risky Contacts among Bodies, Nations, and Disciplines*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 2018, pp. 189–203; HARRISON, Mark: *If You Do Not Change Your Behaviour: Managing Threats to State Security in Lithuania under Soviet Rule* (CAGE Working Paper 247). University of Warwick, Warwick 2015.
34 HORNSBY, Robert: *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union*, pp. 117–126.

22nd congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (KPSS) in November 1961 gave a visible external impulse at this point. In April 1962, the SED Politburo adopted a paper, which was still secret at this stage, expressly promoting alternatives to the imposition of prison sentences, including suspended sentences, "public rebukes", and handing the matter over to "conflict commissions" at the workplace. The justice, home affairs and state security ministers were specifically appointed to attend this Politburo meeting.[35] A few weeks later, the new line was also published (in less explicit form) as a decision of the State Council, which was formally the highest state institution of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).[36]

In November 1962, the East German Supreme Court issued a ruling calling for the *exposure and differentiated punishment* of those who genuinely perpetrated and condemned the state, *without compromising the open atmosphere of discussion of political and social issues and dispute with backward citizens*.[37]

This course correction formed a long-term turning point in the repressive history of the GDR: in 1962, for the first time, the number of those persecuted because they tried to escape across the border exceeded those who were persecuted for offenses involving hostile propaganda and other forms of internal dissent.

At that time the Ministry of State Security of the GDR was under considerable pressure: even at the Politburo level the expectation had been formulated that, after the construction of the Berlin Wall, the domestic situation had been stabilized so that the competences and resources of the ministry should be reduced.

Against this background, the minister, Erich Mielke, quarrelled intensively with the new development and prevailed in the end with an extremely expansive interpretation of the post-Stalinist concept. It is telling for the pending debate about the future of the secret police that, in May 1963, Mielke even gave his first and only radio interview in his more than 30-year term to promote the new self-image of state power and to strengthen the connection to the population. And he was quoted in the press with his personal interpretation of the new situation: *It is important to foster public awareness that the extended rights are closely linked to the commitment of all citizens to be vigilant in order to work together with the security organs to protect the construction of socialism and freedom, the life and property of the citizens of the German Democratic Republic*.[38]

And indeed, this move towards more or less "friendly talks" and operational measures below the level of arrests was the starting point for large programs of preventive surveillance in each and every section of society.

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35   ENGELMANN, Roger – JOESTEL, Frank: *Die Hauptabteilung IX: Untersuchung, (Anatomie der Staatssicherheit. Geschichte, Strukturen und Methoden)*. BStU, Berlin 2016, pp. 93–94.

36   Beschluss des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zum Bericht des Obersten Gerichts über die Durchführung des Beschlusses über die weitere Entwicklung der Rechtspflege vom 24. Mai 1962. *Neues Deutschland*, 26. 5. 1962, p. 1.

37   Beschluss des Obersten Gerichtes über die sorgfältige Überprüfung der Voraussetzungen und die richtige Anwendung der Tatbestände der staatsgefährdenden Propaganda und Hetze (§ 19 StEG) und der Staatsverleumdung (§ 20 StEG) und über die vorbeugende Bekämpfung dieser Straftaten, 14. 11. 1962. Quoted in: ENGELMANN, Roger – JOESTEL, Frank: *Die Hauptabteilung IX*, p. 97.

38   ENGELMANN, Roger – JOESTEL, Frank: *Die Hauptabteilung IX*, pp. 94–97.

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The decrease of physical violence and its limits

Linked to this shift was another important change in the methods of state security: the abandonment of the boundless physical violence, particularly the mass killing of persecuted people and the cult built around it, which represented chekists as "new men".[39] It was important to reestablish some rules of "proportionate and limited means" in the internal and to some extent in the public legitimation of state security actions. For instance, in an internal Stasi meeting in May 1956 the SED party leader, Walter Ulbricht, announced the new stance concerning repression practices: *We have to build a new base, so that people learn that no arrests will be made haphazardly and, in the event that people are arrested, they get the right to a defence.*[40] And even then deputy minister Mielke felt obliged to join in with the new tones: *One has to think twice before arresting someone. And it is particularly important that evidence must be as thorough as possible.*[41]

Although both of them renounced such statements later on, this shift included a strong decline in the death tolls and the use of physical torture during interrogations, as well as the number of assassinations and kidnappings. As reports about internal discussions show, this kind of disciplining posed an extraordinary challenge to the secret policemen involved, such as interrogators, who saw their previous work as being questioned and who still considered it legitimate and necessary to defeat the enemy at all costs. It is therefore no coincidence that this process of "deviolencing" should not be confused with a path to the rule of law. Rather, it reflected three major modifications of the chekist legitimation of the use of violence:

1. Physical and lethal violence continued to be seen as legitimate in a state of emergency, as the uprisings of the 1960s and 1970s showed, like the upheaval of Novocherkassk in 1962, the invasion in Czechoslovakia 1968, strikes und upheavals in Poland etc., with several dozen killed.

2. Physical violence and preparations within the secret police were made increasingly secret and shifted to small, highly conspiratorial task forces. As a result, the vast majority of secret police officers in their service never came into a situation where they used physical or even lethal force. Nevertheless, it was extremely important to the self-understanding of these apparatuses to continue to legitimize the option of lethal operations, particularly with regard to maintaining the "chekist spirit" by killing traitors or other particularly dangerous enemies.

3. This kind of "encapsulation" of direct physical violence went along with a shift in practices of arrest and interrogation as well. The number of arrests and sentences became significantly lower after 1957 and the risk of being arrested became more

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39   BABEROWSKI, Jörg: *Scorched Earth.*
40   Speech by Walter Ulbricht, MfS party active meeting, 11 May 1956. *Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (BStU), Ministry for State Security (MfS), Secretary of the Minister (SdM) 2366, pp. 10–11.
41   MIELKE, Erich: Report on the results of the 28th CC session. In: Minutes of the MfS party secretariat meeting on 14 August 1956. *BStU*, MfS, SED district secretariat (KL–SED) 91, pp. 526–547, here p. 529.

predictable. This resulted in a significant decline in the number of political prisoners, which was accompanied by an at least gradual change in the way prisoners were treated. This change was based on the principles of "socialist legality", i.e. a concept that did not include constitutional guarantees of protection against state intervention, but obliged prosecutors to adhere to certain prison treatment rules. These rules could be interpreted extremely unfavourably for prisoners and, in extreme cases, overridden, but they tended to create a framework for a certain predictability in the state prison system. This was accompanied by a relatively notable appreciation of the legal profession in the Soviet Union and the GDR.[42]

The principles of the post-Stalinist rules of detention can be analysed with a closer look at the central detention centre of the German Stasi in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, which was newly built at the end of the 1950s according to these principles as a kind of state-of-the-art project. In contrast to the formerly used dark and wet "submarine" cells in the basement without daylight or sanitary installations from the immediate post-war period, the newly built cells were designed for a strange mixture of formally correct treatment with extreme forms of "non-intrusive" control over the body, including isolation in solitary confinement and the deprivation of sensory impressions, e.g. by using glass bricks instead of barred windows or erecting small "fresh-air cages" instead of recreation yards in the detention centres. Any kind of typical prison communication was practically prevented, which reduced opportunities for outbreaks of physical violence as well as acts of solidarity by guards or other detainees to a minimum. The main purpose of this detention regime remained to foster the readiness for confessions.[43]

Generally speaking, the new pattern included an understanding of physical and particularly lethal violence as a last resort, concentrated on specified and "exceptional" purposes, such as dealing with "traitors" or top anti-communist "enemies" in the West. To stick to the legitimizing idea of a core of chekist extraordinariness was in a sense an adequate attitude towards the dynamics of the Cold War, as it provided a framework for exceptions from the general trend towards civilizing the East-West--conflict, and to allow a continuation of warlike and violent forms of thinking and behaviour in times of peace. In that sense, the references to this core of extraordinariness had a compensatory function. It served internally as a source for the ongoing cultivation of a secret-police cop culture that fuelled both hatred against persecuted subjects and fantasy for measures of covert psychological terror.

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42 HORNSBY, Robert: *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union*, p. 132; ENGELMANN, Roger – JOESTEL, Frank: *Die Hauptabteilung IX*; *O Massovych Besporjadkach s 1957 goda...*, pp. 146–153.

43 For more on detention conditions: SPOHR, Julia: *In Haft bei der Staatssicherheit. Das Untersuchungsgefängnis Berlin-Hohenschönhausen 1951–1989*. Vandenboeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2015; PASSENS, Katrin: *MfS-Untersuchungshaft – Funktionen und Entwicklung von 1971 bis 1989*. Lukas Verlag, Berlin 2012; BASTIAN, Alexander: *Repression, Haft und Geschlecht. Die Untersuchungshaftanstalt des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit Magdeburg-Neustadt 1958–1989*. Mitteldeutscher Verlag, Halle 2012; BELEITES, Johannes: *Schwerin, Demmlerplatz: Die Untersuchungshaftanstalt des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit in Schwerin*. LStU Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schwerin 2001.

Images and representations within society

The third feature of the search for the future role of the post-Stalinist chekist was a refurbished stance towards the public images of the secret police and how they were received within the population. The secret police continued to act under the cover of secrecy, but at the same time set new public accents as a state organ. Under the pressure of de-Stalinization and a critical assessment of their former role, the main goal of the secret police forces was to secure and renew their legitimacy as a pillar of communist statehood, which should not be questioned after all criticism. The renewed public images included, as already mentioned, the reinterpretation of Dzerzhinsky as a "clean" chekist, with an emphasis on civility, good education, and "kulturnost" (culturedness, cultured behavior), in contrast to Stalin's and Beria's roles. Additionally, the secret services made a remarkable effort to present themselves as "modern" counterespionage agencies, including, for example, movie productions obviously inspired by the idea of creating a type of Eastern-style "James Bond".[44]

Part of this self-portrayal as a benevolent partner of the general population was the key concept of "trust" directed against the primary association of "fear." As Alexander Shelepin publicly announced at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961: *The State Security organs have been reorganized, significantly reduced, released from anomalous functions, cleansed of careerist elements.* [...] *All the activities of the KGB organs now take place under the constant control of the Party and the government,* [and] *are built on complete trust in the Soviet person, on respect for his rights and dignity*.[45]

And his German counterpart, Mielke, announced publicly on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Ministry of State Security in February 1965: *The defence work of the Ministry of State Security against all attacks is primarily aimed at acting as a precautionary measure. We can rely on the broad participation of the working people in the German Democratic Republic and numerous upright West German patriots. The relationship of trust between the working people and the security organs of our republic is the most fundamental basis of every success of our work. We consider it one of our most important tasks to consolidate this relationship of trust and to further develop the participation of broad circles of the population. In this way, we create the necessary conditions for strengthening mass vigilance and preventive work in the sense of resolutions of the socialist justice system and the further development of socialist democracy*.[46]

Five years later, he again emphasized the distinction between enemies and the broader population: *In doing so, we make a strict distinction between the enemies who threaten socialism and the lives of the citizens, and those who have committed crimes on the basis of ambiguities or who have been misused or misled by the enemy against their will. Against enemies we proceed with all severity; their actions are punished ruthlessly*.[47]

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44   FEDOR, Julie: *Russia and the Cult of State Security*. For more on the East German movie, see "For eyes only": STÖVER, Bernd: „Das ist die Wahrheit, die volle Wahrheit". Befreiungspolitik in DDR--Spielfilm der 1950er und 1960er Jahre. In: LINDENBERGER, Thomas (ed.): *Massenmedien im Kalten Krieg. Akteure, Bilder, Resonanzen*. Böhlau Verlag, Cologne – Weimar – Vienna 2006, pp. 49–76.

45   Quoted in FEDOR, Julie: *Russia and the Cult of State Security*, p. 44.

46   MIELKE, Erich: An der Seite des Volkes, für die Sache des Volkes. *Neues Deutschland*, 7. 2. 1965, p. 2.

The concept of "trust" had several dimensions in the public image of the secret police. On the one hand, it was about rhetorically dampening the apparently wide-spread fear of arbitrariness and unpredictability. This did not prevent the secret police from continuing to arrest people who were unpleasant, but it was in line with the Party leaders' wish to gain the support of broader parts of the population while at the same time isolating the scene of intellectual dissidents as "distant from the people". A second dimension was the goal of giving a positive aura to cooperation with the secret police as a (supposedly mutual) "relationship of trust". The aim was to drown out the negative image of informers as traitors and denouncers and legitimize them as part of the paternalistic concept of domination. Third, such attempts at public reinterpretation aimed to highlight common interests between the state and the population, such as the fight against youthful hooliganism or other forms of "disorderly" and "unsocialist" behaviour.[48]

It is difficult to measure the success of these efforts to change the secret police's public image, especially since reports on the broader population, such as opinion polls, were subject to massive restrictions in state socialist societies and usually could not ask about a taboo topic such as the work of the secret police. Nevertheless, we can at least detect some hints from the scattered data. For instance, the Harvard Refugee Project in the 1950s came to the following conclusion on the respondents' stance towards the "NKVD'ists" (as they dubbed the Soviet secret policemen) in Stalinist times: *Often they are pictured as cruel and sadistic people who found in secret police work the ideal job for the expression of warped personalities.* [...] *And especially important to our respondents, the NKVD'ists are viewed as alienated from and not identifying themselves with the people.* [...] *Particularly interesting, and relevant to the contrasting image of the party people, was the almost universal belief that no one, explicitly including the party people, was free from the threat of the NKVD and its personnel.*[49]

In post-Stalinist times, Western explorations of popular opinion showed the presence of the secret police as a more predictable factor, but nevertheless stressed the element of "fear" about the potential threat posed by the secret police against their lives. For instance, the West German polling institute Infratest concluded that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, around 60% of the East German population expressed the conviction that they had to be *very cautious* about political matters, while about one third felt that it was possible to *frankly express your opinion*. At the same time, however, only one third was reported to feel under political pressure, while slightly more than 50% did not. To an extent, such mixed images obviously reflect the new public strategies for this post-Stalinist state of chekist repression.

47   MIELKE, Erich: Kompromißloser Kampf gegen die Feinde des Friedens und des Sozialismus. Zum 20. Jahrestag des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. *Neues Deutschland*, 8. 2. 1970, p. 4.

48   COHN, Edward D.: Coercion, Reeducation, and the Prophylactic Chat: Profilaktika and the KGB's Struggle with Political Unrest in Lithuania, 1953–1964. *The Russian Review*, 2017, Vol. 76 (April 2017), pp. 272–293.

49   INKELES, Alex – BAUER, Raymond A.: *The Soviet Citizen. Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1961, p. 333.

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In the case of the Soviet Union, results are available from a survey of some 2,800 (predominantly Jewish and urban) emigrants who left the Soviet Union between 1979 and 1982. The results showed that the younger generation, who had not experienced Stalin's terror personally, considered Soviet state power to be significantly more predictable than their elders did. In particular, more than half stated that it was relatively easy to *avoid trouble with the KGB*. However, between 80% and 90% of all age and education groups found it difficult to identify informants in their environment, which hints to the still not very predictable presence of the secret police in social life.[50]

Another survey on the work of the Soviet KGB was carried out in 1991 with a sample of the urban population of the Soviet Union at the moment when the old Union structures were disintegrating. It presented an ambivalent retrospective picture of the role of the KGB in Soviet times.

Table 3: KGB: Personal experience and image in Soviet society, 1991[51]
Question: Did you (or any of those close to you) suffer from the KGB/NKVD etc.? (multiple answers possible)

Answer	percentage
Yes, personally persecuted	3
Yes, someone from my family was persecuted	28
At some time under surveillance	25
Believed or was sure they were never monitored	66

Question: What was the overall role of the KGB in Soviet society?

Answer	percentage
Has inflicted harm on society	33
Responsible for both good and bad things	34
Played a positive role	18

Of course, all this data has to be interpreted very carefully, especially since the exact circumstances of the surveys cannot be conclusively reconstructed. Nonetheless, the data suggests that some of the KGB's key image messages from the period discussed here seem to have come to fruition in the long run, i.e. the experience, or rather the impression, that the secret police did not necessarily play a role in personal life.

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50   BAHRY, Donna – SILVER, Brian E.: Intimidation and the Symbolic Uses of Terror in the USSR. *American Political Science Review*, 1987, Vol. 81, No. 4, pp. 1066–1098, here p. 1082.
51   KRYSHTANOVSKAYA, Olga – WHITE, Stephen: Public Attitudes to the KGB: A Research Note. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1993, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 169–175.

Some conclusions

The change in repression policies outlined here includes the positioning of the secret police towards the wider population as a present, but to some extent predictable, power, and the shift from mass persecution to a combination of selective and graduated persecution with broad preventive surveillance. However, a comparison of the different paths of the USSR and the GDR also shows that there are some special dynamics in each country. The GDR always stands out in such comparisons, because after the end of the de-Stalinization crisis, it instituted an unprecedented expansion of the Ministry of State Security in the second half of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, which eventually resulted in a three times more extensive apparatus (in relation to the population) than the Soviet KGB. However, the KGB was also continuously expanded after the period of reorientation during the Khrushchev-Shelepin-Semichastnyi era. In other countries, such as Hungary and Poland, the expansion remained more moderate – after 1956, the secret police were no longer gaining in volume.

Against the background of the "re-invention" of the secret police forces during this period, the case of Czechoslovakia is particularly interesting. With the reform--communist experiment of the Prague Spring in 1967–1968, the described movements about the role of the secret police went way further than in neighbouring countries: the dissolution of the persecution structures as a whole came on the agenda – an experiment that was violently ended by the invasion of the Warsaw Pact countries. It was one of the primary objectives of the "normalization" regime, with the help of the KGB and MfS, to restore the capacity of the Interior Ministry and its secret police branch, which was reflected not least in a renewed massive increase in arrest numbers. In the years 1963–1968, arrests fluctuated between 700 and 2,300. From 1970 to 1972, the numbers rose to well over 10,000, even rising as high as more than 21,000 in 1971. After that, there were repeated waves of arrests – up to 6,000 cases a year. As late as 1986, there were more than 4,000 arrests.[52]

The Czechoslovak case during the Prague Spring showed that it was dangerous for communist leaderships to override the urge to reform the secret police. But since the mid-1960s, the new mode had stabilized and formed an important basis for the stability of state socialist systems for the next 15–20 years.

As mentioned before, it would be worth a chapter of its own when and why this mode began to become unstable once more and move into a new mode that may be characterized as the "late socialist" mode of "Chekism". The institutional development of most of the services remained quite stable even during the 1980s. Nevertheless, there are some hints that, even within the ranks of the secret police forces, not *everything was forever, until it was no more*.[53] The numbers of political prisoners and of *profilaktika* measures fell after 1985, when Gorbachev began to question the role of

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52 BLAŽEK, Petr – ŽAČEK, Pavel: Czechoslovakia. In: PERSAK, Krzysztof – KAMIŃSKI, Łukasz (eds.): *A Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus in East Central Europe 1944/45–1989*, pp. 134–135.

53 YURCHAK, Alexei: *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation.* Princeton University Press, New Haven, 2005.

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the KGB in Soviet society. In East Germany, the numbers of arrests remained high (around 3,000 arrests p.a.), mostly in cases of people who tried to leave the country. Prominent dissidents were protected against arrests in most cases due to the fear of the Party leadership about negative media coverage by Western journalists. The Stasi put strong pressure on them but didn't manage to prevent these groups from slowly broadening their room for manoeuvre, including broad contacts with Western supporters.

However, there are some hints that the stable institutional order of repression was subcutaneously undermined by some atmospheric change. Even to loyal supporters of the communist regime, the value order of repression began to blur.

Figure 2: Word count "enemy/enemies" in *Neues Deutschland*, 1975–1990

"Enemy/enemies" in *Neues Deutschland* 1946–1975
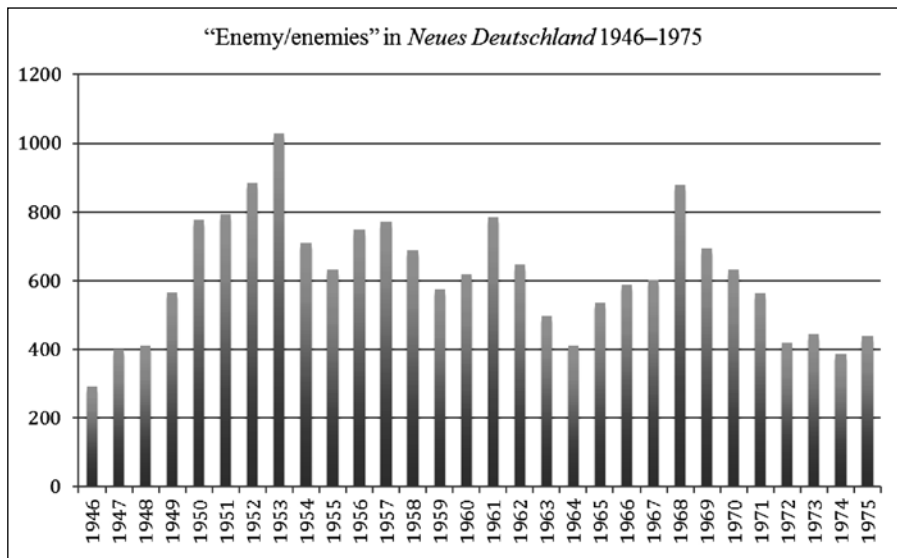
For instance, the number of mentions of the terms "enemy" and "enemies", which can be read as key indicators of the presence of "chekist" thinking, in the East German Communist Party newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, slowly decreased from the second half of the 1970s onwards. Signals like this need further investigation, but together with further indicators like increasing difficulties in recruiting officers and informers, they can be read as a crisis of "Chekism" in late communism, which led to the dissolution of statehood in the East German case; in the Soviet case it opened the field for the de-communization of the concept and, in the long run, the transformation into a new elite ideology of post-communist statism.

Initially, this subcutaneous change had no immediate effect in a largely stable system. But it became important at the moment of destabilization: the willingness to defend "communism" turned out to be remarkably low, while at the same time a re-

-evaluation of "Chekism" took place: the focus shifted towards the legitimacy of the secret police as an expression of "normal" statehood for the defence of "national" interests, combined with the effort of the officers to transform their personal social and cultural capital into a new livelihood under post-communist conditions. This could open very different paths in individual cases: e.g. continuing with an intelligence or police career in the "bourgeois" state, in other cases transitioning to privatized entrepreneurship in an industry where one had good contacts before 1989.