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German rearmament in the Cold War

One of the recurring motifs of German history in the past two hundred years is the question of the changing of imperialism and disintegration, strength and weakness. In 1945 an 'imperial' era ended with a serious military defeat, and it was followed by an age of weakness and dividedness. However, the duration of this era is questionable: we may say that with the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), a new era started; we may say that the era of dividedness lasted until the German unification in 1990; or we may even go as far as saying that the era of 'weakness' (regarding German imperial aspects) is still sustained, since Germany, which has not questioned the territorial changes following 1945 and which is embedded in the European Union cannot be considered a great power in several respects.

If we approach this question from Hungarian diplomatic sources and documents of the archives, these documents, as we will see, confirm our first statement: from the aspect of Hungarian diplomacy, from the 1950s FRG is considered an aggressive, imperialistic, revansistic empire. The situation is not more flattering based on the state archive sources of other countries in the Soviet Union's alliance system either. On the other hand, it is not surprising that the documents of the Federal Foreign Office of the FRG show a completely peaceful Federal Republic of Germany, which conducts a balanced foreign policy. Since the two opposing viewpoints reflect the opinion of the two sides of the Iron Curtain, we may get closer to the truth if we thoroughly analyse the Federal Republic of Germany of the 1950s and 1960s. For this analysis, beside the modern professional literature, we should also use the diplomatic sources of the FRG, the neutral Austria and the contemporary Hungarian Peoples Republic.

The rise of FRG

The Federal Republic of Germany was created on May 23, 1949 on the British, French and American occupation zones.¹ In the international legal sense, the new state only gained

¹ NÉMETH István: *Németország története*. Budapest, 2002, Aula, 369.

sovereign status on May 5, 1955, following the ratification of the Paris treaties,² however, we can state that it possessed a significant potential for growth even at the moment of its creation, which we summarize below:

- the population of the new state exceeded 50 million people, which is far below the 100 million Germans envisaged by Hitler, but still one of the most populous and densely populated states in Europe. Furthermore, its population grew rapidly, in European comparison, during the first part of the Cold War.
- the territory of the new state included the most industrialised, most developed most urbanised regions of the former German Empire, which, though suffered from the destruction of the war and the activities of the allies regarding reparations and demilitarisation, were still competitive and operable.

Beside these two very important geopolitical capabilities, three other factors should be mentioned, which greatly contributed to the rise of the FRG following the years of its establishment. Firstly, the Cold War starting in 1947-48 between the Soviet Union and the United States of America plunged the German populated territories into a very dangerous but also very beneficial situation. The global opposition between the two superpowers posed a huge risk, since a potential World War III with conventional armaments possibly would have been fought in the territory of Germany; for this reason, by the end of the 1940s, both German states became front countries. However, this dangerous situation was also beneficial as the war did not take place: both superpowers integrated the German state they occupied and provided a vast number of economic and political offers to the other German state in order to make it break away from the opposing side.³ Without the Cold War, it would have been a much more difficult task for German states to get back to the normal world of international relations following the horrors of World War II. The FRG led by Konrad Adenauer clearly realised this opportunity and exploited both the political and economic possibilities.

The second factor, the Marshall Plan can be partly considered such opportunity. The United States of America launched this plan in 1947, among other things, in order to rebuild the European economic system. The western occupation zones received USD 1.4 billion from this plan.⁴ The American capital injection and the market liberalisation, which was a prerequisite of the payment, put the economy of the FRG on the path of rapid growth.

² Guido KNOPP: *Dalams 1955. Das Jahr der Anerkennung*. Stuttgart, 1995, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. 77–80.

³ FISCHER Ferenc: *A megosztott világ*. Pécs–Budapest, 2001, Dialóg-Campus, 148.

⁴ NÉMETH István: *Németország története*. Budapest, 2002, Aula. 406.

The third factor which contributed to the recovery of the economy of the FRG was the evolution of European integration. The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the Treaties of Rome (1957) offered a great opportunity for the FRG on political, but mainly on economic level, since the German industry clearly held the strongest position among the six states, and the customs union which was established by the 1960s, transitionally decreased the British and American competition.⁵

Thus, it is not surprising that between 1950 and 1960, the average economic growth in the FRG was 7.6 per cent, and the GRP increased by 80 percent during the same period. By 1960, Germany became the world's second largest industrial power after the USA,⁶ clearly outrunning the United Kingdom and France.⁷ This means that in the economic sense, the FRG state has become a great power, the only questions remaining were whether FRG is able and wishes to become a political great power based on these economic foundations, and whether the cold war environment dominated by the two superpowers allow this to happen.

It is not surprising that such robust economic growth and the possibility of becoming a political great power caused jealousy and helped the revival of old fears: the satellite states of the Soviet Union were worried about the revival of German revansistic politics⁸ and emphasized their security needs. The western European states which lived through the German occupation were also more and more worried about the recently defeated Federal Republic of Germany, which became an economic world power within a few years. By 1955, following long political disputes, it became clear that the FRG joins the NATO, rearms itself and gains military capabilities, this worry transformed into open opposition, especially by the Soviet Union.⁹

The German rearmament

In order to provide a more realistic picture in this current analysis about the revival of the German great power (primarily according to the Soviet propaganda), we need to examine the question of German rearmament. We can state that the rearmament of both German states was necessary because of the cold war: during the opposition in the cold war, neither the

⁵ BLAHÓ András (szerk.): *Európai integrációs alapismeretek*. Budapest, 2003, Aula, 72–79.

⁶ NÉMETH István: *Németország története*. Budapest, 2002, Aula. 407.

⁷ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX_J-1-j-NSZK-62t-SZU-1958

⁸ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (Archiv der Republik 01 POL-II) BRD/837 1963/23280 HAYMERLE Moscow's Ambassador to Austria in his report dated February 20, 1963 gives a detailed account on the background of the anti-German propaganda of the past years. He writes: "*Everything in connection with the strengthening of Germany and the growth of its military potential is received with special worry.*"

Soviet Union, nor the United States of America could afford the luxury of maintaining the demilitarisation of their German territories as it was accepted in Potsdam.¹⁰ Furthermore, the magnitude of the German military potential also justified the rearmament. The often hysterical political atmosphere of the Cold War era, during which both parties felt threatened, helped persuading the majority of those not decided on this issue about the necessity of the rearmament.

It comes from the logic of the Cold War, that – as we will see – the other side used every tool of diplomacy and propaganda to prevent the rearmament or at least make it more difficult. It is especially interesting that diplomatic sources use no self-criticism and only deal with the measures taken by the other party, though today it is obvious that the rearmament of the FRG and the GDR happened in parallel. Despite this, the diplomatic sources of Soviet-friendly states exclusively deal with the issue of the rearmament of the FRG and they place the rearmament of the GDR to a later date, and pose this step of Pankow as a reaction. In view of the facts, this point of view is unsupportable: the first German armed forces that were established after World War II, which were not solely police forces were established in the German Democratic Republic, before the foundation of the states. Border patrol forces were operating here in 1946, and the units of 'kasernierte Bereitschaften' were established in 1948, which were practically riot control units. The 'kasernierte Bereitschaften' controlled 10,000 people of the 66,000 members of the police force of the GDR,¹¹ the Soviet Union provided them with light weaponry using the German weapons captured from the Wehrmacht.¹² Their numbers doubled within a year, the force was organised into 24 infantry, 8 artillery and 3 armoured troops units. In 1950, the first maritime and air 'police' units appeared.¹³

At this time, the FRG had no military force, though the ambition appeared soon (establishment of the Blank-office¹⁴). It is also important to note that by the time the diplomatic discussions regarding the rearmament of the FRG started, and the outlines of the military force of the FRG to be established within the European Defence Community started to appear, the GDR's 'Kasernierte Volkspolizei', which was officially established on July 1,

⁹ Karl-Volker NEUGEBAUER (Hg.): *Die Zeit nach 1945. Armeen im Wandel*. München, 2008, Oldenbourg, 60.

¹⁰ FISCHER Ferenc: *A megosztott világ*. Pécs–Budapest, 2001, Dialóg-Campus. 141–146.

¹¹ Since they were unable to fill the staff with volunteers, the Soviet Union allowed recruitment among German prisoners of war in the territory, which offered an opportunity for them to get home. Several hundred people used this opportunity. It is also interesting that the GDR also needed the expertise of former Wehrmacht officers: at this time about 100 former officers and 5 generals served in the military forces of the GDR. For more information: NEUGEBAUER: i. m. 32. o.

¹² Karl-Volker NEUGEBAUER (Hg.): *Die Zeit nach 1945. Armeen im Wandel*. München, 2008, Oldenbourg. 30-31.

¹³ Karl-Volker NEUGEBAUER (Hg.): *Die Zeit nach 1945. Armeen im Wandel*. München, 2008, Oldenbourg. 36.

¹⁴ Detlef BALD: *Die Bundeswehr. Eine kritische Geschichte 1955-2005*. München, 2005, Beck. 37.

1952, already had a fundamentally soviet-controlled military force of 110,000 people, which by 1953 had 47 heavy tanks, 480 T-34 tanks, 278 self-propelled artilleries, 35 military aircrafts and 69 own-built warships.¹⁵ In contrast with this, the establishment of the FRG's military force – due to diplomatic problems and the resistance of several countries (mainly France) – took a long time. It was only decided at the London conference in September 1954 that the planned 12 divisions will be established within the framework of the NATO, under NATO command and without a separate general staff.¹⁶ According to the Paris Treaties signed on October 23 1954, in practice, the organisation of the armed forces started in 1955, when the first 101 volunteers of the Federal Defence Force (*Bundeswehr*) were inaugurated.¹⁷ In parallel, the GDR made its formerly existing military force official, and the National People's Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*) was established on January 18, 1956. The number of the German military forces increased in the following years according to the following table:

	FRG	GDR
1957	90.000 people	160.000 people ¹⁸
1960	270.000 people	exact data is not available
1965	455.000 people ¹⁹	240.000 people ²⁰

It was an important step in the history of rearmament that German armed forces, which were organised initially on a 'voluntary' basis, soon returned to the institution of enlistment: The FRG re-introduced mandatory military service on July 21, 1956, the GDR did so on January 24, 1962. Naturally, the strike force of military units cannot be measured solely by the number of people, and the comparison of the military budgets of the two armed forces integrated into different power blocks would also be misleading, however, the statistical figures are interesting. Based on these, it is clearly visible that the GDR maintained a larger armed force compared to the population and economic power, but despite this, the GDR could not become a great power based on its population, economic power or military capabilities. On the other hand, the military force of the Bundeswehr became significant in European comparison by the mid-1960s. As we will see, the Soviet propaganda cited this when it painted the picture of the reviving German militarism. For this reason, it is important to state that in fact the Bundeswehr cannot be considered a significant military force in the era of the

¹⁵ Karl-Volker NEUGEBAUER (Hg.): *Die Zeit nach 1945. Armeen im Wandel*. München, 2008, Oldenbourg. 38.

¹⁶ Detlef BALD: *Die Bundeswehr. Eine kritische Geschichte 1955-2005*. München, 2005, Beck. 41.

¹⁷ Guido KNOPP: *Dalams 1955. Das Jahr der Anerkennung*. Stuttgart, 1995, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. 165.

¹⁸ Karl-Volker NEUGEBAUER (Hg.): *Die Zeit nach 1945. Armeen im Wandel*. München, 2008, Oldenbourg. 74. This number comes from the staff of the following armed forces: National People's Army: 90,450 people; GDR Border Police: 34,635 people; Riot Police: 15,100 people; Ministry for State Security: 17,400 people. Furthermore, another 89,617 people served at the German People's Police.

¹⁹ Detlef BALD: *Die Bundeswehr. Eine kritische Geschichte 1955-2005*. München, 2005, Beck. 55.

Cold War in any aspect. The most important such aspect is that the military force of the FRG did not have autonomous military leadership, but it was completely under NATO command. Even if we accept the Soviet's argument that it only seemed this way, the total lack of nuclear weapons is visible. Though it is true that the FRG made steps to acquire nuclear weapons despite the fact that it gave up on possessing nuclear, biological or chemical weapons in the Paris Treaties, this did not happen and as a closing to this question, the FRG signed and ratified the 1968 Non Proliferation Treaty. The rearmament of the FRG within the framework of NATO meant an efficient arms control as well.²¹ The effective range of the FRG's military was rather small: though the Bundeswehr had military bases in several European states, its military capabilities and size retained fundamentally territory protecting character. In view of all these we can state that the existence of the Bundeswehr did not threaten the neighbouring states and especially not the Soviet Union despite what Moscow communicated. What the Nazi Germany, which dominated almost the whole of Europe, was unable to do in 1941 in its full strength, was impossible for the Federal Republic of Germany despite its development, against the Soviet Union, which became a superpower and built an arsenal of nuclear weapons and a strong defensive zone of client states. If this statement is true, we have to examine why the FRG appears in the Soviet propaganda and a great part of diplomatic sources as an aggressive, remilitarised, revansistic state which wishes to restore its former empire.

The background of the diplomatic attacks against the Federal Republic of Germany

The strengthening of the anti-FRG Soviet propaganda in the second half of the 1950s and in the 1960s can be traced back to several reasons. It is obvious that the strengthening of the FRG revived the worries of Soviet diplomacy, since traditional Russian and modern Soviet security policy always believed that a large land-based attack threatens the country from Europe. The bitter experiences of World War II only intensified these fears, and even the perspectives of a potential nuclear war obviously requiring other geo-strategic approach were unable to quench them. Soviet diplomacy reacted with special vigilance when it sensed the strengthening of the Germans, even if Moscow was aware of the fact that the Bundeswehr would never be able to reach even the borders of the Soviet Union.

It is also obvious that the Soviet-led power block, which defined itself as peace camp opposed the rearmament of the FRG based on ideological reasons as well. Not only because

²⁰ Estimated information, as reliable data is not available regarding all armed forces of the GDR this year.

²¹ Karl-Volker NEUGEBAUER (Hg.): *Die Zeit nach 1945. Armeen im Wandel*. München, 2008, Oldenbourg. 61.

the communist parties or the civil society organisations sponsored by them which operated in western countries kept organising peace demonstrations,²² but also because the social democratic parties of Western Europe, which were at this time mostly part of the opposition, were against the continuously increasing military spending and the operation of the strengthening military industry trusts. This was also true for the German social democracy as well, which Moscow considered leaning towards the right, but since it was a workers' party, Moscow wished to provide political support to their peace politics. Several diplomatic sources prove that workers' parties operating in the countries of the Warsaw Pact were primarily able to communicate efficiently with their western twin parties on the subjects of peace suggestions and the issues of disarmament.²³ With the traditional methods of lashing of the FRG, which was led by social democrats, and the conservative politics of Konrad Adenauer, Moscow was able to mix together everyone supporting the rearmament of the FRG from the alleged nazis to liberals.

We can be sure that the anti-FRG propaganda also served more complex political aims. The Kremlin employed excellent diplomats during the Cold War. We must not forget that the appearance of the 'German threat' and its artificial enlargement meant a very important opportunity for Moscow, when it was able to act as a protective power in the countries it occupied. The Hungarian revolution in 1956 or the events in Poland clearly proved to the Kremlin that in these countries, the temporary stationing of Soviet troops is rather a burden than joy for the majority of the society. However, Moscow realized that if they manage to frighten the Polish and the Czechoslovakian political elite and public opinion with the alleged or realistic German revansistic politics, they will consider the protection offered by the Soviet Union necessary, furthermore they will more likely to accept their political subordination, since – if they believe the propaganda – they are still more afraid of the Germans potentially threatening them than the Soviets.²⁴ It is not surprising that one of the most important elements of the anti-FRG Soviet propaganda was the attack on the foreign policy of the FRG questioning the Odera-Neisse border. Though the Federal Foreign Office

²² National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j Lengyelország-98t-002288/1958 Embassy secretary Gyula NÉMETH recorded the memo of the II. Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs analysing the Rapacki plan, who emphasized that the Polish suggestion 1. successfully confused western governments before the following NATO session in Paris, 2. provided a specific aim for the international peace movement, 3. may be the basis of international negotiations, but at the same time he emphasized that it is dangerous for the Polish society as it may further foster the „Worship of the West”.

²³ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j Nagy-Britannia-99-011321-1954 (17d) Hungarian Ambassador Károly SZIGETI's highly confidential report dated November 23, 1954 reports on the reactions of the British Labour Party regarding the Treaties of Paris.

²⁴ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Neue Akten Referat IIA7 B14 Band 830 "White Book" of the Federal Foreign Office, closed on March 20, 1964.

declared a dozen times that Bonn does not want to violently change the borders, which will be finally set by the German peace treaty, the propaganda machine operating in the Soviet and client states always questioned the sincerity and authenticity of these statements.

Beside the above, the continuous attack of the rearmament of the FRG offered another very important diplomatic result for the Soviet Union: Moscow believed that the issue of the German rearmament may be the weak point of the NATO, along which the states of the military alliance are divided. Naturally this Soviet assumption was well-founded: while in harmony with the logic of the Cold War, the USA fully stood by the rearmament of the FRG, the neighbouring countries which lived through German occupation were much less enthusiastic about this. This was true even if the smaller states (Denmark, Belgium and Holland) did not oppose the American plans on governmental level. In the case of France – partly due to its frequent change of direction regarding internal affairs – the picture is more complex: the Pleven plan calling the European Defence Community into existence, though formulated different aims, delayed the rearmament of the FRG by years (1950-1954) in practice. After this, a German-French-Italian armament cooperation started (1957-1958), which manifested in joint rocket technological researches and joint nuclear armament programmes.²⁵ This cooperation stopped at the beginning of the presidential mandate of Charles de Gaulle. After 1958, the president, who dreamt of the French great power, was an ally and at the same time the guard of the development and armament of the FRG.²⁶ This is especially true in the area of nuclear armament: the former cooperation was replaced by the French policy of preventing the Bundeswehr from getting nuclear weapons.²⁷

>From the point of view of Moscow and the capitals of the client states this situation provided an excellent opportunity for loosening the ties of the western alliance system. It is not surprising that the rearmament of the FRG triggered continuous attacks by the states of the Warsaw Pact in the turn of the 1950s and 1960s and the situation remained the practically same until the end of the 1960s when the signing of the Non Proliferation Treaty by the FRG and formation of Willy Brandt's SPD government and the announcement of the new eastern policy inclined the opposing parties to sit at the negotiating table. Due to the preparations of the Helsinki meeting, which was very important for Moscow, they transitionally gave up on the formerly employed propaganda methods.

²⁵ Detlef BALD: *Die Bundeswehr. Eine kritische Geschichte 1955-2005*. München, 2005, Beck. 56–57.

²⁶ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (Archiv der Republik 01 POL-II) BRD/482. 1958/55235. The highly confidential report of ROTTER, the Ambassador of Paris to Austria dated July 19, 1958.

²⁷ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j USA-98t-005416/1962. (21. d.) The highly confidential report of the Hungarian Ambassador's deputy to Washington dated May 30, 1962.

Methods of the anti-FRG propaganda campaign

In the beginning, the Soviet attack aimed at the establishment of the Bundeswehr in general, however, this was only successful among Soviet client states; in the Cold War environment, the states of Western Europe accepted the controlled establishment of the military force of the FRG. When Moscow realised that it is unable to stop the rearmament of the FRG in general, it changed tactics and focused on nuclear armament, which caused worries in western societies and was the topic of public discourse anyway. When on January 28, 1956, the Warsaw Treaty's Political Consultative Committee decided that the military force of the two German states and their allies should be restricted and that the two German states must not possess nuclear weapons was primarily against the rearmament of the FRG.²⁸

The Rapacki plan aiming to prevent the nuclear armament of the FRG by urging the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone in Central Europe, which was announced in 1957 and which was on the agenda until 1968 proved to be especially efficient.²⁹ According to this Polish idea, the zone would have included the territory of the FRG, GDR, Czechoslovakia and Poland, and it would have contributed to the decreasing of the military tension in Europe. Though the FRG and the NATO officially rejected the Rapacki plan, western public opinion welcomed it, and left-wing parties in several countries (FRG, United Kingdom), which were usually in opposition assured Poland of their support. In the following years, the diplomacy of the member states of the Warsaw Pact mobilised all possible force to win one of the smaller NATO member states which was scared of German nuclear armament for the cause. Thus they primarily focused on Denmark, Norway and the Benelux states,³⁰ but they also tried with neutral countries like Austria and Sweden. The issue of preventing the

²⁸ Ernst LABOOR: *Der Rapacki-Plan. Realistische Friedensidee oder Kampfplan gegen Bonn? Die Sicht Warschaus, Moskaus und Berlins. Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte*, Nr. 11. 12.

²⁹ MARUZSA Zoltán: *Denuclearization in Central Europe? The Rapacki Plan during the Cold War*. In: MAJOROS ISTVÁN (szerk.): *Őt kontinens*. Budapest, 2008, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem. 226–239.

³⁰ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j Lengyelország-98t-005500/1960 On July 20, 1960, the Hungarian Ambassador to Warsaw reported on the register published the previous day by the Polish parliament, in which every NATO member state's attention was drawn to the dangers of the reviving nationalism and revansism of the rearming FRG. The Polish register emphasized that Bonn does not recognize the Odera-Neisse border, which means a military threat for Europe. Foreign Minister RAPACKI mentioned this issue regularly during his personal visits as well, for example during his trip to Denmark. The Hungarian Ambassador reports on this in a highly confidential report dated June 24, 1960, which can be found at National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j Lengyelország-48t-004943.

FRG from acquiring nuclear weapons was suitable for deepening the conflicts of interests within the NATO.³¹

The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also active in the propaganda campaign against the rearmament of the FRG. Secretary Sándor Kurtán of the II. political division, which was responsible for this area, prepared several analyses and suggestions, among others, a highly confidential memo on March 31, 1958³²: *“The West-German Bundestag – despite the will of the absolute majority of the population – approved the government proposal on the nuclear and rocket armament of the West-German army on March 25.³³ With this, the NATO member West-German army’s threat potential increased substantially. Considering the fact that this measure primarily threatens people’s democracies and that demonstrations started in several countries, we should also make steps. ... The Hungarian media should deal more with the threat of West-German imperialism and militarism – primarily especially regarding the Hungarian aspect /destruction of the world wars, the role of fascism and its successors in today’s West-Germany, the West-German participation in the Hungarian counter-revolution, support of the Hungarian fascist emigration./...”*

We can also find a number of even more conspirative documents, which cared not for reality: On May 26, 1958, in his highly confidential memo³⁴ Kurtán stated: *“Further steps should be taken for the general fight against the West-German imperialism, to fight specific attacks and in order to intensify conflict among NATO member states. We would be able to cause inconvenience to West-German and American governmental circles by publishing news based on ‘own information’ in the Hungarian media. [...] it would be advisable [...] to publish the following statement through the media as news, or as the ‘own information’ of the newspaper or newspapers: “Based on information from French NATO leaders, American and*

³¹ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j USA-100t-005416/1962 The highly confidential report of Ambassador’s deputy to Washington János RADVÁNYI dated May 30, 1962 gives a detailed account of the opposition between the western allies. The essence of the French-American opposition is that the USA partially shares its nuclear secrets with the United Kingdom, but not with France. For this reason DE GAULLE aimed at establishing its separate nuclear strike force and prevented the inclusion of London into the European integration process. Thus the FRG is in a sensitive situation, since it wanted to become the number one ally of both the USA and France. At the same time, the good French-German relationship secured the back of Adenauer while conducting a determined eastern policy. At the same time, Bonn itself also resented Washington since Kennedy wanted to negotiate with Moscow about Berlin and the German issue. Under these circumstances, Bonn’s mediator role became appreciated, which was against the interest of Poland. The appearance of the Rapacki plan aiming at blocking German nuclear armament made French-German cooperation more difficult and deepened the opposition among western allies.

³² National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j NSZK-100t-SZU-1958

³³ The approved resolution was not about this, but about the Bundeswehr being able to use instruments that may facilitate the employment of NATO nuclear weapons if necessary.

³⁴ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j NSZK-100t-SZU-1958

West-German military leaders conducted secret negotiations, according to which weak and unsteady NATO member states must be occupied in case of a war. According to the preliminary plans, the task of the Federal Republic of Germany is to occupy Denmark, Norway and a part of France. The two Scandinavian countries invoked doubt among NATO leaders by rejecting the stationing of nuclear and rocket weaponry. Americans favour West-German occupation, because West-German military leaders have experience in occupying these countries. Americans would secure South France, Italy and Greece. They tried to keep the plan a secret from American and French NATO leaders as well in order to prevent the increase of the already existing jealousy towards the continuously strengthening West-German partner. ...” This news should be printed in capitals and bold text without comments. Maybe in the following days a commentary should be published in which attention could be drawn to the danger that a West-German military armed with nuclear weapons poses not only against socialist countries but against small western European nations as well.”

Though this specific ‘news’ was not published, upon its publication, not much imagination is needed for how things would have continued: the ‘news’ is reviewed following its publication by the diplomatic agencies in Hungary, they send their reports home and soon all the responsible officers of all mentioned countries can read it. Communist newspapers and probably other media sources Europe-wide also receive the ‘news’ and the political scandal and dispute is ready, within which one party accuses and the other denies. Based on this one quotation, the political atmosphere can be imagined in this period of the Cold War, when each day several countries published similar disinformation, naturally on both sides of the Iron Curtain. It is not surprising that upon seeing such news, the old reflexes soon revived in Danish, Norwegian and French people and though the FRG denied the news, it only looked like a cover-up. As Kurtán mentioned regarding the same topic at the end of his May 29 memo: *“We believe that with this news, we would be able to respond well..., at the same time it would contribute to the increase of opposition against the West-Germans however they deny it.”*³⁵

The attacks on the Bundeswehr were especially important, because these were aimed at flag officers who were officers of the Wehrmacht in World War II. The aim of these attacks was clearly the emphasizing of the continuity between the nazi military and the armed forces of the FRG. As the ‘White Book’ issued by the Bundeswehr in 1964 in defence of general Heinrich Trettner emphasizes, the aim of the attacks is: *“to destroy the authority of the FRG*

³⁵ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j NSZK-100t-SZU-1958

among its allies, to strengthen the distrust of developing countries and to feed the hatred towards “German imperialism” in the Soviet client states [...] Upon the success of this propaganda, the FRG becomes isolated in international politics and becomes excluded from the NATO alliance system.”³⁶ Attacks on general Adolf Heusinger were especially severe.³⁷ Even a “documentary” full of serious distortions was filmed about his activities in the Soviet Union, but a dozen of other German flag officers were attacked. The basis of these attacks was that the majority of the officers of the Bunderwehr – 79% according to an internal survey – served in World War II, but this is not surprising, since this was true for millions of men; and it is also obvious that the work of military experts who were not compromised politically was necessary. As we saw, the organisation of the military force of the GDR was similar, though in a cynical way, the former Wehrmacht officers were removed before the propaganda campaign, but still at least 20% of the officers of the National People’s Army served as officers in the Wehrmacht.³⁸

The already mentioned “White Book” summarizes the channels of the Soviet propaganda in the following way: “1. The official, diplomatic government statements of the Soviet Union or other communist states, letters of presidents, diplomatic registers, official statements of communist diplomats, or those seeming official, publications of official news agencies (The Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union was authorised to state that...), publications or conferences of diplomatic bodies. 2. Agitation activities of the communist parties according to the orders of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union based on the geographical and historical situation. 3. Publications of “scientific” institutions, which prepare materials, edit, publish and interpret them, fake documents if necessary and publish them. 4. Through international charity organisations led by communists, like the World Council of Peace, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the International Association of Resistance [...] 5. Through communist regional or national cover organisations which work with different events, publications and press conferences. 6. Communist news agencies, radio stations, daily newspapers, weekly magazines, publications of editorials, reports, narratives of “eyewitnesses”, pictures, caricatures. 7. Publication of paid advertisements (usually with pictures) in foreign newspapers. 8. Statements of the

³⁶ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Neue Akten Referat IIA7 B14 Band 830 “White Book” of the Federal Foreign Office, closed on March 20, 1964.

³⁷ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Neue Akten, Referat IIA7 B14 Band 830 Report of the FRG’s Ambassador to Moscow dated January 12, 1962.

³⁸ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Neue Akten, Referat II7 B-14-301 Band 186 The document numbered 301-81-02-0/968/59 dated June 10, 1959 (found in reference 301 of section 3 of the Federal Foreign Office) contains the statistical data on the past of the two armed forces.

representatives of communist states at the UN or on the forums of national parliaments. 9. Distribution of Soviet propaganda materials on the occasion of the organisation of exhibitions. [...] This form of combined propaganda is cunning and primitive at the same time. Its relative success lies in the fact that it is not or hardly recognizable in the free western world."³⁹

The reaction of the FRG

At first, Bonn simply confuted these Soviet propaganda methods, and did not take them seriously enough and neither did its allies. The Cold War was a propaganda war to a great extent on both sides, during which both sides used similar methods. However, when the economic power of the FRG increased continuously and the staff of the Bundeswehr was filled by the early 1960s, the Soviet propaganda fell on more and more fertile soil. Though the Soviets were unable to disintegrate the western alliance system with these methods, the Federal Foreign Office of the FRG proved to be defenceless against the attacks: the diplomatic registers and statements emphasizing the peaceful intentions of the FRG and its democratic structure were swept away by heated Soviet confutations, and Bonn had to face with the fact that the more they deny, the more the topic appears in eastern and western media, which is enough to revive the old fears in itself. This is especially true regarding the issue of nuclear armament. Though this was a real ambition, due to the resistance of the allies, by the 1960s it was restricted to German participation in the Multilateral Nuclear Forces, which was supported by the United States.⁴⁰ Despite this, the Soviet propaganda continuously flooded the Foreign Ministries of NATO member states and neutral European states with registers emphasizing the threat of the nuclear armament of the FRG, and we have to realise that was not completely ineffective. It is not surprising that relationship between Paris and Bonn, which could be considered friendly before, had to be settled in a treaty at this time

³⁹ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Neue Akten, Referat IIA7 B14 Band 830 "White Book" of the Federal Foreign Office, closed on March 20, 1964.

⁴⁰ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j USA-100t-001017/1963 The highly confidential report of Ambassador's deputy to Washington János RADVÁNYI dated January 16, 1963 analyses the American-British Nassau treaty which was signed at the Bahamas, based on which London purchased Polaris rockets and other technology usable for nuclear weapons, which were put under NATO command. In practice, this marked the start of the establishment of the joint NATO nuclear force, which appears under the name of multilateral nuclear force in the majority of the sources. The essence of the American proposal was that the NATO should possess an independent nuclear force under its command which is financed by the payments of the member states. Partly Washington used this plan to dissuade France from having an independent nuclear weapon programme, and partly wanted to give nuclear weapons to the FRG while keeping them under NATO (American) command. The project was the source of internal NATO disputes later as well.

(1963) and the deepening of this relationship was also attempted.⁴¹ If we consider the fact that, despite this, de Gaulle opened towards the Soviet Union, conducted a separate nuclear programme and left the military organisation of the NATO among other things due to disputes on nuclear armament, the French interest behind the French measures becomes clear, which happened to be partially identical to the aims of the Soviet propaganda.⁴² Under these circumstances, the FRG had to change the rigid eastern politics of the Adenauer era. The government of Erhardt and mainly that of Kiesinger started to loosen this,⁴³ an important element of which would have been the offering of certain allowances to Moscow and its client states: for example the launch of the politics of non violence,⁴⁴ starting diplomatic relations (except with the GDR), the recognition of the Odera-Neisse border and the repealing of the 1938 Munich Treaty. The ratification of the Non Proliferation Treaty by Bonn and thus even giving up the possibility of nuclear armament within the framework of NATO was an important step on this way. This process started in the mid-1960s and it was closed by making this new eastern policy of the FRG a government policy during the chancellorship of Willy Brandt. The demand for decreasing the Soviet pressure on the government of the FRG was an important factor, among other considerations as well, behind the evolution of the new eastern policy.

Summary

If we approach the history of the FRG after World War II from the aspect of becoming a great power and “imperialism”, we clearly reach the conclusion that though the FRG of the 1950s and 1960s was an economic great power, but it remained a political dwarf on global level. Despite the huge economic growth, capabilities that are characteristics of great powers are clearly missing under the Cold War circumstances.

Furthermore, the rearmed FRG was still under Soviet propaganda attack for years, which was occasionally capable of disturbing its relations with its allies, even if it was unable to stop the rearmament. There is only one – though very important – area, where due to several unfavourable circumstances, the FRG was unable to achieve a decisive result: the

⁴¹ National Archives of Hungary (MOL) XIX-J-1-j NSZK-46t-SZU-1963. The March 29, 1963, highly confidential document of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs titled “The evaluation of the West-German-French treaty signed on January 22, 1963” records the reasons of the German-French opposition, the intention of the FRG to solve these issues and the mutual fear of the isolation of both of the states.

⁴² Henry KISSINGER: *Diplomácia*. Budapest, 1996, Panem-Grafo. 612.

⁴³ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (Archiv der Republik 01 POL-II) BRD/1142 18860/1967. Unclassified report of Wolte, Bonn’s Ambassador to Austria dated March 29, 1967.

development of own nuclear weapons. After the events, we cannot be sure whether this can be considered the success of Soviet propaganda, but it is clear that independent German nuclear armament would have had a much better chance without the objection of Moscow. Thus we can state that though regarding the numbers the Bundeswehr, which was established in this era, was one of the strongest military forces in Western Europe, without the nuclear weapons and military fleet that were essential in this age, it was suitable for protecting territory at most; and possibly even unsuitable for that against the military force of the Warsaw Pact.

Regarding its international political positions, the FRG – though established its own diplomatic service and employed significant resources to win the sympathy of the third world – did not possess diplomatic positions that would have clearly justified its great power status. For example, the FRG getting a position in the United Nations Security Council did not even come up during the Cold War. On the contrary, the dividedness of Germany was constantly a source of conflict, and due to the lack of this internal stability in the broader sense, the foreign politics of the FRG was continuously on the defensive, the majority of its activities were tied up by the international tension around the German issue.

I believe that one of the characteristics of a “great power” or “empire” is the existence of such elements in the political culture. In my opinion this is what differentiated the leaders of the FRG, and in a broader sense the political elite, after World War II from the German elite of the former century that it lacked imperial ambitions. This generation thought that Germany had paid a high price for undertaking such imperial claims when it was defeated in both world wars. This FRG was aware of its relative weakness between the two superpowers and did not even attempt to question the peace treaty system following World War II. As we saw, the majority of opposing opinions can be traced back to the efficient work of the Soviet propaganda machine.

⁴⁴ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (Archiv der Republik 01 POL-II) BRD/1030 34642/1966.