# From Erfurt to Helsinki: Perceptions of East and West Germans on the inner-German border during Ostpolitik 1970–1975

A semiotic analysis of letters to the editor in GDR and FRG newspapers

Master thesis
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November 2018

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# Preface

Dear reader,

In front of you lies my final work as a student. Apart from being a master thesis, it is the resultant from things that I had always wanted to do during my academic career, but could not yet find the time for. Most importantly, I had always dreamt of living in Berlin for a couple of months. It is a city with which I have a special connection, in a country with which I have a special connection. Growing up with the German language, I had always wanted to practice speaking it with other people than my family. In short, I wanted to experience life in Berlin while at the same time further developing my German language skills. So before commencing my master thesis, I made that dream the starting point of everything else that followed.

After defining the location, I formulated a subject: the German Democratic Republic. The GDR had fascinated me since I was young and I had read about it quite a lot already. Inspired by family stories and historical photo albums, I set off to devise a way which allowed me to combine my fascination for the GDR and my dream of living in Berlin for a couple of months. This would become archival research, more specifically historical newspapers from both the GDR and the FRG. It turned out that all these components could be combined with each other. The final product aside, I have had a wonderful time working on it and managed to accomplish every personal goal I had set myself beforehand.

This thesis was not possible without the guidance and inspiration provided by my supervisors dr. Martin van der Velde and Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Bürkner. Dr. van der Velde deserves credit for helping to define the topic at hand and providing very interesting insights over the course of the study. Prof. Dr. Bürkner deserves credit for his warm welcome at the Leibniz Institut in Erkner. In the conversations we have had, he provided me with context, methodological guidance and motivated me to make the right choices for my data collection efforts while in Berlin. I am grateful to both of them for motivating me to make this final assignment a proper goodbye from university life.

I would also like to thank my friends who have visited me in Berlin. Foremost, my girlfriend Judith, but also Gert, Puck, Jetske, Joyce, Roel, Luuk, Leon, Loes, and Ingeborg. Your company made my summer in Berlin even more special. Special thanks also goes to my parents, my younger brother and especially my grandmother. As a born Berliner, you have been a big inspiration from young age to appreciate the beauty of your hometown. Thank you very much for all your stories from your childhood and pointing out special places in Berlin, such as your old house in Siemensstadt. It was special to share the memories. I felt proud to show you my favourite places in former East-Berlin, the part of the city you have never seen due to the very border I have investigated over the last year.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Zeitungsarchiv der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin for their help and kindness during my archival work. I would also like to thank the vendors of Café Amon at the Metzer Platz in Spandau for their excellent coffee and kind words. I will miss having my daily coffee on the way to the Spandau railway station for another day at the archive (or in the city). All in all, it was a summer to never forget. The sunshine and heat, the city, the people, the FIFA World Cup, the swift progress with my data collection all attributed to me falling in love with the city even more.

Enjoy reading!
Patrick

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## Introduction to the subject

„*Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten*". These famous words spoken by the First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Walter Ulbricht, would become one of the biggest falsehoods of the Cold War. Only two weeks after Ulbricht spoke these words in August 1961, the until then still open border between West-Berlin and East-Berlin was permanently closed for everybody. It came to be known as one of the most well-known symbols of the Cold War, and dozens were killed attempting to breach it by GDR border patrols under shoot to kill orders.

Until the permanent closing of the border in the already separated city of Berlin, it was the last remaining loophole where citizens of the GDR could escape to the Western part of the city. The inward border between the GDR and its Western neighbour, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), had been closed since 1952. Increasingly uneasy with the outflow of potential farmers, workers and scientists, this border was to be closed by the GDR authorities. In the end, it was framed as an *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* by First Secretary Ulbricht, a protective measure against potential Western agents and provocateurs. The FRG press however dubbed the Wall either *Schandmauer* or *Totesmauer*, declaring it a symbol of the alleged tyranny unfolding behind it. With the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Western sectors (under control of the U.S., U.K. and France) were sealed off from the Eastern sector (under control of the Soviet Union and posing as de facto capital of the GDR). West-Berlin became an enclave within the GDR (see Figure 1.1).
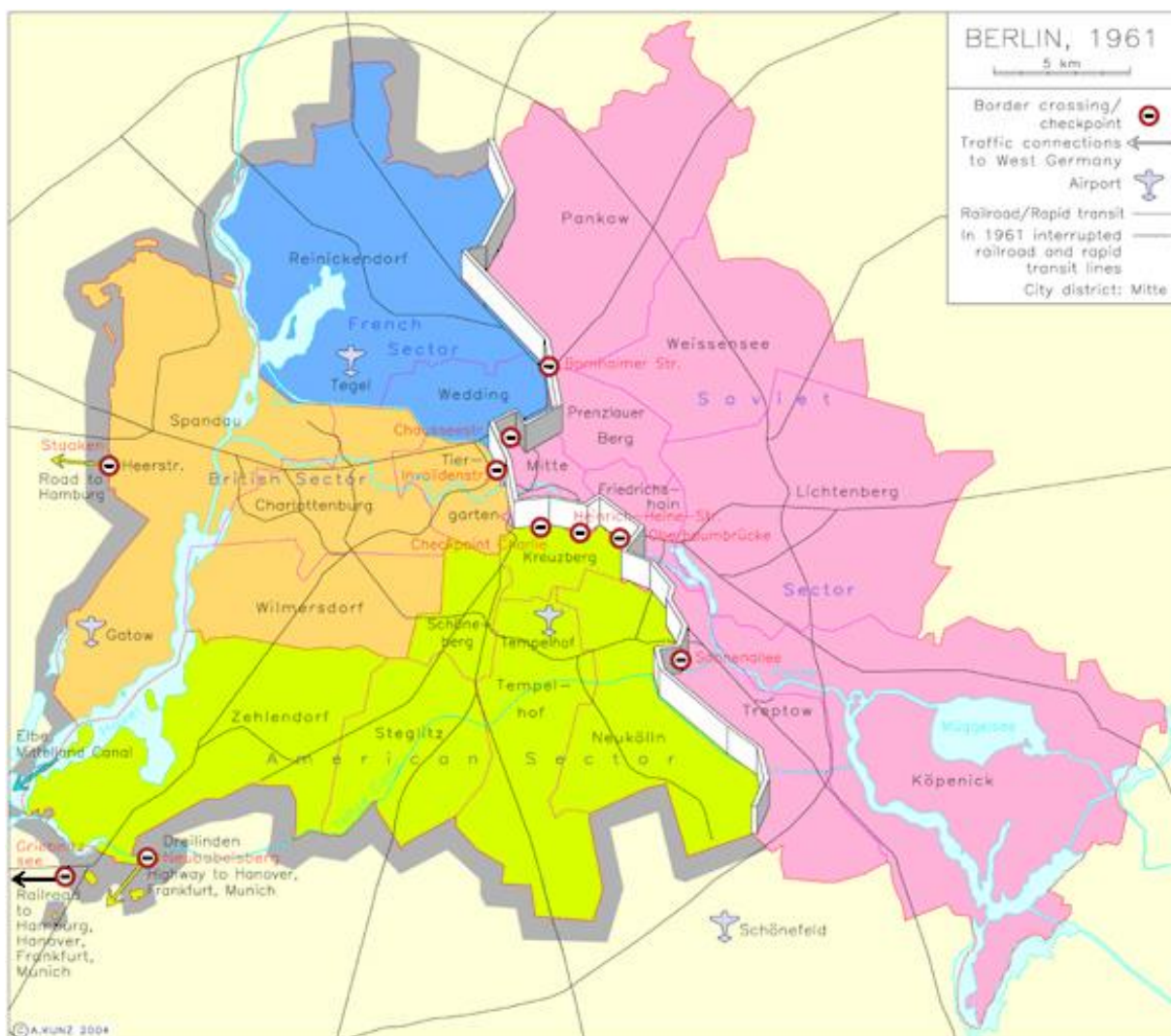


*Figure 1.1 - Berlin divided into four sectors. The Wall was built around the American, British and French sectors. Source: Kunz, 2004.*

The overnight construction of the Berlin Wall was one of Willy Brandt's, the later Chancellor of the FRG, inspirations to formulate and negotiate a policy through which the human misfortunes that arose due to the border could be alleviated. This policy became to be known as Ostpolitik: the foreign policy of the FRG in the early 1970s under which various treaties were signed with the GDR and the Eastern bloc over normalisation and non-aggression. Steps were undertaken to partially reopen the border between the GDR and the FRG that had been closed for a very long time. Transit routes were created from the FRG to West-Berlin in the form of new motor ways and transit train services. Border crossings for ordinary citizens were instated between West- and East-Berlin as well (see Figure 1.2). Eventually, the FRG government recognised the GDR and they exchanged permanent missions.
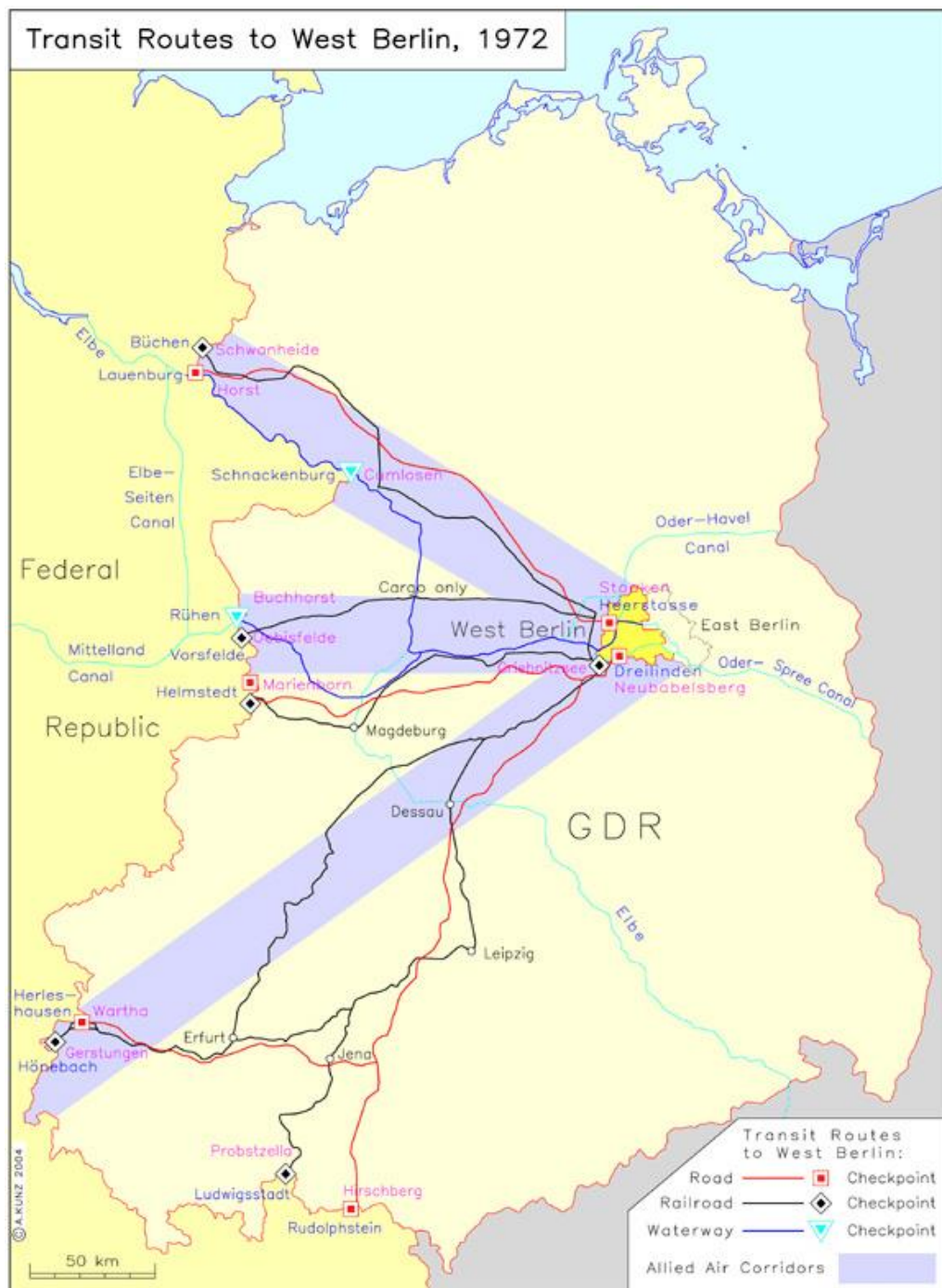


*Figure 1.2 - After conclusion of various treaties under Ostpolitik, Transit routes from the FRG to West-Berlin were instated. These transit routes allowed visitors from the FRG to travel to West-Berlin and other places in the GDR over land. Source: Kunz, 2004.*

But what constitutes a border? Borders are by definition not a natural phenomenon, they are created by humans. Even the seemingly impenetrable border between the GDR and the FRG in itself did not mean anything. It was through the geopolitical meaning that was attributed to the border that it gained its substance during the Cold War. Van Houtum & van Naerssen (2002) define the instatement of borders as a process of 'bordering'. Bordering is the practice to regulate the movement of people through different spaces. The practice of bordering implies that a certain order is made in differing territories. This order is not fixed in time or space, but it shaped through history, social relations and politics (Newman & Paasi, 1998). Borders should therefore never be taken for granted as being 'out there', but should be treated in a more interpretivist sense: they are constructed and shaped through representation. Deconstruction of the border, as well as the related process of ordering, are key components of coming to a renewed geopolitical understanding of borders (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002).

This means that different stories and different representations existed over the inner-German border at the time it was partially reopened under Ostpolitik between 1970 and 1975. This Ostpolitik was both daring and controversial, as it meant negotiating with (and eventually recognizing) the GDR: a country with which the FRG did not want diplomatic relations with until then. This shift in foreign policy may have had an influence on the perceptions and representations ordinary people had on the border in light of the Ostpolitik and vice versa (Dijkink, 1998). This means that the border can be reinterpreted using the accounts of the border as they were given back then. This requires investigating the relationship between government and society.

According to Habermas (1990) one of the most important actors in the intermediary sphere between politics and society are the mass media. The governments, the mass media and society together constitute the public sphere (Gerhards & Neidhardt, 1990). Within this public sphere, free and open debate is possible on matters of common concern. It operates to reach consensus on whatever relevant matter. The mass media are an elementary actor within the public sphere, as they can create, alter and reiterate perceptions and representations ordinary people have on these matters of common concern. Ordinary people buy newspapers and watch televised news, at which they can respond by sending letters to the editors (LTEs). Through LTEs, ordinary people can participate in the debate and voice their opinion. Taken together, these opinions, perceptions and representations indicate what sentiments people are preoccupied with (Wahl-Jorgensen, 1999, p. 54). This means that LTEs can be a suitable source for reconstructing a debate as it took place at a certain point in time. Therefore, they may indicate how people perceived the inner-German border at the time the Ostpolitik was implemented between 1970 and 1975.

It is therefore that the border between the GDR and the FRG will be deconstructed through analysis of letters to the editors (LTEs) of newspapers in the East and the West. The representations that come forward from these LTEs can shed light on how ordinary people on both sides of the border perceived the events under Ostpolitik. By comparing these representations to the foreign policies of the GDR and the FRG, more can be learnt on the operation of the public sphere in both German states. This allows to draw conclusions on the extent to which foreign policy and popular representations shape each other.

Whereas a free press existed in the FRG, this was not the case in the GDR. Then, why bother? Although both newspapers and LTEs in the GDR were subject to censorship, it is still worthwhile to analyse and compare them. Bos (1993) and Fiedler & Meyen (2015a) state that LTEs were one of the few spaces in the GDR where dialogue could exist between citizens, government, industry and administrations, and thus provided a channel to expresses grievances and dissatisfaction. It is through the analysis of this 'surrogate' to the — otherwise non-existent — public sphere in the GDR that the perceptions on the border between the GDR and the FRG can be critically confronted. In general, LTEs form a record of the historical context the debate took place in, more so than secondary historical accounts. What perceptions come forward in East and West German LTEs? How do these compare to their government's *Weltanschauung* (known as geopolitical code in the literature) at the time? And what does the relationship between the popular perceptions and foreign policy teach us on the operation of the public sphere in GDR and the FRG? Can the border be reinterpreted based on the outcomes of this study?

## Rationale

The rationale for conducting this study is a knowledge deficiency on the operation of the public sphere in socialist countries. The public sphere as defined by Gerhards & Neidhardt (1990) and Habermas (1990) is the intermediary layer between society and politics. News media and LTEs are an essential part of the public sphere. Despite

earlier research into the operation of newspapers in the GDR (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015b), their exact role in the limited public sphere of the GDR remains vague.

Another motivation for this study is the lack of cross-national research on how geopolitical code shapes popular representation (and vice versa). Dijkink (1998) sketches a cross-national research agenda for the study of the relationship between the geopolitical codes of the elite and popular representations (Mamadouh, 1999, p. 133). Dijkink (ibid.) states that existing studies, such as Sharp (1996), are limited to geopolitical code and popular representation in one country alone, in this case the United States. In order to further develop insights in the relationship between geopolitical code and popular representation, results of multiple countries should be made comparable with each other.

Whereas the investigation of the relationship between geopolitical codes and geopolitical representations may yield interesting results for the GDR in itself, it cannot completely be understood without knowing how this relationship works in the neighbouring FRG. That is, the histories of the FRG and the GDR are closely entwined. Therefore, both countries are analysed. This fulfils the call for cross-national research on the one hand, and on the other may substantiate existing knowledge on the functioning of the public sphere in a socialist country.

## Objectives and research questions

The goal of this study is to reinterpret the border between the GDR and the FRG from a geopolitics of borders perspective. This means going further than a mere historical approach to the border, instead focussing on representation and meaning-making through the public sphere surrounding it. So, the people's voices are central to the study, instead of the elite capable of making the decisions on geopolitical code and the border.

The second, interrelated goal, is to create a clear picture of perceptions of both East and West Germans during a highly volatile geopolitical era vis-à-vis each other. The border was practically sealed in 1961, and only a decade later, the first initiatives were already undertaken by the two respective governments to reopen it. Consolidation of the two states as well as steps towards reconciliation went hand in hand in this era. Providing more insight in the apparent contradictions of this era through analysis of LTEs will shed more light on the relationship between the German peoples on the one hand, and the relationship between these perceptions and the government's foreign policies on the other.

By analysing LTEs, a clear account of the perceptions regarding the inner-German border during the first half of the 1970s is to come forward. The critical reinterpretation of the border between the GDR and the FRG should add to the existing body of literature on geopolitics between East and West, albeit from a geo-historical perspective. This leads to the following research question:

*To what extent has Ostpolitik influenced the perceptions of East and West Germans on the inner-German border between 1970–1975 and how?*

This research question will be divided into sub-questions, which are as follows:
1) How have the geopolitical codes the GDR and the FRG adhered to evolved between 1970 and 1975?
2) What are the representations on the border that come forward in LTEs in East and West German newspapers between 1970 and 1975?
3) How do the perceptions on the border from LTEs in East and West German newspapers compare to their government's evolving geopolitical codes?

## Relevance

### Scientific relevance

Betts (2010, p. 174) states that although research into GDR history using LTEs is not new and has been practiced before, these have previously been used to investigate the workings of the authoritarian government or the sociable nature of the GDR citizen. However, Fitzpatrick (1996) — on the function of LTEs in the Soviet Union — states that the letters are "probably as close to a public sphere as one is likely to get during the Stalin period". Betts (2010) extrapolates the paramount meaning of LTEs in the limited Soviet public sphere to the GDR. Reiher (1995) in that respect concludes that LTEs are "the most revealing everyday texts of East German history" and

are therefore a good indicator of popular perceptions of the GDR regime. This study tries to take the statement by Reiher (1995) a step further, by trying to prove if and how LTEs are an indicator of perceptions on the geopolitical code of the GDR with respect to the border (and therefore, its Western neighbour).

However, at the end of their article on newspapers in the GDR, Fiedler & Meyen (2015b) conclude that there is a need for more theory on the functioning of this aforementioned public sphere in socialist societies. They state that current research into the extent of the public sphere in the GDR remains vague, despite work by Gerhards & Neidhardt (1990) and Habermas (1990). The conclusions of this study may contribute to further knowledge on how the media and LTEs can shape perceptions despite the limited public sphere in socialist regimes of the Cold War. Taken one step further, the outcomes of this study may shed new light on the 'limits of the dictatorship' (as for instance discussed by Fulbrook, 2005). This should however not lead to trivialization of the far-reaching effects of the inner-German border, downplaying the omnipresent security apparatus and forgetting those who have died trying to cross the border.

Also, the perceptions that come forward on the inner-German border in the light of Ostpolitik add to the existing body of literature on geopolitics of borders. This study evidently deals with a border that no longer exists on the map (mentally, it may still exist, see Welsh, 2006). Geopolitical concepts such as bordering and ordering (Van Houtum & Naerssen, 2002) will be applied to a historical case, making a connection between the geographical scientific field and the scientific studying of history. Its outcomes may make a case for similar border studies on historical cases, as this can shed new light on the way history and the meaning of borders have been written thus far.

Finally, Epstein (2003, p. 661) in this light concludes that "historians of the GDR have […] the challenge to write history that goes beyond a narrow archival focus. They must now interpret sources in ways that are innovative and engaging for readers". This is what this study will try to accomplish.

## Societal relevance

As stated by Betts (2010) and Bos (1993), there was a very limited sphere where GDR citizens could express their grievances, being the letters to the editors of newspapers. This could possibly shed new light on the history of socialist societies and limits to dictatorship. Despite severe impairments of freedom, citizens in socialist societies were no defenceless subjects of their governments. This is against the popular opinion of former West German citizens (Epstein, 2003).

As LTEs form a partial account of daily life in the GDR, its stories can contribute to a better understanding of life during the German separation. The workings of life in the GDR and the effects of the inner-German border have societal relevance, as it forms an important episode of modern German history. Moreover, in the minds of some Germans, distinctions are still drawn between Germans from the East and those from the West: mentally, the border is still there (see Adam, 2015; Behrends, Kuck & Poutrus, 2006). Better understanding of each other's histories during times the border was closed can help further the reconciliation process even 28 years after reunification (Welsh, 2006, p. 149).

# Chapter 2 - Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the most important theoretical concepts will be discussed. In order to reinterpret the inner-German border via a geopolitics of borders approach, a definition of geopolitics will be given. Accordingly, the concept of geopolitical codes will be explained. As geopolitics and geopolitical codes are influenced by representation through media, the most important aspects of the relationship between these concepts are given. Finally, theoretical issues regarding LTEs in both democratic and socialist societies are presented. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework.

## Geopolitics

### Geopolitics of borders

Before introducing the field of geopolitics of borders, a basic definition of geopolitics is required. Without diving into the history of the term or the field (see for example, Hlihor, 2014), geopolitics can be defined as "the geography of international politics, particularly the relationship between the physical environment (location, resources, territory, etc) and the conduct of foreign policy" (Sprout & Sprout, 1960, as cited by Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p. 191). In science, the production of geopolitical theory serves to create knowledge to help governments engage in statecraft and to reify its power over a state (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). Borders are inherently part of the way governments engage with each other. This discipline of geography can be called the geopolitics of borders.

In an early overview of the different disciplines within the field of border studies in geopolitics, Van Houtum (2000) discerns three geographical approaches to borders. These are all rooted in classic disciplines of human geography, namely economic geography and regional studies. The so-called flow approach and cross-border cooperation approach both deem borders as barriers, in the sense that they hinder economic activity and integration of borderlands. Their basic axiom is that the border is already there as fixed in space, and the scientific field deals with how to enable more economic or cooperative linkages. The third approach, the so-called people approach in border studies, takes a different basic axiom, namely that borders are not fixed in space at all (Gregory, 2004; Van Houtum, 2010; Newman & Paasi, 1998).

Van Houtum (2000) cites various authors who have studied borders from the people approach. Among them is Paasi (1999), who wrote a case study on the behaviour and attitudes of people on the Finnish-Russian border, as well as Newman & Paasi (1998), who assert that geographers need to be more aware of the multidimensional nature of boundary studies both on scale level and on societal level. Van Houtum (2005) and Van Houtum & Strüver (2002) contend that more attention should be given to the interpretations of the border and the stories that lie behind it, as those interpretivist notions of that same border are not as visible as the border itself (either on the ground or on a map). It is therefore that borders should not be taken for granted, and that is what geopolitics of borders is about.

Borders are thus by definition not a natural phenomenon. It is through national and international law that a border stone (or wall) gains meaning. Van Houtum & van Naerssen (2002) define the instalment of borders as a process of *bordering*. Bordering is the practice to regulate the movement of people through different spaces. The practice of bordering implies that a certain order is made in differing territories. This order is not fixed in time or space, but is shaped through history, social relations, politics and culture (Newman & Paasi, 1998). In other words, borders gain their meaning through representation, which will be explained in the forthcoming pages. On the other hand, borders also gain meaning through relations between nation states. The tool through which nation states shape their foreign policy towards other states is called a geopolitical code.

### Geopolitical codes

The term geopolitical code was first coined by Gaddis (1982) in a study of U.S. foreign policy paradigms during the Cold War. He built upon a study by fellow researcher George (1969, p. 197), who used the term *operational code* in his work on decision-making by political leaders. He described operational code as "a political leader's beliefs about the nature of politics and political conflict, his views regarding the extent to which historical developments can be shaped, and his notions of correct strategy and tactics". Another term for operational code, according to George (1969) is *Weltanschauung*. Following this line, Gaddis (1982, p. 2) stated that a *geopolitical*

*code* is "an assumption about (American) [parentheses added] interests in the world, potential threats to them, and feasible responses, that tend to be formed either before or just after an administration takes office, and barring very unusual circumstances tend not to change much thereafter".

Taylor & Flint (2000, p. 62) altered the term geopolitical code to a more straightforward definition, deeming it "the manner in which a country orientates itself towards the world". They state that a geopolitical code consists of five main deliberations, being:

- Who are our current and potential allies?
- Who are our current and potential enemies?
- How can we maintain our allies and nurture potential allies?
- How can we counter our current enemies and emerging threats?
- How do we justify the four calculations above to our public, and to the global community?

Flint (2006, pp. 56–58) cites various means of defining and maintaining friendly relations with allies. This can be done through economic ties and/or integration, cultural exchange, visits by heads of state and heads of government, as well as military backing. Enemies can be defined and countered through both passive and active military threat. An example of passive threat would be the possession of a nuclear military arsenal and chances of 'mutually assured destruction' when used. Active military threat would be the mobilisation of troops in border regions or outright invasion. Another way of dealing with alleged enemies can be international sanctions, being trade boycotts or the suspension of diplomatic ties.

## Geopolitical codes and the general public

George (1969), in his work on operational codes asserts that world leaders do not take rational decisions when it comes to world events. Instead, they base their decisions on their own experiences and personalities. One could argue that Gaddis (1982) implicitly incorporated this axiom when remodelling the concept of operational code to geopolitical code. Dijkink (1998) defines this as decision-making based on a *local* rationality of knowledge. On a country level, this would mean that geopolitical decisions are based on national history, national geography, as well as experiences of government officials. Further in his study, Dijkink (1998, p. 293) questions this axiom, instead proposing a duality between the political elite and the masses — as ventilated by the media — in the conception of geopolitical codes.

Dijkink (1998, p. 294) states that there is a degree of concurrence between foreign policy goals outlined by the government and the masses. The geopolitical code, technically applied knowledge on statecraft as used by the government, is different from the popular beliefs the masses possess with regards to the outside world. Despite the difference in the depth of this knowledge, a (automatic) consensus arises due to what Dijkink (ibid.) calls the 'national reflex'. Government officials can be liable to incorporating their country's history and societal value-systems into foreign policy.

Consensus implies that there can also be divergence between government's geopolitical code and popular beliefs on foreign policy. A prime example would be the 1970s domestic backlash against the U.S. government as their war in Vietnam progressed. If an elite does not succeed in either manipulating public opinion or aligning towards it, a democratic crisis or change of government is unavoidable in the long run (Dijkink, ibid.). He asks whether incompatible views aggravate such crises, or that both the codes and popular representations just adapt to new circumstances — which help to maintain an established domestic order.

As there are no set guidelines on what geopolitical code to adhere to as the global political stage changes, it can be stated that geopolitical codes are never free from emotion, as worldwide developments require interpretation. Therefore, geopolitical codes as conceived by the government are not rational and isolated. Instead, they are influenced by popular opinion and culture, in other words: *popular representations* of the world (Dijkink, 1998, p. 295; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992, p. 432; Sharp, 1996, pp. 567–586). The structure of society and dominant historical events help create *geopolitical representations*, the intellectuals and politicians put them in the right words. Geopolitical representations, such as 'the Cold War' or 'Islamic terrorist threat' are based on facts, news and events, which are consequently moulded into something which has meaning with the general public and the government. This meaning is constructed through the process of representation.

# From representation to semiotics

## Representation and signification as part of culture

Representation is a process, which is in essence *meaning-making* through the use of signs. From a reflective approach, it is assumed that objects and ideas derive their meaning from themselves: their meaning reflects like a mirror. The exact opposite is used in a constructivist approach to meanings. In this approach, it is assumed that objects and ideas in itself have no meaning, but that this meaning is constructed by humans through the process of representation. Signs are used to convey the meaning of objects and ideas to others. Signs can be languages, symbols or gestures. In the end, the meanings of these signs are established through representation, or otherwise called meaning-making (Hall, 1997, p. 28). Signs, through representation, signify matters.

For instance, in a material way, red in a traffic light symbolizes 'stop'. In an imaginative way, the colour red may symbolize 'communism'. The colour red in itself does not mean anything: it is through representation that humans agreed with each other that red means 'stop', or that red is associated with 'communism'. These meanings can change over time. Representation, in order to lead to effective understanding of a message, should therefore lead to a shared notion of what something is and what something is not. This is what Hall (1997, p. 18) calls a conceptual map. This shared notion of what something means and what something does not mean will eventually lead to a shared culture of meanings.

In their work on cultural studies, Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay & Negus (1997) contend that representation is part of and produces culture, a relationship that they schematized in their 'circuit of culture'. The model consists of five practices that together produce culture, being: representation, identity, production (of goods), consumption (of goods) and regulation. Meaning-making takes place in interactions with people, in the consumption of goods and the instalment of rules. The sum of these practices and their interactions can be regarded as culture, or as Du Gay et al. (1997) define it, shared meanings or shared conceptual maps (Hall, 1997, p. 18; Rose, 2001, p. 6).

Leve (2012, p. 6) states that Hall's approach to representation may at first glance be too literal, asserting that representation is portrayed as "a distortion of reality". Therefore, research into representation merely serves to measure an alleged gap between the 'true' meaning of something and what it ought to meant, the distorting factor being language. At the same time, Hall corrects this limited conception of representation, stating that representation makes meaning and at the same time creates this reality. Outside of the representation process, there is no 'real' meaning to signs (Leve, 2012).

## Semiotics and representation

The scientific investigation of how meaning is made within the constructivist school can be conducted along two different strands, namely the semiotic approach (Saussure, 1974) and the discursive approach (Foucault, 1974) (Hall, 1997, p. 15). A broad definition of semiotics is given by Eco (1976, p. 7): "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign". This definition does not limit signs to mere speech, but anything that has a certain meaning, such as images, art, objects or sounds. Saussure (1983, pp. 15–16) in that light states that language, and more precisely, speech, are the most important signs and that "semiological problems need to be confronted through the study of language". Jakobson (1949, p. 50) states that "language is a system of signs". For this study, the assumption that signs are part of written or spoken language is leading. This leads to the Saussure model of semiotics.

The Saussure model of semiotics as described by Chandler (2007, p. 14) states that a sign is composed of both a signified and a signifier, their relationship being known as signification. The signified is the concept to which is being referred. Coming back to the example of the traffic light, the indication one has to stop is the signified. The signifier in this case is the form that the sign takes: the red light. The combination of these two, the red light and the association of stopping, is a sign according to the Saussure model (Saussure, 1983, p. 67).

Within his model, Saussure did not give a typology of signs. A basic typology is given by Peirce (1931–58, p. 1291, 2243), where he distinguishes iconic, indexical and symbolic signs. These do not represent a certain type of sign in a narrow sense, but indicates the relationship between the signifier and signified. The least complicated sign is the iconic sign, where the signifier resembles the signified by showing a degree of similarity. An example would be a scale model or a portrait (Chandler, 2007, p. 37). The next, more complicated relationship between signifier and signified, is the indexical sign. This is a sequential relationship between signifier

and signified, for instance a clock with both hands at the top indicate that the time is twelve o'clock. This relationship is therefore not based on resemblance, but on indications of temporality or cause and effect (Bruss, 1978, p. 88).

The last type of relationship between the signifier and the signified is a symbolic relationship. In this relationship, the signifier and the signified do not bear resemblance to each other. This means that the meaning of the symbolic sign has to be learned and agreed upon. Language is a suitable example, as well as the earlier introduced traffic light or a (national) flag (Chandler, 2007, p. 36). This makes symbols connected to either rules or habit (Peirce, 1931–1958, p. 2292). A language therefore goes further than a mere collection of letters, it is the combination of these letters and their meanings that words can form (Jakobson, 1949, p. 50). Letters symbolize sounds, a combination of letters and sounds forms a word, which symbolizes a meaning. The relationship between signifier and signified in a symbolic relationship is settled by convention, making it an arbitrary sign and thus open to multiple interpretations.

Finally, Kress (1997) states that signs are not stable. Their meaning can therefore change over time as the relation between signifier and signified changes to suit the occasion of its use. Laine & van der Velde (2017, p. 73) state that signifiers can stand for a different signified (which creates a new sign), such as the concept of black cats meaning good fortune in the one culture, but bad luck in others. This relationship also works the other way around: different signifiers can have the same signified, creating an again different sign. An example would be the concept of Germany. For some, it is a mighty industrial country with a leading role in Europe, but for others as the country that forced Southern European states to the verge of bankruptcy due to Germany's push for budget cuts. The flux between signifier and signified is, again, altered by representation and meaning-making.

## Media and letters to the editor

### Media and the public sphere in democratic societies

The mass media are influential actors in the process of representation and meaning-making (Hall, 1997, p. 3). Reah (1998, as cited by Laine & van der Velde, 2017, p. 68) states that newspapers in particular are "products of their culture" and that therefore "culture-specific values are unavoidably encoded in their texts". Boggs (2000) states that in democratic societies, the media are part of an intermediary sphere between politics and society in what Habermas (1990) and Gerhards & Neidhardt (1990, p. 32) call the public sphere. Wahl-Jorgensen (2001, p. 306) cites Habermas (1990) in giving a definition of the public sphere: "the public sphere is the physical or mediated site for strangers to discuss matters of common concern in a rational and impartial fashion and to reach consensus about acceptable norms of action". Within the public sphere, everybody should be allowed access to the debate and be treated equally whatever the voiced position may be and without forcing their opinion on others (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001, p. 57). The function of the public sphere according to Habermas (1990) therefore is to pose as the rationalization of the government by deliberative elements (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015a, p. 185).

The media are able to disseminate information quickly to a large audience. On this basis, the electorate can form their opinion on government affairs and the government can inform itself of sentiments in society (Livingstone, 1994, p. 11). Media are therefore elementary to the public sphere, next to the earlier established notion that media are influential actors in meaning-making. The two other levels of the public sphere as described in Gerhards & Neidhardt's (1990) Arena Model are public events (meetings, demonstrations) and the small public spheres (minor encounters in a public setting). The mass media, highest in the hierarchy of the public sphere, can influence the topics and opinions discussed in the lower levels of the public sphere.

One has to take into account that at the time Habermas (1990) and Gerhards & Neidhardt (1990) wrote their works on the public sphere, the internet (as well as social media) had not yet been widely adopted into society. As this study deals with the pre-internet era, this possible hole in the public sphere as discussed should not cause a methodological problem. In that respect the described portrayal of the public sphere should fit the 1970s era to be discussed in this study. Further discussion on the role of the media in this study therefore operate under the axiom that the internet had not yet been adopted by society at large.

### Letters to the editors in democratic societies

The transmission of news stories through the media is not a one-way flow of information from source to the reader. For instance, newspaper readers have the opportunity to voice their opinions on both its content and

matters of general interest through the submission of a letter to the editor (LTE) of the newspaper. Wahl-Jorgensen (1999, p. 54) states that LTEs are a good illustration of the public sphere as coined by Habermas (1990), stating that the letters section is a place where citizens can voluntarily voice their opinions and deliberate with each other equally in order to come to consensus. It is therefore, ideally, a site of interaction and democratic dialogue (Kapoor & Botan, 1992, p. 5).

LTEs in newspapers are important for marketing and circulation purposes (Mayes, 2001). Wahl-Jorgensen (1999, p. 57) states that if newspapers provide space for LTEs, their readership, circulation and therefore, advertising revenues, will increase. If a submitted letter is actually printed, the author will surely tell his/her acquaintances about it, increasing the number of sold newspapers (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001, p. 310). On top of that, the letters section has proven to be a popular section within a newspaper, with a claimed readership of almost 50% (Gregory & Hutchins, 2004, p. 189). LTEs provide a source of information for the editors of the paper on what topics are of interest with its readers, while at the same time posing as a watchdog for the newspaper itself with regards to their content (Richardson, 2008, p. 58; Wahl-Jorgensen, 1999, p. 57).

In a later study however, the added value of LTEs for newspaper editors is disputed. Wahl-Jorgensen (2002) states that although a sufficient amount of letters is submitted, a lot of them lack quality, proper argumentation, conciseness or do not comment on the content of the newspaper (instead, on totally unrelated subjects). Such letters are sometimes published should they fit the general criteria, but, Wahl-Jorgensen (2002) contends, these letters may not be taken seriously by the editorial staff. Therefore, they do not contribute to public deliberation as described by Habermas (1990) and Kapoor & Botan (1992, p. 5). The public sphere therefore does not operate accordingly, as not every participant is taken seriously and the contenders do not strive for consensus but mere imposition of their opinion on others. This might also disprove the statement made by Mayes (2001) on the alleged importance of the letters page to the newspaper staff.

But who are the authors of LTEs? Based on the aforementioned case study by Wahl-Jorgensen (2002), it would seem that only those with extreme opinions take the stage provided for them. However, in another study by Wahl-Jorgensen (2001), she postulates that editors have a preference for more personal letters displaying grievance or dissatisfaction with matters within the community. These letters are, according to the editors featured in the study, mostly elderly, educated white men who care about their habitual community: the average reader as (local) newspapers like to see them. Editors tend to shy away from publishing more activist letters as it is believed that activists have other channels at their disposal or that they lack sincerity. This goes against the public sphere as presented by Habermas (1990), as the preference for personal, 'wailing' letters might silence others who want to present their views in a more dialogic or activist nature. The letters section thus becomes a place for the average reader, and not everybody, possibly compromising the position as 'watchdog' for the papers content as described by Richardson (2008, p. 58) and Wahl-Jorgensen (1999, p. 57).

The aforementioned indicates that newspapers mostly have to make a selection of the LTEs they publish and which they do not. The letters section might therefore be biased towards the average reader displaying discontent about community matters through a more personal narrative. To make generalisations about the extent to which the letters section reflects '*the* public debate' is therefore difficult.

## Media and the public sphere in socialist societies

The envisioned function of the press in socialist societies has been described by the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin in his paramount paper *What is to be done?* (Fix, 2013, p. 280). In this political pamphlet, Lenin argued that:

*"The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser".*

(Lenin, 1902)

According to Stevenson, Childers, West & Marschalk (1988, p. 7), this idea on the role of the press in a socialist society had been adopted by the Soviet Union throughout its existence. This meant that the print press would serve as the collective medium of the proletariat, its contents guided by Marxist-Leninist principles and the ideological course of the communist party. The press was to be the foundation on which the party would be

built, serving as an instrument of information dissemination, but also as a platform for the proletariat to engage with the party and voice its daily activities (Bos, 1993, pp. 6–7). Moreover, the press appealed to the people to change their behaviour to conform themselves to socialist principles. Examples are to aid the lowering of production costs, saving energy, diminishing waste during harvesting and joining the Labour Day demonstrations (Fix, 2013, p. 281).

Coming back to the earlier introduced Arena Model of the public sphere as presented by Gerhards & Neidhardt (1990), the controlled media in socialist societies led to the creation of a politically staged public sphere. Whereas the public sphere in democratic societies serves as the intermediary between politics and society to freely discuss matters of common concern (for instance through media and LTEs), the politically staged public sphere 'creates' a reality through steered press. Using the communist ideology as backdrop, whatever happened in the country had to correspond to this ideology. Merten (2008) states that through the communist ideology, events were interpreted, classified and selected to prepare a fiction of reality which corresponded with communism, even if the facts proved to be otherwise. The public sphere was therefore a staged foray: it did not reflect reality but instead reflected (and celebrated) the achievements of politics (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015a, p. 192). The socialist regime was able to do so by steering the media through the means of political public relations (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015b, p. 840).

The definition and explanation of political public relations comes from Merten (2008, p. 14), namely the "management of the difference between fact and artefact" and to "represent facts in a positive light". This meant that negative facts were either minimized or covered-up in order to "manipulate perceptions of the public to the ruling parties' interests" to create "more positive constructs of reality". These more positive constructs had the aim to serve the interests of the communist party both domestically (e.g. achieving recognition and legitimacy) and internationally in their ideological struggle with the capitalist world (Merten, 2008).

Arendt (1958) however calls the transformation of facts into a more positive construct of reality propaganda. According to her, propaganda is the main characteristic of totalitarian regimes and is essential in rallying support for to-be totalitarian movements. In their work on the effects of media steering in totalitarian states, Friedrich & Brzezinski (1965) also regard media directed by the socialist party as propaganda. They contend that although people tend to withdraw from the public sphere in socialist societies due to the constant flow of propagandist messages, they still incorporate the propagandist views as spread by the regime into their own thinking and stereotypes. Mistrust of the government and refraining from media consumption are therefore consequences of propagandist media.

Fiedler & Meyen (2015b, p. 839; 2015c, p. 454) state that there are a few problems with regarding the media in socialist societies purely as propaganda. First, they purport that there is no strong evidence for stating that people in socialist societies can be 'brainwashed' with propagandist media as concluded by Friedrich & Brzezinski (1965). Furthermore, the term propaganda has a negative connotation which may skew results into the effects or workings of propaganda towards negative results. Finally, Classen (2007, p. 552) states that the term propaganda in itself is difficult to differentiate from public relations, education or even advertising. It is difficult to empirically determine where propaganda starts and where it ends. The term political public relations is therefore a more appropriate term to describe the mass media in socialist societies when using the Arena Model of the public sphere as theoretical background.

## Letters to the editors in socialist societies

Although LTEs in socialist societies were sent to a public body, they often did not contain matters of general concern as in democratic societies, but instead very personal issues (Fitzpatrick, 1996, p. 79). Whereas LTEs in democratic societies are often about providing commentaries on news stories or other matters of general concern and debate, LTEs in socialist societies for a large part contained complaints of various kind. These complaints ranged from bad housing conditions, supply shortages, abusive practices in factories or collective farms, denial of employment or education opportunities as well as loneliness and feuds with spouses. Complaint letters of this kind were mostly submitted as a way of 'blowing a whistle', and not with the authors' intention of publication. In turn, the newspapers could forward the letter to the responsible authorities without publishing it in the newspaper itself (White, 1983, p. 52).

LTEs allowed citizens to, at least to some extent, voice criticism on their government. This had to be within strict limits, as criticism on fundamental questions of Marxism/Leninism or travel restrictions were out of

the question. Criticism had to be constructive, have added value and had to be within the party lines. (Fix, 2013, p. 283). LTEs were therefore also a means where citizens could ventilate their aggression (instead of rallying a protest, for instance). A large minority of LTEs on the other hand dealt with public affairs such as policy, bureaucracy and corruption. According to Fitzpatrick (1996, p. 80) and Betts (2010), letter-writing in socialist societies was a public exercise but posed as private communication with the authorities, both on personal and public matters. LTEs therefore pose as serious accounts of everyday life and its related concerns for citizens in socialist societies.

Similar to LTEs in democratic societies, many of them were not published. Letters with personal concerns and grievances were seldom published, and those that were published were printed in altered form or combined with other letters into short opinion pieces (White, 1983, p. 58). This did not refrain citizens from writing massive amounts of letters to newspapers. Then, every letter a newspaper got had to be answered or forwarded to the right authority in a timely and proper manner. This was even incorporated in both Soviet and GDR law (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015a, p. 189; Fitzpatrick, 1996, p. 101; White, 1983, p. 59).

The main function of newspapers therefore was to process and forward the LTEs they got to the respective authorities, or sometimes take action themselves (Fitzpatrick, 1996, p. 81). White (1983) states that newspapers posed as an ombudsman in the socialist political system. LTEs therefore form one of the few channels of communication between citizens and the government. The possibility of voicing concern through LTEs therefore indicates that next to the politically staged public sphere, there existed an internal public sphere, where the government got to know what sentiments lived in society without having to act with the entire population 'watching' (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015a). The letters that were published often did not require action on the newspaper's part. These are mostly the letters containing a wide array of subjects of public concern, or make reference to the bigger socialist/communist picture (Bos, 1993).

Fix (2013, p. 281) on the other hand states that LTEs were sometimes written by party officials or by newspaper editors themselves (commissioned by those in power). They could be used to artificially boost legitimation of the party course or to enact certain actions or campaigns. Fabricated LTEs could therefore aid in steering the general population towards certain opinions. This may go against the view of Fiedler & Meyen (2015bc), who state that despite political public relations, citizens of socialist societies could not be made to think according to party lines very easily.

## Résumé and conceptual framework

This study takes place against the background of geopolitics of borders, with the main axiom that borders are always manmade and gain meaning through (inter)national law and representation. Despite their intersubjective nature, they remain elementary to foreign policy and the way governments behave themselves towards other governments. Governments do so by defining geopolitical codes towards other governments, categorizing them as ally or foe. The administrations not only base their geopolitical code on facts, but also on popular opinion and culture, in the literature called geopolitical representations. The mass media on the one hand contribute to the creation of geopolitical representations, on the other hand they serve to communicate geopolitical codes to the general public.

Geopolitical representations are based on facts, news, events and personal experience. Together they are moulded into a concept that has meaning. This process of meaning-making is called representation. Humans use signs to signify matters into something that can be understood by other humans. The process of representation and how matters mean can be studied through semiotics. A sign is composed of a signified (the concept to which is being referred) and the signifier (the form a sign takes) with their relationship called signification. This is the Saussure model of semiotics.

The mass media are influential in the process of representation. Their messages are the result of representation and culture, their use being the ability to disseminate government policy to a large audience as well as informing the government of sentiments within society. Together with public events and small encounters, the mass media form the three components of the public sphere as envisioned in the Arena Model. The public sphere is the intermediary sphere between society and politics. The public sphere serves to discuss matters of common concern in an equal and rational fashion for everyone within society.

Both in democratic and socialist societies, the information the media spreads is not a one-way flow of information. In both societies, readers and viewers have the option of sending letters to the editors, in which

they can voice their opinion on the news stories published and other matters of general interest. LTEs are therefore an ideal site of interaction and dialogue, which makes them a prime example of the public sphere. Critics have stated that LTEs in democratic societies have limited value, are written by a non-representative part of society and are not a proper reflection of sentiments in society. In socialist societies, LTEs were one of the few available channels for voicing concern between society and the government. Editors of newspapers had to answer every letter they got. They form a suitable measure for the limited public sphere in societies where freedom of press was not guaranteed. On the other hand, LTEs written in socialist societies were sometimes orchestrated by the regime and were therefore not always genuine reflections of the sentiments that lived in society.

In order to bring the aforementioned theoretical themes together, they are schematized into a conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1 on page 21). The geopolitical codes and geopolitical representations take the centre stage in the diagram. The government formulates geopolitical codes, which give a border meaning. A border also gains meaning through geopolitical representations. Geopolitical representations are created through the (politically staged) public sphere. The mass media, or steered media operating as a political public relations machine, are influential in creating and shaping geopolitical representations, as they are part of the public sphere. LTEs form the smallest unit of analysis. They are a means for ordinary newspaper readers to express their opinion and take part in the debate and/or public sphere. On the other hand, the government in charge of geopolitical codes incorporate the representations from the public sphere, on their turn influencing the debate and representations all over again. This is indicated by the red arrow, and is the main relation investigated in this study. This red relation forms the backbone of this study's main question, being:

*To what extent has Ostpolitik influenced the perceptions of East and West Germans on the inner-German border between 1970–1975 and how?*
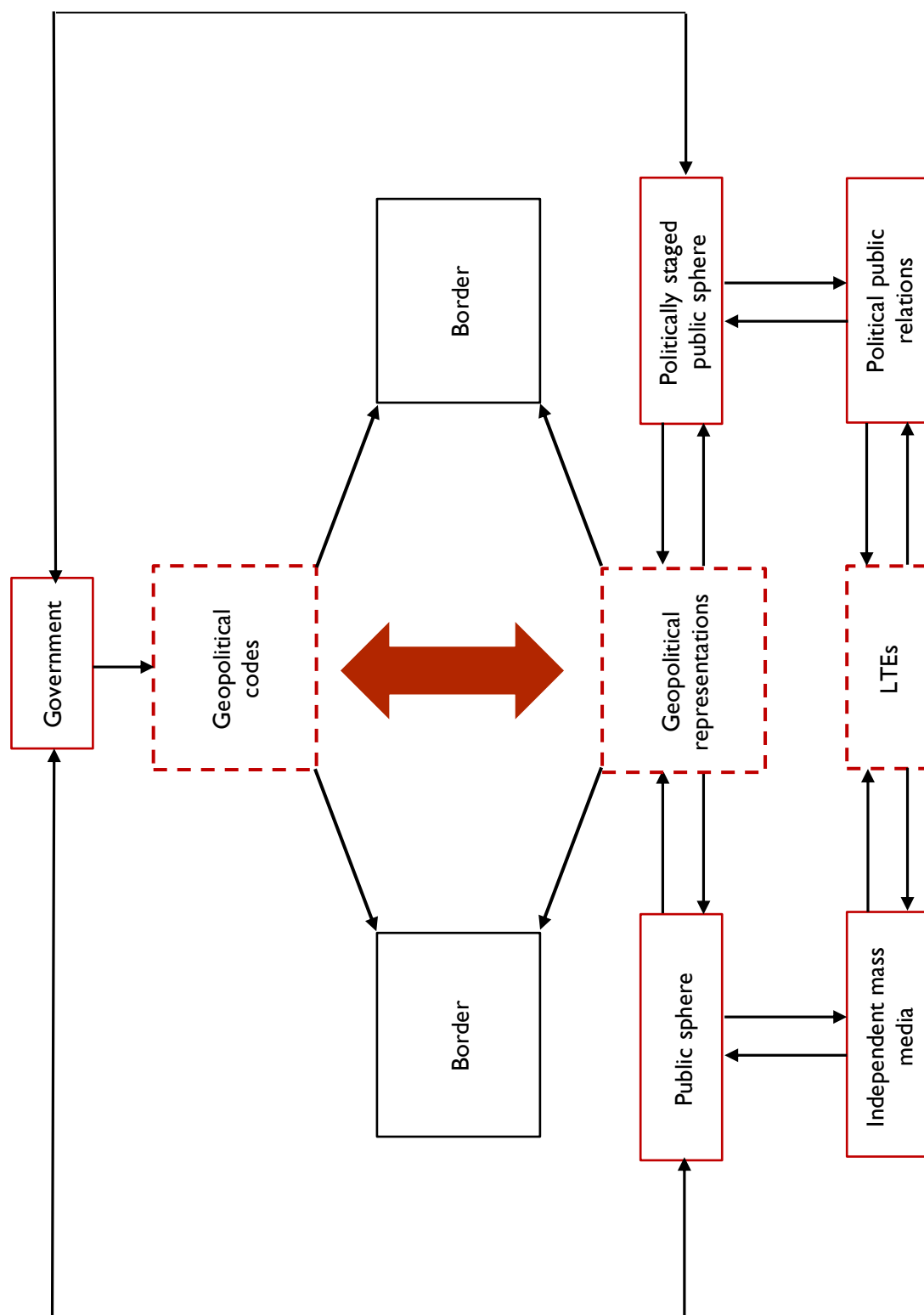
*Figure 2.1 - Conceptual framework*

# Chapter 3 - Methodology and operationalisation

In this chapter, the methodological aspects of data selection, data collection and data processing will be discussed. Deliberations on which newspapers are chosen for this study and why, as well as how the LTEs in question will be collected is described in the following sections. Afterwards, the analytical toolkits of content analysis and social semiotics are discussed. The core of this chapter are the two analysis schemes by which the LTEs on the border will be deconstructed. Issues regarding reliability and validity of the data are also discussed.

## Methodology

### Axioms and qualitative research

When performing scientific research into human geographical reality, it is of importance to reflect on underlying assumptions. The assumptions on what this reality actually is, is called ontology. Two main schools of thought are positivism and constructivism. Within the positivist ontology, it is assumed that there is one reality 'out there' and consequent scientific works will lead to the uncovering of this one reality. In the constructivist ontology, it is assumed that there is no single reality or truth 'out there'. Instead, reality is created and shaped by individuals and groups (Demmers, 2012, pp. 16–17; Hay, 2010, p. 218).

When it comes to epistemology, a division exists between positivists and constructivists. Positivists will articulate that reality can be measured and quantified, which means that reliable instruments capable of measuring this one truth are central to their research. This usually leads to more quantitative research methods (surveys, statistical analysis). Constructivists however will contend that realities are open to multiple interpretations and that these interpretations are used to uncover the meaning of geographical phenomena (Demmers, ibid.; Hay, ibid.). For the constructivist researcher, this will usually lead to the use of more qualitative research methods (interviews, observations, content analysis, semiotics, discourse analysis).

The primary objective of this study is to reinterpret the border between the GDR and the FRG by focussing on meaning-making through the public sphere. This objective already foreshadows that interpretations are given to the border between these two countries as well as the Ostpolitik political context. It is a border that may have very different meanings on either side. Therefore, this study is performed from a constructivist ontology and epistemology. A qualitative methodology therefore lends best to come to the objective of this study on the one hand, and on the other as a suitable toolkit for the analysis of the LTEs. Of course, the analysis of the LTEs helps in answering the research question, to what extent the Ostpolitik has influenced the perceptions of East and West Germans on the inner-German border.

In order to draw a comparison between the meaning-making practices regarding the inner-German border and the geopolitical codes of both the GDR and the FRG, the foreign policies of both countries have to be assessed. This requires a contextualisation and appreciation of the Ostpolitik era based on earlier works. This will also help in better understanding the content of the LTES. Then, as first step of the LTE analysis, it is imperative to categorise them according to their general tone. This categorisation will help in getting a first impression on the debate concerning the inner-German border in both the GDR and the FRG. The different themes articulated in the debate as it was carried between 1970 and 1975 illustrate what sentiments lived under the letter writers: in other words the themes show the social context surrounding the debate. The first categorisation can also shed light on the general opinion East and West Germans may have vis-à-vis each other, which addresses the secondary goal of this study. A content analysis seems best suitable for this first categorisation. The categorised letters will later serve as input for the second part of the analysis, namely the social semiotic analysis which will shed more light on representations in LTEs on the inner-German border using the social context it took place in as background.

The methodological aspects of the content analysis and the semiotic analysis are discussed in the forthcoming sections.

### Content analysis as method

Content analysis is defined by Berelson (1952, p. 18) as "a research method for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest contents of communication". His definition implies that there is a sharp divide between a quantitative and a qualitative way of performing a content analysis. Mayring (2000, p. 6) states

that a quantitative content analysis deals with numbered values and that a qualitative content analysis does not. More specifically, quantitative content analysis can solely be performed using ordinal, interval and scale variables. Qualitative content analysis classifies the content of communication using nominal scale variables.

In the end, this at first sight sharp divide between quantitative and qualitative content analysis does not mean they have to mutually exclude each other. Mayring (2000, p. 7) states that qualitative content analysis can be used to devise and demarcate an analysis scheme for eventual quantitative analysis by loosely applying categories and concepts. This phase model of going from loosely defined categories (nominal variables) to concrete and measurable (ordinal, interval, scale variables) units and revise and reinterpret where necessary indicates that qualitative and quantitative content analysis can be used in conjunction.

Mayring (1983) proposes three basic reasons for performing a content analysis on source material, namely: to summarize a text, to further explain a text and to structure a text. Structuring the text means to filter out previously defined criteria to get a general overview of how these criteria come forward in the source material. In order to establish the general tone of the LTEs, they can be structured by means of a content analysis. This in turn gives an outline of the different themes in the debate on the inner-German border between 1970 and 1975. This will shed light on the social context surrounding the debate.

## Social semiotics as method

What follows from the theoretical framework is that the scientific investigation of how meaning is made can be conducted through semiotic analysis. In a symbolic relationship between signifier and signified, its meaning is settled by convention and is therefore open to multiple interpretations (Peirce, 1931–1958, p. 2292). The meaning of signs can also change over time (Kress, 1997; Laine & van der Velde, 2017, p. 73). Hodge & Kress (1988, p. 12) summarize that meaning is negotiated and that it is never imposed by an almighty author upon its readers through means of absolute truths.

What Hodge & Kress (ibid.) also indicate is that the traditional, Saussurean semiotic school tends to function on the axiom that the meanings of signs are indeed fixed within the source material and are ready to be extracted by the researcher through a neutral analysis scheme. In other words, this tends to be a more positivist approach to meaning-making. On the other hand, a more constructivist approach to semiotics would be that the meaning of the sign is not universal at all, and the extraction of this meaning can also go different ways leading to a world of different meanings other than intended by the author. Hodge & Kress (ibid.) state therefore that "the struggles and their uncertain outcomes must be studied at the level of social action, and their effects in the production of meaning".

The meaning of signs is therefore not only related to the negotiated meaning between signifier and signified, but also on the social context it was written in. This constructivist approach to semiotics can be called social semiotics. Social semiotics is used to find out 'how' a text means: in other words, the interpretation the reader makes when analysing the text (Chandler, 2007, pp. 196–197; Laine & Van Der Velde, 2017, p. 73).

As stated, the goal of this study is to reinterpret the border between the GDR and the FRG by focussing on meaning-making through the public sphere surrounding this border. When taking this into account, the importance of the social context during Ostpolitik 1970-1975 is evident. The combination of investigating meaning-making (semiotics) and taking into account the social context (the debate as outlined in the content analysis) makes social semiotics a suitable methodology to fulfil the goals of this study.

# Operationalisation

## Data selection: newspapers as sources

To conduct an analysis of LTEs, one needs access to sources. Before the selection of sources, three matters were to taken into account, namely their availability, accessibility and the amount of time available. The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (SBB) houses the main newspaper archive for Germany, including newspapers of the former GDR. Apart from digitized newspapers, the SBB also hosts a plethora of newspapers on microfilm, which are accessible to the general public on site. Therefore, there were no limitations in choosing suitable newspapers for this study, as the archives proved comprehensive enough and were accessible in their entirety. As there were only three months available to collect all the necessary data from the SBB archives, digital sources were preferred

over microfilm sources. On top of that, it was decided that three newspapers per country, so a total of six, would be the maximal manageable amount to collect LTEs from during three months.

Based on these three practical reasons of availability, accessibility and time, three GDR newspapers were chosen. These were the Neues Deutschland, Junge Welt and the Leipziger Volkszeitung. The Neues Deutschland was the largest nationally circulated newspaper in the GDR with 955.000 subscribers in 1971, the Junge Welt was the second largest with 509.000 subscribers (Fiedler & Meyen, 2012). The Leipziger Volkszeitung was a regional newspaper for Leipzig and surrounding areas. The Leipziger Volkszeitung and Junge Welt were added to the selection based on Bos' (1993) earlier research into GDR LTEs. The Junge Welt and the Leipziger Volkszeitung were added during data collection, as two other initially chosen GDR newspapers proved unsuitable (see Appendix V - Logbook data collection on page 88 for explanation). Equally, two large nationally circulated FRG newspapers were to be adopted into the list, as well as a regional newspaper.

Because freedom of press was guaranteed by the FRG constitution, another criterium for selection was added, being the newspapers' political stance. Different political stances could influence the content of the LTEs, therefore newspapers with different political stances were preferred. The two large nationwide circulated newspapers of choice were therefore the centre-right Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and the centre-left Süddeutsche Zeitung (Kleinsteuber & Thomass, 2007, p. 112; Maurer & Reinemann, 2006, p. 130). Both newspapers had about 270.000 subscribers each in 1970 (IVW, 1970, p. 63), making them the first and second largest subscription newspapers in the FRG at that time.

Finally, a regional FRG newspaper had to be selected. A suitable candidate would be the Berliner Morgenpost. It has a conservative political stance compared to the earlier discussed Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Süddeutsche Zeitung (Kummer, 2002). The publishing house of the Berliner Morgenpost, Axel Springer Verlag, formulated five principles which its newspapers had to adhere to. The foremost was "peaceful reinstatement of a reunited Germany and where possible a united Europe". Another basic principle was the "support of the Transatlantic partnership". Finally, its newspapers reports would renounce political totalitarianism and would defend the free market (Kummer, 2002). This makes the Berliner Morgenpost an interesting source, because it appears to have an outspoken opinion on the GDR. This gave reason to believe that the readers were outspoken as well.

The Junge Welt, Leipziger Volkszeitung, Berliner Morgenpost and the Süddeutsche Zeitung were stored on the microfilm format and therefore took more time to analyse than the digitally accessible sources (Neues Deutschland and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung). This did not prove problematic in the end and the newspapers did not require replacement due to time constraints. So in the end, the newspapers featured in this research are the Neues Deutschland (ND), Junge Welt (JW) and Leipziger Volkszeitung (LV) from the GDR; and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FA), Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ) and the Berliner Morgenpost (BM) from the FRG. The newspapers are shortly reviewed in Table 3.1 on page 25.

## Data collection: sampling

Because of the limited resources available for this study, it was impossible to analyse all the LTEs on the border published between 1970–1975 in the six aforementioned newspapers. In order to get an impression of the perceptions on the border of letter writers, a selection of cases was made of significant geopolitical events during the first half of the 1970s. These significant geopolitical events may have influenced the perceptions ordinary people had on the border and/or their neighbouring country. Finally, through these cases, the amount of LTEs to be collected and analysed remained workable.

Using geopolitical events as cases resulted in a sample of LTEs from the period 1970-1975. This is a roughly similar approach to Bos (1993). In her book on LTEs in the East German press, Bos (1993, pp. 159–161) analyses LTEs from the four largest GDR newspapers by circulation. Then, she only analysed LTEs from the second quarter of each year the SED held conferences stipulating new media regulations. These SED conferences on press regulations can be deemed cases around which she centres her data collection. What remains in her study are LTEs from the second quarter of the years 1955, 1965, 1979 and 1988 for the four largest GDR newspapers. This amounted to 1223 LTEs on a wide range of topics.

Laine & van der Velde (2017) took a different data collection method in their work on LTEs about the Finnish-Russian border. In their analysis of a major Finnish newspaper's LTEs on the Karelian border, they performed a simple word search using the term 'Karelia'. This implied that their sources were all electronically

| Country | Title | Subtitle | Publisher | Orientation | Circulation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GDR | Neues Deutschland | Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands | Neues Deutschland Verlag, Berlin – Hauptstadt der DDR | Socialist centralized national newspaper, SED | 955.000 (1971 estimate) |
| GDR | Junge Welt | Organ des Zentralrats der Freien Deutschen Jugend | Verlag Junge Welt, Berlin – Hauptstadt der DDR | Socialist centralized national newspaper, FDJ | 509.000 (1971 estimate) |
| GDR | Leipziger Volkszeitung | Organ der Bezirksleitung Leipzig der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands | Verlag Leipziger Volkszeitung, Leipzig | Socialist regional newspaper, SED | Unknown |
| FRG | Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung | Zeitung für Deutschland | F.A.Z. Verlag, Frankfurt am Main | Centre-right | 268.919 (1970) |
| FRG | Süddeutsche Zeitung | Münchner neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wissenschaft und Sport | Süddeutscher Verlag, München | Centre-left | 255.088 (1970) |
| FRG | Berliner Morgenpost | Überparteilich, Berlins größte Abonnementszeitung, Unabhängig | Axel Springer Verlag, Berlin (West) | Right-wing conservative | 233.845 (1970) |

*Table 3.1 - List of newspapers per country*

available, which was not the case in this study. After the word search, they manually selected suitable letters for their analysis. This amounted to 285 LTEs for the time frame 1990–2015. This implies that a temporal limitation like in Bos' (1993) research was not necessary.

This study took Bos' (1993) methodology as base and remodelled it to the needs of this research. This means that a list of cases was drawn up, after which LTEs were analysed from one week before the event until three weeks after the event. LTEs had to be published or answered within 21 days by GDR law (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015a, p. 185). Three weeks after the event was therefore deemed a suitable demarcation. Furthermore, one week prior to the event and three weeks after was a workable window for the amount of time available for empirical data collection, certainly when taking into account that six daily newspapers had to be analysed. This means that for *each* case, 24 weeks of LTEs coverage were analysed (six newspapers and four weeks of coverage).

The eventual selection of cases was based on various studies of the Ostpolitik (Craig, 1994; Haftendorn, 1976; Hofmann, 2007; Krell, 1991; Sarotte, 2001, Wolle, 1998). The list of cases is given in Table 3.2 on page 26. The first substantive event of Ostpolitik is the first meeting between government officials of the GDR and the FRG in 1970. After this first meeting between the GDR and the FRG, a number of treaties were signed in order to normalize relationships between the GDR and FRG on the one hand and the Western bloc and the Eastern bloc on the other. These were: the Treaty of Moscow (FRG-Soviet Union), the Treaty of Warsaw (FRG-Poland), the Four Powers Agreement (Allied Powers U.S., U.K., Soviet Union and France), the Transit Agreement (FRG-GDR), the Grundlagenvertrag (FRG-GDR) and the Treaty of Prague (FRG-CSSR).

These treaties barred all parties from making territorial claims, and therefore acknowledge the borders as drawn after World War II. The treaties eventually led to the recognition of GDR by the FRG (the Grundlagenvertrag), allowing both of them to become members of the United Nations in 1973. These treaties, their implementation dates and the ascension of the FRG and GDR to the UN form the backbone of the cases featured in the research. Other cases of importance are the 1972 FRG general election as well as the resignation

| | Case | Date | Coverage date LTEs |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 1 year prior to 8. Parteitag der SED (pilot) | 1970-06-15 – 1970-06-19 | 09-06-1970 – 10-07-1970 |
| 1 | Erfurter Gipfeltreffen: first visit of FRG chancellor to the GDR | 1970-03-19 | 12-03-1970 - 09-04-1970 |
| 2 | Treaty of Moscow FRG-Soviet Union: recognition of borders Oder/Neiße respectively GDR. Normalisation of relations | 1970-08-12 | 05-08-1970 – 02-09-1970 |
| 3 | Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland: recognition of borders Oder/Neiße (implicitly, GDR border) | 1970-12-07 | 01-12-1970 – 28-12-1970 |
| 4 | Erich Honecker succeeds Walter Ulbricht as First Secretary of the Zentralkomitee der SED (16. ZK Tagung) | 1971-05-03 | 26-04-1971 – 24-05-1971 |
| 5 | 8. Parteitag der SED | 1971-06-15 – 1971-06-19 | 09-06-1971 – 10-07-1971 |
| 6 | Four Powers Agreement U.S., U.K., Soviet Union and France: consolidation of four power status of Berlin, termination of blockages of access routes | 1971-09-03 | 27-08-1971 – 24-09-1971 |
| 7 | Transitabkommen GDR-FRG: travel between FRG and West-Berlin improved | 1971-12-17 | 10-12-1971 – 06-01-1972 |
| 8 | Four Power Agreement and Transitabkommen into force | 1972-06-03 | 27-05-1972 – 24-06-1972 |
| 9 | Bundestagswahl FRG, Willy Brandt re-elected as chancellor | 1972-11-19 | 12-11-1972 – 10-12-1972 |
| 10 | Grundlagenvertrag GDR-FRG: basis for diplomatic relations between GDR and FRG (recognition) | 1972-12-21 | 14-12-1972 – 11-01-1973 |
| 11 | Grundlagenvertrag into force | 1973-06-21 | 14-06-1973 – 12-07-1973 |
| 12 | GDR and FRG join the United Nations as separate states | 1973-09-18 | 11-09-1973 – 09-10-1973 |
| 13 | Treaty of Prague FRG-CSSR: Munich Treaty of 1938 invalid, no more claims on Sudetenland | 1973-12-11 | 04-12-1973 – 01-01-1974 |
| 14 | Guillaume affair: resignation of Brandt after GDR-sponsored espionage scandal | 1974-05-01 | 24-04-1974 – 22-05-1974 |
| 15 | Signing of the Helsinki Accords, consolidating borders in Europe and rapprochement between the Western and Eastern Blocs | 1975-08-01 | 25-07-1975 – 22-08-1975 |

*Table 3.2 - List of cases*

of FRG chancellor Willy Brandt due to a GDR-sponsored espionage scandal in 1974. Craig (1991) dubbed the 1972 FRG general election a "plebiscite" on the Ostpolitik, making it a possibly discursive event worth adopting into the list of cases. The espionage scandal of 1974, which was called the Guillaume affair in the press at that time, was added later. This event had been overlooked in the early stages of the research. It was added during data collection, as it appeared that the scandal would be a significant blow to the rapprochement efforts between the GDR and the FRG.

As important political events in the FRG were added to the case list, so were political events in the GDR. The (unexpected) change of power from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker as new First Secretary of the Zentralkomitee der SED in 1971, as well as the VIII. Parteitag der SED took place right after the first treaties concluded under Ostpolitik, and may have had an influence on the course of consequent events. The case list is concluded with the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975. These accords marked a major step in international rapprochement between the West and the East, stipulating that the borders in Europe as they were at that time should be stable and could only change by peaceful means (CSCE, 1975).

## Data processing part I: operationalisation of content analysis of LTEs

In order to assess how Ostpolitik has influenced perceptions on the border between the GDR and the FRG, it is key to first map out the perceptions on the border on their own. The first step in sketching out these perceptions is sorting the LTEs by their general tone. General tone in this respect means how the author of the letter perceives the border between the GDR and the FRG in light of the current developments. Current developments are defined as the subsequent case the letter belongs to: the geopolitical event as introduced previously in Table 3.2. So, in other words, the perception of the border in light of the Ostpolitik. The categories defining the general tone of the LTE are: positive, neutral and negative. Examples are provided in Box 1 on page 28.

The further substantiation of these three connotations are based on deductive quick scans of a sample of LTEs after these had been collected. They are given in the full operationalisation of this content analysis, to be found in Appendix I - Analysis scheme I: content analysis
on page 74. The substantiations of positive, neutral and negative at the same time pose as the themes along which the debate can be structured. In order to support the choice of categorising the letter according to their tone, illustrative quotes will be added to the data file increasing the robustness of the results.

Not only do the results of this content analysis reveal the general tone of perceptions on the border, in sum they show the different themes along which the debate on the border and/or Ostpolitik was carried between 1970 and 1975. The defined themes allude to which sentiments lived under the general population, giving an indication of the social context the debate took place in. Furthermore, these results show differences between the positions of the newspapers. They also indicate potential differences between perceptions ventilated in local newspapers versus national newspapers. On top of that, it shows which cases attract more attention through LTEs and which do not. In sum, these descriptive statistics help in sketching what different layers of the population think of the border between the GDR and the FRG as well as what geopolitical events cause debate in the newspapers.

## Data processing part II: operationalisation of social semiotic analysis of LTEs

The next step in the analysis of the LTEs is the social semiotic analysis. This means incorporating the previously sketched social context in order to investigate the meaning-making practices surrounding the border. Again, social context influences the symbolic relationship between the earlier introduced signifier and signified. The signified in the LTEs is the border GDR-FRG from either perspective (the neighbour) and/or the inner-German question in light of the Ostpolitik. The text contains the signifier to address the signified. These two elements together form a sign in the Saussurean sense (Chandler, 2007, p. 14). In order to structure the large amount of data, the signifiers are generalised into categories.

In a previous border region study featuring social semiotics, Laine & van der Velde (2017, p. 73) designated five categories of signifiers: activities, events, objects, places and stories (see also Edensor, 1998, 2002; Wodak, 2004, 2008). They define activities as continuous policies and processes. For this study, examples would be the Ostpolitik in general, the Cold War, power blocs struggle or the building up of the socialist society. Event signifiers are for instance natural disasters, political acts or historical events. In this case, they could be the various treaties conducted under Ostpolitik, the Parteitag in the GDR or the elections in the FRG. Objects are defined as signifiers dealing with material culture or the personification of groups. They are for instance the SED leadership, the Brandt government or the depiction of Germans in the neighbouring country as 'different'.

The place signifier contains references to specified geographies or landscapes. Various examples for this case would be calling the GDR 'da drüben, der Zone, Sowjetische Besatzungszone, "DDR"; the FRG for instance 'im Westen, nicht-sozialistischen Ausland, das Imperialistische Ausland'. The places signifier can also mean referring to cities now in the GDR or Poland, as well as references to East- and West-Berlin. Finally, story signifiers contain personal accounts, narratives or stories of shared histories with neighbours. For this study, they could be stories alluding to the past, united Germany and the same language, stories of comparing capitalism and socialism as well as stories relating to World War II. In sum, these signifiers appear suitable and will therefore also be used for this research.

Positive is defined as 'approval of (the government's policy regarding) the border and/or Ostpolitik'. Neutral is defined as no approval (of the government), but no disapproval either. In other words, time will tell. Negative is defined as 'disapproval of (the government's policy regarding) the border and/or Ostpolitik'.

Positive letter FRG:

*„Es muß als Erfolg der Regierung Brandt/Scheel gewertet werden, daß unsere Verbündeten Berlin zum Testfall für den Entspannungswillen Rußlands erklärten und die Sicherung Berlins und seiner Verbindungswege nach Westdeutschland an denen die wirtschaftliche Sicherheit der Stadt hängt, zur Voraussetzung der Teilnahme an einer von der UdSSR mit Nachdruck betriebenen Sicherheitskonferenz machten".*

W. Koßmann
Berliner Morgenpost 21-12-1971, p. 9

Positive letter GDR:

*„Jeder Schritt zur Durchsetzung der friedlichen Koexistenz ist ein Schritt auf dem Wege zum Frieden und zur europäischen Sicherheit und damit ein Gewinn für alle".*

Prof. Dr. Jur. Habil. Joachim Peck
Neues Deutschland 09-09-1971, p. 2

Neutral letter FRG:

*„Abgesehen von der Frage, wieweit die Bundesregierung befugt ist, Machtpositionen der Sowjets in Mitteleuropa rechtlich zu sanktionieren, müßte doch zunächst das Verhältnis der beiden Teile Berlins geklärt werden. Wollte man die Sowjetunion für befugt halten, Ost-Berlin territorial abzuspalten und der DDR (und damit dem eigenen Machtbereich) einzuverleiben, müßten die Westmächte hinsichtlich West-Berlins ein entsprechendes Recht haben. Die Frage Ost-Berlin sollte doch nicht stillschweigend zugunsten der Sowjets unter den Tisch fallen, um dann darüber hinaus wesentlich weitergehende Zugeständnisse zu machen".*

Dr. Jur. Botho Spruth
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 09-07-1970, p. 11

Neutral letter GDR:

*„Heutigentags findet der Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt es nicht unter seine Würde, mit dem Regierungschef der DDR zusammenzutreffen und ihn selbst nach Kassel einzuladen. Haben Willy Brandts Auffassungen sich geändert? Oder gibt es in der Welt - vielleicht sogar in Brandts eigenem imperialistischen Staat - Kräfte, denen er in immer stärkeren Maße Rechnung tragen muß?"*

Manfred Kühne
Leipziger Volkszeitung 22-03-1970, p. 2

Negative letter FRG:

*„Wahrheitsgemäß sollte das Papier "Schenkungsurkunde" genannt werden. Denn in Art. 3 Satz 3 dieses Vertrages haben Brandt und Scheel nichts anderes getan, als große Landteile zu verschenken, die 700 Jahre lang deutsch waren und auf die das deutsche Volk nach wie vor einen Rechtsanspruch hat, auch wenn sie sich zur Zeit in fremder Verwaltung befinden".*

E.R.
Berliner Morgenpost 15-08-1970, p. 11

Negative letter GDR:

*„Trotzdem besteht kein Grund dafür, uns mit der Unterschrift zufriedenzugeben, denn bevor der Vertrag nicht vom Bundestag ratifiziert wurde, besitzt er keinerlei völkerrechtliche Verbindlichkeit für die Bundesregierung".*

Franz Heffing
Junge Welt 25-08-1970, p. 7

*Box 1 - Examples of definitions positive, neutral and negative LTEs*

Examples of these five signifiers have been incorporated into the analysis scheme by deductive quick scans of a sample of LTEs after they had been collected. All criteria of how the signifiers in the LTEs qualify as activities, events, objects, places or stories are given in the full operationalisation of the analysis, to be found in Appendix II - Analysis scheme II: semiotic analysis on page 75. In order to support the choice of categorising the letter according to their signifier, illustrative quotes will be added to the data file increasing the robustness of the analysis.

In conjunction with the content analysis, the social semiotic analysis should provide insight in the representations of the GDR/FRG border from both sides. These representations are to be compared to the shifting geopolitical codes of both the GDR and the FRG in the period 1970-1975 in order to find out how geopolitical code and the geopolitical representations influence each other. This may lead to a reinterpretation of the border and/or a better understanding of life in separated Germany. In turn, the forthcoming can add new insights to the operation of the public sphere in countries where free press is not guaranteed. Moreover, it could add to the existing body of literature on geopolitics between East and West from a cross-national and geo-historical perspective.

## Reliability and validity of LTE data

De Groot (1994, p. 292) defines the reliability of the operationalisation as "the degree to which errors can be excluded". Hox (2009, p. 148) defines the reliability as the "degree to which coincidental errors can be excluded" and the validity as "the degree to which systematic errors can be excluded". Both are of importance for the LTE research.

A coincidental error in this respect could be missing a relevant LTE while browsing through the various newspapers. As the majority of the newspapers is stored on the microfilm format, a digital in-text search is not always possible. It therefore depends on the researchers acumen whether all the relevant LTEs are also scanned and stored. Another example of a coincidental error would be the attribution of the wrong code during the analysis of the LTEs. Both of these mistakes can be blamed on the researcher. Coincidental errors cannot be excluded completely. However, because a high number of relevant LTEs is expected due to a large sample both in time and in newspapers, it is assumed that missing a LTE will not lead to a systematic error in general perceptions that come forward in the LTEs. Typing errors cannot be completely prevented either, but careful reviewing of the dataset can mitigate any misattribution of codes to the LTEs.

Systematic errors however can lead to decreased validity of the research results, they may lead to bias in the data set (Hox, 2009, p. 149). In order to prevent systematic errors, a reliable and representative sample has to be taken. For the LTE analysis, two samples were taken: the newspapers and the cases around which newspaper coverage would be analysed. The newspapers were not randomly selected and therefore do not constitute a representative sample. This should not be a problem, because using LTEs will never lead to a representative sample of the public debate on the inner-German border and Ostpolitik. They are always a representation of a part of the public debate. Therefore, the degree to which the outcomes of this research can be generalised to the entire public debate as it took place between 1970 and 1975 is small. This does not mean that a random choice can be made, as it is still imperative to take various newspaper perspectives into account to get an as broad as possible overview.

For the GDR newspapers, this is not a problem, because it was assumed that the differences in reporting and style were small due to the fact that the press was steered by the government (as was indicated by Fiedler & Meyen, 2015ab, p. 192; p. 840). Despite the sources being selected on the basis of pragmatism, availability and previous research (Bos, 1993), the three newspaper do constitute a proper sample, as the two largest newspapers and a regional newspaper were analysed and differences in style and reporting were not expected beforehand.

For the FRG newspapers, their choice was initially based on the selection of GDR newspapers. Therefore, the two largest nationally circulated FRG newspapers were to be adopted into the list, as well as a regional newspaper. This meant that the Frankfurter Allgemeine and the Süddeutsche Zeitung would be selected. The regional newspaper Berliner Morgenpost was chosen because of its political stance, which would balance the more centrist national newspapers (Kummer, 2002). On this basis, no bias favouring one certain point of view over another was expected and the amount of LTEs from newspapers with different political stances was expected to be roughly equal.

In order to secure a level of validity, a small sample of LTEs from both sides of the border was taken to check the robustness of the theoretical framework and the suitability of the chosen method of analysis (Boeije, 2009, pp. 275–307). This pilot study was dubbed case 0 and featured a time period of one year before a particular case from the aforementioned list. Using a random number generator, it was decided that the pilot study would concern the months one year before the VII. Parteitag der SED, being case 5. From this pilot study, it appeared that all the newspapers except the Leipziger Volkszeitung yielded relevant LTEs with differing opinions and perceptions (at first sight though, these letters later proved irrelevant upon analysis). Therefore, it was decided to continue the data collection with the six aforementioned newspapers.

In order to further increase the validity of the results, notes were taken during data collection to ensure transparency and to note any significant changes in direction (Boeije, 2009, p. 276). All the researchers deliberations during the data collection process have been documented in Appendix V - Logbook data collection on page 88.

## Expectations

After case selection, newspaper selection and defining how many weeks of coverage would be analysed, an estimated number of 300 suitable LTEs was expected in total. This roughly translated to four letters per analysed week. How many of these letters were written in either the GDR or the FRG could not be determined beforehand. It was argued that because the GDR had a well-established tradition of sending LTEs, a slight bias in favour of the GDR was expected. However, before data collection it was not known whether the border and the Ostpolitik in general were widespread themes in GDR letters, which might lead to a bias in favour of the FRG. For the FRG, a sufficient amount of suitable letters was expected, as freedom of press was guaranteed. The chosen time frame for this research 1970-1975 should however sufficiently boost the amount of letters on the subject matter on both sides of the border.

When it comes to the content of the letters, it can be expected that letters from the GDR show a degree of bias in favour of government policy. Although LTEs are a proxy for the public sphere, this does not mean that everything could be written. Criticism was allowed, however only within the predetermined margins and any grievances had to be formulated in a constructive way. This might be even more profound in the letters that were published. It can indeed be expected that the LTEs in GDR newspapers are not too critical on the government, let alone the status quo of a separated Germany. This makes published LTEs on the border published in the GDR even more noteworthy.

LTEs on the border and geopolitical events from the GDR are expected to be formulated in the same kind of 'party language' as other news reports. This means a lot of references to socialism, the party, the party lines and the danger of the class enemy. This makes close reading even more acute. However, because of this alignment with the party lines, the claim can be made that LTEs are generally positive about the border and/or Ostpolitik. It can be expected that the positive coverage on détente involves a degree of alignment with the politically staged public sphere.

Regarding letters written in the FRG, it can logically be assumed that there is more room for criticism. This can also translate in criticism on the rapprochement efforts itself. Without prior indications that the Ostpolitik was either fully endorsed or shunned by the West German population, a mixed view is expected. The Berliner Morgenpost is expected to be more critical, as it is a newspaper published by Axel Springer Verlag. This is expected to be balanced out by the LTEs in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and the Süddeutsche Zeitung, which have a higher readership in centrist-oriented circles of society.

The results that the LTEs yield are reported by using quotes to both define their tone as well as the signifier used. One or two quotes per LTE will suffice to define the tone of the letter. After all the letters are sorted according to their tone, quantitative overviews can be generated on how positive, neutral or negative the LTE writers are and how many times different debate themes come forward. As stated before, this will allow to give an indication of the social context the debate on the border and/or Ostpolitik took place in.

Quotes will also be used to determine which signifier the author uses in the representations of the border. The use of signifiers will not be reported in a quantitative manner. Instead, the most interesting representations will be featured in the results, as well as recurring representations. This will allow to demonstrate what signifying practices in general took place during the research period.

# Chapter 4 - Results

This chapter features the results of the LTE analysis. It starts with a contextualisation of the Ostpolitik, which will serve to determine the geopolitical codes the GDR and the FRG adhered to between 1970 and 1975. This will pose as the answer to sub-question 1. Afterwards, the results of the content analysis and the social semiotic analysis are given. First, descriptive statistics on the data set will be provided, followed by an overview of the perceptions on the border and the signifier used in the LTEs. These results will form an answer to sub-question 2. A comparison will be drawn between the geopolitical codes the governments on both sides of the border adhered to and the results of the LTE analysis, leading to an answer of sub-question 3. The chapter concludes with an answer to the main research question as well as takeaways for concluding the research.

## Setting the stage: evolving geopolitical codes in GDR and FRG during Ostpolitik

Before diving into the Ostpolitik itself, it is important to give a degree of context on what happened in both the GDR and the FRG prior to 1970. The context will be set for both countries, after which an overview of the Ostpolitik itself will follow. This overview will be concluded with the application of the geopolitical code theory by Gaddis (1982) and Flint & Taylor (2002) to the era of Ostpolitik.

### Fortified border and economic reforms: the 1960s in the GDR

The border between the GDR and the FRG had been practically closed for GDR citizens already since 1952. This was done in order to prevent the mass outflow of GDR citizens towards the FRG (Paul, 2003). For GDR citizens planning on leaving the country, Berlin was the only remaining loophole. This ended with the construction of the Berlin Wall in the night of August 13th, 1961: the fortified border around West-Berlin. Two months prior to the start of the construction, First Secretary Walter Ulbricht, had denied that his government was planning on building a wall around West-Berlin, using his infamous words "Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten". At the same time, the Soviet Union's attitude towards the inner-German question turned sharply, favouring distancing from the FRG. In a telephone conversation between the GDR's First Secretary Ulbricht and Soviet First Secretary Khrushchev on August 1st, 1961, the Soviet leadership explicitly granted permission for the GDR regime to start the construction of a wall around West-Berlin (Presidential archive of the Russian Federation, 2009).

Ulbricht attributed the economic hardship in the GDR due to ever ongoing brain drain towards the West. In his contact with the Soviet leadership, Ulbricht stated that economic reasons were the main motivation to construct the Wall (Heidemeyer, 2008, pp. 87-109). Khrushchev on the other hand answered that Ulbricht had to politically motivate the reasons for constructing the Wall. He proposed to Ulbricht that the permanent closing of the border would benefit all socialist countries in the Eastern bloc: it would protect them from Western agents and provocateurs. According to the official response from the GDR regime and GDR newspaper reports, the Wall was therefore an attempt to secure peace in Europe (ND, 13-08-1961, p. 1).

Wolle (1998, pp. 27-28) states that after the construction of the Berlin Wall, living conditions within the GDR worsened. Every opposition against the state, the new border and any fleeing attempt were to be punished. Prosecution of regime opponents reached an all-time high with four times more verdicts in the second half of 1961 than in the first half. Food shortages, already a pronounced problem, became even more problematic after the construction of the Wall. A planned rationing of butter, produce and meat could only be prevented due to food imports from the Soviet Union. The separation from the FRG was as profound as ever. However, for many GDR citizens the reality of everyday life kept them occupied. Gathering the necessary food and supplies distracted from thinking about the closed border too much. If life had to be lived, it had to be in the GDR from now on.

#### The NÖSPL as solution to economic hardship

To solve the economy of scarcity, the GDR regime devised economic reforms in order to boost production. It was therefore that First Secretary Ulbricht decided to introduce a reform plan under the name of Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung (NÖSPL). This gave public companies more responsibilities, flexibility in reaching the production goals as well as more freedom in the implementation of innovations (Paul, 2003). Core of the NÖSPL was the slow introduction of market mechanisms with help of mathematical and

economic models. The introduction of these market mechanisms would mean taking up more economic relations with the West, in particular with the FRG. Combining Western technology with cheap Soviet raw materials would increase production output and improve product quality, which the GDR could then sell to countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain. (Sarotte, 2001, p. 77; Wolle, 1998, pp. 30-31). Walter Ulbricht believed in his strategy and seemed eager to open up channels of communication with the FRG to negotiate trade deals. The other members of the GDR Politburo, especially a faction headed by Erich Honecker, were not very enthusiastic. They reasoned that engaging with the class enemy on the other side of the border under the NÖSPL meant that socialist principles would be thrown overboard. On top of that, getting both the Soviet Union and the FRG to conform to the foreseen plan seemed impossible, as the Soviet Union itself was also very eager to improve economic relations with the West for increased inflow of hard currency (Sarotte, 2001, p. 19).

### Ulbricht's arrogance

Another motive for Ulbricht to devise the NÖSPL was that he truly believed that the GDR could become an exemplary model state for the other socialist countries (including the Soviet Union). He also believed that using the combination of technology and cheap raw materials, the GDR could compete with the FRG in terms of economic performance, consequently providing a true alternative to capitalism. Ulbricht's aspirations would become an insult to Moscow, as he presented the GDR to be the 'better socialist system' compared to the Soviet Union. Sarotte (2001, p. 18-30) postulates that Ulbricht felt entitled to make these statements based on his seniority. He had been in power since 1949 and had met the father of communism Vladmir Lenin in person, the only Eastern European leader who had. This entitled him to lecture the Moscow leadership, and not the other way around. The personality of Ulbricht has to be kept in mind in explaining his early engagements with the FRG. Ulbricht seemed more eager to engage with the FRG leadership than was postulated by for instance Garton Ash (1993), who attributed the Ostpolitik's success mostly to Brandt, U.S. presidents Kennedy and Nixon, as well as the late U.S. secretary of state Henry Kissinger.

The first results of the implementation of the NÖSPL were promising. This was mostly due to internal economic reforms, not because of renewed relations with the West. Consumer goods like televisions, refrigerators and washing machines became more accessible to households and car ownership increased (Paul, 2003; Wolle, 1998, p. 28). Throughout the 1960, working hours were shortened until the point a five-day work week became standard practice for many. Grand prestige project of urban renewal were undertaken, such as the Fernsehturm in Berlin and the Karl-Marx-Universität in Leipzig. However, at the end of the 1960s, these economic achievements turned out to be built on a system which was in essence the same as during the foundation of the GDR in 1949.

The cosmetic changes of the NÖSPL could not prevent renewed shortages of coal and potatoes in 1969. In the end, few had changed during the 1960s: the SED was solidly in power, economic reforms had failed to yield significant results and problems with the building-up of socialism still persisted as if it were the 1950s. Despite the apparent failure of Ulbricht's economic reforms, he still believed in improving relations with the FRG, to the distaste of the Soviet Union (Sarotte, 2001, p. 77). An interesting power triangle between East-Berlin, Moscow and Bonn came to the fore from 1969 and onwards.

## Changing attitudes towards the East: the 1960s in the FRG

### Willy Brandt's deliberations

Whereas the personality of Walter Ulbricht is essential to understand his later actions (and fall), so does the personality of Willy Brandt deserve closer examination to explain the rapprochement of the 1970s (Hofmann, 2007, p. 176). Whereas the closing of the border and the construction of the Berlin Wall surely are facts attributing to the formulation of Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik principles, there is more to the equation. Already in the 1950s, Willy Brandt formulated a concept of coexistence between the FRG and the GDR while being a member of the Senate of West-Berlin. His early concept of coexistence however meant no acknowledgement of the status quo at that time: in other words no recognition of the GDR in any way. Accordingly, a dialogue should be opened, instead of the then regular stance that the FRG government does not talk to representatives of the GDR (Hofmann, 2007, p. 176; Wilkens, 2007, p. 68).

This changed with the previously mentioned construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and over the course of the 1960s. The Berlin Wall consolidated the GDR's position as a state and made the separation of Germany not only a conceptual but also a material fact. It became clear for Brandt, at that time the governing mayor of West-Berlin, that any answer to the Berlin question had to be formulated in conjunction with the four Allied Powers controlling Berlin. On top of that, Brandt realised that the process would take time and had to be pursued in conjunction with other, European-focussed détente initiatives (Hoffman, 2007, p. 128-129; Wilkens, 2007, p. 68).

A complicated puzzle arose in which a modus operandi had to be formulated to deal with the GDR without full and legal recognition. It had to secure humanitarian relief for the people on both sides of the Berlin Wall without side-lining the interests of the four Allied powers in Europe and the world alike (Hofmann, 2007, pp. 43-60; Sarotte, 2001, p. 11). The construction of the Berlin Wall and the passiveness of the Western Allies in its aftermath showed that engaging with the GDR was in the FRG's own interest. Tensions had increased in Berlin and no-one would benefit from more war on European soil (Sarotte, 2001, p. 11-12).

### The Passierscheinabkommen as first try-out

One of the first accomplishments in relation to the above described issues was the conclusion of the temporary Passierscheinabkommen (Pass-Agreement) in 1963. As mayor of West-Berlin, Brandt managed to secure permits for West-Berliners to visit their families in East-Berlin on holidays. It was the first time people were allowed to cross the Berlin border since its closure two years earlier. It has to be noted that right after the construction of the Wall, the GDR authorities already offered West-Berlin to install travel permit distribution offices, an offer which was refused by West-Berlin. Also on the occasion of the Passierscheinabkommen, the invitation to start negotiations over permits came from the GDR Council of Ministers (Hofmann, 2007, p. 90-91). This time, Willy Brandt took his chance however. He explained his motives to the public by stating that through taking "small steps, human misfortune as a consequence of the Wall could be alleviated by allowing limited visits and contacts" (Hofmann, 2007, p. 82; Wilkens, 2007, p. 69).

This policy mantra was later summarised by Willy Brandt's close aide Egon Bahr, stating that "Wandel dürch Annäherung" (change by attempting to work closer together with the GDR with the aim of rapprochement) would be their new approach in dealing with the authorities in East-Berlin (Hofmann, 2007, p. 85; Sarotte, 2001, p. 12; Wilkens, 2007, p. 69). This would, according to Brandt, eventually lead to the transformation of the GDR from within. However, the aim was not to establish reunification, as Brandt and Bahr realised that the construction of the Wall prevented this from happening any time soon.

The Passierscheinabkommen is a remarkable feat, as Brandt managed to conclude it without consultation of the four Allied Powers. On top of that, it was the first time a West-Berlin politician engaged with a governmental body of the GDR, something no FRG politician had done before. In order to prevent a discussion on whether the agreement was a diplomatic recognition of the GDR or not, Brandt and Bahr included an 'agree to disagree' clause to the final document. It left out fundamental definitions and localities about Berlin and limited the agreement only to practicalities of allowing West-Berliners to cross the border on occasions. It would be a similar approach to the conclusion of the Four Powers Agreement in 1971, which also stipulated certain terms but did not include reference to the actual status of Berlin proper – referring to it as 'the relevant area' (Hoffmann, p. 91-93). With practicalities solved for the time being, the fundamental issues had to be tackled somehow.

### Future implications

The success of the Passierscheinabkommen strengthened Brandt and Bahr in their future efforts, but also led them to draw some important conclusions. Hofmann (2007, p. 131) states that more was required than mere humanitarians relief in order to pave the way towards transformation of the GDR from within. Brandt now more concretely realised that resolving the status of Berlin and progress on the inner-German question are interrelated processes. He found out that these issues would depend on the Soviet Union, as the GDR was very strongly tied to it politically and militarily. Therefore, relations between the Soviet Union and the FRG had to be improved, as well as relations between the U.S. and the Soviets. Moreover, the security concerns of the Soviet Union had to be taken seriously in trying to align the GDR with the FRG. In the end, Brandt and Bahr purported that the

reunification of Germany would ultimately depend on European unification. These principles are also cited by Garton Ash (1993) and Wilkens (2007, pp. 69-70).

Whereas Brandt in general realised that the Four Allied Powers were needed to make progress, he now knew more concretely what order of steps he had to take in seeking rapprochement with the GDR (and they involved Moscow and Warsaw as it turned out). But before that, German attitudes with regards to the East in general had to be worked on. This became possible during the chancellorship of Kurt-Georg Kiesinger in 1966, where Willy Brandt became secretary of state.

Since the foundation of the FRG in 1949, chancellors Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard did not take up any relations with states that recognised the GDR as a state. The FRG itself never interacted with the GDR and returned every letter they got from its government unopened (Sarotte, 2001, p. 13). This policy came to be known as the Hallstein doctrine. Concretely, it meant that the FRG only had diplomatic relations to the Soviet Union, but not to the other Eastern European states as well as many third world countries which did acknowledge the existence of the GDR. Hoffman (2007, p. 132) and Sarotte (2001, p. 12) state that this was odd for Eastern European states, as they had no choice in recognising the GDR when it was founded. It also meant that the GDR was the only representative of the German people in Eastern Europe, which diminished FRG influence over the region. With international politics shifting towards multilateralism and increasing unease of Western allies with the Hallstein doctrine, the FRG government realised in late 1966 that a renewed foreign policy was needed (Krell, 1991, pp. 317-318; Wilkens, 2007, p. 71).

*Changing perspectives and first actions*

Within the FRG, public opinion also swayed towards more engagement with the Eastern European states, particularly with intellectuals and young people. Eastern Europeans were still traumatised due to Nazi Germany's atrocities and many did not trust the German successor state. In order to come to terms with the past, a stretched out hand towards Eastern Europe — and indirectly, the Soviet Union — was needed (Krell, 1991, p. 320). Apart from the Hallstein doctrine, another important fact stood in its way however. Until 1970, the so-called Oder-Neiße-Line, the border between the GDR and Poland, was not recognised as the border of post-war Germany. Instead, the FRG asserted that peace talks to settle WWII had to revolve around the 1937 border of Nazi-Germany, which included large portions of Poland. Poland still saw the non-recognition of the Oder-Neiße-Line as an imperialist and revisionist cause. For Poland, the FRG's recognition of the Oder-Neiße-Line was elementary in order to accept the stretched-out hand (Hofmann, 2007, p. 133; Wilkens, 2007, p. 72).

Despite this, the FRG government in 1966 sent the so-called "Peace Notes" to all Eastern European states except the GDR. These letters indicated their commitment to start negotiations over non-aggression pacts. They did not yield any results because both the GDR and the Soviet Union were bypassed, as well as the fact that the Oder-Neiße-Line still was not acknowledged as the border of post-war Germany (Garton Ash, 1993; Sarotte, 2001, pp. 12-13). Taking into account Brandt's deliberations of how to reach rapprochement with the GDR, it became apparent that the key to this lay in Moscow and Warsaw.

The notion that Moscow was key in achieving Brandt and Bahr's goals became even more pronounced during the Prague Spring. In the first half of 1968, the Soviet army invaded Czechoslovakia to halt the reforms undertaken by Alexander Dubcek's pragmatic socialist government. Its forced Brandt and Bahr to realise that the FRG's allies on both sides of the Atlantic were more important than ever for security. The invasion of Czechoslovakia also showed that peaceful co-existence and self-determination for all peoples was far away (Sarotte, 2001, p. 16; Hofmann, 2007, p. 148). An interesting side-note would be that although reform-minded himself, Walter Ulbricht condemned the reforms that were presented in Czechoslovakia and was determined to end them. Kaiser (1997, p. 300) and Sarotte (2001, p. 18) state that this apparent inconsistency can again be attributed to Ulbricht's perception of him being the only one entitled to reforms, as he was the oldest and wisest socialist leader in the Eastern Bloc. As stated earlier, his stubbornness would eventually lead to his fall.

Apart from the complications arising from the Prague Spring, the time to set off the process of rapprochement for the FRG was running out. Wilkens (2007, p. 72) states that the FRG's biggest asset towards the Soviet Union and the GDR was their recognition power: the FRG could lift the veto of non-recognition of the GDR as another German state. Should the GDR have managed to get more recognition or consolidative power on its own, the FRG would lose its biggest bargaining chip.

However, towards 1969 the skies seemed to clear. Bahr realised that the Soviet Union was the only state able to seize concessions from the GDR and anticipated that Moscow would rather serve its own interests first. As the Soviets were getting fond of the idea of stability in Europe between the power blocs, they started to become more responsive towards Brandt's and Bahr's calls for negotiations. Garton Ash (1993) states that Moscow had economic motives all along: better ties to the FRG could mean more trade and economic aid. Taking into account Ulbricht's similar aspirations under his NÖSPL, an interesting situation surfaced where both the Soviet Union and the GDR were eager to negotiate.

The FRG could use this situation in its advantage as it would prove later. This positive climate arose right at the moment when Willy Brandt was elected chancellor of the FRG in 1969. Egon Bahr became his secretary and chief negotiator. The baseline of the new SPD-FDP coalition led by Brandt would be the acceptance of the "so-called results of World War II". Krell (1991) not only postulates that this was supported by the entire cabinet Brandt I, but also by the majority of the citizens of the FRG. The mandate to begin the process of Ostpolitik was set, the conditions to do so proved favourable. Brandt was ready to put all his prior thoughts on Ostpolitik into practice (Sarotte, 2001, p. 27).

## Ostpolitik implemented: the 1970s

### Who gets to go first?

Sarotte (2001, p. 27) deems Willy Brandt's inaugural address in October 1969 the true start of the Ostpolitik era. In his speech, he distanced himself from his predecessors by declaring that he wants to negotiate with the Eastern bloc. By calling the GDR 'another state on German soil', further distancing between the FRG and the GDR could be prevented. He also made clear that improving relations with the GDR would also entail better contacts with the Soviet Union. The speech also reached Ulbricht and Soviet leader Brezhnev. Both of them had their own thoughts on how to engage with the FRG's new chancellor and his ideas on the relationship to the GDR.

The Soviet Union was interested in improving relations with the FRG. Apart from potential economic benefits, more cooperation between them would weaken the FRG's relationship with the United States. In turn, this would possibly prevent the instalment of nuclear weapons on FRG soil. Therefore, the Soviet Union was eager to be the primary negotiating partner of the FRG. Brezhnev therefore played a double game. On the one hand, he wanted to be the preferred negotiating partner in the Ostpolitik efforts, while on the other, he had to keep the eager Ulbricht out of the game. As stated, Ulbricht was just as motivated to start his talks with Bonn in order to improve his own economic situation, to the distaste of his own Politburo and his future successor Erich Honecker. Ulbricht even went as far as to draft a German-German treaty stipulating the relationship between them, calling for equal relations (Sarotte, 2001, pp. 29-36; Wolle, 1998, pp. 57-59).

Ulbricht wanted to consult with Brezhnev on his draft treaty. Fearing that the GDR would take the initiative, Brezhnev stalled Ulbricht's aspirations by insisting that the treaty would be discussed in a plenary session of all Warsaw Pact states. In the end, the Eastern European states (on instigation of Brezhnev) called for a full and legal recognition of the GDR by the FRG. On top of that, Brezhnev advised Erich Honecker (and not Ulbricht) to proceed with caution in engaging with the FRG. Everything had to be consulted with Moscow and the other socialist states in order to act as a unified front. In doing so, Brezhnev had a free hand in negotiating with the FRG (Sarotte, 2001, pp. 29-36; Wolle, 1998, pp. 57-59). He also managed to undermine Ulbricht: his days were counted as he constantly tried to establish his own course independently from Moscow. Honecker was designated to succeed him when the time was right *(case 4)*, as he did listen to Moscow in case of disagreement. By instructing the GDR leadership to set the stakes very high in the first meeting with the FRG, the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen *(case 1)* and the follow-up meeting in Kassel were doomed from the start (Sarotte, 2001, pp. 54-59).

### Berlin, Bonn and Moscow entangled

The sequence of events and treaties in the Ostpolitik era becomes clear with the above assessment. Because of the Soviet Union's influence over the GDR, they managed to make the negotiations of the Treaty of Moscow with the FRG the top priority. This resulted in the signing of the actual treaty in August 1970 *(case 2)*. In parallel, the FRG had conducted the Treaty of Warsaw with Poland in December of the same year *(case 3)*. The FRG

recognised the Oder-Neiße-Line and therefore showed a bona fide interest in pursuing détente with the Eastern bloc. The only thing left for Brandt was securing a majority in the Bundestag to ratify the treaties. In a remarkable twist of events, Brandt informed Brezhnev that the ratification of the Treaties of Moscow and Warsaw would only proceed if significant progress was made in the questions over (West-)Berlin and the German-German talks (Hanhimäki, 2007, p. 164; Hofmann, 2007, p. 179; Sarotte, 2001, pp. 109-111).

With Moscow and Warsaw forced into a holding pattern, the focus shifted towards the Four Power talks surrounding Berlin. In parallel, the talks between the FRG and the GDR also came to a standstill because of high demands from the GDR. These included full FRG recognition and a decrease of official FRG presence in West-Berlin. The Soviet Union, feeling uneasy with the situation, instructed the GDR to make concessions towards the FRG in order to clear the way for the Four Power talks to continue. Brezhnev did so, because the concrete details of how to implement the Four Powers Agreement (meaning the transit of goods and people between the FRG and West-Berlin) would be left to the FRG and GDR themselves (Sarotte, 2001, pp. 123-124).

In the end, it was agreed upon that West-Berlin was not part of the FRG, something the GDR was especially fond of *(case 6)*. In return for this Allied concession, the Soviets allowed the FRG to represent West-Berlin abroad and citizens of West-Berlin could get an FRG passport for travelling. The Allies stated that East-Berlin was a de facto part of the GDR (Bange & Niedhart, 2004; Garthoff, 1994, p. 140). The concrete transit agreements however would be left to the FRG and the GDR to discuss. Only after these talk bore sufficient results, the Four Powers Agreement would be put into force (and indirectly, the Treaties of Moscow and Warsaw). So again, the Allied powers had made themselves dependent on the negotiations between the FRG and the GDR (Hanhimäki, 2007, p. 166; Sarotte, 2001, pp. 118-121).

Swift progress was made in the negotiations over the Transitabkommen *(case 7)*. The agreement stipulated that the FRG would pay an annual lump-sum amount to the GDR for using their infrastructure and the GDR would allow anyone in with a valid passport. The use of private vehicles was allowed, but travellers were only allowed to stop a designated service stations (Bahr, 1996, p. 364). All seemed good for the ratification of the treaties by the West-German Bundestag. However, the CDU opposition as well as the conservative news media headed by Axel Springer saw their chance to block the rapprochement efforts in general and the Transitabkommen in particular (Sarotte, 2001, p. 96). The opposition called for a constructive vote of no confidence aimed at the Brandt government (Garton Ash, 1993). The Soviet Union as well as the GDR colluded in trying to swing the vote in the Bundestag. However, the Transitabkommen was not the final step in enabling travel between the countries, as the very specific details had to be discussed in the so-called Verkehrsabkommen, or traffic treaty (Wolle, 1998, p. 59).

In order to create a positive climate in the FRG, the GDR decided to allow West-Germans in for the Easter and Pentecost holidays in 1972, even before the technical details were all discussed. Acknowledging that the vote of no confidence could blow the entire rapprochement process, the GDR and FRG negotiators worked hard to come to a Verkehrsabkommen before the vote in the Bundestag. They narrowly succeeded. In order to protect Brandt, now First Secretary Erich Honecker held a speech stating that the CDU opposition was harmful to the positive developments between the German states. He also entertained that the successful conclusion of the Transitabkommen would entice the GDR to discuss the future Grundlagenvertrag (Wolle, 1998, p. 60). In the end, the vote of no-confidence was won by Brandt with a two vote margin. It turned out that the GDR secret service Stasi had paid off CDU members of the Bundestag to vote in favour of the Brandt government (Gieseke, 2008, p. 406; Sarotte, 2001, pp. 130-134; Wolle, 1998, pp. 58-60). The treaties were eventually all ratified by the Bundestag *(case 8)*.

### The Grundlagenvertrag and domestic turmoil

With the Treaties of Moscow and Warsaw, the Four Powers Agreement and the Transitabkommen all signed and ratified, the way was clear for the FRG and the GDR to start their own negotiations over their relationship. The GDR was quick to state their base line in the negotiations: a permanent separation of both German states with its borders being non-negotiable and final. In order to seek more domestic approval, Brandt decided to call for another constructive vote of no confidence in the Bundestag. He knew he would lose the vote and new elections would be inevitable. Should he win the election, he could pursue negotiations with the GDR without any risks of dissidents compromising the process (Wolle, 1998, pp. 60-61).

With the elections coming, tough negotiations were held in the summer and autumn of 1972, eventually leading to a deadlock. Chief negotiator Bahr travelled to Moscow in order to negotiate with Brezhnev over stipulations that would entice the GDR leadership to make compromises. Bahr had leverage over Brezhnev, as the two made an agreement on an oil pipeline which the FRG had financed. The Soviets eventually directed the SED towards making a compromise with the FRG over the existence of 'a German nation', calling it instead 'the national question'. The SED leadership was furious about Bahr side-lining them, but eventually Moscow's will prevailed over the GDR. The Soviets namely feared a CDU-led government, should Brandt lose his upcoming election (Sarotte, 2001, pp. 139-146; Wolle, 1998, pp. 60-61). In the end, an agreement was reached between the GDR and the FRG, also because the GDR got a 1 billion DM swing credit with the FRG. Both money and Moscow's pressure lured the GDR into making an agreement with the FRG, 11 days before the FRG elections. Garton Ash (1993) called the election a plebiscite on Ostpolitik. Brandt won the election and managed to form a renewed SPD-FDP cabinet (*case 9*). The Grundlagenvertrag was signed two days after the elections (*case 10*).

Finally, a basic treaty with the GDR was signed. Although the FRG did not fully and legally recognize the GDR ('equal' relationship with the exchange of 'permanent missions' instead of embassies), it did allow the GDR to consolidate itself as a proper state with international merits. The way to UN membership was opened in September 1973 *(case 12)* and the German separation seemed permanent for the future. With many twists and turns, Brandt's 1950s statement of no recognition had turned around 180 degrees.

Through the events of 1972 and 1973, the FRG and the GDR allowed for the organisation of a European Security Conference, to be held in Helsinki in 1975. It served to make agreements over the borders in Europe and sponsor détente between the Western and Eastern power blocs *(case 15)*. The GDR was allowed to sit at the table with the superpowers and other NATO states: they were a fully accepted negotiating partner. Willy Brandt would not sit at the table however. He had been forced to resign due to — ironically — a GDR sponsored espionage scandal *(case 14)*. It turned out that one of his close aides Günter Guillaume had shared classified information with the GDR secret service Stasi. It meant the end of the Willy Brandt era, after 5 years of pragmatic politics.

## Conclusion sub-question 1

### Theory

The above sequence of events in both the GDR and the FRG show that combinations of pragmatism, diplomacy and monetary gain are all linked to the treaties and agreements conducted during the era of Ostpolitik. The above descriptions of Willy Brandt and Walter Ulbricht show that political leaders indeed incorporate their personalities and prior personal experiences into their foreign policy beliefs, as was demonstrated by Dijkink (1998), Gaddis (1982) and George (1969) in the theoretical framework. It can therefore be assumed that these key figures incorporated their own representations of past events into their consequent geopolitical codes. This claim can be substantiated by using Snyder's (1993, p. 118) study, who applied George's (1969) work on operational codes on the Ostpolitik's lead figures.

For Willy Brandt, important events which have shaped his later actions are the construction of the Berlin Wall and the consequent human misfortune suffered by those living with it. His experiences as secretary of state in the Kiesinger government showed him that the key to détente and rapprochement between the FRG and the GDR lay both in Moscow and Warsaw. For Walter Ulbricht, his long experience as GDR leader and his meetings with Vladimir Lenin let him believe that he could set an example to other Eastern European leaders by promoting his GDR as a model state. He was personally convinced that his economic reform plan was a right choice. It can be assumed that his personal disposition towards an economic race with the FRG has formed his initial enthusiasm in engaging with the FRG. Only because of outside pressure from Moscow, he had to lower his pace and eventually resign as First Secretary. He was replaced by Erich Honecker. Whereas he continued Ulbricht's course, he did concede to Moscow in case of disagreement between the GDR and the Soviet Union.

But how can the geopolitical codes of the GDR and the FRG during the era of Ostpolitik be defined? As stated in the theoretical framework, Flint & Taylor (2002) postulate that geopolitical codes can be attributed through defining a country's current and potential allies and enemies. The next step is to define how to maintain these allies and counter the enemies. Finally, it has to be determined how these defined allies and enemies should be communicated (or, represented) to the public and the rest of the world.

## GDR geopolitical code

For the GDR, their current and potential allies were most importantly the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact member states. This did not change over the course of the Ostpolitik. The Soviet Union proved to be a decisive power when negotiations over the treaties deadlocked or when Soviet interests were on the line. Whereas Ulbricht wanted to engage with the FRG for economic gains, it is too bold to state that he perceived the FRG as a potential ally. His motive for economic relations with the FRG was to outperform it and to continue building up his socialist model state. He was eventually hindered by his Politburo members because economic ties with the FRG were an insult to socialist principles. Instead of a potential ally, the FRG can be seen as an obligatory negotiating partner. The GDR depended on the FRG in order to get international recognition and eventually the UN membership. The previously described course of events show that this was only achieved by a combination of the GDR's greed for hard currency and Moscow's instructions.

The fact that the GDR gave in to the Soviet directives can be understood as a way to keep them as their most respected ally, but also shows that the GDR had no choice but to obey. On the other hand, when outside threats emerged, the GDR could turn to the Soviets for help, Examples of this are the status of West-Berlin being defined as an independent political unit, as well as the bribing of Bundestag members when the ratification of the Ostpolitik treaties was in danger. So all in all, the GDR and the Soviet Union in the end always operated as a tandem, both by obligation and by achieving mutual benefits.

## FRG geopolitical code

For the FRG, their current and potential allies were most importantly the U.S. and the other NATO member states. This did not change over the course of the Ostpolitik. The Allies were of major help to the FRG in their negotiations, and their work in conducting the Four Powers Agreement over Berlin enabled the FRG to start their own negotiations with the GDR on a basic treaty. However, it is too bold to state that Willy Brandt and his administration perceived the GDR as a potential ally. Despite his intentions of seeking rapprochement with the GDR and the Eastern bloc, his main motivation was to alleviate human misfortune as a consequence of the closed border. His motivation was not to reunify Germany, but merely to change the GDR from within by making small steps. In attempting this, he had to devise a modus operandi for engaging with the GDR without a full, legal and international recognition. As for the GDR, the FRG position towards the neighbour can be defined as an obligatory negotiating partner. However, he did receive help from them during the negotiations. The prime examples would be the bribery of Bundestag members and Honecker's speech in which he vocally expressed support for the negotiations.

The treaties the FRG concluded with the Eastern European states, the Soviet Union and the GDR are also expressions of how they tried to nurture their allies. The treaties all attributed to détente on the European continent, which was beneficial to both the United States and the Soviet Union (the world's two superpowers of that time). Less tensions in Berlin, Germany and Europe enabled them to focus on other matters, such as the arms limitation treaties SALT I and ABM as well as the organisation of the CSCE talks in Helsinki (Sarotte, 2001, pp. 137-138). On the other hand, the Ostpolitik treaties also served as an acknowledgement of the status quo where Europe was divided into two spheres of influence. This status quo was solidly in place with the status of Berlin and Germany resolved. This in turn can be perceived as ways in which the FRG countered its 'enemies' in Eastern Europe. Détente means less threat and therefore less chances of renewed war breaking out. This would be called 'peaceful coexistence' in GDR and Soviet terminology.

*In general, it can be concluded that the geopolitical codes the GDR and the FRG adhered to have evolved from strong bordering out/in, to a relation based on mutual interests without definitively acknowledging the eternity of a separated Germany. The separation of Germany was not definitive according the FRG, as it had not fully and legally recognised the GDR as a state (völkerrechtliche Anerkennung), but as a state with which it had equal relations (gleichberechtigte Beziehung).*

With the Ostpolitik thoroughly contextualised and explained, it is time to move towards the analysis of the LTEs. Its contents are to be compared with the previously described geopolitical codes in order to come to an answer to the research question. An overview of the data set will be given first, after which the results of the two analyses will be presented.

## Descriptive statistics: overview of the LTE data set

The sixteen cases around which LTEs were collected together amounted to 64 weeks of newspaper coverage in total, or 448 separate days. The six reviewed newspapers amounted to 2.688 unique newspaper editions to extract LTEs from. After finishing data collection, 669 LTEs were copied from the archives. However, upon starting data analysis, it turned out that 12 LTEs were illegible either due to poor image quality or corruption during storage of the file. A number of 657 LTEs remained for analysis. During the analysis, a further 75 LTEs were deemed irrelevant to the subject of this research, leaving 582 relevant LTEs to eventually work with. Of the 582 relevant LTEs, 436 were written in the FRG and 146 were written in the GDR. A division of country of origin and the newspaper the LTEs were published in is given in Table 4.1:

| Newspaper | Country | Number LTEs | % |
|---|---|---:|---:|
| Berliner Morgenpost | FRG | 330 | 57% |
| Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung | FRG | 61 | 10% |
| Süddeutsche Zeitung | FRG | 45 | 8% |
| *Subtotal FRG* | | *436* | *75%* |
| | | | |
| Leipziger Volkszeitung | GDR | 86 | 15% |
| Neues Deutschland | GDR | 47 | 8% |
| Junge Welt | GDR | 13 | 2% |
| *Subtotal GDR* | | *146* | *25%* |
| | | | |
| **Total FRG-GDR** | | **582** | **100%** |

*Table 4.1 – Number of LTEs sorted by country and newspaper*

From Table 4.1, it can be seen that there is a strong bias towards letters written in FRG newspapers compared to the GDR newspapers. 75% of the LTEs were written in the FRG as opposed to 25% in the GDR. The large amount of LTEs featured in the Berliner Morgenpost (FRG) is remarkable as well, these constitute 57% of the total number of LTEs analysed. Moreover, it shows that the two local newspapers Berliner Morgenpost and Leipziger Volkszeitung attracted more letters than the national newspapers: 72% in local newspapers versus 28% in national newspapers.

When considering the division of LTEs per case, a mixed view arises in the GDR and a more constant division arises in the FRG. In the GDR, the cases that attracted most letters are the conclusion of the Four Powers Agreement, the signing of the Helsinki Accords and the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen with respectively 59, 37 and 22 LTEs. These top three cases form the bulk of the total amount of GDR LTEs, being 80%. The other 20% is scattered over nine other cases, with the pilot study (case 0), the coming into force of the Grundlagenvertrag (case 11), the Treaty of Prague (case 13) and the Guillaume affair (case 14) not attracting any letters at all. For the entire division of LTEs in the GDR newspaper, see Table 4.2 on page 40.

A remarkable fact arising from Table 4.2 is that the most written-about case, the conclusion of the Four Powers Agreement, was the only case where relevant LTEs were found in all three analysed GDR newspapers. Moreover, the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen (case 1, the start of the Ostpolitik) as well as the Helsinki Agreement (case 15, the final step in consolidation of the GDR as a state) attracted relatively many LTEs. Another interesting point is that the succession of Ulbricht by Honecker (case 4) as well as the 8. Parteitag der SED (case 5), both grand domestic political events, did not attract that many LTEs.

The division of LTEs in the FRG newspapers is more even. In the FRG, the cases that attracted most letters are the signing of the Transitabkommen, the signing of the Four Powers Agreement and the Treaty of Warsaw with respectively 78, 76 and 51 LTEs. This top three amounts to 47% of all relevant letters found in the FRG newspapers. There are no cases which did not attract any letters all, so the remaining 53% of the LTEs are scattered among the other thirteen cases. It also appears that in every case, most relevant letters were found in the Berliner Morgenpost. An exception would be the re-election of Willy Brandt (case 9), where most letters were found in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. For the entire division of LTEs in the FRG newspaper, see Table 4.3 on page 40.

| No. | Case | LV | ND | JW | Total GDR | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Four Powers Agreement | 16 | 39 | 4 | 59 | 40% |
| 15 | Signing of the Helsinki Accords | 37 | - | - | 37 | 25% |
| 1 | Erfurter Gipfeltreffen GDR-FRG | 20 | - | 2 | 22 | 15% |
| 12 | GDR and FRG join the UN | 5 | 1 | - | 6 | 4% |
| 7 | Transitabkommen GDR-FRG | 1 | 4 | - | 5 | 3% |
| 2 | Treaty of Moscow FRG-Soviet Union | - | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2% |
| 3 | Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland | 2 | - | 1 | 3 | 2% |
| 8 | Four Powers and Transit in force | 2 | - | 1 | 3 | 2% |
| 4 | Honecker succeeds Ulbricht | 1 | 1 | - | 2 | 1% |
| 5 | 8. Parteitag der SED | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1% |
| 9 | Elections FRG, Brandt re-elected | 2 | - | - | 2 | 1% |
| 10 | Grundlagenvertrag GDR-FRG | - | - | 2 | 2 | 1% |
| 0 | 1 year prior to 8. Parteitag der SED (pilot) | - | - | - | - | 0% |
| 11 | Grundlagenvertrag in force | - | - | - | - | 0% |
| 13 | Treaty of Prague FRG-CSSR | - | - | - | - | 0% |
| 14 | Guillaume affair: resignation Brandt | - | - | - | - | 0% |
| | **Total** | **86** | **47** | **13** | **146** | **100%** |

*Table 4.2 - Division of LTEs in GDR newspapers per case*

| No. | Case | BM | FA | SZ | Total FRG | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Transitabkommen GDR-FRG | 74 | 3 | 1 | 78 | 18% |
| 6 | Four Powers Agreement | 71 | 2 | 3 | 76 | 17% |
| 3 | Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland | 45 | 3 | 3 | 51 | 12% |
| 2 | Treaty of Moscow FRG-Soviet Union | 26 | 4 | 10 | 40 | 9% |
| 9 | Elections FRG, Willy Brandt re-elected | 14 | 21 | 3 | 38 | 9% |
| 0 | 1 year prior to 8. Parteitag der SED (pilot) | 25 | 4 | 3 | 32 | 7% |
| 1 | Erfurter Gipfeltreffen GDR-FRG | 15 | 4 | 12 | 31 | 7% |
| 14 | Guillaume affair: resignation Brandt | 11 | 3 | 7 | 21 | 5% |
| 15 | Signing of the Helsinki Accords | 14 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 3% |
| 10 | Grundlagenvertrag GDR-FRG | 7 | 6 | 0 | 13 | 3% |
| 13 | Treaty of Prague FRG-CSSR | 6 | 6 | 0 | 12 | 3% |
| 12 | GDR and FRG join the United Nations | 9 | 0 | 2 | 11 | 3% |
| 11 | Grundlagenvertrag into force | 3 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 1% |
| 8 | Four Powers and Transit into force | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1% |
| 4 | Honecker succeeds Ulbricht | 3 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1% |
| 5 | 8. Parteitag der SED | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1% |
| | **Total** | **330** | **61** | **45** | **436** | **100%** |

*Table 4.3 - Division of LTEs in FRG newspapers per case*

An otherwise remarkable fact arising from the division of LTEs in the FRG is that the top three cases in the FRG are only ranked that high because of the high amount of LTEs printed in the Berliner Morgenpost. A possible explanation can be that the Transitabkommen and the Four Powers Agreement both contain explicit provisions on the status of Berlin vis-à-vis the FRG and the GDR. The cases dealing with the putting into force of the Grundlagenvertrag, the Four Powers Agreement and the Transitabkommen did not attract many LTEs in general. The same goes for the change of power in the GDR (case 4) and the 8. Parteitag der SED (case 5). These GDR domestic affairs did not prove very discursive when it comes to submitted and printed LTEs.

When combining the insights provided in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3, it shows that the Four Powers Agreement (case 6) solicited the most LTEs in total: 135 in the GDR and FRG combined. Other cases which attracted many LTEs on both sides of the border are the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen (case 1) with 53 LTEs and the Helsinki Accords (case 15) with 51. Of course, it remains difficult to strike comparisons between the sheer amount of LTEs in the GDR and the FRG, as different mechanisms are in place for the admission of LTEs — controlled press versus free press. In order to compare the content of the LTEs on both sides of the border, the content analysis and the semiotics analysis come into play.

## Content analysis: the debate and social context around the border

In order to assess how Ostpolitik has influenced perceptions on the border between the GDR and the FRG, it is key to first map out the development of perceptions on the border on their own. The first step in doing so is sorting the LTEs by their general tone. This will lead to a sketch of through what themes the debate was carried during the research period, or in other words the social context surrounding the inner-German border. All the 582 LTEs have been analysed and classified according to their tone, being positive, neutral or negative. Various themes have been devised in order to help categorising the LTEs according to their tone. From this first analysis, it shows that 90% of the letters written in the GDR had a positive tone vis-à-vis the border respectively the Ostpolitik. On the other hand, 78% of the letters written in the FRG had a negative tone regarding the border respectively the Ostpolitik (see Table 4.4 and Figure 4.1).

| Attitude | GDR amount | GDR % | FRG amount | FRG % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 132 | 90% | 58 | 13% |
| Neutral | 10 | 7% | 36 | 8% |
| Negative | 4 | 3% | 342 | 78% |
| **Total** | **146** | **100%** | **436** | **100%** |

*Table 4.4 - Tone of LTEs per country*
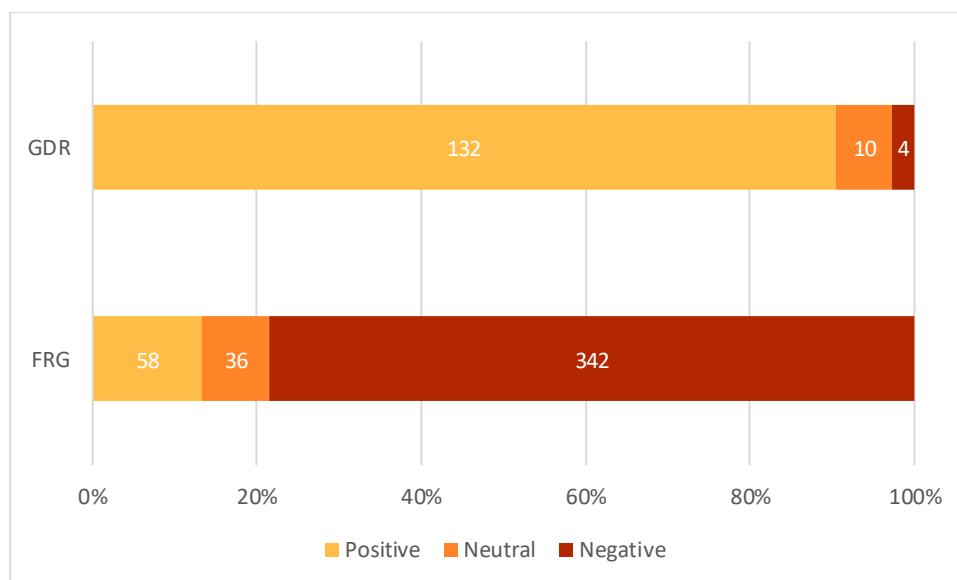


*Figure 4.1 - Tone of LTEs per country*

What also arises from Table 4.4 and Figure 4.1 is that the division of letters by their tone in the GDR and the FRG roughly mirror each other. The amount of LTEs with a negative tone in the GDR is very small, with 3%. On the other side of the border, the amount of positive LTEs in the FRG is also limited, with 13%. The relative amount of LTEs written in a neutral tone is roughly the same in both the GDR and the FRG, 7% respectively 8%.

The division of LTEs according to their tone per country will be discussed in in the following sections. After all the LTEs and their connotations have been discussed, a résumé will follow summarising the main themes in the debate around the border. These themes will then be further explained in the semiotic analysis.

## Tone of LTEs written in the GDR

The earlier introduced division of LTEs according to their tone for letters written in the GDR remains the same when this is broken down per newspaper. The tone of the LTEs is positive for a large majority (see Figure 4.1).
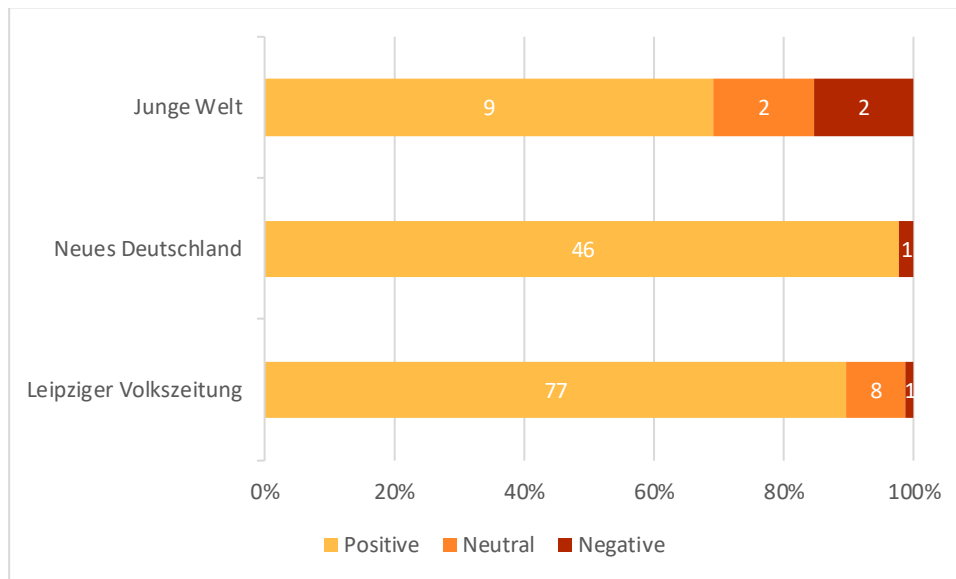


*Figure 4.2 - Tone of LTEs written in the GDR sorted per newspaper*

The division can be explained using Merten's (2008) study. He states that through the communist ideology, events were interpreted, classified and selected to prepare a fiction of reality which corresponded with communism, even if the facts proved to be otherwise. This fictitious communist reality was imposed onto the press. It can therefore be argued that the large amount of positive LTEs is a manifestation of the politically staged public sphere. This politically staged public sphere does not reflect reality, but instead reflects (and celebrates) the achievements of GDR politics (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015a, p. 192). In consequence, it can be presumed that the letter writers, at least for a large part, 'played along' with the politically staged public sphere.

### GDR: LTEs with a positive tone

The GDR LTEs with a positive tone regarding the border respectively Ostpolitik cite various themes in making their point. These themes in the debate are co-existence, right to existence (recognition) for the GDR, the strengthening of socialism and protection from the West. Their division is given in Figure 4.3.



*Figure 4.3 - Division of themes for positive LTEs (GDR)*

From Figure 4.3 it shows that over half of the 132 positive LTEs written in the GDR are themed along the debate concept of co-existence. Authors of these LTEs cite that the border between the GDR and the FRG helps the establishment of li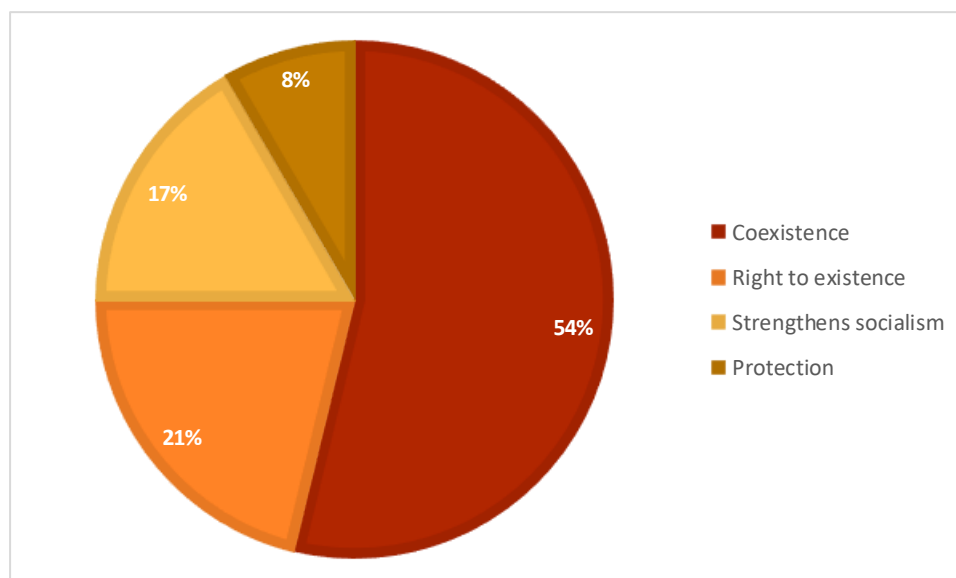ving next to each other in peace. Moreover, these authors also cite that the various treaties conducted under Ostpolitik help in attaining peaceful co-existence between the Western and Eastern bloc in a more general sense. A further illustration of this theme with quotes from selected letters can be found Box 2 on page 76.

A further 21% of the 132 letters with a positive tone contain reference to the right to existence for the GDR as a state. This position in the debate means that despite the different opinions that exist on whether the GDR is sovereign country, the GDR is a proper nation state which deserves international recognition from other states. This also means that the borders as they are should be maintained, including the division of Berlin in a Western sector and an Eastern sector. Thus, according to the letter writers, the various treaties help in consolidating the position of the GDR as a sovereign state. These findings are illustrated with excerpts from selected letters in Box 3 on page 77.

A further 17% of the 132 positive LTEs refer to the border and/or Ostpolitik as processes which correlate with the building-up of the socialist state. On the one hand, working and contributing to society helps in achieving world peace and international recognition; while on the other hand, world peace and recognition helps in both a successful fulfilment of plan goals and contributing to the common good for everybody in the GDR. The two-way relation between working and the achievement of peace are illustrated with excerpts from selected letters in Box 4 on page 77.

The least mentioned reference in the 132 positive LTEs, is the reference to the protective element of the border with 8%. The letter writers state that the recognition of the border due to the Ostpolitik protects the GDR from the imperialist, Western capitalists. It secures the nation as well as the entire Eastern bloc. This can be illustrated with an excerpt from a selected letter to be found in Box 5 on page 78.

### GDR: LTEs with a neutral tone

10 out of 146, or 7%, of the LTEs written in the GDR take a more neutral stance in the debate surrounding the border and/or Ostpolitik. The writers of these letters are more apprehensive in expressing their joy with the events taking place in the Ostpolitik period, but are not negative either. They mostly cite that the negotiations have to be awaited in order to see if the détente really has the desired effect for the GDR and its population. This is illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 6 on page 78.

### GDR: LTEs with a negative tone

Four out of 146 LTEs written in the GDR took a negative stance in the debate on the border and/or Ostpolitik. The fact that LTEs with a negative stance were found at all is very remarkable (as well as beyond expectation for the analysed GDR newspapers) as only constructive criticism within the party lines was allowed and these letters were seldom published in publicly accessible news media (Fix, 2013, p. 283). However, the negative letters are not negative in the sense that they disagree with the GDR government's policies. Instead, the letters contain criticism in the sense that the steps undertaken by the FRG government vis-à-vis the GDR are not far-reaching enough (no recognition until 1972) or that the FRG has a double agenda in their negotiations with the Eastern Bloc and the GDR. They are, however, the 'best' examples of criticism in the analysed GDR press. Excerpts of the four letters are shown in Box 7 on page 79.

The limited number of LTEs with a critical tone does not mean that the large majority of the GDR population actually agreed with their government's actions under Ostpolitik. The lack of possibilities to voice criticism on fundamental issues (such as free travel or relations with the FRG) is a plausible explanation for the limited number of critical LTEs. In support of this assumption, Fiedler & Meyen (2015bc) state that despite political public relations efforts of the GDR government, citizens of socialist societies could not be made to think according to party lines very easily.

Another remark that has to be made in relation to these letters is that their authenticity cannot be verified. As discussed in the theoretical framework, Fix (2013, p. 281) states that LTEs were sometimes written by party officials or by newspaper editors themselves in order to artificially boost legitimation of the party course or to enact certain actions or campaigns. Fabricated LTEs could therefore aid in steering the general population towards certain opinions. Most of the analysed letters however are signed with a name and place of residency,

often accompanied with the job the writer has. Of course, this is not a guarantee of authenticity, but could add to the assumption that the letter in question is genuine. On the other hand, one cannot check whether the letter was written on the author's own instigation, or that he/she was asked to do so by his/her employer, trade union, mass organisation or local SED representative.

Because of the authenticity issue, any generalisation, extrapolation or conclusion in relation to the collected GDR LTEs has to be made very prudently, despite efforts to take a proper sample of LTEs from the GDR newspapers. However, the analysed LTEs do provide some insight into the themes of the debate surrounding the border and/or Ostpolitik and the social context it took place in.

## Tone of LTEs written in the FRG

The aggregate division of FRG LTEs according to their tone does not hold when breaking it down into separate newspapers. When looking at the tone of LTEs in the separate FRG newspapers, it shows that letters published in the Berliner Morgenpost are way more negative than letters published in the Süddeutsche Zeitung. For LTEs posted in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the majority is still written in a negative tone, however less frequent when compared to the Berliner Morgenpost (see Figure 4.4).
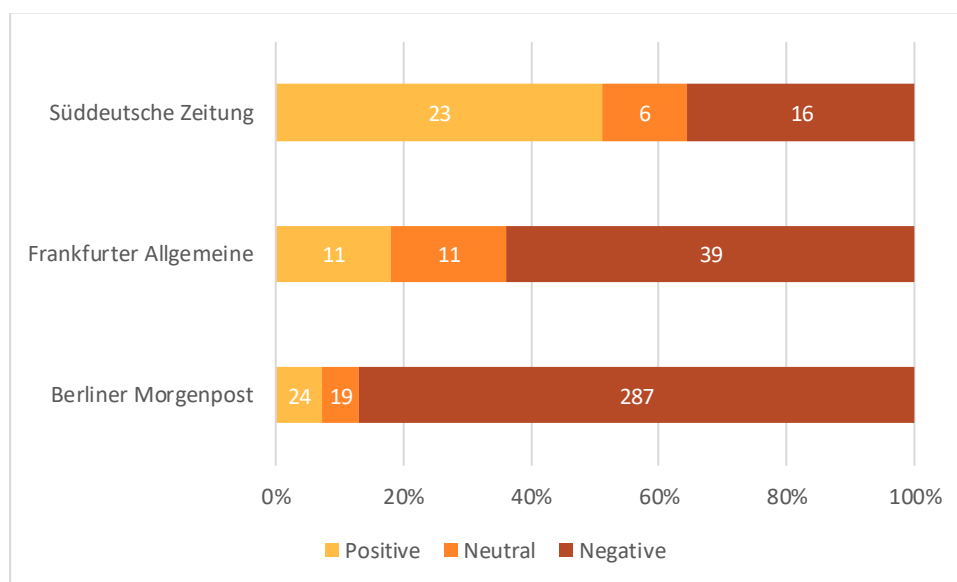


*Figure 4.4 - Tone of LTEs written in the FRG sorted per newspaper*

A possible explanation for the high amount of negative LTEs published in the Berliner Morgenpost may be found in a study by Wahl-Jorgensen (2001). She postulates that editors of newspapers have a preference for more personal letters displaying grievance or dissatisfaction with matters within their habitual community. Berlin was the place where tensions between the FRG and the GDR were most profound, with the official status of (West-)Berlin only vaguely defined in the Ostpolitik era. It can therefore be argued that inhabitants of West-Berlin were very vocal in expressing their discontent with the status quo in their local newspaper. Reasons for their discontent may be found in the facts that West-Berlin was not part of the FRG, the occurrence of unsafe situations along the Wall, as well as discrimination in travel regulations for going to the GDR in comparison to citizens of the FRG.

Another possible reason why the number of negative LTEs in the Berlin Morgenpost is so high can be attributed to its political stance. Kummer (2002) states that the Berliner Morgenpost reports according to five basic principles formulated by its publishing house, Axel Springer Verlag. One of these is the "peaceful reinstatement of a reunited Germany and where possible a united Europe". It can be argued that the readers of the Berliner Morgenpost agree to this principle and incorporate this stance in their letters. The more balanced division of different tones in the Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung may arise from the fact that these newspapers are positioned in the middle of the political spectrum, with the Süddeutsche leaning centre-left and the Frankfurter leaning centre-right (Kleinsteuber & Thomass, 2007, p. 112; Maurer & Reinemann, 2006, p. 130). The SPD, as well as chancellor Willy Brandt being positioned centre-left in the political

spectrum as well, may be a reason why the Süddeutsche Zeitung contains more positive LTEs than the other newspapers. The FDP, coalition partner with the SPD during the period of Ostpolitik is a centre-right political party. This may be a reason why the Frankfurter Allgemeine also contains more positively written letters compared to the Berliner Morgenpost.

*FRG: LTEs with a positive tone*

Three recurring themes surface when analysing the positive LTEs in FRG newspapers: the border and/or Ostpolitik should be welcomed for pragmatic reasons, for posing as a step towards unity of the FRG and the GDR, as well as providing stability in the FRG and Europe. Their division is given in Figure 4.5.
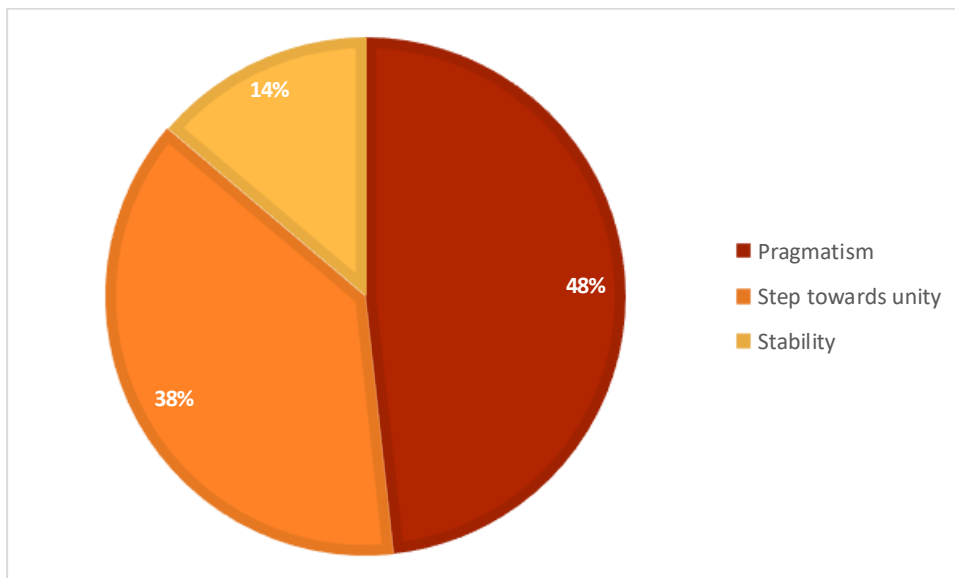


*Figure 4.5 - Division of themes for positive LTEs (FRG)*

28 of the 58 positive LTEs published in the FRG newspapers cite pragmatic reasons for approving the border and/or Ostpolitik. Writers for instance state that the status quo of a separated Germany cannot be changed any time soon and that it is therefore imperative to acknowledge this status quo in order to make progress in the inner-German question. Writers also state that despite the flaws of some elements of the Ostpolitik, it is better than continuing the animosity that exists between the FRG and GDR since the end of WWII. The theme of pragmatism is illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 8 on page 80.

A further 22 out of 58 positive LTEs is positive on the border and/or Ostpolitik because they perceive them to be steps towards German reunification. These authors frequently allude to the Ostpolitik treaties bringing renewed possibilities for Germans on both sides of the border to come into contact with each other again. Letter writers also state that due to the treaties, it is only a matter of time before the separation of Germany ends. Thus, letter writers express their hope for a better future for both the FRG and the GDR. This theme is illustrated with excerpts from selected letters in Box 9 on page 81.

8 out of 54 positive letters cite stability as the main feat of the border and/ or Ostpolitik. These writers believe that the rapprochement towards the GDR and the Eastern Bloc will lead to stability for the FRG. Other writers state that the treaties prevent future war and thus stability in Europe as well. Excerpts from selected letters illustrate the described theme in Box 10 on page 81.

*FRG: LTEs with a neutral tone*

36 out of 436 FRG letters, or 8%, take a neutral stance in the debate on the border and/or Ostpolitik. The writers of these letters are more apprehensive in expressing their joy with the events taking place in the Ostpolitik period, but are not negative either. Again, they mostly cite that the negotiations have to be awaited in order to see if the rapprochement really has the desired effect for the FRG and its population. This is illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 11 on page 82.

The large majority of the analysed letters in the FRG are negative on the border and/or Ostpolitik: 342 out of 436, or 78%. These authors cite various reasons for why they disagree with the current borders and the Ostpolitik. These letters can be sorted along six debate themes: the Ostpolitik is dangerous and gives the Eastern Bloc more influence, Germany may not be divided as a matter of principle according to the FRG constitution, the Wall/border is a nuisance, the Ostpolitik has no support under the electorate (democratic deficit), the Hallstein doctrine should be kept in force, and the Wall/border is an infringement of human rights. Their division is shown in Figure 4.6.
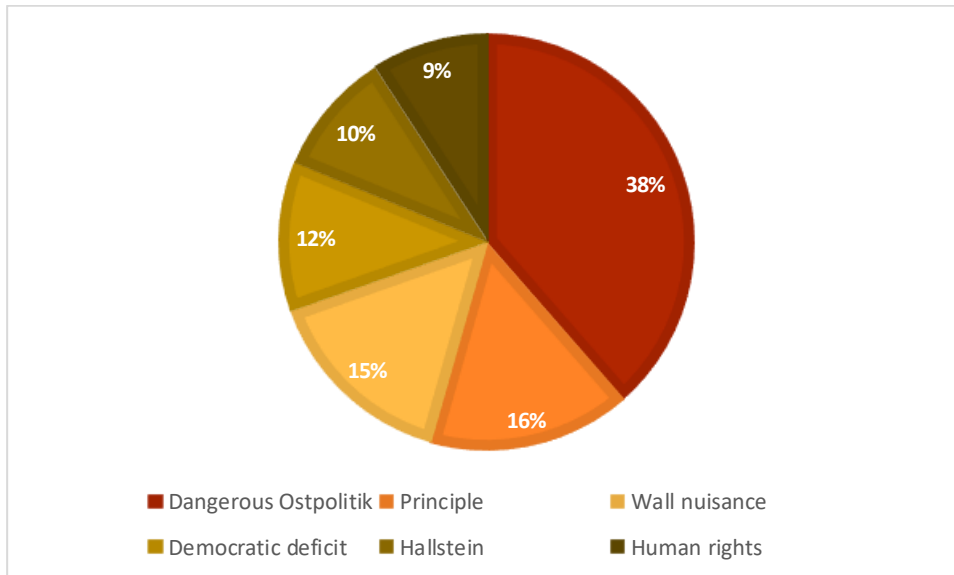


*Figure 4.6 - Division of themes for negative LTEs (FRG)*

From Figure 4.6, it shows that the most recurring theme in the negative letters from the FRG is the alleged danger that arises from the Ostpolitik. 132 letters, or 38% out of 342 negative LTEs feature this argument. These authors generally state that the Ostpolitik is a danger to FRG security, gives the Soviet Union and/or the GDR more influence in FRG domestic affairs and increases Soviet grip on other socialist states in Europe. The dangerous side of the Ostpolitik is a recurring theme throughout the entire analysis period and is a deeply felt sentiment for many authors contributing to the debate. This theme can be illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 12 on page 83.

The second-most recurring theme in the LTEs with a negative tone is the argument that a separated Germany is unconstitutional according to the FRG. The status quo is therefore wrong as a matter of principle. In other words, the FRG and the GDR belong together as one nation and should together constitute the post-WWII German state. This argument is made in 54 LTEs, or 16% of the 342 negative letters written in the FRG. Authors argue that although the FRG constitution states that the reunification of Germany should be the prime destiny of the FRG, it becomes increasingly hard to fulfil with the treaties signed under Ostpolitik. Finally, authors also state that citizens of the GDR are as much German as those living in the FRG and that the border is an impairment to this principle. This theme of the debate is illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 13 on page 84.

Another prominently recurring theme in the debate is the GDR-FRG border being a nuisance in daily life, as well as a source of unsafe situations. These authors state that despite the various Ostpolitik treaties, the crossing of the border has not become any easier. Authors also state that the treaties are discriminatory towards citizens of West-Berlin, as they can only cross the border under a stricter, more monetarily expensive regime than citizens of the FRG. Others also comment on the unsafe situations at the border, such as provocations and shooting by GDR military personnel. 52 out of 342 negative letters, or 15%, contain reference to this particular theme, most of them published in the Berliner Morgenpost. This is illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 14 on page 85.

The fourth most recurring debate theme in the negative LTEs from the FRG is the so-called democratic deficit. Authors of these LTEs state that the conclusion of the Ostpolitik treaties has taken place either without consent of the voters, or that the electorate should have been asked its opinion through referenda or public consultations. The letter writers state that Brandt has not taking into account principles of democracy and should therefore be voted out of office. 40 out of 342, or 12% of the letters feature this theme, again most of them published in the Berliner Morgenpost. This can be illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 15 on page 86.

A further 33 out of 342 LTEs, or 10% of the letter writers state that the FRG should keep the Hallstein doctrine, that the GDR has no right to existence. It should therefore not be recognized as an independent state, as it is a Soviet-occupied territory. This position is only uttered in cases 0 to 9, also before the ratification of the Grundlagenvertrag recognizing the independence and sovereignty of the GDR by the FRG. This argument can be illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 16 on page 86.

The final theme worth discussing within the negative LTEs from the FRG are the human rights issues surrounding the Wall/border, as well as the living conditions within the GDR. 31 out of 342 LTEs, or 9% make their points around this theme. This theme is almost exclusively confined to LTEs published in the Berliner Morgenpost. Authors for instance state that the shoot-to-kill order at the border is a violation of basic human rights and that the impaired freedom of speech in the GDR is disgraceful. Other authors express anger about the fact that despite human rights violations at the border and within the GDR, it was recognised by the FRG and even admitted into the United Nations. This last theme can be illustrated with the excerpts from selected letters in Box 17 on page 87.

The large amount of LTEs with a negative tone in the FRG should not automatically lead to the conclusion that the majority of the FRG population actually disagreed with Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik. As with the GDR letters, any generalisation, extrapolation or conclusion in relation to the collected FRG LTEs has to be made very prudently, as it can be assumed that '*the* public debate' in the FRG regarding Ostpolitik is not entirely featured in the data set despite efforts to take a proper sample. However, as with the GDR letters, the analysed LTEs do provide some insight into the themes of the debate surrounding the border and the social context it took place in.

## Takeaways of content analysis

The content analysis forms a cross-section of the attitudes ordinary newspaper readers and letter writers forwarded on the inner-German border in a narrow sense, and the Ostpolitik in a broader sense. Together, they indicate along what themes the debate was carried, which give an indication of the social context the authors posted their letters in. The results as presented show the aggregated attitudes on the border and the Ostpolitik for the entire research period (June 1970 - August 1975).

The research period could have been divided in smaller periods, for instance to see if the attitudes have changed over time. The overwhelmingly positive attitudes in the GDR newspapers would not justify splitting up the results in different time periods however, because negative attitudes are almost non-existent in the research material. The somewhat more varied results from the FRG could justify a categorisation over time. However, splitting the research period in two roughly equal timeframes, being cases 0-8 and 9-15 do not show a significant changes in attitude towards the border and/or Ostpolitik. The letter writers remain strongly negative nonetheless. The descriptive statistics for this division are given in Appendix IV – Statistics content analysis on page 88.

When considering a division according to the place of residence, a slight difference exists for the FRG. In urban areas (over 100.000 inhabitants), 11% of the authors write about the border and/or Ostpolitik in a positive tone, whereas for the countryside, this number lies at 27%. Performing a complete statistical analysis for differences in disposition towards the border is beyond the scope of this research. The descriptive statistics for the locality division in the FRG are given in Appendix IV – Statistics content analysis on page 88. This locality analysis was only performed for the FRG, as there is no sufficient variation in the tone of the LTEs from the GDR.

Even when performing a locality analysis for West-Berlin only, no strong differences exist in the author's dispositions towards the border when comparing their postal districts. In all postal districts, a wide majority is

negatively inclined towards the border. The descriptive statistics for the locality division in West-Berlin are given in Appendix IV – Statistics content analysis on page 88.

## GDR debate themes

The overall attitude on the border and the Ostpolitik in the GDR is overwhelmingly positive. Neutral or negative letters are very exceptional. This can be attributed to the fact that voicing criticism in public was not generally approved of and could have serious implications for the author in question. The debate that comes forward in the GDR newspapers can therefore be seen as the opinions of the SED party members as well as convinced socialist-minded GDR workers.

The social context of the debate in the GDR can be summarized as follows: the authors of LTEs approve of 'bordering out' the FRG and gaining diplomatic recognition at the same time. They attribute these phenomena to their own peaceful foreign policy as well as to the peaceful intentions of the Soviet Union. The letter writers state that the border and the border treaties contribute to peaceful coexistence and strengthens their own socialist state. It also consolidates the GDR. The diplomatic recognition by the FRG shows that the GDR indeed has a right to existence despite more than two decades of tensions with the FRG.

## FRG debate themes

The overall message that can be deduced from the LTEs published in the FRG newspapers is disapproval of the Ostpolitik and negative sentiments on the inner-German border. The social context can be summarized as follows: a majority of the authors state that the Ostpolitik treaties pose a danger to FRG interests and only gives the GDR and the Soviet Union more influence in their domestic affairs. Others state that Germany belongs together unified as a matter of principle, so anything helping to consolidate the GDR as a separate state should be prevented. Authors also forward that the Brandt government has no electoral mandate to conduct these far-reaching treaties. Other letter writers state that despite the effort, the situation at the border has not improved: travel conditions are still very strict and procedures very cumbersome and slow-paced.

However, those few welcoming the Ostpolitik state that the treaties show pragmatism and political bravery. Accordingly, they are a step forward in an otherwise deadlocked problem. The positive attitudes also come from people expressing hope that the Ostpolitik is indeed a step towards German reunification. They also laude the stabilizing effects that arise from the treaties. The size of this group however is rather modest.

Now that the debate on the border and Ostpolitik and its social context has been sketched, it is time to discuss the representation of and meaning-making practices around the inner-German border. The second part of the analysis concerns the signifiers which are used to address the question of the inner-German border, taking into account the social context debate themes. This is the essence of a social semiotic approach to the LTEs.

## Social semiotic analysis: the meaning-making practices around the border

This second part of the analysis serves to dive deeper into the messages the LTEs covey, that means in more detail than the content analysis. After categorisation of the LTEs according to their tone and theme, all 582 were analysed for what signifier they use in order to comment on the signified — the border from either perspective (the neighbour) and/or the inner-German question in light of the Ostpolitik. Again, the signifiers used are activities, events, objects, places and stories. These signifiers and their symbolic relationship to the signified are dependent on the social context they were written in. 'How' these signs mean is therefore key in understanding the representation and meaning-making surrounding the inner-German border. The first step is to map out how often which signifiers are used in the LTEs. Their division is given in Table 4.5 and Figure 4.7.

| Signifier | GDR amount | GDR % | FRG amount | FRG % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Events | 84 | 58% | 146 | 33% |
| Activities | 37 | 25% | 111 | 25% |
| Stories | 16 | 11% | 92 | 21% |
| Objects | 9 | 6% | 73 | 17% |
| Places | - | - | 14 | 3% |
| **Total** | **146** | **100%** | **436** | **100%** |

*Table 4.5 - Signifiers in LTEs per country*
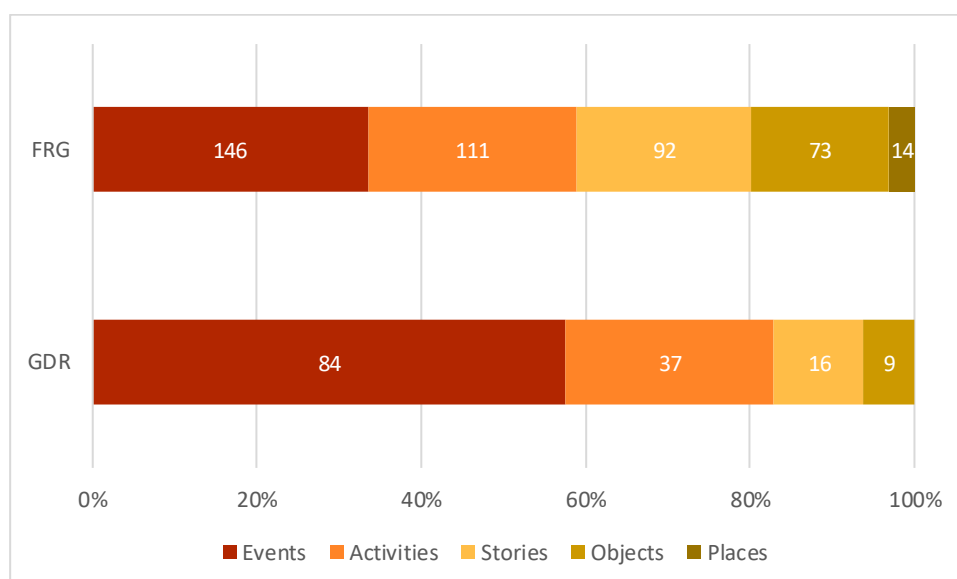


*Figure 4.7 - Signifiers in LTEs per country*

From Table 4.5 and Figure 4.7, its shows that the most used signifiers in both the GDR and the FRG are the events signifier and the activities signifier. This means that in the authors' representations of the border and/or Ostpolitik, they mostly convey their points using current affairs or longer lasting processes as background. This is a logical finding, as the Ostpolitik was a remarkable shift in foreign policies for both the GDR and the FRG. It was, of course, 'the news of the day' during the research period. The stories signifier comes in third. The objects signifiers comes fourth in both countries. Remarkable is that the places signifiers is not used once in the GDR LTEs and only very limitedly in the FRG LTEs. What follows in the sections below is an overview of how the border and/or Ostpolitik are represented within the previously introduced debate themes, first for the GDR, then for the FRG. A résumé with how LTE writers from both countries represent the border and/or Ostpolitik will conclude this section.

## GDR: Signifiers in LTEs with a positive tone

In the GDR letters with a positive attitude, the events signifier is used most. Afterwards comes the activities signifier. The stories signifier and the objects signifier are used infrequently. The places signifier is not used at all.

As indicated in part one of the analysis, the four recurring themes in the positive LTEs written in the GDR are peaceful coexistence, the right to existence for the GDR as a state, the strengthening of socialism, and the protective element of the border. For matters of structure and lucidity, the use of signifiers per theme will be outlined below.

*Peaceful coexistence*

The authors of LTEs within the peaceful coexistence debate theme frequently articulate their point using an events signifier and an activities signifier. In other words, letter writers express their point on the border and/or Ostpolitik leading to peaceful coexistence by making direct reference to a current event that took place or on longue-durée processes. Letter writers very much appreciated the closing declaration of the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen and also appreciated prime minster Willi Stoph's explanation of the results of the meeting in the Volkskammer (LV, 26-03-1970, p. 2).

Similar approving expressions were found in the letters writers' representations of the Four Powers Agreement. The letter writers represented the treaty as a major contribution to peace as it clarifies the previously ambiguous position of West-Berlin: it is not part of the FRG. The Soviet Union and the other socialist states are also represented as powers enabling the GDR to continue along the path of peaceful coexistence with the Western neighbour. Another letter writer stated that the Four Powers Agreement will expedite the ratification of other treaties conducted under Ostpolitik. Similar expressions were found for the conclusion of the Transitabkommen. Letter writers comment on the signing of the Helsinki Accords as the proof that the socialist states are on the right side of history in settling the post-WWII European order of states and that the results were enabled by the peace politics of the Soviet Union (LV, 11-08-1975, p. 2). All in all, these letter writers represent the socialist countries as the lead actors responsible for the rapprochement treaties in the years of the Ostpolitik, and not the FRG as main architect.

Authors using an activities signifier in representing the border and/or Ostpolitik as matters leading to peaceful coexistence for instance alluded to socialism being in itself a peaceful societal order. One letter writer especially attributed the success of the peace initiatives by the GDR and the Soviet Union to Vladimir Lenin's principles of peace (ND, 06-09-1971, p. 2). Another writer accurately contended that the signing of the Four Powers Agreement would help the FRG in ratifying their treaties with Poland and the Soviet Union (ND, 07-09-1971, p. 3). Two other letters worth noting represent the Ostpolitik process as something which leads to peaceful coexistence, however at the same time depict the imperialist Western bloc as the party that has to keep their side of the bargain. These authors state that Ostpolitik indeed shows that the societal orders can live next to each other in peace, but that 'Abgrenzung' from each other remains the bottom line. They conclude by explicitly pointing out that détente between the Western and Eastern bloc in no way means reconciliation between socialism and capitalism or that a societal order of these combined systems is on its way (LV, 27-05-1971, p. 16; JW, 14-12-1975, p. 2).

A few letters approving the border as a matter attributing to peaceful coexistence use an object or stories signifier. A letter writer for instance represented the FRG CDU party as the embodiment of the expansionist aspirations of the FRG. The CDU is the reason why diplomatic recognition of the GDR has not happened yet (LV, 25-03-1970, p. 2). Others applaud the SED leadership and especially prime minister Stoph. They are responsible for the new peaceful initiatives. Finally, a letter from a GDR football player represented the conclusion of the Four Powers Agreement as scoring the winning goal in an important match (ND, 11-09-1971, p. 2).

*Right to existence*

As in the peaceful coexistence debate theme, the authors applauding the border and/or Ostpolitik as a sign that the GDR has a right to existence primarily use an events and activities signifier. These authors state that for instance the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen, the Four Powers Agreement and the CSCE conference in Helsinki show that recognition of the GDR is an obvious move. They call it an acknowledgement of the peaceful intentions the GDR and Soviet Union have in Europe. An author represented the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen as an acknowledgement of the facts on the ground which have existed the last 25 years (LV, 21-03-1970, p. 2). These letter writers also represent the conclusion of the Four Powers Agreement as a de facto recognition of the GDR, despite the fact that the Grundlagenvertrag had not been signed at that time. In the comments on the Helsinki Accords, letter

writers represent the event as an indication that the borders as they are now are right and forces the capitalist states to acknowledge the strength of the socialist bloc (LV, 04-08-1975, p. 2; LV, 05-08-1975, p. 2).

The authors using an objects signifier applaud the SED leadership. On the instalment of Erich Honecker as First Secretary, a letter writer represented this as a major motivation for all the workers to continue their efforts of building up socialism, which will eventually lead to the diplomatic recognition of the GDR (ND, 06-05-1971). Another author thanked the SED leadership for concluding the Helsinki Accords, stating that the SED has made peace in Europe (LV, 08-11-1975, p. 2). Two letters containing stories are both worth noting. A French guest visiting the GDR represented the citizens of the GDR as very hospitable, friendly and peace-loving, but at the same time expresses grief that the French government has not yet recognised the GDR as a state. The author expresses his hope that his government will do so in the near future, as the GDR has a right to existence (JW, 02-09-1970, p. 5).

Another story deals with the inherent unfairness of capitalism. This person represents the capitalist neighbour as a society where happiness and social behaviour towards each other are not core to everyday life. Instead, the author presents socialism as the only way to go in order to reach peace and prosperity for all. According to him, the GDR is a way more social society than the FRG, and therefore has a proper right to existence in order to counterbalance the grim capitalist societies (ND 08-08-1970, p. 9).

## Strengthens socialism

The authors expressing their approval of the border and/or Ostpolitik using the strengthening of socialism as their main point mostly do so using an event and activities signifier. In these letters, the various Ostpolitik treaties are represented as the results of the building up of socialism. This also works the other way around according to the letter writers: the treaties enable the strengthening of socialism even better. In these letters, the Erfurter Gifpfeltreffen, the Four Powers Agreement and the Helsinki Agreements are the direct motivation to make their point. An exception would be a letter where the author cites the speeches of Honecker and Brezhnev as inspiration to even do better in fulfilling the production plans and thus strengthening the socialist society (LV, 05-08-1975, p. 2).

The letters using the stories signifier make their point using more personal remarks. One letter for instance cites that everybody's achievements in school and work have helped in creating the right circumstances to conclude the various Ostpolitik treaties (ND, 08-09-1971, p. 3). Another represents the Four Powers Agreement as a political feat that helps the farmers in improving their output. The successful conclusion of the agreement will pose as a motivation to sow and harvest the best quality products (ND, 08-09-1971, p. 3). A similarly themed letter was written by a steelworker, representing the Four Powers Agreement as an enabling factor in producing more and better steel (ND, 08-09-1971, p. 3).

A final remarkable letter comes from an author stating that the GDR is a way warmer and more social society than the FRG. He represents the neighbour as the exact opposite. According to this author, the GDR way is the only way to go to secure peace in Europe, which in turn leads to a stronger socialist society (ND, 29-12-1971, p. 8).

## Protection

The final theme that positively inclined letter writers cite is the border being a measure of protection. The authors using the event signifier state that the Four Powers Agreement finally solves the ambiguous status of West-Berlin, representing this as a trouble now taken away. The authors using the objects and stories signifier are more revealing of the representation of this particular theme. Two separate letters for instance represent the FRG SPD party as untrustworthy when commenting on the 1972 elections in the FRG. They state that the SPD is not a proper negotiating partner for further treaties, as this party still upholds the prohibition of the West-German Communist Party KPD. Therefore, these powers have to be kept out of the GDR as much as possible (LV, 22-11-1972, p. 2).

Three letters contain a story commenting on the Four Powers Agreement as increasing protection. One author represents the agreement as giving more protection to the citizens of East-Berlin, taking into account provocations and murders of GDR border personnel by FRG agents (ND, 06-09-1971, p. 2). The two other letter writers make similar remarks in representing the Four Powers Agreement as a treaty preventing future troubles at the border by FRG agents and provocateurs (ND, 08-09-1971, p.3; ND, 09-09-1971, p. 2).

## GDR: Signifiers in LTEs with a neutral tone

The most used signifiers in neutral letters are the events and activities signifier. Again, these letters make direct reference to the meeting or treaty at hand or the underlying process. A letter writer for instance represents Willy Brandt as someone who has kept out the GDR leadership for years, and all of a sudden wants to negotiate in Erfurt. The author questions his motives and is not overjoyed with the news (LV, 22-03-1970, p. 2). Other letter writers question whether the FRG will keep their side of the agreements as concluded during the Helsinki Accords. These authors represent the West as a power bloc making agreements with the East on the one hand, but poking around in other countries' domestic affairs on the other (LV, 08-08-1975, p. 2; LV, 08-08-1975, p. 2).

Another example worth noting is an LTE commenting on the meeting between FRG Chancellor Schmidt and First Secretary Honecker at the Helsinki Conference. The author, using an event signifier, expresses that he hopes that the new agreement will lead to fairer media coverage by the FRG media in their reporting on the GDR, representing them as untrustworthy and biased (LV, 08-09-1975, p. 2).

## GDR: Signifiers in LTEs with a negative tone

Four negative letters were found in the GDR newspapers. Two of these contain criticism in response to events, being the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen and the Treaty of Moscow. These authors both state that the measures taken so far by the FRG government are insufficient. They represent Brandt as an unreliable Chancellor that should do more in order to reach normalisation with the GDR. They contend that recognition is the only option (JW, 09-04-1970, p. 4; JW 25-08-1970, p. 7). Another author, using the activities signifier, writes that the process of building up socialism is the only way to protect the country from the FRG. This author represents the FRG (again) as an imperialist force only wanting to incorporate the GDR into its own capitalist societal order (ND, 12-06-1971, p. 1). The last example of a negative letter that appeared in the GDR press comes from an author who articulates that despite the Transitabkommen, the leadership of the SED should not have the illusion that it can reconcile with the capitalist governments.

So in short, the criticism voiced in the letters mainly warn the GDR government for negotiating with the class enemy, which the authors represent as the imperialist Western neighbour. The theoretical framework needs to be taken into account in explaining the occurrence of these letters. Even though LTEs allowed citizens of socialist states to, at least to some extent, voice criticism on their government, this had to be within strict limits. Criticism on fundamental questions of Marxism/Leninism or travel restrictions were out of the question. Criticism had to be constructive, have added value and had to be within the party lines. (Fix, 2013, p. 283). It can be stated that the criticism voiced in these letters is within these bounds, as the GDR government is not criticised directly (only implicitly upon close reading) and the FRG government is represented as the main culprit.

With the GDR letters sorted along theme and their use of signifiers, it is time to do the same for the letters that appeared in the FRG press. After that section, the representation and meaning-making practices around the border and/or Ostpolitik will be summarised in order to come to a conclusion of the analysis of the LTEs.

## FRG: Signifiers in LTEs with a positive tone

In FRG LTEs with a positive tone, the events and activities signifier are used most. They are followed by the stories and objects signifier in terms of usage. There are two instances of the places signifier. The use of signifiers per theme is discussed in the following section.

### *Pragmatism*

The letter writers lauding the border and/or Ostpolitik for pragmatic reasons use the various signifiers in roughly equal measure, with the exception of the places signifier. The authors using the activities and events signifier represent the entire process of Ostpolitik as, on the one hand, a way to reconcile with the past, and on the other as 'something rather than nothing' (BM, 21-08-1970, p. 13; FA, 27-12-1973, p. 9). Compromise had to made in order to move the reconciliation process in Europe further. One author stated even that compromise can be overcome with new negotiations to reach more satisfying results (BM, 25-12-1971, p. 59).

The authors using the objects signifier frequently allude to the unconstructive role of the CDU opposition party. They represent Brandt as a Chancellor that has achieved something the CDU had not been

capable of for the last 20 years (SZ, 18-05-1974, p. 115). The opposition has not made a single positive contribution to the Ostpolitik, whereas the SPD has by making pragmatic policy choices (BM, 16-12-1971, p. 23). In the aftermath of the Guillaume affair espionage case, letter writers again represent Willy Brandt as a politician that has made the world safer with pragmatic politics. A writer states that the smear campaign on his character by the opposition parties reminds of the politics during the Weimar Republic (SZ, 18-05-1974, p. 115).

The stories signifier is also used to illustrate why Ostpolitik is a pragmatic way forward. Various authors write about the atrocities the Germans committed during WWII, especially in Poland. They therefore represent the Treaty of Warsaw as a way to make up for their misconduct and acknowledge the consequences of a war the Germans started themselves (BM, 12-15-1970, p. 9). Another writer illustrates the atrocities he experienced himself in Poland as the reason why the FRG is in no position to make demands in their negotiations with Poland and is satisfied with the result (FA, 17-12-1970, p. 12).

The one LTE that features the use of the place signifier makes reference to the territories Germany lost in the aftermath of World War II. The author states that despite the loss, there are worse things in the world and represents the strive to reincorporate these territories as a lost cause. Therefore, the Ostpolitik is a pragmatic way forward (BM, 03-08-1970, p. 2).

### Step towards unity

In the LTEs featuring the theme Ostpolitik as a step towards unity, the signifiers are used in equal proportions, with the places signifier not used at all. The authors using the activities signifier represent the various treaties as enabling new cross-border contact and burying old hatred between the FRG and the GDR (BM, 30-12-1971, p. 2). Another author states that the Soviet Union's actions in the GDR can only be paid for by having the unity of Germany reinstated. That, according to the author, will be the definitive solution to tensions in Europe (SZ, 28-03-1970, p. 107).

The authors making direct reference to a treaty or event for instance write that the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen is more important than the landing on the moon. He represents the meeting as an event that leads to reconciliation instead of more competition (SZ, 28-03-1970, p. 107). Another pair or letter writers represent the Four Powers Agreement as a small step forward and a good basis for further negotiations with the GDR on their future relationship (FA, 21-12-1972, p. 8; FA, 07-04-1973, p. 10). After the resignation of Brandt, letter writers take the opportunity to thank him for his efforts and represent him as a good man with truly bona fide intentions of bringing the FRG and the GDR closer together (SZ, 18-05-1974, p. 115).

Some authors use the stories signifier to make their point in this theme. An example is a letter writer who states that he has spoken to many people who are positive about the Ostpolitik and truly feels confident that reunification may happen one day. Therefore, he writes that the letters section in the Berliner Morgenpost should post more letters that contain these positive representations (BM, 17-12-1971, p. 12). A final letter worth noting comes from an author expressing joy on the conclusion of the Transitabkommen. He writes that with the 1972 Olympics taking place in Germany and the positive results of the Ostpolitik thus far, it is now or never for German reunification (BM, 04-01-1972, p. 2).

### Stability

The LTEs featuring the stability theme show use of the activities, events and places signifiers. A letter writer using the activities signifier represents the situation in the GDR as stable and that it is no longer necessary to portray those on the other side of the border as in dire need of the FRG's economic aid (SZ, 25-03-1970, p. 49). Another letter writer uses the activities signifier in the sense that rapprochement towards the East is the only way to prevent a future war, thus contending that the border and the Ostpolitik have a stabilising effect (SZ, 22-08-1970, p. 113). The authors using the events signifier represent the Treaty of Moscow as a way towards reconciliation with the Eastern European states and pave the way towards a more stable situation in Europe (BM, 11-08-1970, p. 2; SZ, 22-08-1970, p. 113). The one author using the places signifier represents the situation in West-Berlin as stable, stating that the question around it should not be dramatised too much (BM, 27-06-1970, p. 2).

## FRG: Signifiers in LTEs with a neutral tone

The representations that follow from the neutral letters using the activities signifier portray the Ostpolitik as something that takes time in order to have effect (BM, 01-07-1970, p. 6). Moreover, the status of West-Berlin remains uncleared despite the Four Powers Agreement, with West-Berlin itself being increasingly exposed to Soviet and GDR influence (BM, 28-07-1971, p. 7; SZ, 12-06-1971, p. 119). Another author states that in the debates over the ratification of the Grundlagenvertrag, it has to be kept in mind that recognition of the GDR also means recognition of the human rights situation over there, which should be heeded with caution (FA, 19-12-1972, p. 18).

The letter writers using the events signifier express their doubts over the effectivity of the various treaties and events in question. Three authors fear that despite the Erfurter Gipfeltreffen only being an explorative meeting, it may lead to recognition of the GDR on the long term and warn that future negotiations with the GDR have to be prepared carefully (BM, 12-03-1970, p. 2; BM, 24-03-1970, p. 2; BM, 09-04-1970, p. 2). Recognition of the GDR is represented here as something unwanted. Other letters containing events signifiers are more contemplative and represent the treaties under Ostpolitik as possible violations of the FRG constitution or as recognition of the GDR in disguise (FA, 31-08-1970, p. 6; FA, 02-12-1970, p. 8).

Some interesting letters using the stories signifier surfaced in this category. A letter writer states that despite the criticism voiced on the Four Powers Agreement, opinion polls show that 64% of the Berliners are satisfied with the agreement and that a further 82% agrees that the political situation in West-Berlin has not worsened with the agreement (BM, 18-09-1971, p. 2). The author does not express opinion, he only utters these numbers. Another author is surprised with the sudden resignation of Walter Ulbricht as First Secretary, as he initiated a reform course which might not be supported by his successor Erich Honecker. Instead, the author represents that Honecker's views on European security may not aid the détente process and should be approached cautiously (FA, 30-04-1971, p. 8).

Furthermore, a writer marks up a story on the historical development of the GDR's industry and represents this as a phase full of hardship for GDR citizens. This can be attributed to the Soviet Union's policy of reparations after WWII. This influence the Soviet Union has over the GDR means that the country should not be recognized, instead only high-level meetings should take place (SZ, 20-06-1970, p. 104). This point should be taken into account in the negotiations.

## FRG: Signifiers in LTEs with a negative tone

LTEs with a negative stance are by far the largest group within the letters collected from FRG newspapers. The division of signifiers show a large use of the events and activities signifier. The stories signifier and objects signifier are used less frequently but in roughly the same measure. The places signifier comes last, but with interesting arguments. For matters of structure and lucidity, the use of signifiers will be discussed per theme.

### Dangerous Ostpolitik

The majority of the contributors within this theme use the activities and events signifiers to express their opinion of the Ostpolitik being dangerous. Again, they do so by making direct reference to the treaties, meetings and the process in general. These authors make the same points over and over again, representing the GDR and the Soviet Union as untrustworthy partners who are only willing to negotiate in order to increase their influence in Europe, the FRG and West-Berlin.

One author called the Ostpolitik a failure and making the separation of Germany permanent, with no sign whatsoever of human relief for those in West-Berlin and the GDR (FA, 21-11-1972, p. 21). LTE writers also represent the GDR as the only party getting concrete results from the negotiations and leaves the FRG with nothing in return. An author called this the sell-out of German interests, areas and assets (BM, 23-12-12, p. 8). These authors represent Brandt as the politician responsible for the eternal separation of the German people (BM, 13-12-1970, p. 2). Two authors even represented the negotiation process over the Four Powers Agreement and the subsequent instalment of a Soviet embassy in West-Berlin as the final nail in the coffin for West-Berlin. They represent it as a trojan horse (BM, 31-08-1971, p. 2, 9 ).

The LTE contributors using the events signifier make similar representations of the GDR, the Soviet Union, the border and the Ostpolitik as those using the activities signifier. Many LTEs were posted on the Four

Powers Agreement, where an author called the signing the biggest tragedy for Germany since WWII and the construction of the Berlin Wall. He fears more influence of the Soviets in West-Berlin (SZ, 03-09-1971, p. 127). The Four Powers Agreement is also represented as the final blow for West-Berlin, as the agreement stipulates that it is not part of the FRG and makes it vulnerable to Soviet and GDR influence. In general, the GDR is represented as an evil dictatorship only wanting to introduce socialism in the FRG.

The authors using the objects signifier generally aim their concerns over the danger of the Ostpolitik towards Willy Brandt's government and the SPD party. They are represented as traitors who have given away all German interests to the Soviet Union. They are credited with the loss of German territory (BM, 19-09-1973, p. 2). One commentator even called all SPD voters who re-elected Brandt 'people without morals' (BM, 26-11-1972, p. 60).

LTEs featuring the stories signifier frequently represent the Soviet Union as an imperialist force. Two authors articulated that the Soviets are accomplice to the invasion and annexation of Poland during WWII and that the Ostpolitik cements this annexation. This means that the Soviets are not at all a peace-loving socialist society as they portray themselves (BM, 18-12-1970, p. 2, 43). A final letter writer represents the 17 million people living in the GDR as having to suffer every day, and the possible reunification of Germany under socialist flag (as articulated by the SED) with 67 million people suffering is completely out of the question (BM, 16-12-1971, p. 23).

## Principle

Half of the authors within the principle theme use the activities and events signifiers. Authors state that the status quo of a separated Germany is wrong out of principle, and make direct relation to the various treaties and events to make their representations. The Ostpolitik for instance gives away territory that belongs to Germany. The presence of the Soviet military in East-Berlin is against the previous agreements, making the GDR claims to counter the presence of FRG institutions in West-Berlin very hypocritical (BM, 04-12-1970, p. 11; BM, 08-12-1970, p. 8). A letter writer represented the rhetoric coming from the GDR in relation to the position of West-Berlin as wrong. He states that the FRG should pose the same kind of rhetoric their way: if East-Berlin can pose as capital of the GDR, so can West-Berlin be the capital of the FRG (BM, 01-12-1970, p. 2).

Those using the events signifier for instance state that not a single agreement on Berlin can make up for the loss of a quarter of German territory (BM, 01-09-1971, p. 2). Moreover, the Grundlagenvertrag will not solve the issues surrounding travel between the territories, as well as being counterproductive in the reunification of the shared motherland (BM, 23-12-1972, p. 2). The LTEs containing the objects signifier again aim their grievances towards the FRG government. Again, the SPD is being accused of ignoring the West-Berlin interests and making matters for ordinary GDR citizens even worse with their recognition of a dictatorial regime (BM, 19-12-1971, p. 31; BM, 28-12-1973, p. 11).

This theme is the first which contains usages of the places signifier. Authors make explicit reference to places and cities now in Polish territory, using this to illustrate that the German separation and loss of territories after WWII is wrong by principle. References include Oppeln, Kattowitz, Breslau, Liegnitz, Marienburg, Stettin (Berlins Hafenstadt) and Western Prussia (BM, 12-06-1970, p. 2; 15-08-1970, p. 11; 10-12-1970, p. 2).

## Border as a nuisance

Within this theme, the activities signifier is being used by authors who state that crossing the border has not become any easier since the conclusion of the various treaties. They complain that citizens from the FRG can stay in East-Berlin longer than those from West-Berlin, calling it a discriminatory practice. Writers also complain that the GDR does not stick to the agreements conducted under the Four Powers Agreement and the Transitabkommen in matters of border crossings, and therefore do not deserve recognition as a state (BM, 22-06-1972, p. 2). The Wall is represented as a nuisance with no improvements being made to alleviate the stress it causes for those in West-Berlin. Authors using the events signifier make similar remarks about the border (FA, 22-12-1972, p. 16). All in all, the Transitabkommen and its new regulations are represented as unfair and not helping the détente process.

The situation at the border causes some letter writers to express their anger towards the FRG government. These authors represent the new regulations after the Transitabkommen as a debacle and contend that the FRG government and the Berlin mayor are unfit to continue their service (BM, 15-12-1971, p. 10; 19-

12-1971, p. 31). Other authors express their discontent with the border using personal stories. Those using this particular signifier write about the long queues for lorry drivers, the inherent danger that arises from shootings at the border, the mandatory currency exchange being too expensive and the randomness of granting travel permits being unfair (BM, 04-12-1970, p. 4; 15-12-1970, 17-12-1970, p. 17, 15-12-1971, p. 10; 15-06-1972, p. 2).

### *Democratic deficit*

The authors using the activities and events signifiers in making their point almost all represent the Ostpolitik treaties as hurried and undemocratic. The authors generally state that referenda would have been better in order to come to better agreements with the GDR and the Eastern states. Especially the letter writers from West-Berlin feel that their interests have been ignored because no public plebiscite was organised. The authors of these LTEs are especially agitated because of the magnitude of the Ostpolitik treaties: it concerns their territory and their country (BM, 12-12-1970, p. 2). Authors also question the content of the negotiations, as these are held behind closed doors (BM, 11-09-1971, p. 9; 11-12-1971, p. 2).

The objects signifier is used by authors to express their feelings of anger towards the government and/or Willy Brandt. The SPD government is represented as having no connection with the voters, as biased towards the Eastern bloc and as not realising that their Ostpolitik will lead to a permanent separation of Germany (BM, 06-12-1970, p. 2; 27-12-1970, p. 11; 22-12-1971, p. 2). The FRG would be better off if Brandt is elected out of office. The one author using a story to make his point on the democratic deficit of the Ostpolitik represents the Treaty of Warsaw as a new Treaty of Versailles, calling the 7th of December 1970 one of the blackest days in German history (BM, 09-12-1970, p. 2).

### *Hallstein doctrine*

Letter writers using the activities and events signifiers in iterating their Hallstein doctrine approach to the GDR give various illustrations for doing so. For instance, the GDR is represented as economically completely dependent on the FRG Deutsche Mark, and therefore disqualifies as a proper state (BM, 01-01-1972, p. 2). Also, the GDR is represented as a puppet state of the Soviet Union and therefore the Grundlagenvertrag does not mean anything (FA, 05-12-1972, p. 19). Other authors using the activities and events signifier represent the various treaties under Ostpolitik as the definitive blow to reunification, despite the fact that the agreements are related to an entity which is — according to the authors — not a state (BM, 15-08-1970, p. 2, 11).

Within this theme, the places signifier is used more. In bolstering their argument, letter writers do not mention the GDR, but instead represent it as Mitteldeutschland, the Heimat, or "DDR" (BM, 13-03-1970, p. 2). Furthermore, one author will never agree with the Ostpolitik as long as he requires a visa to visit his own Heimatland (BM, 16-12-1971, p. 23).

### *Human rights*

The least mentioned theme of human rights concerns around the border and/or Ostpolitik is mostly commented on using the activities and events signifiers. Authors of LTEs state that the continuous human rights violations in the GDR are reasons why the various treaties should not be signed (BM, 15-08-1970, p. 11; 16-08-1970, p. 2). These authors often allude to the shooting order at the border, the impaired freedom of expression and the inability to travel freely. Especially the accession of the GDR to the UN is frowned upon by letter writers for reasons of human rights violations. Other authors utter that the Ostpolitik treaties have not led to an improvement of human rights in the GDR (BM, 13-12-1970, p. 52; 19-11-1972, p. 63). Letter writers also state that the Ostpolitik treaties are a de facto recognition of the border where people are shot daily without any reason (BM, 09-09-1971, p. 2).

The letters featuring stories in relation to human rights violations at the border contain personal references and eyewitness accounts of shootings and harassments (BM, 08-09-1971, p. 2; 19-12-1971, p. 31). One author even goes as far as postulating that if the Berlin Wall were somewhere else in the world, there would be daily protests. However, there are no protests against the daily shooting of people trying to live in freedom (BM, 19-09-1971, p. 8).

# Conclusion sub-question 2

## Theory

The previous sections enable to draw a conclusion on the question of what perceptions and representations come forward in the East and West German LTEs. From the theoretical framework, it shows that borders gain meaning through relations between the states involved. States manage their relations through geopolitical codes (Gaddis, 1982; Van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). On the other hand, borders gain meaning through geopolitical representations created in the public sphere. Within the public sphere, everybody should be allowed access to the debate and be treated equally whatever the voiced position may be, without forcing their opinion on others (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001, p. 57). The function of the public sphere according to Fiedler & Meyen (2015a, p. 185) and Habermas (1990) therefore is to pose as the rationalization of the government by deliberative elements.

In democratic societies, the government informs itself of sentiments in the public sphere, which they may incorporate into their policies as well as in their geopolitical codes (Dijkink, 1998, p. 295; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992, p. 432; Sharp, 1996, pp. 567–586). LTEs are part of the public sphere (Wahl-Jorgensen, 1999, p. 54). On their turn, they create, shape and alter geopolitical representations of, in this case, the inner-German border. The representations of the border as they come forward from LTEs in the FRG are largely negative, however there is a small group which represent the border and/or Ostpolitik in a more balanced, if more positive fashion.

The overwhelmingly positive representations in the GDR LTEs of the border and the negative representations of the FRG can be explained using Merten's (2008) study on political public relations, Arendt (1958) prefers to call it propaganda. Either way, a fictitious communist reality was imposed onto the press. It can therefore be argued that the above representations in LTEs are a manifestation of the politically staged public sphere. This politically staged public sphere does not reflect reality, but instead reflects (and celebrates) the achievements of (GDR) politics and the socialist societal system (Fiedler & Meyen, 2015a, p. 192).

The representations of the border and/or Ostpolitik in both countries can be summarised as follows.

## GDR representations in LTEs

The representations that come forward in the LTEs posted in GDR newspapers generally sketch a positive image of the border and the Ostpolitik. The treaties are represented as major contributions to peace between the GDR and the FRG and Europe in general. They show that the socialist states are on the right side of history, and the treaties display that their peaceful foreign policy works. The success of the GDR government in concluding the treaties is many times represented as a result of the support the GDR gets from the Soviet Union. So, not the FRG is represented as the architect of the Ostpolitik treaties, but the Soviet Union and the SED leadership. The recognition of the GDR as a full-flown state and their accession to the United Nations is represented as the crown on the GDR's continuous efforts of striving for peace. The SED regime is represented as the party which has made all achievements in the GDR possible, and Erich Honecker deserves proper compliments for his work in the international sphere.

The Ostpolitik is also represented as a phenomenon that strengthens the continuous building-up of the socialist society. The farmers, workers, students and party members all contributed to the international success of the GDR and this international success will also help every GDR citizen in performing even better. The socialist society is represented as a friendly, warm and caring system, way better than the competitive, harsh and cold capitalist society. Therefore, despite the successful détente with the capitalist FRG neighbour, there can never be a mix of both systems: peaceful coexistence is the maximum. The détente does not mean reconciliation with the capitalists, who are represented as imperialist and untrustworthy. The intentions of the FRG and Willy Brandt in their alleged cooperation with the GDR peace initiatives are questioned, and earlier on the research period, marked as outright insufficient (calling for full recognition instead). The Western bloc is also represented as making agreements on the one hand — implicitly acknowledging the power of the GDR and the Soviet Union — while on the other keeps on involving itself in the domestic affairs of other states. So the Western bloc is represented as a group which should be approached with caution.

The border is represented as a protective element keeping Western agents and provocateurs out. The various treaties dealing with the border itself are represented as a positive feat for the GDR. The status of West-Berlin not being part of the FRG is cleared, which means less trouble for GDR border personnel. In itself, the border is represented as a measure guaranteeing the freedom and peace the GDR citizens can live in.

## FRG representations in LTEs

The segment within the FRG society that represents the Ostpolitik as a positive step does so by portraying it as steps towards peace and stability between the GDR and the FRG, as well as Europe on the whole. The Ostpolitik is a means to reconcile with the past of WWII, and is represented as a hand of peace towards Poland, the Soviet Union, the GDR and the CSSR. Pragmatic reasons are forwarded for negotiating with the GDR, as it is the only way to move forward after the deadlock since the end of the war. It is also represented as careful steps towards possible reunification of the FRG and the GDR. Despite the flaws in the agreements, it enables FRG and GDR citizens to come in contact with each other again and keeps the spirit of future reunification alive. The architect of the Ostpolitik, Willy Brandt, is represented as a pragmatic statesman with a true heart for peace, willing to improve conditions for travellers to the GDR and citizens of West-Berlin alike.

However, the majority of representations of the border and/or the inner-German question in light of Ostpolitik are negative. The treaties are very frequently represented as harmful to German interests and only increase the influence of the Soviet Union and the GDR. The treaties result in the giving-away of a quarter of German territory for which the FRG got nothing in return. The status of West-Berlin as an autonomous unit is a big source of anger, and its citizens represent the FRG government as traitors who had not taken their position into account at all.

Willy Brandt is portrayed as the man responsible for the misery the FRG finds itself in. He permanently slammed the door for German reunification and has concluded treaties without consulting the voters. He operated undemocratically and has not in any way reached his goals of improving the situation for travellers and citizens of West-Berlin. His re-election of 1972 show that his electorate has no morals and the FRG would be better off without him. Brandt is also represented as the man responsible for making human rights violations in the GDR disappear from the discussion, as he has recognized a border where people are shot daily. He has allowed a regime into the UN that consequently denies its citizens free travel and freedom of expression.

The border is represented as a nuisance for those crossing it. Outrage is being forwarded over the new travel regulations as stipulated by the various Ostpolitik treaties. It is represented as the work of an evil regime which is supported by an equally evil and imperialist Soviet Union. The history of the GDR and the influence the Soviet Union has had over its formation show that their peaceful co-existence doctrine is hypocritical. The border is also represented as a work that separates Germans from Germans, a people that belong together and share the same lands. Its recognition through Ostpolitik, a border surrounding a state which should not even be a state, is the final nail in the coffin for German reunification: a destiny only made possible by Willy Brandt.

*In general, it can be concluded that diametrically different representations of the border and/or Ostpolitik exist in the GDR and the FRG. The GDR authors represent the Ostpolitik as beneficial for their own position in the world and perceive the border as a protective element against the West. The borders are final and just right. The separation of Germany is here to stay in a positive sense. The FRG authors represent the border as unfair, a nuisance and against common sense. The Ostpolitik is widely represented as only beneficial to the Eastern Bloc. The FRG has lost territory. The separation of Germany is here to stay in a negative sense. The positive representations are overshadowed by thoroughly negative representations of the border, the Ostpolitik and the GDR.*

In order to find out how the geopolitical codes both countries adhered to have influenced the representations of the border and/or Ostpolitik, the two phenomena have to be compared and contrasted. This will shed light on how the public sphere operates in both countries and if a degree of causality exists between geopolitical codes and representations. This comparison will be drawn in the next section.

# Comparing previous results: conclusion sub-question 3

## Theory

In order to find out to what extent Ostpolitik has influenced the perceptions of East and West Germans on the inner-German border, comparing these representations with the geopolitical codes is of prime importance. As introduced in the theoretical framework, Dijkink (1998) states that there can be a consensus or divergence between the geopolitical code and the popular beliefs of the masses. In case of a divergence, a democratic crisis or a change of government is inevitable. In case of consensus, there is no incompatibility between the government's goals and the popular opinion, so the geopolitical code can be upheld.

## GDR comparison geopolitical code versus geopolitical representations

Based upon the contents of the LTEs, one may conclude that a perfect concurrence existed between the GDR geopolitical code and the geopolitical representations of the masses. The GDR government engaged with the FRG on the basis of a geopolitical code of inevitability and mutual interest: they were eager to gain diplomatic recognition and a seat at the UN-table. In order to achieve this, they had to engage with the FRG and the Allied powers, while at the same time distancing themselves from them and consolidating their own state. The representations that come forward in the LTEs show that almost everybody supported the GDR government in its strive for peaceful co-existence with the capitalist bloc. The readers attributed the success of the Ostpolitik negotiations to the consequent and persistent efforts of the GDR negotiators, the peaceful intentions of the Soviet Union and the hard work everybody has performed in the socialist society.

This statement however should be interpreted with extreme caution. As concluded before, the press in the GDR was steered by the government in which events were interpreted, classified and selected to prepare a counterfactual fiction of reality which corresponded with communism. The representations that were found in the LTEs printed in GDR newspapers are almost exclusively positive. This can be interpreted as the manifestation of what Fiedler & Meyen (2015a, p. 192) call the politically staged public sphere. Therefore, although concurrence between the geopolitical code and the representations of the masses can be seen in the GDR, it is doubtful whether this is a rightful claim, given the lack of LTEs resembling some sort of functional public sphere with free debate as envisaged by Habermas (1990). The answer on whether 'true' concurrence or divergence existed between the GDR's geopolitical code and the geopolitical representations of ordinary people therefore remains inconclusive.

## FRG comparison geopolitical code versus geopolitical representations

For the FRG, a straightforward answer is not available either. Based on the above results, one may argue that there is a strong divergence between the geopolitical code the FRG adhered to and the representations of the general public ventilated in the analysed media. The FRG engaged with the GDR on the basis of inevitability and mutual interest. It had to seek concessions from the GDR in order to alleviate the border regime for FRG travellers and clarify the status of West-Berlin, while at the same time preventing a full legal recognition. The opening up of the border could start change in the GDR from within, as entertained by Willy Brandt's government. As the LTEs show, the Ostpolitik process caused quite a stir with the FRG population, with sentiments of lost territory and fears of increased influence of the Eastern bloc being widespread with a majority of the letter writers.

If Dijkink's (1998) theorisation of consensus and divergence is applied to the FRG between 1970 and 1975, it would either mean that there would be a democratic crisis respectively a change of government or a normalisation of the incongruence eventually leading to the maintaining of the geopolitical code. Assuming that the representations and perceptions found in the analysed LTEs are generalisable to the entire public sphere and public debate as it existed at that time, Dijkink's (1998) allusions may have credit.

Indeed, the Ostpolitik provoked serious domestic backlash in the FRG when reading the LTEs from especially the Berliner Morgenpost. This in turn led to the constructive vote of no confidence in the German Bundestag, which was called for by the CDU opposition party. Brandt and his government managed to survive the vote (with alleged help from the Stasi), however they did draw the conclusion that new elections were needed in order to secure a new mandate for further negotiations with the GDR. Brandt won the 1972 election and was able to form a renewed majority government consisting of the SPD and the FDP. He continued his negotiations

with the GDR, which eventually led to the Grundlagenvertrag with the GDR, upkeeping the geopolitical code they had used until that point. The unsuccessful constructive vote of no confidence and the positive election result may show that despite previous divergence between geopolitical code and popular representations, a normalisation was reached and the Ostpolitik process could continue.

However, this statement can be questioned when examining the representations following from the analysed LTEs. Apart from selection bias favouring LTEs which are in line with a newspapers stance (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001; 2002), the large amount of negative letters can also be attributed to the Berliner Morgenpost itself. It is a newspaper published by the opposition-minded Axel Springer Verlag, a publishing house known for its anti-GDR sentiments and fierce defence of the unity of the German state (Kummer, 2002; Sarotte, 2001, p. 96). Their relative overrepresentation in the analysed LTEs lead to a significant bias towards anti-GDR and anti-rapprochement sentiments. It is therefore difficult to extrapolate the representations found in the analysed LTEs to the entire debate surrounding the Ostpolitik. In turn, this means that answering the question on whether a concurrence or divergence existed between the geopolitical code of the FRG and the popular representations is difficult based on the data at hand. The answer remains inconclusive.

What these results exactly mean will become clear in the next section, where the main question will be answered based on the previous results.

## Interpretation of results: the main research question

Although it cannot be determined whether 'true' convergence or divergence existed between the geopolitical codes and the geopolitical representations on the border for both the GDR and the FRG, the results so far do allow to explain the actual relationship between the two concepts. This relationship is the core of this study and is the central investigative element as featured in the conceptual model (see page 21). The relationship between the geopolitical code and geopolitical representations sheds light on a possible correlation between Ostpolitik and the perceptions of ordinary citizens regarding the inner-German border. This will be explained in the forthcoming sections. In turn, this possible correlation can lead to a renewed interpretation of the meaning of the inner-German border, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

## GDR: geopolitical code and influence on geopolitical representations

In the 1960, GDR First Secretary Walter Ulbricht is confronted with severe economic decline. Food shortages could only be prevented by mass imports from the Soviet Union. It was in this decade that Ulbricht devised his new economic reform plan NÖSPL in order to prevent these shortages in the future. By implementing reforms, the economy could be bolstered and the GDR could turn into an exemplary model state for all other socialist countries, even for the Soviet Union. His economic reforms involved taking up diplomatic and economic relations with the FRG in order to sell quality GDR goods to them.

With his plan, he could consolidate the state (strong economy prevents shortages), continue building up the socialist society and maybe even overtake the FRG as the economically stronger German state. Apart from his personal disposition towards renewed economic relations with the FRG, it may carefully be assumed that Ulbricht incorporated the sentiments from the public sphere of shortages and discontent with the economy into his plans. The NÖSPL basically involved reshaping the incumbent geopolitical code of barring any relations with the FRG. Consequently, one may presume that the sentiments in the (politically staged) public sphere did have some degree of influence in the early (re-)shaping the GDR's geopolitical code.

During the Ostpolitik however, a different relationship exists between the geopolitical codes and geopolitical representations. The GDR government communicates the negotiations, results and various treaties to their press offices. These serve as the mouthpiece of the SED party and reports the news according to their socialist principles (Bos, 1993; Merten, 2008). The politically staged public sphere is fuelled by political public relations, celebrating the achievements of the SED party and shows the positive sides of whatever happened in the country. With only positive news on the Ostpolitik treaties remaining, the LTEs responding to the political public relations reporting also remain positive. Apart from a handful of mildly critical letters, all the analysed LTEs were positive on the border, the Ostpolitik and the GDR geopolitical code in general.

### *The positive relationship explained*

This apparent positive relationship between the geopolitical code and the geopolitical representations can be explained through the conceptual framework. The GDR government controls the politically staged public sphere and fills it with political public relations. The authors of LTEs presumable incorporate these political public relations messages in their letters. This means that the government's geopolitical code is basically reiterated in the LTEs. The authors of the analysed LTEs include (well-performing) working brigades, proud socialists, enthusiastic school classes, university professors as well as ordinary workers.

In short, the best socialists take the stage in the LTEs. In their letters, through the use of various signifiers, they represent the Ostpolitik, the GDR government and the Soviet Union as positive feats. Positive stories are told, lauding reports are written on the various events of the Ostpolitik, the entire process being represented as a means to safeguard peaceful co-existence and to continue the efforts of building the socialist society. The SED leadership is objectified as a wise and consequent group acting in the best interests of the GDR. What all this means is that the LTEs amplify the positive representations and recreate them in the politically staged public sphere. The representations as foreseen by the GDR government on the border and/or Ostpolitik therefore persist, that is in the politically staged public sphere.

In answer to the first part of the main question — *to what extent* has the Ostpolitik influenced perceptions on the border in the GDR — one may conclude that there is a large influence of the GDR government over these perceptions. The relationship between geopolitical codes and geopolitical representations is positive, at

least for the politically staged public sphere (of which the LTEs are a manifestation). In order to answer the second part of the main question — *how* Ostpolitik has been of influence to the perceptions on the border — one may conclude that in the politically staged public sphere, anything can be reported and will automatically become part of the representations that exist over something. This happens because the government controls the press and reports its activities through political public relations. The GDR's geopolitical code of dealing with the FRG becomes the new reality in the politically staged public sphere. The geopolitical representations that exist in the politically staged public sphere therefore move along with whatever direction the SED party line goes.

### *What the LTEs do not show*

Knowing that the LTEs and its representations are a reiteration of the GDR government's geopolitical code is not the full analysis. More revealing would be to briefly elaborate on what the analysed LTEs do not show. Based on the theoretical framework, Fix (2013) states that a large minority of LTEs dealt with policy, bureaucracy and corruption. Letters of this kind were indeed found, albeit from an almost exclusively positive perspective. However, Fiedler & Meyen (2015a) state that apart from the politically staged public sphere (of which the analysed LTEs are a manifestation), there existed an internal public sphere. This is the sphere where LTEs not suitable for publication in the actual newspaper are answered and forwarded to the responsible authority. These letters may have contained the complaints and grievances and potentially negative elements. This is what White (1983) calls the ombudsman function of the socialist newspaper.

Based on these authors and the analysed LTEs, one may therefore conclude that the 'feedback loop' from LTEs, through the public sphere, towards the government (as presented in the conceptual framework) does not work in the politically staged public sphere. Critical letters containing grievances and different opinions were internalised in the invisible internal public sphere, which is the true 'feedback loop' where some degree of freedom of expression may have existed. It may be assumed that the more critical letters were not published and dealt with internally without the general public knowing what was really going on. Indirectly, the analysed LTEs and the theory confirm the existence of this internal public sphere. Its contents however remain unknown.

The main takeaway of this section would be:

*The Ostpolitik has influenced the perceptions of GDR citizens on the inner-German border. The GDR government communicates its stance on Ostpolitik through means of political public relations to a politically staged public sphere. LTEs in the steered press merely reiterate the official GDR government geopolitical code during Ostpolitik. The alleged positive relationship between the Ostpolitik and the perceptions on the border is not a full representation of the actual perceptions ordinary people had on the inner-German border between 1970 and 1975, as the politically staged public sphere is not the entire picture. In the internal public sphere, a proper feedback loop with possibly more critical representations from internal public sphere towards the government may exist, although the analysed LTEs are not a manifestation of this internal public sphere.*

## FRG: geopolitical code and influence on geopolitical representations

In the 1960s, the mayor of West-Berlin Willy Brandt is confronted with the construction of the Berlin Wall and its dire consequences for all Berliners. He shares the concerns of the worried citizens and deliberates on how to alleviate the human suffering as a consequence of the seemingly permanent sealing of the border. Over time, his deliberations were concretised into a plan of rapprochement with the GDR. The sentiments of insecurity and peril that lived in the public sphere were incorporated into Willy Brandt's future shift of the FRG geopolitical code towards the GDR. Consequently, one may assume that the sentiments that lived in the public sphere and its representations of the border have had a degree of influence in the new geopolitical code executed during the era of Ostpolitik.

During the Ostpolitik, a different relationship exist between the geopolitical codes and geopolitical representations. The FRG government communicates the negotiations, results and various treaties to the independent mass media. The mass media are the core part of the public sphere. According to Habermas (1990), it serves as the rationalisation of governmental policy through deliberative elements. This indicates a theoretical 'feedback loop' between the government and those taking part in the various debates in the public sphere. LTEs are a prime example.

The analysed LTEs however indicate very negative representations of the border and/or Ostpolitik, despite the political mandate Willy Brandt had secured with his 1969 election to implement his ideas of "Wandel dürch Annäherung" with the GDR. The negative sentiments mostly come from the Axel Springer Verlag newspaper Berliner Morgenpost, a newspaper known for its outspoken stance on the GDR. Its letter writers stated that the Ostpolitik went way too fast and its treaties are negative for the FRG. The other newspapers also tend to represent the border and/or Ostpolitik in a negative way. Over the entire research period, this negative tenure remained.

### The negative relationship explained

It may appear that the FRG government did not succeed in positively influencing the perceptions of FRG citizens on the inner-German border despite their Ostpolitik efforts. On the other hand, the negative representations in the public sphere *in the end* did not manage to change the FRG's geopolitical code either. Egon Bahr, Willy Brandt's chief negotiator had worked as a journalist before his entry into politics. Sarotte (2001) states that Bahr was very effective in keeping the press at a distance and playing public opinion. He was especially instructed to do so to keep the Axel Springer press away. One could therefore conclude that the conceptual 'feedback loop' from LTEs (containing negative geopolitical representations) forwarded through the public sphere towards the government, does not work.

Such a conclusion however would forego a critical episode in the Ostpolitik era. Right before the conclusion of the Grundlagenvertrag between the FRG and the GDR, the CDU opposition party called for a no confidence vote against Chancellor Willy Brandt. Although he won, he had to call for snap elections in order to renew his mandate. The no confidence vote and the elections shows that the negative representations in the public sphere did have effect. Not surprisingly, the most outspoken critical LTEs in the Berliner Morgenpost often aligned themselves with the right-wing CDU opposition party. On behalf of its angry electorate, the CDU tried to swing the FRG geopolitical code by preventing a treaty with the GDR. One could therefore assume that a negative relationship exists between the FRG's geopolitical codes and the geopolitical representations in the public sphere. The Ostpolitik negatively affected the perceptions of FRG citizens on the inner-German border: the policy (briefly) backfired. Brandt could however carry on after his electoral win in 1972.

In answer to the first part of the main question — *to what extent* has the Ostpolitik influenced perceptions on the border in the FRG — one may conclude that there is a large influence of the FRG government over these perceptions. The relationship between geopolitical codes and geopolitical representations is negative, at least for the part of the public sphere for which LTEs have been analysed. In order to answer the second part of the main question — *how* Ostpolitik has been of influence to the perceptions on the border — one may conclude that Ostpolitik has fuelled negative representations in the LTEs (and thus, the public sphere), eventually leading to a short but stormy political crisis almost bringing Brandt's government down. This is the Habermasian (1990) public sphere at work, where free and open debate is key in the intermediary layer between politics and society.

What the above sections indicate is that the negative representations of the border and/or Ostpolitik have had a short effect on the course of the events. On the other hand, the Ostpolitik created negative geopolitical representations. This means that the relationship between geopolitical codes and geopolitical representations works both ways for the FRG.

### What the LTEs do not show

Knowing that the geopolitical codes and geopolitical representations in the FRG have a correlative relationship based on the analysed LTEs is not the full story. The large amount of negative LTEs does not rhyme with the eventual positive 1972 election result for the Brandt government. If the LTEs had been a complete representation of the public sphere as it existed at that time, it could be assumed that Brandt had not won the election, as the majority would have rejected his Ostpolitik.

From this postulate, one can assume that the analysed LTEs are a depiction of the more negatively-minded half of the FRG public sphere. However, even if this were the case, this would not have changed the correlative relationship between the geopolitical code and geopolitical representations. The possible representations that existed in the more positively-minded half of the public sphere could have attributed to Brandt's electoral win. The 'feedback loop' would have functioned anyway.

The main takeaway of this section would be:

*The Ostpolitik has influenced the perceptions of FRG citizens on the inner-German border. The FRG government faced backlash in executing its geopolitical code from the negatively inclined public sphere, leading to a short democratic crisis. A negative, correlative relationship between the Ostpolitik and perceptions on the inner-German border exists. However, the electoral win of 1972 for Brandt's government may fuel the assumption that a public sphere with more positive representations may have existed outside the analysed LTEs. This does not however change the most important finding that a two-way relation exists between geopolitical code and geopolitical representations in the FRG between 1970 and 1975.*

The takeaways for both the GDR and the FRG will be further discussed in the next chapter. Conclusions will be drawn based on the answer to the main research question. Also, the inner-German border will be reinterpreted as much as possible, based on the previous chapters.

# Chapter 5 – Conclusion

## Synthesis of the research

*"Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten"*! Despite the falsehood of Walter Ulbricht's statement, he managed to permanently seal off the GDR from the FRG. In August 1961, he could not have known that 9 years later, he was ousted from office and his successor Erich Honecker allowed a slight opening of the border by concluding several treaties with the neighbouring FRG. On the one hand, the separation of Germany seemed permanent with the GDR receiving recognition from the FRG under Ostpolitik. Both of them got a seat at the table with the United Nations. The GDR could even negotiate with the NATO-states at the Helsinki Conference of 1975 to make agreements over the post-WWII spheres of influence in Europe. In little than five years, the GDR went from an unrecognised 'Soviet protectorate' to a state with full international merits, as Erich Honecker had dreamt of.

What seemed as consolidation of the GDR and 'Abgrenzung' from its neighbouring FRG class enemy also had another side. The various treaties concluded under Ostpolitik enabled FRG citizens and West-Berlin citizens to visit the GDR. The ambiguous status of West-Berlin had been cleared: it was not part of the FRG but was represented by it abroad and West-Berlin citizens got an FRG passport. The FRG recognised the GDR as an equal state and the countries exchanged permanent missions. All in all, the pragmatic politics by Willy Brandt and the willingness of the GDR to gain recognition had worked out.

A diplomatic marvel in hindsight, the reactions from ordinary citizens in the FRG were not that positive. The analysed LTEs show that a majority of the authors do not agree with Brandt's Ostpolitik, fearing more influence of the Eastern bloc in domestic affairs, all the while regretting the loss of territory and the firm position the Berlin Wall still had. The analysed LTEs from the GDR show a different picture. Complete acclamation of the GDR's 'consequent and persistent peaceful intentions achieving co-existence with the capitalists' could be read in the LTEs.

The analysis of the LTEs show that the Ostpolitik has had influence over the perceptions of East- and West-Germans on the inner-German border. The relationship works positively in the GDR, where the perceptions forwarded in the LTEs are a reiteration of the government's geopolitical code under Ostpolitik. There is no feedback from the politically staged public sphere to the government's geopolitical codes, as the government is the sole creator of the politically staged public sphere. What the results do not show is the operation of the separate, internal public sphere: the place where presumably some degree of closed debate could have existed in the GDR.

The relationship between geopolitical code and geopolitical representations works negatively in the FRG, where the perceptions forwarded in the LTEs indicate a backfiring of the Ostpolitik. This in turn led to a democratic crisis, which Willy Brandt narrowly survived. There is feedback from the public sphere to the government's geopolitical codes, however it did not change the FRG's course in the end. One could assume that the analysed LTEs reflected the more negatively inclined portion of the public sphere regarding the inner-German border and/or Ostpolitik.

But what do these conclusions mean, apart from alleged correlation between geopolitical code and geopolitical representations? Can the inner-German border be critically reinterpreted on the basis of these conclusions? In other words, can the foreseen goal of this study be accomplished?

## The reinterpretation of the inner-German border

On the basis of the LTEs analysed, a reinterpretation of the border and its meaning in the GDR is unhelpful. The repetition of the GDR's government policies against the socialist backdrop in the LTEs only reflect the SED party lines. Accordingly, the border gives protection against Western agents and provocateurs and other unwanted elements. Of course, behind the scenes, the border served to keep the GDR citizens in, in other words prevent the outflow of skilled workers who can contribute to the building-up of the socialist society. The Ostpolitik did not change this, as GDR citizens were still deprived of free travel: they could now only receive friends and relatives from the FRG.

In short, this does not shed any new light on the meaning the border has for the GDR society at large. The 'limits to dictatorship' as postulated by Fulbrook (2005) cannot be determined solely on the basis of this study. For the GDR citizens involving themselves in the politically staged public sphere, the Wall protects and

consolidates the GDR into a proud, independent and sovereign state, thanks to the SED, the Soviet Union and everybody's hard work in the socialist society.

The LTEs that were published in the FRG are more revealing in terms of a possible reinterpretation of the border. Even where the Ostpolitik in theory sounded as a win-win situation, the negative representations persisted in the entire research period. For many LTE writers, the Ostpolitik meant the permanent separation of Germany, the recognition of a regime violating human rights, hassles at the border due to long procedures and no prospect of a future reunification. The people's voices as they existed at that time show that their border with the GDR elicits strongly negative sentiments, something the Ostpolitik apparently could not change (at least for the analysed part of the public sphere).

Even the fact that the FRG government did not 'fully' and 'legally' recognise the GDR did not matter for the average LTE writer. Whereas the inner-German border was devalued to some extent through the Ostpolitik treaties, this devaluation was not enough for the authors of the FRG LTEs featured in this study. This reinterpretation of the border from the FRG side is interesting, as one could assume that every attempt to make a border accessible for those willing to cross it should be appreciated.

## Zum Schluss

Despite the fact that the GDR LTEs do not shed sufficient light on the perceptions on the border of those outside the politically staged public sphere, as well as taking into account that many FRG LTEs were very negative over the results of the Ostpolitik, one must not forget the magnitude the treaties may have had in their time. The Ostpolitik, disregarding whether it was Willy Brandt or Erich Honecker who were 'most responsible', did enable more cross-border contacts between two countries which had turned its back to one another for years. This may have prevented alienation between two people who spoke the same language and had lived in the same country in the past.

A bold conclusion could be that the Ostpolitik indeed planted a seed for further change in the GDR. As the unexpected events of November 1989 unfolded, one may assume that the spirit for an eventual reunification of Germany had never faded, despite the GDR's attempts of Abgrenzung and the FRG's negative perceptions and prejudices. The Ostpolitik may have been controversial in both the FRG and the higher circles of the GDR government, but despite its imperfections, it did allow for families and friends to visit each other. The importance of these contacts may not be underestimated: it kept the hope for reunification alive. This conclusion was perfectly summarised by Dr. Jur. Walter Lewald in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 4th of July 1973, right after the signing of the Grundlagenvertrag. To conclude this study, the only sensible thing to do would be to end with an excerpt of a letter to the editor:

*"Die Intensivierung des menschlichen Verkehrs zwischen den Bewohnern der beiden Herrschaftsgebiete, die mit den in Artikel 7 des Grundvertrags erwähnten humanitären Fragen anvisiert ist, die aber auch wesensnotwendig zur Normalisierung gehört, kann viel eher dazu dienen, das Bewußtsein der nationalen Einheit wachzuhalten als alle wohlfeilen und noch so schönen Deklamationen bundesdeutscher Zeitgenossen".*

## Discussion of results and recommendations for future research

The results of this research demonstrate how the politically staged public sphere and political public relations in a socialist society operate, a model introduced by Gerhards & Neidhardt (1990) and refined by Fiedler & Meyen (2015a). What the results did not manage to clarify are the perceptions and representations that exist outside of the politically staged public sphere, in other words the internal public sphere. In this internal public sphere, LTEs were not published in the newspapers but were forwarded to those responsible. In order to find out more about the 'limits to dictatorship', more research into the internal public sphere is needed, as the politically staged public sphere seems unhelpful in that respect. This would involve archival research into the letters GDR newspapers received instead of researching the LTEs that they published. In that respect, the theoretical framework, the conceptual model and the results could form a good basis for future research into the actual perceptions and representations of ordinary GDR citizens, and with that the operation of the public sphere in socialist countries.

Regarding the FRG, the results of this research are a good indication of the workings of the public sphere in a democratic society, where free debate serves as a rationalisation of the government's policies by deliberative elements (Habermas, 1990; Gerhards & Neidhardt, 1990). Apart from being a demonstration of existing theories on the public sphere and the how geopolitical representations may influence geopolitical code, the LTEs are an indication of a part of the debate as it was carried during Ostpolitik. Future research could try to create a more complete picture of the debate by analysing a broader selection of newspapers, for instance more left-leaning press. This future research could also pay more attention to the spatial component, meaning the place of residence of authors as well as differences in opinion in the countryside and urban areas. The descriptive statistics featured in Appendix IV – Statistics content analysis on page 88 may indicate that this is a variable worth considering.

Apart from that, the findings this research presents could be a good starting point for further research into historical borders from a geopolitics of borders perspective. Of course, Epstein's (2003) call for archival research that is innovative and engaging for its readers still holds credit in future historical border studies. Even 28 years after reunification, the need to further investigate this important episode in German post-WWII history remains. Even though the inner-German border is long gone, finding out what it meant can help in deconstructing the sometimes still existing 'mental border' in the minds of some Germans (Adam, 2015).

## Reflection

Over the course of this research, some choices may have influenced the results this thesis yielded. The foremost possible methodological flaw would be the choice of analysing the actually printed LTEs in the GDR newspapers instead of the LTEs submitted to the newspaper in general. Despite indications in previous research into GDR LTEs that these may contain a diverse array of opinions, this did not prove to be the case. No attempt was undertaken to deviate from this flaw, as it was unknown whether the letters sent to the GDR newspapers still existed and if these were accessible. The fact that only published LTEs were analysed resulted in a reiteration of the official SED party line on the inner-German border, which had been investigated already (see Wolle, 1998).

Another methodological choice which may have had profound influence on the results at hand would be the choice of FRG newspapers. Before data collection, it was not expected that the Berliner Morgenpost would become overrepresented in the empirical data. This skewed the results towards a very negative representation of the border and/or Ostpolitik. Adding another newspaper in order to balance out the overrepresentation was not possible in the limited time available for the empirical phase. Leaving out the Axel Springer press could have led to a more nuanced view, but on the other hand the Berliner Morgenpost did give a fascinating insight into the fierceness of the debate on the Ostpolitik.

Furthermore, the operationalisation of this research strongly leans on a single article, namely Laine & van der Velde (2017). This article was one of the first concrete guidelines for this research, which lead to an anchoring bias favouring their methodology and operationalisation. Not much further thought was put into devising other operationalisations of social semiotics, as it turned out to be a rather abstract and difficult to comprehend methodology. The choice of anchoring to this article can be attributed to the lack of experience of the researcher with the social semiotics methodology. On the other hand, it remains unknown if this has negatively influenced the outcomes. A discourse analysis of the LTEs for instance may have yielded similar outcomes.

[Word count from Introduction to Reflection: 39.243]

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Analysis scheme 1: content analysis

General tone regarding the border between the GDR and the FRG in the light of current developments (geopolitical events), or broadly, the Ostpolitik:

LTEs written in the GDR:
- Positive on the border = *approval of government's policy regarding the border and/or Ostpolitik*
    - o Protection from imperialist forces/FRG/capitalist West
    - o GDR has a right to existence, we deserve recognition
    - o Contributes to peaceful co-existence
    - o Strengthens the building-up of socialism
- Neutral on the border = *no approval, no disapproval, time will tell*
    - o Negotiations have to be awaited
    - o The border can potentially be devaluated
- Negative on the border = *disapproval of government's policy regarding the border and/or Ostpolitik*
    - o Restrictive
    - o No negotiations with the class enemy
    - o Bordering process is not sufficient yet (Abgrenzung)

LTEs written in the FRG:
- Positive on the border = *approval of government's policy regarding the border and/or Ostpolitik*
    - o Stability in Europe
    - o Ostpolitik as a step towards unity
    - o Pragmatic reasons, recognition of the facts
- Neutral on the border = *no approval, no disapproval, time will tell*
    - o Negotiations have to be awaited
    - o The border can potentially be devaluated
- Negative on the border = *disapproval of government's policy regarding the border and/or Ostpolitik*
    - o Matter of principle: Germany is one nation as defined by the FRG constitution
    - o Hallstein doctrine: the GDR should never be recognized
    - o The Wall/border is against the UN Declaration of Human Rights
    - o The Wall/border is a nuisance, is unsafe, causes tensions
    - o Ostpolitik lets in the dangerous communists, meaning more influence for the Eastern bloc (without anything in return)
    - o Ostpolitik is undemocratic, no mandate from voters, referendum would be better

Take one or two illustrative quotes from LTE to motivate choice of positive/neutral/negative and incorporate into data file. Use these in results chapter.

Matters to keep in mind during the first categorisation:
- Are there differences in tone between newspapers of different political stances?
- Are there differences in tone between local newspapers and national newspapers?
- Has the LTE to do to with the case in question? Or otherwise spontaneous letter?

## Appendix II - Analysis scheme II: semiotic analysis

Signified: border FRG/GDR and/or the inner-German question

Signifiers:
- Activities: longue-duree policies and processes
    - o Ostpolitik in general
    - o CSCE negotiations
    - o Cold War/power blocs
    - o Building-up of socialism
- Events: natural disasters, political acts and historical events
    - o Treaties conducted under Ostpolitik
    - o Parteitag
    - o Elections
- Objects: material culture, personifying certain groups
    - o Leadership
    - o Ethnicities (the other = GDR/FRG)
    - o Political groups
- Places: geographies and landscapes, be it specified
    - o The other side: 'da drüben', 'der Zone', 'SBZ', "DDR" (in quotation marks), 'im Westen', 'im nicht-sozialistischen Außland',
    - o East or West-Berlin etc.
- Stories: accounts, narratives, reports of (shared) history
    - o Hallstein doctrine
    - o Shared history of Germans and same language
    - o Displacement after WWII
    - o Abgrenzung Kapitalismus vs. Sozialismus

Take one or two illustrative quotes from LTE to motivate choice of activities/events/objects/places/stories and incorporate into data file. Use these in results chapter.

Matters to keep in mind during the second categorisation:
- The signified, be it the border GDR-FRG, can also be nominated as 'the inner-German question'.

## Appendix III – Illustrative quotes content analysis

*„Andererseits konnte der westdeutsche Kanzler in Erfurt den Vorschlag der DDR zur Sicherung des Friedens und zur Durchsetzung der friedlichen Koexistenz zwischen DDR und BRD durch die Herstellung gleichberechtigter völkerrechtlicher Beziehungen auch nicht mehr rundweg ablehnen".*

Author name illegible,
Junge Welt 26-03-1970, p. 4
Case 1: Erfurter Gipfeltreffen

*„Es zeigt sich, daß die Friedenspolitik der sozialistischen Länder zum bestimmenden Faktor geworden der politischen Entwicklung in Europa geworden ist. Ich erwarte, daß auch die Regierung der BRD dieser Entwicklung Rechnung trägt".*

Hans Schwarz,
Leipziger Volkszeitung 05-12-1970, p.2
Case 3: Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland

*„Mit dem Vertrag ist die Grundlage gegeben, Westberlin von einer Frontstadt, einem neuralgischen Punkt Europas, in den Zustand der Entspannung und friedlichen Koexistenz zu führen".*

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Eugen Philippow,
Neues Deutschland 07-09-1971, p. 3
Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

*„Daß die Konferenz stattfindet, ist ein großer Erfolg der Friedenspolitik der Sowjetunion und unserer Staatengemeinschaft. Wir stehen vor dem bisherigen Höhepunkt der Entspannungspolitik, einem neuen Ausgangspunkt für die Politik der friedlichen Koexistenz".*

Paul Matuschewski
Leipziger Volkszeitung 30-07-1975, p. 2
Case 15: Signing of the Helsinki Accords

*Box 2 - Illustrative quotes GDR LTEs positive theme: peaceful coexistence*

„*Dauerhaft gute Beziehungen setzen jedoch die völkerrechtliche Anerkennung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik durch die Bundesrepublik voraus. Wir fordern damit nichts anderes, als die Bestätigung bereits mehr als 20 Jahren bestehender Tatsachen. Wir erwarten deshalb von der Bundesregierung, daß sie das als Voraussetzung für weitere Verbesserung der Beziehungen anerkennt.*

Dr. Rainer Falck
Leipziger Volkszeitung 21-03-1970, p. 2
Case 1: Erfurter Gipfeltreffen

„*Die drei Westmächte haben in dem Abkommen zum ersten Mal unsere DDR als souveränen Staat bestätigen müssen. Unsere Arbeit und unser Kampf zahlen sich aus*".

Heinz Knaak
Neues Deutschland 06-09-1971, p. 2
Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

„*Dem müßten auch die Vertreter der drei Westmächte Rechnung tragen und mit ihren Unterschriften anerkennen, daß die derzeitigen Realitäten zwei deutsche Staaten gegenseitiger Weltanschauung sind, daß also eine Deutsche Demokratische Republik besteht, souverän, mit festen Grenzen. Diese erstmalige westliche offizielle Anerkennung auf einem offiziellen Vertrag ist Fakt*".

Brigade "Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft" der Reparaturabteilung des Kombinatsbetriebes
Landmaschinenbau "Rotes Banner", Döbeln
Leipziger Volkszeitung 09-09-1971, p. 2
Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

„*Aus der Rede Erich Honeckers möchte ich den Gedanken hervorheben, daß eine Vorbedingung für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit die strikte Anerkennung der Unverletzlichkeit der Grenzen ist. Daran wird man die Politik jedes Staates messen*".

Horst Hosbach
Leipziger Volkszeitung 04-08-1975, p. 2
Case 15: Signing of the Helsinki Accords

*Box 3 - Illustrative quotes GDR positive LTEs theme: right to existence*

„*Arbeiter und Bauern waren sich einig: Jede gute Tat hilft, unsere Republik zu stärken und damit ihr Ansehen in der Welt zu erhöhen. Das entspricht genau der Feststellung Erich Honeckers, wenn er am Schluß des Interviews sagt, daß jeder, der täglich für die Stärkung der Republik arbeitet, damit ein festes Fundament für neue Erfolge unserer Außenpolitik schafft*".

Gerhard Reißig
Neues Deutschland 07-09-1971, p. 3
Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

„*Wir wissen, daß alle unsere Vorhaben zur Verbesserung der Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen einen sicheren Frieden voraussetzen. Deshalb haben wir ein ureigenes Interesse daran, daß der Helsinki-Gipfel erfolgreich verläuft*".

Dieter Hessel
Leipziger Volkszeitung 31-07-1975, p. 4
Case 15: Signing of the Helsinki Accords

*Box 4 - Illustrative quotes GDR positive LTEs theme: strengthens socialism*

> *„Als Berliner wohnte ich unmittelbar an der Staatsgrenze, die ich offen und dann gesichert erlebt habe. Wenn ich daran denke, wie man versucht hat, uns auszukaufen, so kann ich nur sagen: Es ist gut, daß dieser Spannungsherd durch vertragliche Regelungen weiter abgebaut wird".*
>
> Dr. Walter Kueszel
> Neues Deutschland 08-09-1971, p. 3
> Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

*Box 5 - Illustrative quote GDR positive LTEs theme: protection*

> *„Allgemeine Erklärungen nutzen nichts. Brandt muß als ersten Schritt beginnen, den Alleinvertretungsanspruch der Regierung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland auf zu geben um auf der Grundlage des Völkerrechtes normale, gleichberechtigte Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und BRD herzustellen".*
>
> Helmut Voigt
> Leipziger Volkszeitung 22-03-1970, p.2
> Case 1: Erfurter Gipfeltreffen
>
> *„Nun stehen auch die Unterschriften der Staatsoberhäupter der kapitalistischen Staaten unter einem internationalen Friedensdokument. Sie mußten sich dem Willen ihrer Völker nach sicherem Frieden beugen. Aber es gilt, wachsam zu bleiben, weiterhin ihre Worte in Helsinki mit ihren Taten zu vergleichen".*
>
> Manfred Scharf
> Leipziger Volkszeitung 08-08-1975, p. 2
> Case 15: Signing of the Helsinki Accords

*Box 6 - Illustrative quote GDR neutral LTEs theme*

„Typisch für die Haltung der Bonner Regierung war das Auftreten Brandts in Erfurt. Obwohl er ein Vierteljahr Zeit hatte, den Vertragentwurf der DDR zur Herstellung gleichberechtigter Beziehungen zu studieren, hat er sich weitherum um eine klare Antwort darauf gedrückt. Ganz offenbar geht es dieser Regierung darum, Zeit zu gewinnen und die für die Sicherung des Friedens unumgängliche, längst überfällige völkerrechtliche Regelung des Verhältnisse zwischen DDR und BRD immer weiter hinauszuschieben. Den Nutzen davon haben einig und allein jene Kräfte, die keine friedliche Koexistenz wollen".

Hilde Lust
Junge Welt 09-04-1970, p. 4
Case 1: Erfurter Gipfeltreffen

„Trotzdem besteht kein Grund dafür, uns mit der Unterschrift zufriedenzugeben, denn bevor der Vertrag nicht vom Bundestag ratifiziert wurde, besitzt er keinerlei völkerrechtliche Verbindlichkeit für die Bundesregierung. […] Obwohl sich Willy Brandt über das Zustandekommen des Vertrages befriedigt äußerte, reicht das bei weitern nicht aus. Die einzige Bekräftigung seines guten Willens muß durch weitere Taten und nicht durch Reden erfolgen […] .und nicht zuletzt, völkerrechtliche Beziehungen zur DDR aufnehmen.

Franz Heffing
Junge Welt 25-08-1970, p. 7
Case 2: Treaty of Moscow FRG-Soviet Union

„Die Entfaltung der sozialistische Lebensweisen ist ein Prozess der Abgrenzung vom menschenfeindlichen System des Imperialismus, ist Klassenkampf gegen die geistige Manipulierung und Technokratie der Lebens- und Arbeiterprozesse der werktätigen Menschen in jener Gesellschaft".

Dr. Werner Dohrmann
Neues Deutschland 12-06-1971, p. 1
Case 5: 8. Parteitag der SED

„Mit ihm [FRG] kann es in der Ideologie keine Versöhnung geben, wie es Genosse Erich Honecker auf dem 4. Plenum des ZK zum Ausdruck bringt. Wir dürfen uns nicht der Illusion hingeben, daß Bonn mit dieser Unterschrift plötzlich ein Freund der Arbeiterklasse geworden sei. […] Am menschenfeindlichen Wesen des Imperialismus hat sich dadurch nichts geändert".

Anton Suchanka
Leipziger Volkszeitung 27-12-1971, p. 2
Case 7: Transitabkommen GDR-FRG

*Box 7 - Illustrative quotes GDR LTEs negative theme*

*„Diese Herren wissen sehr genau, daß an den Realitäten nichts mehr zu ändern ist. […] Es ist bedauerlich um unsere verlorenen Gebiete, aber besser so als tot".*

Carl Müller
Berliner Morgenpost 16-08-1970, p. 2
Case 2: Treaty of Moscow FRG-Soviet Union


*„Ebenso muß man heute zugeben, daß auch die DDR, so unerwünscht sie uns sein mag, ein Sicherheitsbedürfnis hat, das man nicht ungestraft ignorieren kann. Wir werden sonst keinen Schritt in Richtung Normalisierung weiterkommen, sondern nur in ewiger Konfrontation leben und den Geruch des "Revanchismus" nie loswerden. Die Leidtragenden werden wie bisher die Menschen in der DDR sein".*

Erika Pöllner
Süddeutsche Zeitung 29-08-1970, p. 105
Case 2: Treaty of Moscow FRG-Soviet Union


*„Endlich haben wir eine Bundesregierung, die die Probleme nicht nur vor sich herschiebt und die Bevölkerung mit schönen Worten abspeist. Die Jugend will nicht eine unbewältigte Vergangenheit die von der älteren Generation verursacht wurde, mit sich herumtragen".*

Georg Leiser
Berliner Morgenpost 18-12-1970, p. 43
Case 3: Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland


*„Die einzige Alternative war eine CDU-Regierung. Es ist äußerst unwahrscheinlich, daß sie überhaupt eine aktive Ostpolitik betrieben hätte. Einsichtige unter ihren Abgeordneten waren sich darüber klar, daß die Partei sich dies ihren Wählern gegenüber nicht hätte leisten können. Die Ost-Verträge wären überhaupt nicht geschlossen worden. In der Tat hätten dann allerdings weder die angeblichen Fehler beim Abschluß noch die bedauerlichen Reaktionen bei der Durchführung eintreten können. Sogar unter den heutigen zweifellos ungünstigen Aspekten kann die These, ein solcher vertragsloser Zustand sei für uns günstiger als die gegebene mangelhafte Situation, nicht überzeugen".*

Hans Müller-Henneberg
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 27-12-1973, p. 9
Case 13: Treaty of Prague FRG-CSSR

*Box 8 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs positive theme: pragmatism*

> *„Dem diplomatischen Geschick des Bundeskanzlers möge gelingen, Herrn Stoph davon zu überzeugen, daß Deutschland - unabhängig von Direktiven aus Ost und West - wieder zusammenwachsen muß, solle alle mitteleuropäischen Spannungskrisen überwenden werden. Dem Herrn Bundeskanzler wünsche ich auf diesem Wege viel Erfolg".*

Rudolf Jahn
Süddeutsche Zeitung 28-03-1970, p. 107
Case 1: Erfurter Gipfeltreffen

> *"Wir wünschen uns, daß die Verhandlungen nie abbrechen und so Stück für Stück in unserem Lande wieder in Ordnung kommt".*

E.B.
Berliner Morgenpost 16-12-1971, p.23
Case 7: Transitabkommen GDR-FRG

> *„Die Intensivierung des menschlichen Verkehrs zwischen den Bewohnern der beiden Herrschaftsgebiete, die mit den in Artikel 7 des Grundvertrags erwähnten humanitären Fragen anvisiert ist, die aber auch wesensnotwendig zur Normalisierung gehört, kann viel eher dazu dienen, das Bewußtsein der nationalen Einheit wachzuhalten als alle wohlfeilen und noch so schönen Deklamationen bundesdeutscher Zeitgenossen".*

Dr. Jur. Walter Lewald
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 04-07-1973, p. 4
Case 11: Grundlagenvertrag into force

*Box 9 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs positive theme: step towards unity*

> *„Bei einer Respektierung der augenblicklichen Grenzen durch die Bundesregierung kann man wohl kaum von einem Ausverkauf Deutschlands sprechen".*

H.B.
Berliner Morgenpost 16-06-1970, p. 2
Case 0: 1 year prior to 8. Parteitag der SED (pilot)

> *„Was in dem Vertrag steht, müßte eigentlich von allen Deutschen, die den Krieg nicht mehr als Mittel der Politik bewerten, akzeptiert werden…"*

Konstantin Ortloff
Süddeutsche Zeitung 22-08-1970, p. 113
Case 2: Treaty of Moscow FRG-Soviet Union

*Box 10 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs positive theme: stability*

*„Die Heimat ist natürlich verloren, für immer, das sagt mir mein gesunder Menschenverstand. […] Die jetzige Regierung strebt menschliche Erleichterungen an. Ich wünsche, daß sie es schafft".*

Karl Jaenicke
Berliner Morgenpost 28-06-1970, p. 2
Case 0: 1 year prior to 8. Parteitag der SED (pilot)

*„Nicht nur wir Westberliner, sondern auch unsere weiteren oder näheren Verwandten jenseits der Mauer werden mit Ungeduld auf die weiteren Verhandlungen und deren Ausgang warten"*

M. St..
Berliner Morgenpost 27-08-1971, p. 7
Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

*„Über diesen Vertrag kann nicht mit Emotionen, sondern nur mit dem geschulten leidenschaftslosen Verstand des Fachmanns entschieden werden. Das sollte nach der Wahl geschehen, wenn die Gemüter sich wieder etwas beruhigt haben".*

Hans-Georg von Weitzel
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 17-11-1972, p. 23
Case 9: Elections FRG, Willy Brandt re-elected

*Box 11 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs neutral theme*

„Die Sprecher der Opposition haben völlig recht mit ihrer Aussage, daß dieser Artikel die Verewigung der deutschen Teilung bedeutet. […] Das bedeutet eine klare Kapitulation vor den Forderungen der Russen und ein ende freier Verhandlungen mit den an uns grenzenden östlichen Ländern".

Dr. Otto Baxman
Frankruter Allgemeine Zeitung 08-07-1970, p. 13
Case 0: 1 year prior to 8. Parteitag der SED (pilot)

„Die Politik Brandts muß in ihrer rasanten Erfüllung aller Wünsche der sowjetischen Seite ohne Rücksicht auf Menschenrecht, Völkerrecht, Heimatrecht und insbesondere auf das Selbstbestimmungsrecht des deutschen Volkes notgedrungen und natürlicherweise einen tiefen innenpolitischen Riß im deutschen Volk hervorrufen".

Friedrich Meisel
Berliner Morgenpost 13-12-1970, p. 2
Case 3: Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland

„Das Bündnis mit Moskau, Warschau und die Zugeständnisse des Westens in dem Drama Berlin, ohne nennenswerte Gegenleistungen, sind außer dem Zweiten Weltkrieg und dem Bau der Mauer, das allergrößte Unglück nicht allein für Deutschland, sondern für die gesamte, noch freie Welt. Mit dieser verunglückten Ostpolitik macht sich unsere derzeitige Regierung zum Handlanger Moskaus".

Erna Hannebauer
Süddeutsche Zeitung 03-09-1971, p. 127
Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

„Da dadurch eine Wiedervereinigung in Freiheit praktisch unmöglich wird, wurde die Präambel der Verfassung, auf die Brandt und Bahr vereidigt sind, verletzt. Wer aber glaubt, daß man durch Verzichtsverträge mit kommunistischen Staaten den Frieden sicherer machen kann, der bracht nur in den Werken des kommunistischen Dogmatikers Lenin nachschlagen. "Der Parteitag hebt besonders hervor, daß das ZK bevollmächtigt wird, in jedem beliebigen Augenblick alle Friedensverträge mit den imperialistischen und bürgerlichen Staaten zu zerreißen und ihnen den Krieg zu erklären".

Ferdinand Kraus
Süddeutsche Zeitung 16-11-1972, p. 39
Case 9: Elections FRG, Willy Brandt re-elected

„Die ganze "Schönmalerei" mit Händchengeben bei der UNO, Bruderküssen der Sowjets sind potemkinsche Dörfer, die der westlichen Welt, Deutschland, besonders Berlin, Sand in die Augen streuen sollen. Die ganze Welt läßt sich vom russischen Bären zum Narren halten".

M.K.
Berliner Morgenpost 29-09-1973, p. 2
Case 12: GDR and FRG join the United Nations

*Box 12 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs negative theme: dangerous Ostpolitik*

*„Wenn die Zonenregierung die "Anwesenheit" der Bundesregierung in West-Berlin bekämpfen will, muß sie sich zuerst selbst danach richten und alle Einrichtungen der Sowjetunion aus dem Ostsektor Berlins herausnehmen. Tut sie das nicht, handelt sie rechtswiedrig und gewalttätig, denn auch nach 20 Jahren wird ein Unrecht nicht zum "Rechts"-Zustand. Es darf nicht mit verscheidenen Maß gemessen werden".*

O. Kanold
Berliner Morgenpost 04-12-1970, p. 11
Case 3: Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland

*„Am Schluß heißt es dann, wir sollten „den in Moskau ausgehandelten Modus vivendi akzeptieren". Der Umgang mit der Verfassung scheint den Deutschen ein schwer vollziehbarer Vorgang — und auch dies: aus der Geschichte zu lernen. Die „Gewissensfrage an die Nation" sollte hier gestellt werden".*

Dr. Peter Klassen
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 05-01-1972, p. 9
Case 7: Transitabkommen GDR-FRG

*„Die Flucht von Deutschen aus der DDR wegen der dortigen politischen Verhältnisse in die Bundesrepublik — von Deutschland nach Deutschland (denn die deutsche Nation besteht ja nach Aussagen des Bundeskanzlers auch nach Abschluß des Grundvertrages mit der DDR fort) — stellt sich also in seinen [Brandt] Augen als „illegaler Grenzübertritt" dar! Entlarvender konnte sich der Bundeskanzler nicht ausdrücken!"*

Wulf Wilbert
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 21-11-1972, p. 21
Case 9: Elections FRG, Willy Brandt re-elected

*„De facto und de jure gibt es jetzt zwei deutsche Staaten, die völkerrechtlich gegenseitig Ausland sind, und daran ändert auch kein Urteilsspruch eines Verfassungsgerichts etwas".*

H.M.
Berliner Morgenpost 25-09-1973, p. 2
Case 12: FRG and GDR join the United Nations

*Box 13 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs negative theme: principle*

„*Der Eilbrief (Traueranzeige im schwarz umrandeten Kouvert) ist am 9.12. abends in Pankow zugestellt worden, damit ja nicht noch jemand einen Antrag auf Genehmigung zur Beerdigung dabeizusein, stellen konnte*".

<div align="right">

E.K.
Berliner Morgenpost 17-12-1970, p. 17
Case 3: Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland

</div>

„*Wo ist da noch eine Spur zu sehen von gleicher Behandlung zwischen Bundesbürgern und Westberlinern bei Ostbesuchen? Wo von unbürokratischer Durchführung? Wo sieht man in diesem Abkommen überhaupt ein Entgegenkommen seitens der DDR?*"

<div align="right">

B. v.d. Berg
Berliner Morgenpost 15-12-1971, p. 10
Case 7: Transitabkommen GDR-FRG

</div>

„*Die Mordmauer in Berlin und der Schießbefehl seitens der DDR bestehen nach wie vor weiter, sie wurden sogar noch durch die Regierung Brandt/Scheel mit der Unterschreibung des Grundvertrages am 21. Dezember 1972 anerkannt. Minenfelder, Stacheldrahtverhau und mörderische neu hinzugekommene Selbstschußanlagen können wahrlich nicht als Zeichen der Sicherheit und Friedfertigkeit angesehen werden*".

<div align="right">

Frieda Ruhnke
Berliner Morgenpost 04-01-1973, p. 2
Case 10: Grundlagenvertrag GDR-FRG

</div>

„*Die friedliebende sozialistische DDR setzt dazu Polizeigewalt ein, obwohl das Warenangebot sorten-, mengen- und gütemäßig geradezu jammervoll ist. Hinzu kommen die absurden Ausfuhrbestimmungen. Meine Verwandte wollte mir als Gegengabe für so manches Geschenkpaket ein Paar Filzpantoffeln zusenden. Sie erhielt das Päckchen vom Kontrollamt zurück. Die Ausfuhr jeglichen Schuhwerks ist verboten. Die SED bekommt ohne Filzlatschen kalte Füße*".

<div align="right">

H.B.
Berliner Morgenpost 06-12-1973, p. 2
Case 13: Treaty of Prague FRG-CSSR

</div>

„*Trotz des ganzen KSZE-Theaters hat sich kein Jota geändert*".

<div align="right">

Ulrich F. Krüger
Berliner Morgenpost 13-08-1975, p. 2
Case 15: Signing of the Helsinki Accords

</div>

*Box 14 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs negative theme: Wall nuisance*

*"Die Mehrheit der Bevölkerung der Bundesrepublik befürworte den deutsch-polnischen und den deutsch-sowjetischen Vertrag". Ich frage: woher nimmt er diese Weisheit? Vielleicht von sogenannten Meinungsforschungsinstituten, deren Ergebnisse doch nicht ernst zu nehmen sind".*

Walter Strelow
Berliner Morgenpost 27-12-1970, p. 11
Case 3: Treaty of Warsaw FRG-Poland

*„Ich meine, bei so eminent wichtigen Entscheidungen von einschneidender und weittragender Bedeutung - wie Verzicht auf Selbstbestimmung und ebenso freiwilliger Verzicht auf ein Viertel von Deutschland (Ostgebiete) - sind Volksbefragungen nicht nur selbstverständliche Erfordernisse und die beste Lösung, sondern sie entsprechen auch einer wahren Demokratie. Aber die gibt es nicht mehr".*

E. Mahling
Berliner Morgenpost 11-09-1971, p. 9
Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

*„Was bedeuten wir Berliner nach dieser Regelung überhaupt noch der Bundesregierung? Zu allem kann man feststellen: Hoch lebe der Sozialismus. Die Demokratie ist längst zu Grabe getragen. Alles was heute geschieht, erinnert in jeder Phase an 1933".*

W.P.
Berliner Morgenpost 12-12-1971, p. 2
Case 7: Transitabkommen GDR-FRG

*Box 15 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs negative theme: democratic deficit*

*„Völlig unverständlich ist auch die Aufgabe des deutschen Volkes auf Selbstbestimmung durch die Anerkennung der bestehende Grenze zwischen der BRD und der DDR. […] Wir sollen also noch dazu beitragen, dieses Regime ohne jegliche Legitimation vom Volk, das sich eingemauert hat und auf wehrlose Deutsche schießen lässt, das uns Berliner tagtäglich zu schikanieren trachtet, in der Welt salonfähig zu machen. Frieden um sowjetischen preis ist unserem Volk nicht gedient"*

U. Kr.
Berliner Morgenpost 07-07-1970, p. 6
Case 0: 1 year prior to 8. Parteitag der SED (pilot)

*„Ich bin der Meinung, daß ein Deutscher innerhalb seines Heimatlandes kein Visum braucht. Außerdam setze ich meine Unterschrift niemals unter ein Schriftstück, auf dem die verlogene SED-Bezeichnung für den anderen Teil Deutschlands vermerkt ist".*

K.R.
Berliner Morgenpost 16-12-1971, p. 23
Case 7: Transitabkommen GDR-FRG

*„Die DDR hat keine Eigenstaatlichkeit. Sie ist ein von der Sowjetunion besetzter mitteleuropäischer Landstrich, dem nur eine ortsansässige Verwaltung konzediert wird. Seine politische Lenkung wird still, aber zielsicher von Moskau gehandhabt. Für Moskau aber sind die der DDR auferlegten Konzessionen nur ein nebensächlicher und für seine weltpolitische Linie nur kurzfristig nützlicher Akt. Hieran sollte die außenpolitische Winzigkeit Bundesrepublik die im Alleingang und in nervöser Hast erzielten bescheidenen Ergebnisse ihrer Bemühungen messen".*

Dr. Felix Ehrmann
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 05-12-1972, p. 19
Case 9: Elections FRG, Willy Brandt re-elected

*Box 16 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs negative theme: Hallstein doctrine*

„*Unter diesem Regime werden Deutsche von Deutschen an Mauer und Stacheldraht wie Verbrecher abgeknallt. Hinzu kommen noch die tägliche Schikanen auf den Zufahrtswegen von und nach Berlin. Solch ein Verhalten, das die Begriffe von Humanität, Menschlichkeit und Menschenrechten dermaßen mißachtet, kann von der Weltöffentlichkeit nicht scharf genug verurteilt werden*". [126]

G.K.
Berliner Morgenpost 15-08-1970, p. 11
Case 2: Treaty of Moscow FRG-Soviet Union

„*Den Menschen in der DDR ist mit den zu leistenden Unterschriften nicht geholfen. Das Selbstbestimmungsrecht sowie freie Wahlen und die Beseitigung der "grausamen Grenze" bleiben weiterhin für sie eine Utopie*".

H.M.
Berliner Morgenpost 23-09-1971, p. 2
Case 6: Four Powers Agreement

„*Die DDR wurde durch Bonn salonfähig. Sie wurde trotz Mauer, Schießbefehl und allen bestialischen Grausamkeiten an der Zonengrenzen von allen westlichen Staaten anerkannt und selbst als Mitglied in die UNO gejubelt. […] und dieses alles, damit einige Westdeutsche mehr in die DDR reisen dürfen, während von Ost nach West nur noch auf dem gefährlichen Fluchtweg ein Wechsel möglich ist*".

M.R.
Berliner Morgenpost 26-09-1973, p. 2
Case 12: FRG and GDR join the United Nations

*Box 17 - Illustrative quotes FRG LTEs negative theme: human rights*

## Appendix IV – Statistics content analysis

### Temporal division of FRG LTEs and tone

| Attitude cases 0-8 | BM | FA | SZ | Total | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 23 | 4 | 17 | 44 | 14% |
| Neutral | 18 | 8 | 6 | 32 | 10% |
| Negative | 225 | 10 | 10 | 245 | 76% |
| **Total** | **266** | **22** | **33** | **321** | **100%** |

*Table A-IV-1 - Temporal division of FRG LTEs according to tone (cases 0-8)*

| Attitude cases 9-15 | BM | FA | SZ | Total | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | 0 | 7 | 6 | 13 | 11% |
| Neutral | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 3% |
| Negative | 64 | 29 | 6 | 99 | 86% |
| **Total** | **64** | **39** | **12** | **115** | **100%** |

*Table A-IV-2 - Temporal division of FRG LTEs according to tone (cases 9-15)*

For cases 0-8, the tone of FRG letters is 14% positive, 10% neutral and 76% negative. For cases 9-15, 11% is positive, 3% is neutral and 86% is negative. This difference is insufficient to assume that a sharp turn in perceptions on the border and/or Ostpolitik has taken place over the course of the research period 1970-1975.

### Locality division of FRG LTEs and tone (national)

| Locality of FRG LTE author | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 44 | 29 | 310 | 383 |
| Countryside | 14 | 7 | 30 | 51 |
| **Total** | **58** | **36** | **340** | **434** |

*Table A-IV-3 - Locality division of FRG LTEs according to tone (absolute)*

| Locality of FRG LTE author | Positive % | Neutral % | Negative % | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 11% | 8% | 81% | 100% |
| Countryside | 27% | 14% | 59% | 100% |

*Table A-IV-4 - Locality division of FRG LTEs according to tone (relative)*

For LTE authors living in urban areas (over 100.000 inhabitants), 11% are positive about the border and/or Ostpolitik. For authors living in the countryside (less than 100.000 inhabitants), 27% are positive about the border and/or Ostpolitik. There may be indications that a significant difference exists in attitudes towards the border and/or Ostpolitik when comparing FRG citizens living in urban areas and those living in the countryside. Urban places with over 100.000 inhabitants are regarded 'Großstädten' according to the German Ministry of Construction and Urban Planning (BBSG, 2015).

## Locality division of FRG LTEs and tone (West-Berlin)

| Locality of LTE author (West-Berlin) | Postal district West-Berlin | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gatow und Kladow | 22 | 0 | 0 | 1 | *1* |
| Wannsee | 39 | 0 | 0 | 1 | *1* |
| Charlottenburg und Wilmersdorf | 15 | 0 | 0 | 2 | *2* |
| Frohnau, Hermsdorf, Lübars und Waidmannslust | 28 | 0 | 1 | 1 | *2* |
| Nikolassee | 38 | 0 | 0 | 2 | *2* |
| Charlottenburg-Nord und Siemensstadt | 13 | 0 | 0 | 3 | *3* |
| Kreuzberg-Ost | 36 | 1 | 0 | 2 | *3* |
| Lichtenrade | 49 | 2 | 1 | 0 | *3* |
| Marienfelde | 48 | 0 | 0 | 3 | *3* |
| Berlin - not otherwise specified | n.a. | 0 | 1 | 3 | *4* |
| Wittenau | 26 | 2 | 0 | 2 | *4* |
| Spandau, Staaken und Haselhorst | 20 | 0 | 0 | 6 | *6* |
| Grunewald, Schmargendorf und Dahlem | 33 | 0 | 0 | 9 | *9* |
| Schöneberg-Süd | 62 | 0 | 0 | 9 | *9* |
| Reinickendorf-West | 52 | 0 | 0 | 10 | *10* |
| Wedding | 65 | 1 | 0 | 9 | *10* |
| Lankwitz | 46 | 1 | 0 | 10 | *11* |
| Moabit | 21 | 2 | 1 | 8 | *11* |
| Zehlendorf | 37 | 0 | 0 | 11 | *11* |
| Tegel, Konradshöhe und Heiligensee | 27 | 2 | 0 | 10 | *12* |
| Britz, Buckow und Rudow | 47 | 2 | 0 | 13 | *15* |
| Lichterfelde | 45 | 1 | 2 | 12 | *15* |
| Wilmersdorf | 31 | 1 | 0 | 14 | *15* |
| Schöneberg-Nord und Tiergarten-Süd | 30 | 2 | 2 | 12 | *16* |
| Steglitz und Friedenau | 41 | 2 | 3 | 11 | *16* |
| Neukölln | 44 | 2 | 1 | 14 | *17* |
| Tempelhof und Mariendorf | 42 | 2 | 2 | 18 | *22* |
| Kreuzberg-West | 61 | 1 | 0 | 22 | *23* |
| Reinickendorf-Ost | 51 | 0 | 1 | 22 | *23* |
| Charlottenburg | 10/19 | 1 | 4 | 31 | *36* |
| **Total** | | **25** | **19** | **271** | ***315*** |
| **Total %** | | **8%** | **6%** | **86%** | ***100%*** |

*Table A-IV-5 - Locality division of West-Berlin LTEs according to tone (absolute)*

When LTE authors living in West-Berlin are sorted according to their relevant postal district, no clear differences appear in the author's inclination towards the border and/or Ostpolitik. Apart from differences in the amount of LTEs per postal district, no sharp differences can be seen in the LTEs dispositions.

# Appendix V - Logbook data collection

| Date | Activity | Findings | Decisions |
|---|---|---|---|
| 03-05-2018 | Introduction at SBB Zeitungsarchiv | SZ has a number of interesting letters | - |
| 04-05-2018 | Data-gathering case 1 SZ and BM, completely covered for case 1 | SZ prints LTEs on Wednesday and Weekends; BM prints LTEs every day of the week; GDR is a hot topic in the FRG press; 38 LTEs collected | In order to quick-search microfilm, key word in LTEs is 'DDR', then check other letters if they deal with the GDR, then read in-depth; 2nd meeting Brandt/Ulbricht in May 1970 as extra case? |
| 07-05-2018 | Data gathering case 1 FA completely covered case one; Started data collection from digitized GDR newspapers | FA prints LTEs every day of the week, but LTEs are not very concerned with GDR matters; LTEs in GDR newspapers are very scarce | Take a closer look at GDR LTEs tomorrow, otherwise reconsider choice of GDR newspapers in order to collect more data |
| 08-05-2018 | Data gathering case 1; ND, NZ, BZ completely covered for case 1; Junge Welt also covered for case 1 | Very little LTEs in ND, NZ and BZ, almost no relevant letters on the case. | Junge Welt also added to data collection efforts |
| 09-05-2018 | Reading on methodology, searching for more information on social semiotics | I need a lot more background info methodology-wise, concept of social semiotics still vague, especially what signifiers to use during analysis | More reading required before starting on analysis scheme and consequent full-scale data collection |
| 11-05-2018 | Meeting with HJB, go-ahead to start data collection to see whether there is enough (GDR) data to work with after all; Data-gathering case 0+2 for ND | 3 relevant LTEs in ND for cases 0 and 2 | Start full-scale data collection next week |
| 14-05-2018 | Data gathering cases 0+2 in BM, partly BZ | 55 relevant LTEs in BM, no results in BZ | Keep going |
| 15-05-2018 | Data gathering cases 0+2 in BZ and NZ | No results in BZ and NZ | Keep going, but maybe reconsider BZ and NZ as sources if no results come forward in the next shifts |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 16-05-2018 | Data gathering cases 0+2 FA; therewith cases P and 2 completed | Score so far: 153 LTEs in total, from which 29 GDR and 124 FRG. | Keep going |
| 17-05-2018 | Data gathering case 3 completed, totals: BM: 130 BZ: 4 FA: 15 JW: 11 ND: 9 NZ: 7 SZ: 32 = 208 LTEs GDR: 31 FRG: 177 | Found out that dates of case 2 are incorrect (one year too early. Data will not be disregarded though and perceived as pilot study. Random number generator 2 etc.); Erich Honecker did not take office during case 5 (VIII Parteitag); Case forgotten, Prager Vertrag between FRG and CSSR, no more claims on Sudetenland | Case added, Erich Honecker takes office, numbered as 4. Case added, Prager Vertrag FRG-CSSR, numbered as 15. |
| 22-05-2018 | Data gathering case 4 ND, NZ, BZ and FA | Only 2 relevant letters, LTEs mostly deal with Honecker/Ulbricht and the Parteitag, not geopolitics | Keep going |
| 23-05-2018 | Data gathering case 4 and 5 BM, JW, SZ and ND | 9 relevant letters, LTEs again mostly deal with Honecker/Ulbricht and the outcomes of the Parteitag (factories, farms, production quota, building socialism with new energy) | Keep going |
| 24-05-2018 | Data gathering case 5 ND, NZ and BZ  Data gathering case 6 | No relevant letters found for case 5 99 relevant letters found for case 6, 77 in BM, 6 in JW and 16 in LVZ | NZ and BZ dropped from research, continue with LVZ instead. So, GDR newspapers to be covered are ND, JW and LVZ  LVZ seems a suitable newspaper with many LTEs published, for case 6 alone already 16  LTEs in GDR newspapers are not grouped into a separate LTE section, but can also be listed in the form of an article, for instance public response to an interview by SED members |

| 25-05-2018 | Data gathering case 6 ND and 7 LVZ JW and SZ | 42 relevant LTEs case 6 ND, 3 LTEs for case 7 | Keep going |
|---|---|---|---|
| 28-05-2018 | Data gathering case 7 completed BM and ND | 88 LTEs in BM, 4 in ND | Keep going |
| 29-05-2018 | Data gathering case 8 completed | 9 LTEs found | Keep going |
| 30-05-2018 | Data gathering case 9 in BM, FA, SZ. LV and JW | 53 LTEs found | Keep going |
| 31-05-2018 | Data gathering case 9 ND and case 10 ND, FA | Nothing in ND, 7 LTEs in FA | Keep going, draw up balance tomorrow |
| 01-06-2018 | Data gathering case 10 completed, totals:<br><br>BM: 328<br>FA: 55<br>JW: 22<br>LVZ: 23 (cases 6-10)<br>ND: 57<br>SZ: 41<br>=<br>526 LTEs<br><br>GDR: 102<br>FRG: 424 | Plenty of material to work with approximately 60% of data gathering completed | Draw up the first balance of contents and quality of data so far in preparation of meeting with HJB. |
| 06-06-2018 | Started writing interim report for HJB, sorted out the best examples of LTEs both GDR and FRG | Best examples as of now amount to 30 LTEs | Finish interim report tomorrow by writing short commentary and comments on the contents |
| 07-06-2018 | Finished interim report HJB | | Prepare meeting tomorrow |
| 08-06-2018 | Meeting with HJB | Surprised with the amount of relevant LTEs | Finish the data gathering and start thinking about methodology and operationalisation for analysis of the letters. |
| 18-06-2018 | Data gathering LVZ for cases 0-5 | 23 relevant LTEs found | Finish the missing cases for LVZ, continue with case 11 |
| 19-06-2018 | Data gathering LVZ for cases 0-5<br><br><br><br>Data gathering case 11 completed for all newspapers | 2 relevant LTEs found, no more gaps in data for now. This means all the data for cases 0-10 have been collected<br>6 relevant LTEs found<br><br><br>2 relevant LTEs found | Keep going |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Data gathering case 12 FA and ND | | |
| 20-06-2018 | Data gathering case 12 BM, SZ, JW and LVZ | 20 relevant LTEs found | Keep going, finish data gathering as of end next week |
| | Case 13 (start of Helsinki process) scrapped, as it features the same dates as previous case. Technically merged with case 12. Other cases renumbered. | | |
| | Data gathering case 13 (new numbering) in FA | 7 relevant LTEs found | |
| 25-06-2018 | Case has been omitted thus far, Guillaume affair of 1974 (resignation of Brandt). Therefore case added, numbered 14. Helsinki renumbered to 15 | | Keep going, start case 14 |
| | Data gathering case 15 | 58 relevant LTEs found | |
| 26-06-2018 | Data gathering case 14 | 25 relevant LTEs found<br><br>Total number of LTEs after 15 (16) cases:<br><br>BM: 371<br>FA: 71<br>JW: 22<br>LV: 91<br>ND: 57<br>SZ: 52<br><br>GDR: 170<br>FRG: 494<br><br>Total: 664<br><br>Data gathering for cases 16 and 17 cancelled, as in my opinion sufficient data has been collected. Cases 16 and 17 both deal with Parteitag/ elections and the other cases which had this theme did not attract | Start reading theory on social semiotics in order to devise a data analysis scheme. |

| | | that much attention in LTEs. Therefore, data collection is concluded with the completion of 16 cases. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 28-06-2018 | Review cases 1-5 for ND and JW to check thoroughness of data collection efforts in early stages of the process | No new LTEs found | |

# Executive summary

This master thesis features a semiotic analysis of letters to the editor (LTE) of newspapers from East- and West Germany. The goal of this thesis is to reinterpret the inner-German border between the separate states. It does so in the light of their rapprochement efforts that took place under a new foreign policy called Ostpolitik, put into practice between 1970-1975 by the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt. Under Ostpolitik, several treaties between the FRG, the GDR and the Eastern Bloc were signed in order to normalise their relationships and prevent future aggression. This also led to a slight opening of the until then sealed border between the GDR and the FRG. Border treaties now allowed FRG citizens to visit the GDR. The FRG also de facto recognised the GDR as an independent state under the Ostpolitik, a remarkable shift in geopolitical stance.

The core of the analysis is a comparison between the geopolitical codes both countries adhered to and the popular representations of the border and/or Ostpolitik as forwarded in letters to the editor of East- and West-German newspapers. Geopolitical codes, or *Weltanschauung*, are means by which countries engage with other countries in order to achieve their foreign policy goals. These geopolitical codes are devised by politicians who in turn incorporate their own personal experiences and popular representations of the world. Representations are created, shaped and altered through the mass media. The mass media are an elementary part of the Habermasian public sphere: the intermediary layer between politics and society. Within the public sphere, everybody is allowed to enter free and open debate. Letters to the editor are a manifestation of the public sphere. They allow ordinary people to interact with the media, at least in democratic societies where freedom of press is guaranteed.

In socialist societies, the theoretical public sphere is defined by steered press. The public sphere is politically staged through political public relations. This means that the news reported in the steered media is aligned with the communist backdrop and features celebrations of socialist government. But even in the socialist society, ordinary people can communicate with their media through letters. For both democratic and socialist societies, the public sphere can theoretically influence a government's geopolitical code. Convergence between the representations in the public sphere and the geopolitical codes lead to maintaining of the geopolitical code. Divergence may result in a political crisis, which may lead to the abandonment of the geopolitical code. LTEs may indicate how this relationship works in practice.

The geopolitical codes the GDR and the FRG adhered to changed diametrically between 1970 and 1975. The GDR was willing to engage with the FRG in order gain recognition. They gave away concessions in the negotiations, but also consolidated themselves as an independent nation. They treated the FRG as an obligatory negotiating partner. The FRG was also willing to engage with the GDR in order to alleviate the negative effects of the border regime, possibly reaching a change in the GDR from within. While the FRG did not want to negotiate with the GDR for 20 years, they now de facto recognized another German state.

From the analysis of the LTEs, a positive view of the Ostpolitik comes forward in the GDR and a negative view comes forward in the FRG. The authors of the LTEs printed in GDR newspapers strongly approve of the Ostpolitik and the inner-German border, lauding it as a means of protection against the West and at the same time guaranteeing their right to existence as an independent state. The authors of the LTEs printed in FRG newspapers strongly disapprove the Ostpolitik and the inner-German border, explaining it as wrong by principle, exposing the FRG to the dangers of communism and an outright sell-out of German interests and territory.

The comparison shows that a concurrence existed between the popular representations of the border and the geopolitical code the GDR adhered to. This has to be attributed to the newspapers in the GDR being part of the politically staged public sphere. For the FRG, a divergence existed between the geopolitical code and the popular representations from the LTEs. This means that a part of the public sphere in the FRG did not concede with the Ostpolitik geopolitical code.

These results show that the public sphere in the GDR operates according to the theory. The government stages a public sphere and the LTEs reiterate the government's geopolitical codes. The LTEs do not represent the 'true', that is internal, public sphere: unpublished letters where criticism may indeed have been found. This shows that the theoretical feedback loop from public sphere to government does not work in a socialist society with a politically staged public sphere. The public sphere in the FRG also operates according to the theory. The government's geopolitical code causes negative reactions in the public sphere, and the negative sentiments fuelled a brief political crisis leading to snap elections. The political crisis was resolved in the end with the elections won by the ruling coalition. This shows that a feedback loop from public sphere to the government

is in place and works. Thus, the thesis explains the operation of the Habermasian public sphere in a socialist and democratic country.

In conclusion, a reinterpretation of the inner-German border is unhelpful based on results yielded in this thesis. Because the LTEs from the GDR are merely a reiteration of the government's geopolitical codes, no new insights are gathered. These renewed insights can be gathered by future analysis of the internal public sphere, the unpublished letters where actual criticism was voiced in the GDR. The LTEs from the FRG are an indication of the fierceness of the debate as it was carried at that time. This gives a better understanding of how an at first glance positive political development still yielded bitter feelings with a part of the FRG population.