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Cold War Narcotics Trafficking, the Global War on Drugs, and East Germany's Illicit Transnational Entanglements

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Abstract

Although it lacked a significant domestic market for internationally trafficked drugs, East Germany emerged as an important corridor for narcotics smugglers in the 1970s due to its position between supply countries in Asia and consumer countries in the West. The unique geography of West Berlin created a large market of consumers surrounded by East German territory, forcing traffickers to pass through the GDR border. Efforts by officials in both Germanys and the United States to cooperate on the problem of narcotics trafficking revealed conflicts between the geography of the Cold War—where the GDR border was the front line in the ideological conflict between East and West—and the international drug prohibition system, which sought global interstate collaboration in the name of a “universal international society,” against the common threat of crime. As Cold War tensions declined in the 1980s, border enforcement cooperation between East and West became increasingly viable as both sides reoriented toward the view that Europe had to defend itself from the threats posed by mobilities of those in the global south.

Keywords: GDR; borders; narcotics; Cold War; global; transnational

In March 1990, shortly before the first competitive elections in the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the *Washington Post* reported, “Erich Honecker, East Germany’s disgraced Communist chief, is now believed personally to have enriched himself with cocaine dealings.” The article went on to say that details remained vague, but Western intelligence believed that Honecker had personally made at least \$75 million importing cocaine for sale to the West. The journalists even claimed that Honecker sought to preserve the Berlin Wall to maintain his hold on the drug trade because he knew it was “essential to his own drug profiteering. Without it, East German officials would lose control over traffic across the border.” The former leader of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), taking refuge in a vicarage just outside East Berlin, faced possible criminal charges for his role in the lethal border regime meant to stop human traffic across the East German border. Now faced accusations of further criminal activity for allowing too much cross-border traffic of another kind.¹

¹ Evan Rawls and Robert Novak, “The Honecker Connection,” *Washington Post*, March 7, 1990. The article was ostensibly based on claims by Alexander Schalk-Golodkowski, the head of the East German Kommerzielle Koordinierung (KoKo), which was tasked with generating foreign hard currency, at times through illicit means, but in the years since, these anonymous accusations have never been substantiated publicly or in the archives. These allegations, citing media reports, are nonetheless often repeated in the academic literature: Daniel

From the late 1960s onward, East Germany did in fact act as a transit country for the illicit trafficking of drugs into the Federal Republic, but the reality on the ground was much more complicated than the paranoid tropes of Western Cold Warriors. The SED was horrified by narcotics and viewed them as a sign of Western moral and social degradation.² Far from a plot to destroy the West, the problem of drug smuggling via the GDR reflected an embarrassing inability of East German customs and border agents to completely interdict the tenacious network of traffickers, both amateur and professional, that aimed to bring hashish and heroin into West Germany and beyond. Just as East German society was decisively shaped by the border regime enacted by the SED to prevent people getting out and Western influence from getting in, the GDR was also shaped—both domestically and in foreign policy—by the illicit narcotics that were smuggled across its borders to the West.³

Politically and ideologically, the SED succeeded in creating a global role for the GDR through international solidarity movements and direct aid to revolutionary parties and socialist states across the Global South. Yet it always struggled to integrate the country into the globalizing economy; until its collapse, access to international consumer goods from blue jeans to coffee remained a perpetual issue delegitimizing the regime.⁴ From the standpoint of illicit drugs, however, a very different narrative emerges. International traffickers had little interest in the East German market due to the lack of customers with access to hard currency: drugs such as cannabis, heroin, and cocaine are illicit goods, but they are also commodities produced, distributed, and purchased as part of a globalizing economy that was similarly out of reach of the average East German.⁵ Viewed as globally traded

J. Nelson, *Defenders Or Intruders? The Dilemmas Of U.S. Forces In Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 94–97; Martin Booth, *Opium: A History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 315; Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Trafficking and International Security* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 30. Tobias Wunschik claims that the Stasi “tolerated” traffic to the West, but only cites the absence of “active measures” against drug smugglers by the agency at Schönefeld Airport in *Hauptabteilung VII: Ministerium des Innern, Deutsche Volkspolizei (MfS-Handbuch)* (Berlin: BStU, 2009), 30. A Bundestag inquiry into KoKo in 1994 also only found rumours of drug smuggling with no conclusive evidence of state complicity: Bundestag Drucksache Nr. 12/7600 Beschlussempfehlung und Bericht des 1. Untersuchungsausschusses nach Artikel 44 des Grundgesetzes, May 27, 1994, 517. Conversely, the (West) German Federal Police (BKA) did not endorse the theory that the SED was complicit in trafficking: Heinz Schulz, *Die Bekämpfung der Rauschgiftkriminalität. Ein Handbuch für die Praxis* (Heidelberg: Kriminalistik Verlag, 1987); Hagen Saberschinsky, “Europa (West und Ost) als Absatzmarkt des illegalen Rauschgift Handels,” in *40 Jahre Bundeskriminalamt*, ed. Hans-Ludwig Zachert and Hans Udo Störzer (Stuttgart: Boorberg, 1991), 202–03.

² On SED hatred of cannabis, see Ned Richardson-Little, “Hashers Don’t Read *Das Kapital*: East Germany, Socialist Prohibition, and Global Cannabis,” in *Cannabis: Global Histories*, ed. James Mills and Lucas Richert (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021).

³ On the extreme lengths taken to police the border, see Gerhard Sälter, “Policing the Border Area in East Berlin: Rules, Conflicts and Negotiations, 1961–89,” in *Cold War Berlin: Confrontations, Cultures, and Identities*, ed. Scott H. Krause, Stefanie Eisenhuth, and Konrad H. Jarausch (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021). On role of the border regime in shaping East German society, see Thomas Lindenberger, “Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung,” in *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR*, ed. Thomas Lindenberger (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999); Thomas Lindenberger, “Grenzregime und Gesellschaftskonstruktion im SED-Staat,” in *Die Mauer. Errichtung, Überwindung, Erinnerung*, ed. Klaus-Dietmar Henke (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011); Frank Wolff, *Die Mauergesellschaft. Kalter Krieg, Menschenrechte und die deutsch-deutsche Migration 1961–1989* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019).

⁴ On the GDR in the global Cold War, see Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Quinn Slobodian, *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015). On the GDR’s failure to integrate into the globalizing capitalist market economy, see Olaf Klenke, *Ist die DDR an der Globalisierung gescheitert? Autarke Wirtschaftspolitik versus internationale Weltwirtschaft; das Beispiel Mikroelektronik* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2001); Gareth Dale, *Between State Capitalism and Globalisation: The Collapse of the East German Economy* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004); André Steiner, “The Globalisation Process and the Eastern Bloc Countries in the 1970s and 1980s,” *European Review of History* 21, no. 2 (2014): 165–81.

⁵ On narcotics as global commodities, see Paul Gootenberg, “Talking about the Flow: Drugs, Borders, and the Discourse of Drug Control,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 71 (2009): 13–46.

commodities, the traffic in narcotics represented an illicit form of “alternative globalization”: East Germany acted as a transit corridor between producing countries in the Middle East and central Asia and the lucrative consumer countries of western Europe.⁶ Similar to the effects of prohibition enforcement elsewhere, East German participation in the global anti-narcotics system not only drove the professionalization of smuggling, but also increased the profits that could be made by trafficking drugs to a relatively isolated pocket of consumers such as in West Berlin, located in the heart of East Germany.⁷ The Allied occupation of Berlin during the Cold War created exploitable ambiguities of sovereignty and control over the boundaries between the GDR and the western sectors of the divided city.

Narcotics enforcement revealed the spatial conflict between the geography of the Cold War—where the GDR was at the front line of an intractable ideological conflict between East and West—and the international drug prohibition system, which sought global interstate cooperation in the name of a “universal international society,” against the common threat of criminality.⁸ In the early years of the Cold War, both sides integrated the fight against narcotics into a Cold War framework, attributing abuses to the evil of their rivals. American antidrug warriors imagined narcotics trafficking as part of a global communist plot, whereas East German officials understood international smuggling as a problem of capitalist social decay expanding outward from West Germany.⁹ For the SED, joining the international community to stop this traffic was understood as a means of containing a pathology of Western life. In the 1970s, however, the mutual reinforcement of the drug war and the Cold War began to break down as experts on both sides of the Berlin Wall began to look positively at the prospect of East-West cooperation to suppress the common threat of international drug traffickers.¹⁰

Despite American and West German protests about the inhumanity of the GDR border regime toward its own citizens, the East German border actually became a site of collaboration among the three states, with the common goal of the increased policing of suspected drug traffickers from the Global South. The conflicting geographies of the Cold War and the drug war were resolved in the 1980s by the GDR’s move away from associating narcotics with the corruptions of Western capitalism and toward a strategic partnership with the West

⁶ On the Eastern bloc and globalizing connections to the global south, see Anna Calori et al., *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019); James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

⁷ On the effects of drug interdiction and prohibition regimes on professionalization and increased profits for illicit global trade, see Willem van Schendel, “Spaces of Engagement: How Borderlands, Illegal Flows, and Territorial States Interlock,” in *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization*, ed. Willem van Schendel and Itty Abraham (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 59. Peter Andreas, “Illicit Globalization: Myths, Misconceptions, and Historical Lessons,” *Political Science Quarterly* 126, no. 3 (2011): 403–25; Nils Gilman, Jesse Goldhammer, and Steven Weber, *Deviant Globalization: Black Market Economy in the 21st Century* (London: Continuum, 2011).

⁸ On seeing global history through multiple layers of spatiality, see Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, “Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization,” *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 1 (2010): 149–70. On the presumption of “universal international society,” see Ethan A. Nadelmann, “Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms in International Society,” *International Organization* 44, no. 4 (October 1990): 483.

⁹ On anti-narcotics and anti-communism in the early Cold War, see David R. Bewley-Taylor, *United States and International Drug Control, 1909–1997* (London: Continuum, 2001), 108–14.

¹⁰ On American diplomatic efforts to coordinate its allies on drug enforcement, see H. Richard Friman, *NarcoDiplomacy: Exporting the U.S. War on Drugs* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Matthew R. Pembleton, *Containing Addiction: The Federal Bureau of Narcotics and the Origins of America’s Global Drug War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017). On the Eastern bloc’s engagement with western Europe in the late Cold War, see Angela Romano and Federico Romero, “European Socialist Regimes Facing Globalisation and European Co-Operation: Dilemmas and Responses—Introduction,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire* 21, no. 2 (2014): 157–64; Angela Romano and Federico Romero, *European Socialist Regimes’ Fateful Engagement with the West: National Strategies in the Long 1970s* (London: Routledge, 2020).

as fellow countries beset by traffickers from the Global South.¹¹ The SED's fight against narcotics and its ongoing fears about drug traffic across the borders of the GDR demonstrate the double-edged nature of East Germany's connections to the outside world—which the SED saw as both necessary but also existentially threatening to the GDR as a socialist state—and the central role of the border as an institution mediating those encounters with the rest of the world.

The GDR's Semi-Integration into Global Narcotics Networks

At the Zinnwald-Cínovec border crossing on the highway from Prague to Dresden, East German customs agents made their first drug seizure since the building of the Berlin Wall at 8:20 am on April 29, 1968, when a young Yugoslavian student was arrested with forty-six grams of hashish.¹² He had apparently acquired the drugs in Sweden, where he worked in a Stockholm café, before driving to Belgrade for a visit, and then got caught on the return trip. The next case came in 1969, when a student from West Berlin was apprehended at the Rudolphstein-Hirschberg crossing between the East German district of Gera and West German Bavaria with a mere four grams of hash. The other ten cases that year were very similar: almost all had only enough for personal consumption, were moving between West Berlin and West Germany, and were Germans whose profession was usually listed as “hippie.” The only exception was an unfortunate Istanbul-born sailor from West Berlin who forgot he was carrying two grams of hash when he decided to go dancing in the capital of the GDR. The largest amount seized was from a twenty-one-year-old, caught with 174 grams of hash and 2 grams of opium that he picked up from a pop and blues festival in the western city of Essen before returning to West Berlin via the Helmstedt-Marienborn train crossing at the border of Braunschweig in the Federal Republic and Magdeburg in the GDR.¹³

Although there had been only eleven drug seizures at the border in two years, it was seen as a burgeoning crisis: “Every successful transit of narcotics through the territory of the GDR is a blatant violation of the sovereignty of the GDR,” declared one study on drug smuggling produced for the criminology department of Humboldt University.¹⁴ Framing trafficking as an attack on East German sovereignty echoed state language that described illegal border crossing by individuals as well as crimes punishable by the death penalty under the criminal code.¹⁵ There was no evidence of Western complicity, but drugs were deemed one of the dark tools employed by the agents of imperialism, as evinced by US chemical warfare in Vietnam.¹⁶ The Humboldt study blamed not only hunger, discrimination, the absence of rights, and other general problems of late capitalism as root causes of drug abuse, but also the emerging counterculture, including hippies, beats, the “pop-movement,” and “drop-outs” (*Gammlertum*). Far from being allies of the East German state, these groups were

¹¹ On the late socialist turn away from solidarity with the global south toward visions of European civilization, see James Mark et al., 1989: *A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 140–41. On racialization of the global drug war, see Kojo Koram, ed., *The War on Drugs and the Global Colour Line* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

¹² Although petty drug smuggling prior to the building of the Berlin Wall is mentioned in other sources, customs reports treat this incident as the beginning of a new phenomenon; all statistics on drug trafficking begin in April 1968.

¹³ Bundesarchiv (BArch) DL 203/4 Anlage 2, Aufstellung über bisher getroffene Feststellungen zum Schmuggel mit Rauschgift im Rahmen und durch die Zollkontrolle, 1–3.

¹⁴ BArch DL 203/4 Werner Hammer, Einige Probleme der Erkennung und Aufdeckung des Schmuggels mit Rauschgift im Reiseverkehr über die Grenzen der DDR, 15.

¹⁵ The standard phrasing based on the criminal code was “crimes against the sovereignty of the GDR, against peace, humanity and human rights.” *Strafgesetzbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (January 12, 1968).

¹⁶ BArch DL 203/4 Hammer, Einige Probleme der Erkennung und Aufdeckung des Schmuggels mit Rauschgift im Reiseverkehr über die Grenzen der DDR, 15. This perception that the Cold War enemy was using drugs as a form of psychological warfare was paralleled by American fears of brainwashing. See Pembleton, *Containing Addiction*, 147–48.

understood to be a fake opposition that did not threaten the power structures of the capitalist system and whose communes could be falsely linked to the socialist bloc for propaganda purposes.¹⁷ Although there were a few long-haired hippies who did try to live a nonconformist life in East Germany, they had been targeted politically and legally by the SED as dangerous “asocials” since 1965, the same year that recreational drug usage had taken off in the West.¹⁸

In 1970–1971, the number of trafficking cases at the East German border exploded due to the massive expansion of drug smuggling across Europe. In 1970, the number of cases skyrocketed to 328 seizures totaling 142 kilograms of narcotics, all but 1 kilogram of which was hashish. Seizures at the border, almost all hashish, nearly doubled in 1971, to almost 211 kilograms.¹⁹ Fewer than 10 percent of border seizures concerned traffic in the direction of the GDR, and seemingly all involved very small quantities brought from West Germany or West Berlin.²⁰ Although the largest group of smugglers caught at the border was composed initially of West Germans (or West Berliners), many of whom were students transporting small quantities, already by 1970 there were several cases that demonstrated that the GDR was now part of a globalizing network of trafficking.²¹ By land, East Germany was now an obscure side road on the hippie trail: the counterculture route traveled from Europe to Nepal and Afghanistan.²² For example, a young mail courier from Amsterdam was caught at the border with more than five kilograms of hashish that he had purchased in Peshawar, Pakistan, for \$72. From Pakistan, he had driven a car registered in West Berlin through Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, only to be busted crossing into the GDR at the Zinnwald-Cínovec crossing on his way to West Berlin, a stopover en route to his final destination, Amsterdam, where he planned to sell the hashish at the Club Paradiso.²³ In another case, a Jordanian engineer was arrested at Schönefeld Airport in East Berlin with 5.8 kilograms of hashish that he was supposed to deliver to the Hotel Steinplatz in West Berlin. He had traveled to the capital of the GDR on a Hungarian airline from Damascus by way of Nicosia, Athens, Budapest, and Vienna and been paid 5,000 Deutsche Mark, along with the cost of the flight and the promise of a hotel room in West Berlin upon arrival.²⁴

This collection of small-time international smugglers would soon be joined by more professional operations that aimed to bring in bulk quantities of hashish to West Berlin via Schönefeld Airport, making it the main conduit for drug trafficking in the GDR until the fall of the Berlin Wall.²⁵ East Germany’s Interflug Airline had expanded its routes from

¹⁷ BArch DL 203/4 Hammer, Einige Probleme der Erkennung und Aufdeckung des Schmuggels mit Rauschgift im Reiseverkehr über die Grenzen der DDR, 26.

¹⁸ Sven Korzilius, “Asoziale” und “Parasiten” im Recht der SBZ/DDR. *Randgruppen im Sozialismus zwischen Repression und Ausgrenzung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 350–51; Stefan Wolle, *Der Traum von der Revolte. Die DDR 1968* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2008), 61. On hippies in the GDR, see Michael Rauhut, *Bye, Lübben-City: Bluesfreaks, Tramps und Hippies in der DDR* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2009).

¹⁹ The Stasi Records Agency (BSTU) HA VI 16858, Vorlage zu Problemen der Bekämpfung des Schmuggels mit Suchtmitteln in der DDR, 72.

²⁰ BArch DL 203/12 Anlage 13, Die Bekämpfung des Rauschgiftschmuggels über die Grenzen der DDR durch den Zollfahndungsdienst, 1971.

²¹ BArch DL 203/12 Anlage 12 and Anlage 18, Die Bekämpfung des Rauschgiftschmuggels, 7.

²² On West Germany and the hippie trail, see Robert P. Stephens, *Germans on Drugs: The Complications of Modernization in Hamburg* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 72. On Afghan hashish and the hippie trail, see James Bradford, *Poppies, Politics, and Power: Afghanistan and the Global History of Drugs and Diplomacy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 133.

²³ BArch DL 203/12, Die Bekämpfung des Rauschgiftschmuggels, Anlage 8.

²⁴ BArch DL 203/12, Die Bekämpfung des Rauschgiftschmuggels, Anlage 6.

²⁵ See the study of Stasi Archive files on the subject, Susanne Fechner, *Flughafen Berlin-Schönefeld Drehscheibe des Drogenhandels Ost-West: Bedeutung und Rolle des Flughafens Berlin-Schönefeld im Zeitraum 1970 bis 1989* (Saarbrücken: AV Akademikerverlag, 2015).

other Eastern bloc capital cities to include neutral and nonaligned Europe as well as North and West Africa and the Middle East.²⁶ Although a larger number of seizures occurred at the border checkpoints between West Berlin and West Germany, these were usually only a few grams for personal consumption, and offenders were often released with only a fine. At Schönefeld Airport, there were fewer individual seizures, but amounts were usually much larger (around fourteen to twenty kilograms of hashish), and the smugglers were almost all non-German. In 1971, the thirteen trafficking cases from the airport leading to criminal prosecution included five suspects from Lebanon, three Jordanians and Palestinians, and one each from Sudan and the United Arab Republic (the short-lived union of Egypt and Syria).²⁷ Approximately half the cases involved some form of organized crime, which provided the smugglers—many of whom were unemployed and needed the money—with luggage that had hidden compartments. In one case, the son of an Indian general (who claimed to have been blackmailed by an organized crime group) had traveled by plane from India to Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and then Czechoslovakia, where he boarded a train bound for West Berlin via the GDR.²⁸ Others arrested included a bar hostess, a West Berlin police officer, and a pair from a “militant African Maoist group,” seeking to sell marijuana in France to finance the revolution back home.²⁹

The emergence of drug smuggling led GDR authorities to reform their border control practices, which had previously been oriented around preventing emigration, illicit currency exchange, and the unauthorized export of valuables such as precious metals.³⁰ In 1969, a directive was sent to all customs agents warning them to be on the lookout for drug traffickers. After West Berlin newspapers published stories on two high-profile hashish seizures, where smugglers from Lebanon and Syria were apprehended after crossing to West Berlin on a bus direct from Schönefeld Airport in East Berlin, GDR officials undertook a review of customs and anti-smuggling procedures for incoming air passengers.³¹ The Humboldt criminology study from that year recommended that customs agents be on the lookout for beats, hippies, and dropouts, but also those traveling from “narcotics countries” in “the Far East, South East Asia, the Middle East, North and West Africa” looking to go to West Berlin or Scandinavia. Recognizing that this covered a vast population, the author recommended extra scrutiny for those who seemed to be traveling the route with suspicious regularity.³² The following year, the chief customs inspector issued new service instructions on “measures to detect and prevent the import, export and transit of narcotics across the state borders of the GDR,” outlining procedures for inter-agency coordination, standardized criteria for drug arrests, and the requirement to immediately report all narcotics seizures to higher authorities.³³

These drug busts were not publicized in the GDR, but the threat of narcotics trafficking emanating from the West became a common theme in East German public culture. GDR officials took pride in the idea that there was no drug scene in the East, and narcotics abuse was

²⁶ Annette Vowinckel, “Drehkreuz Ost. Der Flughafen Berlin-Schönefeld im Kalten Krieg,” in *ZeitRäume. Potsdamer Almanach für Zeithistorische Forschung*, ed. Frank Bösch and Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2019) 175–88.

²⁷ BStU HA VI 16858 Anlage 2, Bericht zu Feststellungen des Rauschgiftschmuggels im Transitverkehr, January 1, 1971–October 31, 1972.

²⁸ BStU HA VI 16858, Bericht zu Feststellungen, January 1, 1971–October 31, 1972, 3–5.

²⁹ BArch DL 203/2474, Einschätzung Rauschgiftschmuggels im Zeitraum 01.07.1971 bis 20.06.1972.

³⁰ Jörn-Michael Goll, *Kontrollierte Kontrolleure. Die Bedeutung der Zollverwaltung für die ‘politisch-operative Arbeit’ des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 105.

³¹ BArch DL 203/2801 Anlage 4, Bericht über den Stand der Zollkontrolle am Grenzzollamt Berlin-Schönefeld und Vorschläge zur Unterbindung der gesetzwidrigen Aus- und Einfuhr von Waffen, Munition und Rauschgiften, 1969.

³² BArch DL 203/4 Hammer, *Einige Probleme der Erkennung und Aufdeckung des Schmuggels mit Rauschgift im Reiseverkehr über die Grenzen der DDR*, 33–36.

³³ BArch DL 203/1647, Maßnahmen zur Erkennung und Verhinderung der Ein-, Aus- und Durchfuhr von Rauschgift über die Staatsgrenzen der DDR. Dienstanweisung Nr. 21, 1970.

consistently depicted as a social issue exclusive to the capitalist West or part of traditional cultures in the underdeveloped South.³⁴ Yet as early as 1967 (a year before the first drug seizure at the GDR border had even taken place), the state film production company DEFA began shooting *Heroin*, a film about the heroic East German customs officer, Kommissar Zinn, who works with Hungarian and Yugoslavian comrades to foil a drug smuggling ring running through East Berlin led by a pair of Frenchmen.³⁵ When the show *Customs Investigation (Zollfahndung)* premiered on GDR television in 1970, an early episode centered on a West German pop singer trying to smuggle heroin to West Berlin from Hamburg via East Germany.³⁶ GDR media coverage of international crime highlighted the role of ostensibly respectable Westerners in the drug trade, including a German law student convicted by a Lebanese court for having thirty-five kilograms of hashish in his car, US military personnel arrested in Southeast Asia smuggling heroin, and the New York police accepting bribes from mafia-connected drug dealers.³⁷ In keeping with the perception of drugs as a covert weapon of the imperialists, the East German press also reported on CIA involvement in opium production in Laos and the arrest of a French secret agent smuggling forty kilograms of heroin.³⁸ Although the socialist order forestalled the causes of drug abuse afflicting the capitalist world, narcotics were still viewed as a possible threat that could infiltrate and undermine life within the borders of the GDR.

The SED's response to international narcotics trade revealed the simultaneous drive for the GDR to integrate more fully into global affairs in the 1970s and the fears of increased Western influence. The threat of drug smuggling was imagined as an element of East Germany's position on the frontline of the Cold War, and the response was ideologically integrated into the SED policy of *Abgrenzung*—the demarcation of the socialist East Germany from its Western imperialist counterpart—formally adopted at the 8th SED Party Congress in 1971. With the increasing engagement from West Germany as the result of new policy of Ostpolitik, the SED had begun to foster a more entrenched sense of East German identity, including the creation of a separate GDR citizenship and a new “socialist constitution” in 1968.³⁹ As the traffic in hashish through East Germany exploded, the politically influential intellectual Jürgen Kuczynski wrote:

³⁴ Minister of Justice Hilda Benjamin and Chief Prosecutor Josef Streit quoted in Arnold Freiburg, *Kriminalität in der DDR. Zur Phänomenologie des abweichenden Verhaltens im sozialistischen deutschen Staat* (Opladen: Springer-Verlag, 2013), 184. On public depictions of the GDR having overcome drug crime, see Richard Millington, “‘Crime Has No Chance’: The Discourse of Everyday Criminality in the East German Press, 1961–1989,” *Central European History* 50, no. 1 (2017): 74. SED officials generally claimed that crime was alien to socialism; Volker Zimmermann, “Kriminalität und Kriminologie im Staatssozialismus,” in *Ordnung und Sicherheit, Devianz und Kriminalität im Staatssozialismus: Tschechoslowakei und DDR 1948/49–1989*, ed. Volker Zimmermann and Michael Pullmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015). The abuse of addictive substances was largely restricted to legal if controlled pharmaceutical products. See Markus Wahl, “‘Es habe damit angefangen, daß ihr Ehemann geschnarcht habe....’ Arzneimittelmisbrauch und -sucht und dessen Behandlung im Bezirkskrankenhaus Arnsdorf in der DDR,” in *Psychiatrie in der DDR: Beiträge zur Geschichte*, vol. 3, ed. Ekkehardt Kumbier (Berlin: be.bra, 2022).

³⁵ *Heroin*, Heinz Thiel and Horst Brandt (dir.) (DEFA, 1968). One review noted it was odd to make such a film because drugs were not actually a problem in the GDR: “Zu Land und unter Wasser—‘Heroin’—ein neuer DEFA-Kriminalfilm,” *Berliner Zeitung*, March 19, 1968, 7.

³⁶ “Frühe Kriminalserien des Deutschen Fernsehfunks einschließlich Kriminalatsatiren und Krimirätsel 1958–1978,” *Deutsches Rundfunk Archiv Spezial* 15 (2007): 20. GDR crime shows regularly depicted Western police as incompetent and corrupt: Nora Hilgert, *Unterhaltung, aber sicher! Populäre Repräsentationen von Recht und Ordnung in den Fernsehkrimis ‘Stahlnetz’ und ‘Blaulicht’, 1958/59–1968* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014), 390.

³⁷ “Haschisch–Schmuggel,” *Neues Deutschland*, October 22, 1971; “USA–Chefpilot schmuggelte,” *Neues Deutschland*, April 29, 1970; “Durch und durch korrupt,” *Neues Deutschland*, June 22, 1970.

³⁸ “Was sonst noch passiert,” *Neues Deutschland*, April 30, 1971; “Geheimdienste als Heroinschmuggler,” *Berliner Zeitung*, December 1, 1971.

³⁹ On *Abgrenzung* and East German identity, see Jan Palmowski, “Citizenship, Identity and Community in the German Democratic Republic,” in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. G. Eley and J. Palmowski (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 73–94; Sebastian Gehrig, “Cold War Identities:

Yes, we consciously draw a line between ourselves and the plague, between life and death ... “Demarcation” [*Abgrenzung*] a word our enemies hate just like the “wall” that we built ten years ago in one night to defend against their attacks! Demarcation against everything that is harmful to be smuggled into our country, against drugs and ideological perversion, against hash and heroin, against nationalist reaction and social democracy.⁴⁰

Narcotics served as a metonym for the threat of Western influence coming across the border, which equated the poison of drugs with the poison of capitalist culture. To allow drugs to freely cross the border would be to abandon the broader defense against Western infiltration and subversion.

If narcotics trafficking required separation from the West, SED officials also decided that it demanded further integration into the previously ignored global narcotics control system of the United Nations. In the immediate postwar period, the GDR established a Central Opium Office, responsible for reporting on drug imports and exports, which had been created by the Soviet Occupation Authority to comply with prewar League of Nations drug conventions signed by Weimar Germany.⁴¹ In 1958, the SED affirmed that it would abide by the prewar conventions, but East German officials seemingly made no effort to influence the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotics—the first truly global legal agreement on drug control—in contrast to the Federal Republic, which was one of seventy-three states that negotiated its terms. In 1969, the Federal Republic’s diplomatic blockade broke down, clearing the path for the GDR’s wider recognition outside of the socialist bloc, culminating with its entry into the United Nations in 1973 and near-universal recognition of the GDR following the Helsinki Accords in 1975.⁴² Although the GDR was again too late to take part in the negotiations of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, East German officials decided that year to implement a raft of legal changes to update the regulation of narcotics. Because the overhaul of the criminal code in 1968 had not actually included narcotics offenses (because drugs were no longer a problem in the GDR), and the new code effectively invalidated earlier drug legislation including the 1929 Opium Law, the only legal recourse between 1968 and 1973 was to arrest traffickers on smuggling and customs violations charges instead of drug charges.⁴³

The key law passed to deal with the surge in narcotics trafficking was the Addictive Substances Act of 1973, which created the Central Bureau for Addictive Substances, based in the Ministry of Health, which replaced the postwar Central Opium Office⁴⁴ and formally assigned responsibility for policing criminal drug violations to Section II (Investigative Services) of the Customs Enforcement Department, under the supervision of the Stasi’s Main Division XVIII.⁴⁵ This was followed by a ratification of both the 1961 and 1971 UN narcotics conventions in 1975.⁴⁶ According to the Ministry of Health, which spearheaded the

Citizenship, Constitutional Reform, and International Law between East and West Germany, 1967–75,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 4 (2014): 794–814.

⁴⁰ Jürgen Kuczynski, “Abgrenzung,” *Neues Deutschland*, February 10, 1971, 6.

⁴¹ See BArch DQ 1/4410, Zusammenarbeit mit dem Ständigen Zentralen Opiumbüro der Vereinten Nationen (UN) in Genf.

⁴² William Gray, *Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁴³ BArch DQ 1 6529, Suchtmittelgesetz—Begründung, 4. The discovery of new forms of psychopharmaceuticals led to the revision of pharmaceutical regulations in 1964, but this was not done under the rubric of narcotics control. See Volker Hess, “Psychochemicals Crossing the Wall. Die Einführung der Psychopharmaka in der DDR aus der Perspektive der neueren Arzneimittelgeschichte,” *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 42, no. 1 (2007): 61–84.

⁴⁴ DQ 1/10050, Umwandlung des Zentralen Opiumbüros in ein Zentrales Suchtmittelbüro beim Ministerium für Gesundheitswesen, 1973.

⁴⁵ This was the third of three laws defining the powers of the East German customs service, along with the Customs Law of 1962 and the Foreign Exchange Law of 1973; Goll, *Kontrollierte Kontrolleure*, 86 and 196.

⁴⁶ Ned Richardson-Little, “The Drug War in a Land Without Drugs: East Germany and the Socialist Embrace of International Narcotics Law,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 21, no. 2 (2019): 282.

reforms, this was a matter of global politics: it was vital for the GDR to refute claims circulating in West German media that the SED tolerated drug trafficking for profit and to reinforce East Germany's conformity with the norms and values of the United Nations and the World Health Organization as a member of the global community. Simultaneously, these regulations were needed to foster ties to the global economy and were justified as a necessity for the GDR, as an "important country for travel and transit in Europe," to secure the transit of licit pharmaceuticals and hinder the traffic in illicit narcotics. Specifically, the East German chemical and pharmaceutical industries and their capacity to export to the socialist and nonsocialist world required clear legal regulations.⁴⁷ Narcotics control was thus a means of mediating East Germany's relationship with the rest of the world at its borders, allowing for a clear distinction between good forms of cross-border international trade and exchange and the criminal prosecution and control of illicit forms of drug trafficking.

The Heroin Wave and Western Panic about the GDR Border

Although trafficking across the GDR border was a crisis for the SED, it initially barely registered in the West. Early Cold War claims by American antidrug officials that communists were behind the global drug trade were largely abandoned upon US President Richard Nixon's opening of relations with the People's Republic of China.⁴⁸ According to West German law enforcement, there were twelve reported drug seizures from people crossing the border from the GDR into West Berlin in 1970, but this paled in comparison to the sixty-four seizures at the Swiss border, forty-nine with Austria, thirty-five with France, and thirty-two with the Benelux countries. Only Denmark was a lesser problem, with only two incidents.⁴⁹ West Berlin was also not considered a major smuggling hotspot among West German cities: in that same year, 180 kilograms of cannabis was seized in West Berlin—compared to 264 kilograms in Freiburg, 663 kilograms in Hamburg, 822 kilograms in Munich, and 1,428 kilograms in Frankfurt.⁵⁰ American authorities also took a particular interest in drug trafficking in the Federal Republic due to media reports that drug use was rampant among its 185,000 soldiers stationed there.⁵¹ This was primarily blamed on the failure of local police to stop overland shipments from entering Bavaria at the border crossing with Austria as they transited from their origin in Turkey to destinations in southern France.⁵²

As traffic between East and West Germany increased after their mutual recognition through the Basic Treaty in 1972 and the Helsinki Accords in 1975, the movement of non-Germans across this border began to raise alarm. The West German Customs

⁴⁷ The export of pharmaceutical chemicals was prioritized over domestic pharmaceutical production. In the case of one flu drug, only six of the 100 tons of domestically produced precursor chemicals were used by the GDR pharmaceutical industry. See BSTU ZAIG 1852 Informationen über einige Probleme im Bereich des Gesundheitswesens der DDR, 05. November 1970, Bl. 1–11, at 10. Cited from an early draft of Markus Wahl, "Doing Drugs in Socialist East Germany: Gendered Prescription and (Ab)use of Pharmaceuticals in the GDR, 1949–1989," *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs*, 35, no. 2 (2021).

⁴⁸ Jonathan Marshall, "Cooking the Books: The Federal Bureau of Narcotics, the China Lobby and Cold War Propaganda, 1950–1962," *Asia-Pacific Journal* 11, no. 37 (2013): 5.

⁴⁹ BArch B 126/97162 Anlage 2, Zahl der Rauschgiftaufgriffe 1970 an der internationalen Grenze sowie der Grenze West-Berlin zur DDR.

⁵⁰ BArch B 126/97162 Anlage 3, In der BRD im Jahre 1970 insgesamt sichergestellte Cannabismengen in kg (aufgeteilt nach Bezirken).

⁵¹ Drew Middleton, "U.S. Army in Germany Fights Drug Use by Reminding the Addict He Is a Soldier," *New York Times*, February 26, 1973. The War on Drugs was ostensibly due to the widespread problems of heroin addiction among veterans returning from Vietnam; see Kathleen Frydl, *The Drug Wars in America, 1940–1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 403. Narcotics use in Vietnam was exaggerated to excuse military failure and legitimize increased federal enforcement; see Jeremy Kuzmarov, *The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).

⁵² BArch B 126/97162 Anlage 2, Zahl der Rauschgiftaufgriffe 1970 an der internationalen Grenze sowie der Grenze West-Berlin zur DDR; BArch B 126/97162 Anlage 3, In der BRD im Jahre 1970 insgesamt sichergestellte Cannabismengen in kg (aufgeteilt nach Bezirken); Friman, *NarcoDiplomacy*, 102.

Investigation Service could not operate on the boundary to the Soviet Sector of Berlin, but did monitor how the East Germans were handling trafficking on their side of the line. Reports noted that drug searches including the use of sniffer dogs and baggage checks had been implemented at Schönefeld Airport. Most importantly, East German customs had effectively stopped smuggling from its side of the Waltersdorfer Chaussee border crossing, which allowed West Berliners and foreigners to travel from Schönefeld to West Berlin via a short bus connection. Far from ignoring the problem of narcotics smuggling, West German customs had reports of arrests and major seizures of hashish at the airport—the fact that one smuggler was sentenced to seven years imprisonment was taken as a sign that the crime was being handled seriously, in contrast to the Weimar-era Opium Law, which had until recently capped such punishments at three years. This matches East German records, which showed a drastic decline in seizures after the high in 1971 to a range of fifteen to eighty kilograms a year.⁵³

In 1975, intelligence gathered from suspects in the West now pointed to a new system of smuggling from East to West Berlin via the checkpoint at the Friedrichstraße train station. Because West Germany and the Western Allies refused to accept that this border was an international boundary (as it connected the Soviet sector of occupied Berlin to the western sectors), checks were conducted only by GDR officials, whose priority was to prevent the unauthorized emigration of East Germans and ensure travelers were in conformity with GDR currency controls. Smugglers would take their product from the airport to a train station locker and then meet clients at international hotels around Alexanderplatz in East Berlin to sell the locker key to the Western buyers.⁵⁴ When West Berlin officials wrote to the various West German government ministries tasked with drug enforcement to ask that the East Germans be contacted directly with this information in order to convince them to more effectively police trafficking at Friedrichstraße, West German officials confronted the question of how to do so.

West Germany had already established police working groups to coordinate more closely with France, Turkey, and the Netherlands, but cooperation with the GDR was much more complicated.⁵⁵ The 1972 Basic Treaty had established mutual recognition, but stopped short of full diplomatic exchange, and the special status of Berlin remained politically sensitive as the city lingered under four-power occupation by the Allies, but with East Germany claiming the Soviet sector as its capital city and an integral part of its territory. A precedent existed for reporting specific imminent threats to the East German police, but requests for preventive enforcement against a general criminal activity did not fit that mold. Another option was to contact the permanent representative—the equivalent of the ambassador—but this could elevate the matter to a full-blown diplomatic incident. The final option was to treat the problem as a health issue. After signing the Basic Treaty, the first agreement between the GDR and the FRG had been the Health Accord, which included provisions on public health information sharing between the countries. Article 6 of the agreement specifically mentioned the “spread of the abuse of narcotics and other addictive substances,” but no one had yet tried to use this for anti-smuggling purposes.⁵⁶

⁵³ BStU HA VI 16858, Vorlage zu Problemen der Bekämpfung des Schmuggels mit Suchtmitteln in der DDR, 72–73.

⁵⁴ For the timeline of customs intelligence on these activities, see BArch B 137/11775, Mitteilungen von Herrn Frank vom Zollfahndungsamt über Feststellungen des Einschleusungsweges Ost-West, August 18, 1977.

⁵⁵ Heiner Busch, *Polizeiliche Drogenbekämpfung—eine internationale Verstrickung* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1999), 95–97. In 1972, the BKA sent an agent to work from Istanbul, copying an American program that had stationed drug enforcement officers in Turkey since 1950. After a year, the BKA shuttered the program after the agent found local police uninterested in cooperation and his own efforts to develop informants hampered by a lack of funds and facility with the Turkish language; BArch B 106/91374, Deutsch-türkische Zusammenarbeit bei der Rauschgiftbekämpfung 1970–1981.

⁵⁶ Margit Roth, *Zwei Staaten in Deutschland. Die sozialliberale Deutschlandpolitik und ihre Auswirkungen 1969–1978* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1981), 158; “Abkommen auf dem Gebiet des Gesundheitswesens zwischen beiden deutschen Staaten” (April 25, 1974), *Bundesgesetzblatt*, Jahrgang 1975, part 2, 1732.

The West German Ministry of the Interior rejected the possibility of directly contacting the East German police, and the wider ministerial consensus held that the Ministry of Health, Families and Youth should act as the messenger. In coordination with the Chancellor's Office and the Ministry for Inner-German Relations, they drafted a note to inform the East German Ministry of Health of the problem without making any accusations of complicity with the traffickers: "According to the information available, drugs are traded on the premises of the Friedrichstraße train station. There are numerous indications that members of Arab states, who often refer to themselves as Palestinians, smuggle narcotics, preferably hard drugs, into West Berlin in this way."⁵⁷ The letter went on to acknowledge the extra efforts made by East German customs to secure the Waltersdorfer Chaussee crossing (between Brandenburg and West Berlin) against smugglers, and provided details about the use of the train lockers and hotels for dealmaking. The GDR responded with boilerplate language, without addressing the issues raised directly, but the West Germans did receive reports that the security services were acting on the information they had provided.⁵⁸ This effort at using the Health Accord as a tool for quiet anti-narcotics cooperation was partially successful, but the issue would not remain in the backroom for long.

Successful American interdiction operations against the Turkey-to-Marseille drug pipeline known as the "French Connection" opened up a vacuum that was filled by drug traffic from Southeast Asia via major international airports such as Frankfurt, Munich, and Amsterdam, as well as on land via the so-called Balkan Route, running along Route E5 from Turkey to the Schwarzbach Autobahn in Bavaria via Southeastern Europe.⁵⁹ A surge in heroin overdose deaths in West Berlin, however, suddenly made the GDR border into a central theater in the drug war. Although there were twenty-nine illicit drug-related deaths a year in the entire Federal Republic at the start of the decade, there were eighty-four deaths from heroin overdoses in West Berlin alone in 1977.⁶⁰

The sharp rise in heroin-related deaths was blamed in the media on the combined threat of resident ethnic minorities and the incompetent East German authorities who enabled them. *Die Zeit* labeled West Berlin "the capital city of the fixer," blaming lax controls at Schönefeld and quoting an anonymous judge saying that courts were overwhelmed with cases of dealers that often involved "Turks and Arabs."⁶¹ The West Berlin Senate publicly agreed with these accusations, and, in the Bundestag, Kurt Spitzmüller of the Free Democrats (FDP)—the junior partner in the governing social-liberal coalition led by the SPD—proclaimed, "obviously, numerous people involved in drug smuggling from the Middle and Near East come to East Berlin via East Berlin's Schönefeld Airport and from there to West Berlin," where "the mass of Turkish guest workers in West Berlin—the Kreuzberg district—has created a dangerous breeding ground for such drug-related crime."⁶²

The widespread panic about heroin in West Berlin did reflect the growing problem of heroin deaths, but the West German Ministry of Health, Families and Youth disputed the focus on the divided city. Seizures there were not out of the ordinary (compared to other major cities), and local prices remained high in contrast to Frankfurt (which appeared to be the main air connection for traffickers), indicating difficulties for dealers in meeting supply.⁶³

⁵⁷ BArch B 137/11775, Herbert Harsdorf to Fredo Wegmarshaus, March 31, 1976.

⁵⁸ BArch B 137/11775, Vermerk Senator für Inneres von III B 21, June 5, 1981.

⁵⁹ Friman, *NarcoDiplomacy*, 103; BArch B 131/1544 Bericht über den Stand des Rauschgifthandels in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland des BKA (January 1977), 11, 14. European Route E5 ran from London to the Turkish-Syrian border (the present-day E5 runs from Scotland to Spain) and was a regular travel route for Turkish-Germans. See Michelle Lynn Kahn, "The Long Road Home: Vacations and the Making of the 'Germanized Turk' across Cold War Europe," *Journal of Modern History* 93, no. 1 (2021): 109–49.

⁶⁰ Klaus Weinbauer, "Drug Consumption in London and Western Berlin during the 1960s and 1970s: Local and Transnational Perspectives," *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 21, no. 2 (2006): 386.

⁶¹ Margrit Gerste, "Berlin-Hauptstadt der Fixer: Sie machen nicht nur sich kaputt," *Die Zeit*, September 16, 1977.

⁶² Deutscher Bundestag, 8. Wahlperiode 56. Sitzung, Bonn, November 11, 1977, 4336.

⁶³ BArch B 137/11775, Drogen-Szene in Berlin. Einbeziehung der US Streitkräfte, October 18, 1978.

The fears of an uncontrolled border with East Germany also reflected a shift from the widespread social anxieties surrounding the drug-associated counterculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s to a broader social unease surrounding foreigners and East Germans with whom coexistence was now a permanent feature of everyday life.⁶⁴ In 1973, West Germany ended the program of bringing in guest workers in response to the oil crisis and the subsequent economic downturn. Rather than leaving, a substantial minority of guest workers stayed and sent for their family members.⁶⁵ By the outbreak of the heroin wave, it had become generally accepted, if grudgingly, that these groups would be integrated into West German society.⁶⁶ At the same time, however, the state apparatus began to more closely connect foreigners with crime: the courts began to collect information on convictions of “non-Germans,” and, in 1978, the police began to publish statistics on “crime by foreigners” (*Ausländerkriminalität*).⁶⁷ Although diplomatic relations between the two Germanys had been largely established by that point, the GDR remained the communist other to the Federal Republic’s democratic *Rechtsstaat*, making it a natural scapegoat and villain for the sense that the state was losing control and the social order was breaking down.

East German media countered the allegations that the GDR was complicit with drug trafficking by interpreting them as a mere attempt to deflect blame from the failings of the capitalist system. In an interview with a West German newspaper, one East German official denounced how the “plague of imperialism” was being made into a “problem of the socialist states.”⁶⁸ In the international affairs magazine *horizont*, one author wrote: “On all other matters there are constant accusations ‘you police too much,’ and now it is all of a sudden, ‘you police too little!’” The “campaign of libel” against the GDR and Schönefeld Airport in particular represented little more than envy at the competition offered by East Germany’s Interflug airline. Moreover, “Every traveler can observe that our customs authorities are meticulous in fulfilling their duties—unlike the thoroughly corrupt customs agents of West Berlin.”⁶⁹

The conflict escalated the following year when American congressman Glenn English, a Democrat from Oklahoma and chair of a taskforce on drug abuse, claimed that East Germany was a “silent partner” to drug traffickers. Despite the alleged 7,000 pounds of heroin a year being shipped through the GDR, English said, “They’re taking no steps to intervene.”⁷⁰ The American Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) publication *Drug Enforcement* reinforced these accusations: “Mid-East heroin is flowing with little disruption through East Berlin.” It blamed the Turkish nationals residing in West Berlin for taking advantage of lax customs controls by “East German border officials [who] reportedly seem

⁶⁴ On the rise of youth drug culture in West Germany, see Klaus Weinbauer, “The End of Certainties: Drug Consumption and Youth Delinquency in West Germany,” in *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960–1980*, ed. Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006); Weinbauer, “Drug Consumption in London and Western Berlin during the 1960s and 1970s”; Stephens, *Germans on Drugs*; Tilmann Holzer, *Die Geburt der Drogenpolitik aus dem Geist der Rassenhygiene. Deutsche Drogenpolitik von 1933 bis 1972* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2007), 399–405. On the dropout (*Gammler*) subculture and drugs, see Stephens, *Germans on Drugs*, 61–66; Klaus Weinbauer, “The End of Certainties,” 381; Timothy Scott Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62–67.

⁶⁵ Lauren Stokes, *Fear of the Family: Guest Workers and Family Migration in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁶⁶ Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 97; Sarah Thomsen Vierra, *Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany: Immigration, Space, and Belonging, 1961–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 39.

⁶⁷ Heinz Schöch and Michael Gebauer, *Ausländerkriminalität in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Kriminologische, rechtliche und soziale Aspekte eines gesellschaftlichen Problems* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1991), 38. In the mid-1970s, criminologists in West Germany began to see the children of guest workers as particularly inclined to crime as an expression of cultural conflict; Günther Kaiser, “Gastarbeiterkriminalität und ihre Erklärung als Kulturkonflikt,” in *Gastarbeiter in Gesellschaft und Recht*, ed. Tugrul Ansay and Volkmar Gessner (Munich: Beck, 1974).

⁶⁸ Quoted in BStU HA VI 16859, Vortrag der Delegation der Zollverwaltung der DDR, April 10, 1979, 70.

⁶⁹ Peter Anders, “Die ‘Türken’ des Senats,” *horizont* 35 (August 29, 1977), 31; clipping from BArch B 137/11775.

⁷⁰ Bernard Weinraub, “East Germany Is Linked to Increase in Heroin Traffic,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1978, A13.

more interested in identifying persons engaged in suspicious anti-state activity than stopping drugs being smuggled to the West.⁷¹ On the ground, however, the Narcotics Commissioner in West Berlin said there was no evidence that Schönefeld Airport was the problem given checks on public transit near the border crossing from the GDR yielded almost no drug seizures. He argued it was more likely that drugs were coming in through West Berlin's Tegel Airport or by car and truck on overland routes.⁷² Yet American officials and West German media had suddenly transformed the border with the GDR and Schönefeld Airport in particular into a hotspot in the global war on drugs.

The Difficult Path to East-West Anti-Trafficking Cooperation

Although officials in both Germany and the United States all had a strong interest in working together to secure the GDR border against narcotics trafficking, the geographies of the Cold War and the global drug war were incompatible. The Cold War logic of a bipolar world divided between the communist East and democratic West mapped poorly onto the actors of the global drug trade, which included everyone from nonaligned substate criminal gangs to CIA-backed anti-communists in Asia and Latin America and elements of the Bulgarian and Cuban security services.⁷³ As a result, efforts by narcotics officials to foster cross-border collaboration continuously ran into roadblocks as their plans hit up against the Cold War prerogatives of other parts of their state and bureaucratic apparatuses.

Nonetheless, as Berlin became the new public frontline in the drug war in the late 1970s, circumstances in the GDR, West Germany, and the United States aligned to create new opportunities for cross-border collaboration. On the East German side, there was clear interest in international collaboration on the part of Ulrich Schneidewind, the effective head of GDR narcotics policy. An SED member with a doctorate in pharmacy, Schneidewind was head of the health department's section on pharmaceutical and medical technology before becoming Deputy Minister of Health in 1982. He had been one of the architects of the reformed East German drug system, supervised the operations of the Central Bureau for Addictive Substances, and represented the GDR at international events on illicit narcotics and trafficking. For the West Germans, narcotics trafficking quickly replaced international terrorism as the new threat to the Federal Republic following the decline of the Red Army Faction after 1977.⁷⁴ German Federal Police Chief Horst Herold announced a plan for a "war at the Dardanelles" against the influx of drugs from Turkey by repurposing the massive computer data system developed to track down the Red Army Faction to map the drug trade with the help of international allies.⁷⁵ At the same time in the United States, President Jimmy Carter's administration was trying to reach out to communist countries to find common ground through cooperation on drug interdiction. As part of the negotiations on a clear maritime boundary with Cuba, the US State Department included provisions on a cooperation to stop Caribbean cocaine smuggling; American customs officials had also

⁷¹ "Berlin as a Heroin Transit Point," *Drug Enforcement* 5, no. 1 (1978): 37.

⁷² Ekkehard Müller-Jentsch, "Heroinhändler ziehen sich neue Opfer heran," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 247, October 26, 1978, 48.

⁷³ On anti-communists, see Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade, Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, Central America, Colombia* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill, 2003). On Bulgarian truckers, see Emiliya Karaboeva, "Borders and Go-Betweens: Bulgarian International Truck Drivers during the Cold War," *East Central Europe* 41, no. 2–3 (2014): 236–37. The extent to which Fidel Castro was aware of military and security services personnel profiting from cocaine trafficking through Cuba in the 1980s is contested. Andres Oppenheimer, *Castro's Final Hour* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 127–28.

⁷⁴ Johannes Stehr, "Massenmediale Dealer-Bilder und ihr Gebrauch im Alltag," in *Drogendealer: Ansichten eines verurteilten Gewerbes*, ed. Bettina Paul (Freiburg: Lambertus, 1998), 98–99.

⁷⁵ "Rauschgift: Herolds Internationale," *Der Spiegel*, November 4, 1979. On Herold's use of computer technology to pursue the RAF, see Karrin Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 118–21.

been working with Bulgaria since 1971 to train customs agents to more effectively prevent heroin from being smuggled from Turkey and Lebanon.⁷⁶

The public accusations of East German complicity in the heroin trade by a sitting US congressman threw a wrench into plans to bring the GDR into the global US-led drug war. The State Department had organized a conference of customs representatives in Varna, Bulgaria, in September 1978 to initiate a broader East-West collaboration against drug traffickers. The US ambassador to the GDR had even reached out to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to ask if they could pass along information on suspected traffickers to assist East German drug enforcement. Ulrich Schneidewind had encouraged this plan and justified some form of information exchange with the West on the grounds that a failure to do so could be used against the GDR by its enemies.⁷⁷ But before further steps could be taken, Congressman English's accusations led GDR officials to doubt the sincerity of the Americans. In August 1978, the United States went on a charm offensive to try and get the GDR back on board. While presenting his credentials to President Carter, the new East German ambassador was assured that the United States did not seek to blame the GDR, but instead sought cooperation.⁷⁸ As part of a congressional delegation, English was sent to meet with the GDR's ambassador to the United States and then to East Berlin, where he apologized to Schneidewind by claiming that the information on GDR drug complicity came from concerned constituents in Oklahoma.⁷⁹ The US ambassador arranged for the delivery of rapid drug testing equipment to assist with East German customs inspections.⁸⁰

Yet East German officials remained wary. The US-sponsored conference in Varna had been scheduled on the same dates on which the GDR was supposed to host an annual conference of socialist customs agencies. Although the Soviets saw drugs as an "American problem," they embarrassingly asked the GDR to cancel its event to avoid the appearance of a split in the Eastern bloc.⁸¹ In Varna, American officials sought to undo the damage of English's accusations through interpersonal diplomacy. The chief of the DEA's Paris office spoke to the GDR representatives assuring them that his organization did not agree that East Germany was complicit in trafficking, and the US ambassador traveled from East Berlin to Bulgaria to lobby for greater contacts between border agents. The American line throughout the event was that they sought to support the "brotherhood of customs agencies" against a global problem.

East German officials were torn as to whether they would cooperate. On the one hand, they wanted to demonstrate their willingness to fulfill international legal obligations and decided to accept the American offer of information on known traffickers. East German assumptions about traffickers were moving away from a Cold War framing and converging with West German conceptions that traffickers were more likely to be non-German, particularly Turkish or Arab.⁸² The Stasi had informers in the West Berlin Turkish community who reported on drug dealing in East Berlin, including cannabis and valium, and on hashish and heroin trafficking via East German territory. According to the Stasi, the small-scale drug

⁷⁶ William M. LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh, *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2014), 160–61. US Congress Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources Subcommittee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, *Drugs and Terrorism, 1984: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources, United States Senate, Ninety-Eighth Congress, Second Session, on Investigation of the Link Between Drugs and Terrorism, August 2, 1984* (US Government Printing Office, 1984), 65.

⁷⁷ BArch DQ 1/15260, Schneidewind to Neugebauer, May 4, 1978.

⁷⁸ BStU HA VI 16859, Vermerk, October 11, 1978, 95.

⁷⁹ BStU HA II 31328, Vermerk, October 16, 1978, 28–29.

⁸⁰ BArch DQ 1/15260, Record of call, Schumann to Singer, August 23, 1978, and letter, Schumann to Schneidewind, August 30, 1978.

⁸¹ BStU HA VI 16858, Vorlage zu Problemen der Bekämpfung des Schmuggels mit Suchtmitteln in der DDR, 81–82.

⁸² Beginning in 1979, the Stasi routinely surveilled Turkish nationals in the GDR on the grounds that they were potential drug smugglers; Jennifer A. Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders, 1960s to 1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 122–24.

dealing to East Germans—contained to “deviant” communities such as homosexuals and prostitutes—could be blamed on “foreign day trippers,” meaning Turkish guest workers from West Berlin who congregated at a handful of popular cafés in East Berlin.⁸³ In contrast to West Germany, however, the Stasi also still saw drug smuggling operations as connected to “human smuggling” operations—namely groups helping East Germans to illegally emigrate.⁸⁴ GDR customs officials also rejected the universalist American framing and saw drug abuse not as a “worldwide problem,” but one rooted “in the misanthropic social system of imperialism.”⁸⁵ East German officials saw this framing as an attempt to make the problem of drugs “class indifferent” and abstracted from the particularities of the competing social orders.⁸⁶ The Stasi in particular remained skeptical after English’s accusations and due to the involvement of the CIA in drug policy, which was also seen as evidence of a possible US intelligence plot.⁸⁷ As the conference was taking place in Bulgaria, East German customs officials apprehended a smuggler with 4.5 kilograms of hashish and, fearing it was some kind of test of GDR border controls by the CIA, no decision was made on what to do with him until the event had concluded.⁸⁸ Although the Stasi believed the Americans were motivated by concerns over drugs, they saw the Carter administration’s anti-narcotics program as one element in the broader American effort to effect global moral change outside of UN institutions, including the president’s anti-communist human rights campaign.⁸⁹ That the initiatives on antidrug collaboration came so soon after major American public pressure on East German human rights violations at the Helsinki Accords follow-up meeting the year before in Belgrade—contrary to the strategy of quiet engagement by West Germany—had further poisoned the well.⁹⁰ After Varna, an immediate follow-up meeting to discuss a new US-GDR bilateral relationship was ultimately rejected by the East Germans.⁹¹

Although the Varna conference failed to deliver tangible results, both the Americans and West Germans kept trying in the dying days of détente. In 1979, Ulrich Schneidewind was invited to Washington DC to meet with officials from the White House, State Department, Department of Justice, US Customs, and the DEA. Schneidewind reported that they were very frank about the extent of the US drug problem and highly impressed that the GDR had a comprehensive registry of drug addicts.⁹² The White House drug czar Lee Dogoloff reportedly accepted that the GDR had effectively stamped out drug use and argued for

⁸³ Stefan Zeppenfeld, *Vom Gast zum Gastwirt? Türkische Arbeitswelten in West-Berlin* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 350–56.

⁸⁴ BStU HA VI 16858, Vorlage zu Problemen der Bekämpfung des Schmuggels mit Suchtmitteln in der DDR, 89. On the drug/human trafficking linkage, see BStU HA IX 1273, Dokumentation zum Rauschgiftschmuggel und zum Mißbrauch Rauschgiftsüchtiger durch kriminelle Menschenhändlerbanden in Westberlin und in der BRD, September 13, 1978. This shift could also be seen in media coverage, particularly in the case of the organized escape helper group around Hans Ulrich Lenzlinger, emphasizing their connections to drug smuggling. See “Transitabkommen wurde verletzt,” *Berliner Zeitung*, September 12, 1978, and “Agentin der kriminellen Lenzlinger-Bande verurteilt,” *Neues Deutschland*, January 6, 1979.

⁸⁵ Quoted in BStU HA VI 16859, Vortrag der Delegation der Zollverwaltung der DDR, April 10, 1979, 66.

⁸⁶ BStU HA VI 16858, Kurzbericht über die “Internationale Konferenz für den Erfahrungsaustausch und die Zusammenarbeit bei der Bekämpfung des Suchtmittelschmuggels,” 2. The American line echoed Interpol’s framing of international police and customs cooperation against narcotics as nonpolitical and outside normal inter-governmental forms of cooperation. Busch, *Polizeiliche Drogenbekämpfung—eine internationale Verstrickung*, 66–71.

⁸⁷ BStU HA VI 16859, Vortrag der Delegation der Zollverwaltung der DDR, April 10, 1979, 75.

⁸⁸ BStU HA VI 16859, Information, September 6, 1978, 58.

⁸⁹ BStU HA VI 16858, Kurzbericht über die “Internationale Konferenz für den Erfahrungsaustausch und die Zusammenarbeit bei der Bekämpfung des Suchtmittelschmuggels,” 9. On US human rights policy as part of global moral politics, see Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2014); Jan Eckel, *The Ambivalence of Good: Human Rights in International Politics Since the 1940s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 193.

⁹⁰ Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 130–31.

⁹¹ Author’s correspondence with Lee Dogoloff, June 14, 2019.

⁹² The GDR reports regularly cite no more than 100 registered drug addicts in East Germany.

their shared interests in working together since the GDR could one day be similarly afflicted by narcotics. Schneidewind's only criticism of the American officials was that they "did not, of course, accept that there was a link between abuse of drugs and the social order—or the 'free market economy.'"⁹³ Although West German officials were able to establish contact with drug enforcement counterparts in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Romania, the GDR still eluded them.⁹⁴ West German representatives to a UN meeting in Geneva on drugs also approached Schneidewind about further cooperation and reported that he responded positively about further exchange, but emphasized it could only take place within some kind of legal structure. He suggested that the West Germans raise the issue at the next Health Accord exchange meeting to discuss the matter under the terms of Article 6, but when the representative from the Federal Republic did so, the GDR officials at the meeting had not heard of any such plan and thus could not discuss it further.⁹⁵ Although there was goodwill among individual drug enforcement experts, it was not enough to realize an institutional breakthrough.

In the early 1980s, another wave of heroin-related deaths sparked a panic in West Germany that pushed the new conservative-liberal West German government led by Helmut Kohl to take action on drugs.⁹⁶ The proliferation of international smuggling networks and the rise of Andean cocaine meant that West Germany was now also a destination for traffickers from South America and West Africa.⁹⁷ In December 1983, at a meeting of American and West German drug officials, the doubling of drug-related deaths in West Berlin that year was attributed to more smuggling via Schönefeld Airport. Of particular concern was an influx of trafficking by Sri Lankan refugees, fleeing the civil war in large numbers. Several of them had reported upon their arrest that they had been able to travel directly from the airport to the Friedrichstraße train station (and then on to West Berlin) by means of a "\$100" bribe to an East German People's police officer. The DEA believed that the East Germans were simply trying to get the refugees out of their country as quickly as possible, while the West Germans saw a nefarious conspiracy to flood West Berlin with unwanted refugees (and heroin).⁹⁸

Cooperation between the two Germanys should have been made easier by the West German economic bailout in 1982 that forestalled the bankruptcy of the GDR through loans negotiated by Bavarian Minister President Franz Josef Strauss.⁹⁹ Yet that year, the Federal Republic had created a new roadblock when the Narcotics Law (*Betäubungsmittelgesetz*) took effect. It included a passage ruling that the reporting on—and the customs paperwork required for—the trade in international controlled substances would not apply to (legal) imports from the GDR. This was an extension of a broader West German trade policy that regarded imports from East Germany as a form of domestic, rather than international, trade, which had become entrenched in the European Economic Community policy and was reinforced by the Berlin Convention, an agreement between West Germany and the GDR that underlined the duty-free nature of trade between the

⁹³ BArch DQ 1/15260, Schneidewind Trip Report, 1979, 2.

⁹⁴ BArch 137 11775, Zusammenarbeit mit der DDR bei der Bekämpfung des Drogen- und Rauschgiftmittelmisbrauchs, April 1979, 4.

⁹⁵ BArch B 137/11775, Rauschgiftbekämpfungsprogramm; Besprechung der beamteten Staatssekretäre am 12. November 1979, November 12, 1979.

⁹⁶ "Heroin: 'Die Lage war noch nie so Ernst,'" *Der Spiegel*, May 23, 1982. In the final months of the Social-Liberal government in 1982, the Ministry of the Interior was already calling for a renewed effort to work with the GDR. See BArch B 137 11775, Bekämpfung der Rauschgiftkriminalität durch Erschwerung der Rauschgiftzufuhren über Berlin (Ost) nach Berlin (West), June 28, 1982.

⁹⁷ "Rauschgift: 'Charley' auf der Straße," *Der Spiegel*, May 20, 1984; Stephen Ellis, "West Africa's International Drug Trade," in *Deviant Globalization*, 118.

⁹⁸ BArch B 106 91360 11, Sitzung der Zentralen Arbeitsgruppe gem. den deutsch-amerikanischen Richtlinien für die Zusammenarbeit bei der Bekämpfung des Drogen- und Rauschmittelmisbrauchs am 15. Dezember 1983, December 15, 1983, 1–3.

⁹⁹ Maximilian Graf, "Before Strauß: The East German Struggle to Avoid Bankruptcy During the Debt Crisis Revisited," *The International History Review* 42, no. 4 (2020): 737–54.

two countries.¹⁰⁰ This agreement masked a fundamental disagreement between the two Germans—for the Federal Republic, the border with the GDR was a line separating two parts of the German economy, whereas for the SED, the border was an international frontier.¹⁰¹ When the narcotics law passed, the SED filed a formal complaint at the United Nations that this non-recognition of the GDR border violated West Germany's commitments to international law.¹⁰² In a tit for tat, the United States responded that East Germany's claims to total sovereignty over East Berlin also violated international law regarding the continued occupation of all of Berlin by the four Allied powers.¹⁰³

In spite of warnings from the Ministry of Health, Families and Youth that this border question would prevent any kind of collaboration, the West German government sent a note to the East German foreign office with a new proposal for anti-narcotics cooperation. Citing the proliferation of drug crime across western Europe and West Germany's partnerships with other neighbor countries, the note praised the East German anti-trafficking efforts to date while also noting that a West Berlin gang had managed to smuggle five kilograms of heroin over a matter of months via the GDR. As a solution, it suggested a "non-bureaucratic exchange of information" by police and customs in service of the "community of international solidarity."¹⁰⁴ West German officials saw the border designation as a technical impediment, but for the East Germans, it was an insulting delegitimization of GDR sovereignty. Top-level East German officials—including Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer, Stasi Chief Erich Mielke, Health Minister Ludwig Mecklinger, and Günter Mittag, the Secretary of the SED's Central Committee—were mixed in their judgment of the proposal. They were positive about the idea of a "substantial contribution" to the fight against trafficking rather than some kind of "spectacular agreement" and saw Article 6 of the Health Accord as a sound legal basis for such an exchange. But they also agreed that the non-recognition of GDR's international border by the recent drug law would have to be changed as a precondition for any collaboration.¹⁰⁵ The realization of an "ordinary" amount of cross-border cooperation would in fact require an extraordinary shift in West German policy on the status of the border.

The West German government, under international pressure to stem the flow of Sri Lankan refugees through their territory, shifted tactics and sought to link the problem of narcotics to its other initiative to stop the GDR from allowing Sri Lankans to fly into East Berlin (and then on to West Berlin without the requisite visa) in the hope that the immediacy of the problem could shake the East Germans into action. Once again, proposals for cooperation on the matter of the cross-border drug customs paperwork were rejected, as the East Germans understood the West Germans' discrete problem as an existential threat to their sovereignty, with wide-ranging implications for the internationally recognized status of the border and daily GDR border policy. As a result, the West German government abandoned its short-lived strategy, uncoupled the problem of migration from narcotics, and instead used its financial leverage over the GDR to pressure the East Germans into allowing only those Sri Lankans in possession of a visa for West Germany to enter East Berlin (see

¹⁰⁰ H. R. Krämer, "'German Internal Trade' under EEC-Rules," *GeoJournal* 9, no. 4 (1984): 434–36.

¹⁰¹ Ryszard W. Piotrowicz, "The Border between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic: A Demarcation Line or Just an International Frontier?," *Netherlands International Law Review* 36, no. 3 (1989): 314–41.

¹⁰² BArch B 137 11775, Delegation of the GDR to the Seventh Special Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, February 2, 1982.

¹⁰³ BArch B 137 11775, US Mission to the International Atomic Energy Agency to Acting Chairman of the Seventh Special Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, April 20, 1982.

¹⁰⁴ BArch DL 226-1290, Gesprächsnotiz. The West German government was confident enough in the possibility of success, the note to the GDR was mentioned in response to an inquiry in the Bundestag about trafficking from East Berlin. Bundestag Drucksache Nr. 10/1150, Antwort der Bundesregierung zu Drucksache 10/1060, March 20, 1984, 22.

¹⁰⁵ BArch DL 226-1359 Fischer to Mittag, February 24, 1984; BArch DL 226-1290, Mittag to Honecker. March 27, 1984.

Lauren Stokes's article in this special issue).¹⁰⁶ For West Germany, forcing a limited change in East German migration policy provided clear and immediate results to a specific problem (one actually welcomed by the Stasi to help stem drug trafficking),¹⁰⁷ whereas the issue of narcotics as a whole opened up too many questions of sovereignty and legitimacy for both sides of the German-German border.

From the American side, the Carter administration's outreach to communist countries had given way to renewed Cold War belligerence under President Ronald Reagan. Backchannel cooperation with Cuba had ended and training programs in Bulgaria were called off.¹⁰⁸ After declaring a renewed "War on Drugs" in 1982 and ratcheting up domestic law enforcement against drug users, Reagan's 1984 reelection platform denounced "communist dictators" for their role in the international drug trade, singling out the USSR, Bulgaria, Cuba, and Nicaragua.¹⁰⁹ The DEA, however, dissented from this line, arguing that the Soviets had no role in narcotics trafficking.¹¹⁰ On the ground in East Berlin, the DEA and the US embassy continued to try and work out a system of information exchange by framing cooperation with eastern Europe as a means of working together to prevent the misuse of GDR chemicals by Latin American cocaine producers—a common enemy of both the capitalist and socialist worlds.¹¹¹ In 1985, they were able to arrange an expert meeting with DEA specialists and representatives of the GDR foreign office, the Ministry of Health, and the head of the Central Bureau of Addictive Substances in East Berlin. Nonetheless, the East Germans remained unwilling to create a bilateral backchannel to discuss problems with precursor chemicals, purchased legally but diverted to illegal use in third countries (in particular by Latin American drug labs), as this was deemed contrary to the UN conventions, which demanded direct contact with the relevant third state parties.¹¹²

In the mid-1980s, progress in establishing bilateral anti-narcotics cooperation thus appeared at a standstill, but a shift was underway in how East German officials understood the geography of the global drug war. First, the demarcation between the socialist world and the capitalist world began to collapse as recreational narcotics usage, which had previously been seen as a Western problem, was now on the rise across the Eastern bloc.¹¹³ Drug abuse in the GDR was still not seen as a social problem, but the SED and the Stasi had growing concerns about low-level trafficking connected to a range of transnational actors who were beginning to supply the domestic market with imported narcotics. Contract workers, refugees, and students in the GDR were all now viewed as possible vectors of small-scale smuggling, which was moving away from small "deviant" niche groups to respectable

¹⁰⁶ See Lauren Stokes, "Racial Profiling on the U-Bahn: Policing the Berlin Gap in the Schönefeld Airport Refugee Crisis," an article in this issue.

¹⁰⁷ BStU Neiber 652, Übersicht zu Ergebnissen der Zollverwaltung der DDR bei der Aufdeckung raffinierter Methoden des Suchtmittelschmuggels unter Mißbrauch der Transitwege der DDR, July 24, 1985, 74.

¹⁰⁸ US cooperation with Bulgaria was suspended in 1981 due to evidence of state complicity in drug and arms smuggling; US Congress Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources Subcommittee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, *Drugs and Terrorism*, 1984, 72. Cuba pulled out of the cooperation in retaliation against US travel restrictions. Alfonso Chardy, "Cuba Cancels Pact to Halt Drug Traffic," *Miami Herald*, April 28, 1982), 1.

¹⁰⁹ "The Communist Connection," *New York Times*, September 13, 1984, A17.

¹¹⁰ "The Communist Connection," *New York Times*, September 13, 1984, A17.

¹¹¹ On the Reagan administration's reframing of the drug war as a fight against "narcoterrorism" in Latin America, see Michelle Getchell, "Reagan's War on Drugs and Latin America," *Texas National Security Review* (<https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-reagan-and-latin-america/#essay6>).

¹¹² Barch DQ 1 15213, Bericht über ein Expertengespräch mit Vertretern der USA zum illegalen Suchtmittelverkehr am 30.10.1985, October 30, 1985.

¹¹³ The Soviets in particular were having problems with smuggling by soldiers stationed in Afghanistan; Barch DQ 1 15251, Soviet Customs Report, 1–3. See also Krzysztof Krajewski, "Drugs, Markets and Criminal Justice in Poland," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 40, no. 2 (2003): 273–93; Jan Kolář, "Drogenabhängigkeit in der sozialistischen Tschechoslowakei (1969–1989)—'Cliques' von Drogenabhängigen," in *Ordnung und Sicherheit, Devianz und Kriminalität im Staatssozialismus*, 399–420. On growing Stasi awareness, see BStU HA II 28137, MFS Informationen über Bewertungen zur internationalen Rauschgiftlage durch BRD-Regierungskreise Nr. 48/1986, 2–3.

locations like universities.¹¹⁴ In the 1980s, SED concerns about cross-border drug traffic were linked to not only minority groups present in the GDR, but also foreign diplomats (and their families) and even Soviet occupation forces who apparently were caught smuggling drugs from Syria to the consternation of East German officials.¹¹⁵ Second, smugglers were also growing more sophisticated. In one presentation to a Stasi investigations unit, a customs inspector complained that organized crime groups from the Middle East were trying to bring drugs through Schönefeld Airport hidden in boxes of foul-smelling fish or shaped into fake cherries or pistachio nuts.¹¹⁶ Customs and the Stasi were particularly concerned about the shift from using suitcases with hidden compartments to smuggle drugs to a new generation that also swallowed condoms filled with heroin to evade detection at the border.¹¹⁷

This shifting geography of the drug war vis-a-vis the Cold War was reflected in both public policy and public culture. Through negotiations at the United Nations, the GDR and the rest of the Eastern bloc worked with the West to create the 1988 Vienna Trafficking Convention, which called for universal criminalization of drug offenses and created new mechanisms to target international drug smuggling via money laundering rules and the regulation of precursor chemicals used in manufacturing. This was posed as a tool to protect the citizens of consumer states and transit states, including the GDR, from the wave of cocaine smuggling out of South America, but also more generally, from producing countries in the global south.¹¹⁸ Public depictions of narcotics in the GDR also changed in this period: although narcotics addiction was ostensibly still an ever-present danger in the West, the image of capitalist states as corrupt forces generating the traffic in drugs shifted toward a portrayal in which they were allies against a global, de-ideologized problem of cross-border crime. While in 1984, GDR state media reported on the mafia's connections to Italian intelligence or on police in Florida who were running a protection racket for drug dealers,¹¹⁹ by 1987, the *Berliner Zeitung* was running coverage with grudging praise for American conservatives and even Ronald Reagan's White House for denouncing Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega's corruption and complicity in the drug trade.¹²⁰ By the end of the year, *Neues Deutschland* ran an article praising a US-Soviet bilateral agreement on narcotics trafficking cooperation.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ Although reports of smuggling to the GDR were rare, in 1988, the Stasi focused on a pair of cases involving small quantities of cannabis brought in by contract workers from Angola and Mozambique. See BStU HA VI 4676, 171–73. West German intelligence regularly reported on East German concerns of drugs linked to foreigners; Barch B 106 91360, BND Meldung, March 25, 1982, mentions Turks, Pakistanis, Arabs, and “other Asians,” and BND Meldung, June 29, 1984, mentions asylum seekers; BND Meldung, August 17, 1984, mentions foreign workers in Halle; BND Meldung, September 19, 1984, mentions Vietnamese contract workers traveling to West Berlin; Barch B 137 11775, BND Meldung, June 19, 1984, mentions Jordanians and Iranians selling heroin at Leipzig University. On the criminalization of foreigners in the GDR, see Jürgen Mense, “Ausländerkriminalität in der DDR. Eine Untersuchung zu Kriminalität und Kriminalisierung von Mosambikanern. 1979–1990,” in *Transit—Transfer—Politik und Praxis der Einwanderung in die DDR 1945–1990*, ed. Kim Christian Priemel (Berlin: Be.Bra, 2011).

¹¹⁵ Barch B 106 91360, BND Meldung, April 25, 1984, mentions East German officials' concerns of foreign diplomatic staff smuggling drugs. This is supported by Maxim Leo's memoir of life in East Berlin, which mentions hashish being available in small quantities through connections to the children of diplomats in Prenzlauer Berg in the 1980s. Maxim Leo, *Haltet euer Herz bereit. Eine ostdeutsche Familiengeschichte* (Munich: Heyne, 2009), 238–39. Barch B 137 11775, BND Meldung, March 9, 1984, mentions Soviet military advisers.

¹¹⁶ Goll, *Kontrollierte Kontrolleure*, 200.

¹¹⁷ BStU Neiber 652, Übersicht zu Ergebnissen der Zollverwaltung der DDR bei der Aufdeckung raffinierter Methoden des Suchtmittelschmuggels unter Mißbrauch der Transitwege der DDR, July 24, 1985, 72–73.

¹¹⁸ Richardson-Little, “The Drug War in a Land Without Drugs,” 291–92.

¹¹⁹ “Mafia räumt weiteren Kritiker aus dem Weg. Sizilianische Regionalregierung mußte zurücktreten,” *Berliner Zeitung*, January 24, 1984; “Korrupte Polizisten angeklagt,” *Neues Deutschland*, July 4, 1984.

¹²⁰ “Unruhen rechts und links des Panamakanals. Angriffe auf die Verträge und die Contadora-Politik Einige Hintergründe des Aufruhrs der Geschäftsleute,” *Berliner Zeitung*, July 18, 1987.

¹²¹ “Gemeinsame sowjetisch-amerikanische Gipfel-Erklärung,” *Neues Deutschland*, December 12, 1987.



Figure 1. The East German Customs drug detection Cocker Spaniel Jessy checking a Trabant for narcotics at the Heinrich Heine border crossing between East and West Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall, November 28, 1989.¹²²

By 1988, when the US State Department once again organized an East-West summit on customs and anti-narcotics interdiction in Sopron, Hungary, the reception from Eastern bloc countries was vastly more positive compared to a decade before in Varna. Almost all the state socialist countries admitted to growing drug abuse problems, and the GDR delegate emphasized his country's commitment to bilateral and multilateral cooperation against international drug trafficking.¹²³ Rather than focusing on the debauched capitalist countries of the West, the GDR representative saw the Arab states, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Jamaica, and Africa (in general) as the main problem areas for law enforcement.¹²⁴ The conference represented a triumph of the American vision of drug enforcement that the East Germans

¹²² Source: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-1989-1128-013.

¹²³ BArch DQ 1/15251, Bericht über das Europäische Regionalseminar zu Fragen der Drogenbekämpfung 24. April bis 6. Mai 1988 Sopron UVR.

¹²⁴ BArch DQ 1/15251, DDR-Lagebericht, 5.

had previously found so ideologically intolerable: this was a meeting of the “brotherhood of customs officials,” discussing how to best secure their borders collectively against the scourge of drugs—without regard to their competing social orders and indifferent to class perspectives.

By the final year of the GDR’s existence as a socialist state in 1989, East German drug officials had reoriented narcotics enforcement at the border toward collaboration with both West Germany and the United States. Over the summer, East German media covered the trial, imprisonment, and execution of high-ranking Cuban military officers accused of collaborating with Colombian drug cartels.¹²⁵ In August and September, the GDR and the Soviets sent representatives to a training seminar in Alexandria, Virginia, run by the DEA; all the while SED control over the country was collapsing and mass demonstrations took hold across the GDR. During a side trip to Fort Meade in Maryland, GDR customs and health officials were given the opportunity to try out the handguns used by the DEA in the fight against Colombian traffickers. Having not completely abandoned their earlier perspectives on narcotics and socialism, the GDR representative expressed disappointment that the training sessions did not include any analysis of the social roots of drug abuse and reported his suspicions that the Hells Angels biker club could be fascist-oriented.¹²⁶ Only a few months later, the day the Berlin Wall fell, November 9, 1989, the director of Stasi counter-intelligence was preparing plans for collaboration with the United States on international drug trafficking.¹²⁷ That day, policing drug traffic across the border was seemingly as much a priority as preventing the total collapse of the border fortifications that maintained the very existence of the GDR as a sovereign socialist entity.

Only a week after the Berlin Wall opened, *Neues Deutschland* announced the influx of “speculators” into the GDR and the need for a new era of collaboration with West German customs to fight the threat of drug smuggling.¹²⁸ With traffic moving in the other direction, now border guards with drug-sniffing dogs were posted to the crossings in Berlin to stop the flow from West to East (see picture). This was a first step toward the integration of narcotics enforcement between the two countries—even before unification was concluded in 1990. The perceived rapid spread of narcotics across the border led West German media to warn of the “dealer-paradise GDR.”¹²⁹ Far from a haven against the global proliferation of drugs, the GDR was now widely portrayed as needing Western tutelage to secure its border against a new kind of narcotics trafficker, who was targeting the East German domestic market.¹³⁰ A retired head of the West German Federal Police (BKA) was brought in to advise the GDR interior minister on reforms, and the BKA provided assistance to the People’s Police when it created its first narcotics unit in May 1990.¹³¹ The preceding decade of rapprochement between West and East Germany on the problem of policing cross-border drug trafficking served as a prelude to reunified Germany driving the creation of a European Drugs Unit as a stepping stone to the founding of Europol in 1998.¹³² Just as the explosion in recreational narcotics was part of the West German economic boom and rise of youth consumer culture, so too was the proliferation of drug trafficking a part of the full integration of East Germany into globalized market capitalism. The panic over the influx of drugs was also precursor

¹²⁵ “Verfahren gegen hohen kubanischen Offizier,” July 1, 1989; “Höchststrafe für frühere kubanische Offiziere,” July 8, 1989; and “Kuba: Todesurteile vollstreckt,” July 14, 1989, *Neues Deutschland*.

¹²⁶ BArch DQ 1/15271 Bericht über das internationale Seminar zur Drogenbekämpfung 14. August 8–September 12, 1989.

¹²⁷ BStU Neiber 300, Büchner to Neiber, November 9, 1989.

¹²⁸ “Gewinne von Spekulanten, was unser Zoll dagegen tut,” *Neues Deutschland*, November 16, 1989.

¹²⁹ “400 Prozent mehr Drogen- und Waffenschmuggel?” *taz*, February 3, 1990.

¹³⁰ “Vollgeladen bis zum Himmel,” *Der Spiegel*, November 1990, 61.

¹³¹ “Das Ende der Volkspolizei—Chronologie des Zerfalls,” *Bürgerrechte & Polizei—Cilip*, December 27, 1990 (www.cilip.de/1990/12/27/das-ende-der-volkspolizei-chronologie-des-zerfalls/).

¹³² Busch, *Polizeiliche Drogenbekämpfung—eine internationale Verstrickung*, 142–54.

to the widespread fears about the openness of borders ushered in by the fall of the Wall that would proliferate with the rise of xenophobic violence in the 1990s.¹³³

The long-standing problem of drug traffickers using the GDR as a transit country and the engagement of East German drug enforcement officials and experts with international initiatives worked to steadily reorient narcotics smuggling from a symptom of capitalist decay to a technocratic issue of law enforcement requiring collaboration beyond the framework of the Cold War. Although the Berlin Wall was the central Western symbol of the suppression of freedom under socialism, the GDR, the United States, and West Germany found common ground on the need for the East German border regime to be even more restrictive, so long as it conformed to the priorities of the global war on drugs.

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¹³³ Patrice Poutrus, "Die Revolution war nicht nur friedlich," *taz*, June 11, 2021; Christopher A. Molnar, "'Greetings from the Apocalypse': Race, Migration, and Fear after German Reunification," *Central European History* 54, no. 3 (2021): 491–515.

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