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Aspects of Inner-Korean relations examined from a German viewpoint

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Sven HORAK

Aspects of Inner-Korean Relations Examined from a German Viewpoint



Title:

Aspects of Inner-Korean Relations Examined from a German Viewpoint

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Sven Horak, M.Sc., is a Research Associate at the Institute of East Asian Studies of the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany. He conducted research projects and field assignments in South Korea, India and Japan and holds a BA honors and Master's degree in business administration from Universities in Germany and the U.K.

As a German native he finds it especially interesting to take a view on the unification process from a German point of view and believes that the German pre- and post unification experience can be of value to Korea.

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Abstract:

This paper series takes a look at several aspects of inner-Korean relations, primarily in the area of international relations and economic cooperation, from a German viewpoint. In fact, the complexity of the respective subjects touched in this frame would require a deeper and more comprehensive analysis than developed here. The underlying idea is to stimulate further thought in several areas of pre- and post unification aspects by deriving inspiration from Germany's historical experience. The pre-unification phase and, specifically, the post-unification experience in Germany are of value to both Koreas. Further joint research is recommended on historical and contemporary aspects of German reunification that is relevant and suitable to Korea.

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Editorial

This series of papers was prepared on behalf of the Ministry of Unification (MOU) of the Republic of Korea, which was established in 1969 in order to develop a reunification policy and to support various aspects of the inner-Korean dialogue. The assignment aimed at informing the international community on inner-Korean relations, thereby contributing to the decision making process of the Ministry. Due to similarities in the German history and the situation in Korea today as a divided country, the author focused the direction of research particularly into this area.

The first paper outlines the special relationship between Korea and Germany which celebrated 125 years of official relations in 2009. Instead of being a proactive mediator on the way to a Korean reunification, Germany's role can be best described as an "honest counselor".

Denuclearization of North Korea is an issue which seems to go in circles against the background of the six-party talks. Dr. Köllner, Acting Director of the leading German Think Tank GIGA Institute of Asian Affairs, sheds light on North Korea's aims and resulting negotiation behavior in the second paper.

The third paper features an interview with Dr. Seliger, Representative Director of the Hanns Seidel Foundation based in Seoul, and honorary citizen of the City of Seoul since 2006. Dr. Seliger shares his thoughts about the status of the "sunshine policy", which has prevailed for quite a long time and has guided the political direction of the South Korean reunification policy for years and the crisis of 2008/2009.

Does Christianity contain political power? For several years now, North Korea leads the Christian persecution index worldwide. The fact that Pyongyang was once called "Jerusalem of the East", due to its huge Christian population, seems to be forgotten by many meanwhile. Churches in East Germany played a crucial role during the reunification process in Germany. Does Christianity have the potential to trigger a similar development in North Korea? This is the leading question examined in the fourth paper.

The fifth and the sixth papers analyze the relationship between the former German Democratic Republic and North Korea. Both have not been ideological brothers at all times, as one might assume. The relationship has developed from ideologically close to distant, affected, to some extent, by the respective relationships to the Soviet Union and China.

Armin Herdegen is a lecturer of the German Academic Exchange Service based in Pyongyang. For this reason, he is one of the very few foreigners who are allowed to live and work in North Korea. In the seventh paper, he talks about his experiences in the country, which is considered the most hermetically closed one in the world.

The eighth and ninth papers put their focus on institutional requirements in Germany during the transition and post-unification phase. Dr. Kaminsky, Managing Director of the Federal Foundation for the Reconciliation of the SED¹ Dictatorship, alludes to the important role of the Federal Foundation in its mission to assess the history of the socialist regime of the German Democratic Republic in relation to its impact on newly reunified Germany.

Prof. Dr. Gehrman has been consultant to the German Trust Institution between 1991 and 1996. He was one of the first West Germans entering the German Democratic Republic right after unification in order to transform East German peoples' enterprises into profitable market-driven companies. He talks about his personal experiences and impressions during this time in the ninth paper.

Discourse on political system transformation deals, to a great extent, with political and economic theories. The personal experiences of individuals' lives under a socialist regime fall too often behind. Renate Hong from Jena in Germany married an exchange student from North Korea. Due to political friction between both countries, the family was separated for 47 years, until her story became public and the North Korean government allowed a reunion. The experience of the Hong family portrayed in the tenth

1 German: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), English: Socialist Unity Party of Germany.

paper is not unique. The massive media attention it received in Germany, as well as in Korea, gives hope to other families in similar circumstances, that light will be shed on their family history as well.

By the end of the 1990s, against the background of the famine which took millions of North Korean lives, the question arises why North Korea does not introduce economic reforms in order to be able to secure at least the food supply of the population. In fact, North Korea tried several reforms but could not achieve any success so far. Dr. Hilpert of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), a leading German think tank based in Berlin, talks, in the eleventh paper, about factors of influence on economic reform attempts in North Korea.

Closely connected to the prior paper's subject is the question of why such a misanthropic system does not simply collapse. Even though this kind of analysis could fill books, the twelfth paper outlines, though very briefly, the obvious major factors which act as glue to keep the system alive. The author thanks an anonymous expert for his advice.

Against the background of stagnating six-party talks and political efforts permanently running into dead end streets, standard diplomatic procedures seem to face difficulties to deliver results. An alternative approach would include supporting a foremost non-political initiative in order to reach the majority of the population, hence triggering friendship, trust and cooperation in the long run. The use of cultural diplomacy by means of sporting events is suggested in the last paper.

In order to advance research on the subject of inner-Korean relations in connection to the German experience, selected papers of this series were further developed and published in academic journals such as the North Korean Review (NKR), Eurasisches Magazin and the Journal of Religious Culture. Some other papers are currently under review.

Acknowledgement

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Paper 1 March 22, 2009

The Korean-German relations and Germany's special role in the Korean reunification process

2009 is a year of exceptional significance for Korea and Germany. This year, both countries celebrate their official relations which have lasted for 125 years.

Officially starting on November 29th, 1883 with a mutual contract on friendship, trade and shipment, the Korean and German relations have developed and have deepened continuously. Today, Korea is Germany's major trading partner in Asia and Germany is Korea's most important partner in Europe, with a trading volume of more than USD 25 Billion (2007) and accounting for almost a third of the entire trade volume between Korea and the European Union. The traded goods of both countries are on a high technological level. Both countries are important investors and employers in the respective partner country.

Complexity of relationships

Especially after World War II, Germany intensified its relations with the Republic of Korea, whereby the relationship between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) developed in parallel. Those days, the two divided countries had to manage their official and unofficial relationships alongside – an experience just a few countries in the world undergo. For the DPRK, the most important partner within the Eastern bloc was the GDR, with which it developed official relations in 1949.

After the reunification, Germany and the DPRK established official relations in 2001. According to the mutual agreement, the diplomatic relations included the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, progress in the inner-Korean dialogue and the improvement of the human rights situation in the DPRK. At present, the political dialogue focuses in particular on the North Korean nuclear weapons program and the weak progress of human rights issues in the North. German humanitarian assistance over the last years, which includes financial support and efforts from official and private German humanitarian organizations aiming to improve insufficient food supply of the North Korean population, has played an important role in the bilateral relations.

From a German point of view, it is quite impressive to find so many people in the DPRK who speak German. These skills were acquired during advanced trainings which were received in the GDR. Today, these professionals can be found in state enterprises, among parliament members or in public administration. This is also a heritage of the relations between Germany and Korea.

In the history of the partnership, both countries experienced enrichment in both ways. German merchants, diplomats, the Benedictine order, and people from the cultural sector entered Korea early, as did Korean miners and nurses in Germany playing a crucial and enriching role. Since Germany has been reunified for more than a decade, it is of interest for Korea to see what its partner and friend in Europe for 125 years now has experienced on the way to a German reunification.

“Ostpolitik” and the CSCE

Two items shall be stressed here that contributed in Germany to changes during the cold war. It is the “Ostpolitik” of Willy Brandt, including the important features of rapprochement and integration.

Egon Bahr, who served from 1969 to 1972 under Willy Brandt as Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, can be regarded as being the creator of the German “Ostpolitik”. In 1963, he presented the concept of “change through rapprochement”. Therewith, he recommended giving up the policy of power-politics. According to his understanding, formal agreements and condition-based politics were no longer suitable tools to enable a German unification. A change can be brought about by extending the frame of communication to a European level that also includes the Soviet Union, in order to weaken the existential fear of the GDR. Following the ideas of Egon Bahr, other German politicians caught up on this approach of understanding that a German unification can only be realized in the frame of a general Euro-

pean peace framework. Treaties on renunciation from military force followed with the Soviet Union and other East European states. In 1968, the GDR was officially approached and included in the talks in this context. These new developments on the political stage were recognized by the German public and generated a new attitude towards the relationship with the East German neighbors. The point of view became increasingly pragmatic.

Consequently, due to several separate treaties between the European states, the desire for a closer cooperation within Europe emerged.

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) served as a forum for multilateral talks starting in 1973. It was the first conference in which the world's largest inter-governmental organization, in terms of security orientation, finally emerged: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In 1975, the Helsinki declaration was signed by the participating states, concluding a closer cooperation in the area of economic questions, science, environment, humanitarian affairs and security. Initially, the Helsinki declaration was regarded as being the most beneficial for the Eastern bloc states, since therewith their borders were officially approved and further economic activity with the West was expected. In addition to this, each state committed not to interfere in the other states' internal affairs. Nonetheless, the declaration also included commitments on human rights, on which especially the Eastern bloc states made concessions. Hence, the domestic civic rights movement could legally refer to the agreements of the Helsinki declaration.

The CSCE, the six-party talks and the role of Germany

The six-party talks, including Russia, USA, Japan, China, South Korea and North Korea, were introduced when concerns on security in North Eastern Asia arose due to the North Korean nuclear weapons program in 2003. The latest status of the talks indicates that China is possibly willing to disconnect the talks from the nuclear weapons issue and to develop the six-party talks into a permanent multilateral dialogue. Here, a parallel can be found between the development of the CSCE process and the six-party talks. In September 2008, MP Hartmut Koschyk reports in an interview with n-tv that "*The Chinese are open-minded towards such thoughts and study the Helsinki process closely*". Germany's role can be defined as being an "*honest counselor*", rather than a mediator. What does the term *honest counselor* imply? Germany has experiences with the East-West confrontation and with how to overcome it by means of confidence-building measurements, such as the CSCE process. Taking the role of Korea's *honest counselor* can be regarded as fulfilling an historic duty to share these experiences and contribute to a reunification on the Korean peninsula in the background of 125 years of official relationship.

Conclusion

This essay outlines the special relationship between the former two Germanys and the two parts of Korea in the background of their official 125 years lasting relationship. It argues that Germany's experiences with its own reunification can be of inspiring value in the process of reunification in Korea. Germany pursued the way of the so-called "Ostpolitik" under Willy Brandt, including the main features of rapprochement and integration, which turned out to be successful in the end. Egon Bahr, the creator of the "Ostpolitik", understood the zeitgeist of the late sixties and early seventies well, which enabled him to pursue new political ways. However, there is no standard formula for implementing a successful reunification which is suitable for all countries. Korea needs to find its individual approach in order to achieve a successful reunification, since historical developments, economic standards, population ratio, inner-political affairs, geopolitical aspects and several other items are quite different in Korea, these days, in comparison to Germany in the eighties. A one-to-one takeover of the German model of reunification is difficult to imagine and surely not recommendable. However, there are several aspects that might be quite inspiring for Korea; for example, the impact of the CSCE, which caused a major impulse towards reunification; or the growing cooperation with other countries in the region in a wide range of common challenges, among others, issues of trade and human rights.

Due to the differences mentioned above, Germany is not in the position to support Korea in the role of an active mediator. Due to the experiences made before, and after, the German reunification, regardless

of whether they were good or bad, Germany can be a valuable partner for Korea, acting rather as an *honest counselor* instead of a proactive mediator on the way to a Korean reunification.

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Paper 2 April 26, 2009

Evaluation of the six-party talks and the German experience

An interview with Dr. Patrick Köllner, Acting Director of the GIGA Institute of Asian Studies

Dr. Köllner is an acknowledged German expert on East Asian Affairs and Acting Director of the leading German Think Tank GIGA Institute of Asian Affairs located in Hamburg. Among others, he is teaching at the Universities of Trier and Duisburg-Essen on North and South Korean political systems and economies. He is a board member of the European Alliance for Asian Studies, a member of the scientific advisory council (Japan/Korea) of the German Association for Asian Studies, and an active member of international scientific networks, including the German-Korean Forum, the British Association of Korean Studies and the American Political Science Association. Dr. Köllner has published numerous scientific books and articles on East Asian Affairs.

The assumption that North Korea will in no way denuclearize is not utopian. The, thereby, bargaining position won is being used by North Korea in order to get foreign help. As a result, North Korea receives whatever it needs to survive: foreign help and, in addition to that, possibly self-made nuclear weapons. How do you judge this situation concerning the six-party talks? Is North Korea going to be the only winner in the end?

No, I do not think so. In my opinion, the six-party talks aim at making an essential contribution on the path to a denuclearization of North Korea. Certainly, this is a very difficult process, and in its course there will be obstacles in the way which will have to be removed every now and then. It is also a process that is hallmarked by persistent setbacks and following progress. Pivotal to me is the point that the six-party dialogue seems to be the only possible way to tie North Korea – even in the concert of the involved powers – into substantial responsibilities.

Would you generally denote the six-party talks as being a success or a failure? How do you rate the future of the six-party talks in view of a development to a multilateral forum, following the example of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)?

I think that the six-party talks indeed have provided important impulses, especially after the unfortunate ending of the agreement between the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) and North Korea, which dealt with the denuclearization but, above all, was about the plutonium weapon-based program. After this dialogue was over, the six-party talks helped to fill the vacuum and contributed to return to the status quo, to resume the discussion and, thus, to carefully regain control over the plutonium-based atomic program of North Korea.

Nonetheless, it is not an absolute success since the denuclearization of North Korea could not be accomplished. Especially in the domain of verification, there are unsettled questions; anyway, the fact that a process could have been started and the fact that it was possible to bring the program under international control by which first progress was achieved, is a crucial success of the six-party talks. One should take care not to impose absolute standards to the success of the six-party talks. Generally spoken, this is a process that is valued by being a process per se in order to continuously bring all the relevant agents together as well as to achieve a coordinate proceeding as good as possible. As a matter of fact, I perceive the six-party talks as very expedient.

One can also relate to a number of achievements. Nonetheless, we have not succeeded yet. Hopefully, North Korea changes its mind and resumes the six-party talks, since the purely bilateral conversational channels, which could work as an alternative, would only be a suboptimal solution. Whether the six-party talks can develop into something like the CSCE for Asia must be awaited. Personally, I am very sceptical concerning this because the framework conditions that contributed to the emergence of the CSCE historically and institutionally are not present in the Northeast Asian context. The CSCE process was dependent on a number of preconditions which, in my opinion, are not given in Asia.

In December 2008, North Korea aborted the dialogue with the South and threatened the South with a military strike. Talks with Korean, as well as foreign economy representatives, often made clear that the North Korean aggressive rhetoric is not taken seriously at all. Are the threats of war on the part of North Korea really of no relevance? Why is this behaviour not ignored on the political stage as well?

North Korea's persistent threatening gestures are not meaningless but all agents involved are not interested in playing these respective comments up and, thereby, playing into North Korea's hands. However, there has been deterioration in perception taking place concerning the use of threatening gestures and provocative vocabulary. People involved just got used to it, meanwhile. Of course, one is aware of the actual danger that is coming from North Korea in the form of, for instance, the powerful number of the military by headcount, above all their artillery. Therefore, one cannot be casual about the menace coming from North Korea. On the contrary, one must take care not to react with doing useless things for the sake of just doing something in order to react to the verbal threats, and, thus, playing into North Korea's hands.

Both Germany and Korea share the experience of being separated. Meanwhile, the Republic of Germany is reunified, Korea is not. MdB (Member of Bundestag) Koschyk sees Germany rather in the role of the "honest counselor" than in taking the part of a mediator on Korea's path to a reunification. What can Germany contribute to the Korean process of reunification? Which part can it take?

Germany is not in the position of taking the part of a negotiator between the two Koreas. But Germany can support Korea in many respects. For instance, it can use its contacts in North Korea, as limited as they may be, in order to create communication channels, by which the North could be provided with information on global politics and global economics. This can advance a realistic understanding of actual developments, as well as their realistic interpretation. Surely, South Korea can draw lessons from the German reunification process in many sectors. For example, concerning questions which deal with the land reform or regarding the restitution of ownership structures. Moreover, questions relating to the reintegration of the North Korean army into a complete army. Hence, they can do so with a number of technical questions.

Furthermore, the negative lessons Germany drew from the process of reunification can also be interesting for Korea. Here, a concise example is the question of the monetary reform, the undertaking of the currency reform after the reunification. Insofar as there are plenty of relevant examples. Of course, the German reunification cannot serve as a blueprint for the Korean reunification. For that, the political, economic, social and psychological conditions in both cases are much too different. Not only the economic, but also the psychological, slope between both parts of Korea is considerably larger and goes more downhill than that between the BRD and the former GDR. Another difference is that Germany already had a sophisticated net of social security when the reunification took place, which also contributed to the fact that far too tremendous waves of migration from the East of Germany did not occur. Such a system of similar dimensions is also missing in South Korea. These are only several examples which, nonetheless, indicate that the framework conditions are pretty different. One must always be aware of that and than take a look at the fields and domains where the German case provides illustrative material how to proceed in case of a reunification or how not to proceed.

Dr. Köllner, thank you for this interview.

Paper 3 May 29, 2009

The policy of détente and economic cooperation with North Korea An interview with Dr. Bernhard Seliger, Representative Director of the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Seoul

Dr. Seliger graduated at the University of Kiel in Germany in economics, from where he holds a PhD. His thesis won the Wolfgang Ritter Prize for extraordinary achievements in economics. He is author and editor of numerous academic publications and gives lectures at Korean and German Universities. He is one of the few distinguished German experts on inner-Korean relations. Since 2002, Dr. Seliger is Representative Director of the Hanns Seidel Foundation based in Seoul. In 2006, Dr. Seliger became an honorary citizen of the City of Seoul, awarded by the, then presiding, mayor of the town, President Lee Myung-bak.

The former Presidents Kim and Roh followed the concept of the so-called “sunshine policy”, developed by President Kim. Can the sunshine policy be regarded as over now?

As a buzzword, definitely, yes. Initially, when joining office, President Lee Myung-bak did just the opposite compared to President Roh, in order to distinguish them from each other. One can say that his election is the result of the people’s decision in relation to his idea on how to approach the North in the future, too. However, I believe the differences in the policy towards the North are not that drastic as one might assume. The huge contributions rendered by South Korea in the past 10 years will, most likely, not occur in anymore. This was one of the points criticized by the current government and its president. I believe that from a historical point of view, the approach of the former governments can be justified for a certain phase of the relationship. For example, if establishment of trust is a crucial determinant, it was adequate to provide benefits in advance, as South Korea is the more powerful and economically stronger partner. On the other hand, it is also suitable that these benefits, meanwhile, are brought to a halt. Obviously North Korea hasn’t played according to the rules, neither internationally nor within the inner-Korean context. It is certainly more advisable these days to establish a closer relationship based on incentives and results for the inner-Korean affairs, or by reforms in North Korea, or in the frame of the six-party talks. As a consequence, three of the parties might speak with one voice in this frame: South Korea, Japan and the US; two parties might remain neutral: China and Russia; and North Korea is urged to react. So far, North Korea’s chance to play South Korea off against the US was quite high. Ironically, in the past, it was rather South Korea that hindered the US to approach North Korea in a stricter manner. Since last year, it is just the other way around. However, other contents of the sunshine policy, such as contact and economic cooperation, I believe the new government just names them differently but they remained, to a certain extent, similar content-wise. Today, the new policy is certainly more realistic with regard to what can finally be achieved. For example, plans to establish further special economic zones could possibly be realized in the very far future, but not right away. The Lee administration does not oppose economic cooperation at all. I believe if North Korea would introduce reforms, they would receive immediate and massive support from South Korea. The same counts for civil contacts. In my opinion, the basic attitude for a policy of détente has not changed.

North Korea closed the borders to South Korea on December 1, 2008 and accused South Korea of being on a political confrontation course. How do you evaluate the actual situation of inner-Korean relations?

The inner-Korean situation is regarded currently with disconcertment. The only cooperation project which remained is the Kaesong project located in the special economic zone Kaesong in North Korea. Other projects, such as the ones concerning the development of tourism, derived from the inner-Korean summit of October 2007, were stopped or not approached at all.

I believe, nevertheless, that the situation is not as bad as it eventually appears. Except for the last three months, there is an increase in production, as well as an increase in employment observed in Kaesong. Unfortunately, there is also a lack of qualified and reliable employees. Currently, there are approximately 30 000 workers employed in Kaesong. Aid shipments from South Korea are, in fact, expired, but

civil contacts have not as drastically declined as media coverage might suggest. Therefore, I assume the situation is generally not that bad. North Korea's negotiation position gets weaker, as they are urged to make concessions towards South Korea this year, due to economic reasons. They need to collaborate with the US or otherwise they will not receive any aid shipments anymore, independent of political conduct. This will impact the six-party talks. If North Korea is going to cooperate more with the US, they are not able to refrain from the dialogue with South Korea. In addition, US aid is much less attractive to North Korea, because South Korea is able and also willing to provide North Korea with much more resources. Even this year, South Korea provides German organizations with approximately a triple million Euro amount to support development projects. This affirms South Korea's continuous willingness to cooperate. In this respect, I regard the inner-Korean relation tensed indeed, but the situation is not extremely amiss. I see parallels to the change of government in Germany in the year 1982, when the social-liberal coalition was exchanged by the conservative Christian Democratic Party. Initially the new government was not too popular at all. In the long run, this view changed. I believe that in Korea, contacts on the economic side will also intensify over time.

Which are the most important items both governments should focus on, on the way to a re-unification?

This is difficult to answer. I would recommend that South Korea should give preference to smaller and more feasible measurements than to visionary projects which are hardly realizable. Criticism can be especially made in regard to the inner-Korean summit in October 2007, where huge visions for the future were discussed and agreed upon, which were actually unrealistic and which finally remained unapproached. One can state that this is the fault of the new policy course of the Lee administration, but this is certainly only half the truth. I'm personally involved in a project which was enacted under President Roh, whose administration provided the project funding. Currently, the North Korean administration tells us that this project cannot proceed under the current political circumstances. Therefore, the current President cannot be blamed. South Korea is willing to realize the projects discussed with North Korea at the October 2007 summit, but not all at once and not at all cost. I believe it is the right approach to focus first on projects that are feasible.

On which items shall the North Korean administration focus? This question should be answered against the background of their first political priority, which is nothing less than securing the regimes existence and political survival. In general, all cooperation projects are beneficial for North Korea, whether in the area of education or of economic development. On the other hand, the North is cautious of opening up too much, as attraction to South Korea could spread within the country and lead to undesirable effects for the administration. In this regard, I'd like to mention the aggressive reaction of the North on the recent incident at the boarder caused by South Korean civic groups. Insofar as the scope of action for North Korea is very limited, assuming that the priority of North Korea is a policy of isolation, the current conflict does indeed make it easier for the regime to survive politically. Therefore, it is quite difficult to evaluate the situation for North Korea. On one hand, cooperation projects with the South are beneficial for the North; on the other hand, they represent a serious political threat.

Dr. Seliger, thank you for this interview.

Paper 4 June 29, 2009

Can an ecclesial movement cause political change? The cases of North Korea and the former German Democratic Republic

The church in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) is seen ex-post as an accelerator of opposition and a key element of democratization. Therefore, a justifiable and nearby thought is the analysis of the development of the GDR churches in search for inspiration in order to finally ask whether the lessons learnt can be applied to North Korea at a time when it seems that an organized people movement is needed to bring about change in North Korea.

Clergy and Christian movements in North Korea

Survival as a Christian in North Korea is rather difficult. The *Persecution of Christians Index 2009*, issued by the Christian Open Door Organization, has ranked North Korea first place for seven years in a row (s. Tab. 1). God-like status is reserved for Kim Il Sung (“The eternal president”) and his son Kim Jong Il (“The dear leader”). The *Juch’e* ideology does not abide another belief of the people. Both the leader, as god-like figure, and the virtually holy *Juch’e* ideology fulfill the function of a religion-like belief. Thus, any other form of religion is seen as being a dangerous influence from the outside, and therefore regarded as a threat. The North Korean government massively persecutes churches which are operating in the underground. Christians are regarded as public enemies, once discovered or betrayed they will be arrested, tortured or executed.

The amount of active Christians is estimated at 200 000–500 000. Between 50 000 and 70 000 Christians are held hostage in labour camps. The same number of people is estimated to stay in China, where several got in contact with the Christian belief and converted. On their return to North Korea, they started helping to bring Christianity into their country.²

Tab. 1: Persecution of Christians Index 2009 (First 10)

	Country	2009 ¹	2008	PCI 2008*	Trend ²	Deviation ³
1.	North Korea	90,5	90,5	1	0	0,0
2.	Saudi-Arabia	67,0	64,5	2	–	0,0
3.	Iran	67,0	64,0	3	–	0,0
4.	Afghanistan	63,0	57,5	7	–	0,0
5.	Somalia	60,5	54,5	12	–	2,0
6.	Maldives	60,0	61,0	4	0	0,0
7.	Yemen	57,5	57,5	6	0	5,0
8.	Laos	55,0	56,5	8	0	0,0
9.	Eritrea	55,0	55,0	11	0	7,5
10.	Uzbekistan	54,5	55,0	9	0	0,0

Source: Open Doors Germany, 2009a.

¹ Point system: 0 = total freedom, 100 = total oppression.

² Trend: “–” = min. 2.5 points higher compared to previous year; “0” = no change of min. 2.5 points.

³ Deviation: due to missing or unconfirmed information retained points.

* Index rank in 2008.

At the time of the great famine, North Koreans who were in search for food got in contact with small churches in rural villages along the Tumen River. Missionaries are active at the Chinese-Korean border. From there, bibles find their way into North Korea. Some are sent with balloons over the border, some are hidden in rice bags. Little is known about the fact that North Korea had quite a strong tradition of Christianity in the past. Before the Korean War, the Christian population of Pyongyang was as high as 30 %, which is the reason why the city received the nickname “Jerusalem of the East”. Today, there are no other further churches than four located in the capital, which are mostly used as evidence that reli-

2 Open Doors Germany, 2009a/c.

gious freedom is officially granted. Obviously, these official churches serve as propaganda instruments only. Other local churches were destroyed or converted for other purposes.³

In order to practice their belief, North Korean churches are compelled to operate in the underground. Reports estimate approximately 1 000 underground churches in North Korea today, with 135 000 members across the country. The government places much higher interest in arresting Christians than spies, which shows that a Christian movement represents a higher risk than espionage.⁴ Cases are reported where employees of the Conspiracy Department of the North Korean National Security Agency operate undercover to betray Christians. At the border area to China, a faked underground church, staffed by security agents, was discovered. They pretended to be defectors and so approached Korean churches operating in China. They received money and bibles in order to promote the North Korean Christian movement. The purpose behind this is not only to hunt down Christians and missionaries; it is also a good financial source for the National Security Agency that directly receives the money provided by Christian organizations in South Korea.⁵

Christianity seems to spread even among police officials. A case is reported where a North Korean family became subject to a house check by two police officers while they were praying. The bible could be hidden in time, though it was eventually found by one of the two police officers. He hid it, however, from his colleague and recommended to check another house, since nothing was found. Days later, he returned the bible to the family and confessed that he was a Christian too, but concealed it. According to the organization *Open Doors*, Christians meet in North Korea in secret and started a campaign to pray for freedom and change. From their point of view, the leadership of Kim Jong Il has already started crumbling.⁶ So does the recent report of Jay Lefkowitz, U.S. special envoy for human rights in North Korea, say: “North Korea might be entering the final stages of its Stalinist era, after which the government is no longer able or willing to control all elements of daily life.”⁷

How was the situation in East Germany, in relation to the Christian movement? Can any parallels be drawn that could serve the North Koreans as good examples?

The Church and the Christian movement in the GDR – an inspiration?

Christians in the GDR were not very much appreciated. But only in the rarest cases did they have to fear for their lives. Particularly in the 1950s, violence targeted Christians and they became subject to long sentences in jail. Nevertheless, it may not be forgotten that many young Protestants were put, by force, on private or professional paths that did not correspond with their individual ideas and desires.

The Protestant church had a special role in the socialist regime of the GDR, as it was the only state-independent social organization, large by size. The ideologists of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (in German: *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, short form: *SED*) initially assumed the churches would sooner or later dissolve automatically, into a civil relic, in the course of the development to a more mature form of socialism. Initially, that is to say for the first twenty years, the protestant church of the GDR has been part of the protestant church in entire Germany, East and West. It stood under the common management of the Evangelical Church in Germany (in German: *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, short form: *EKD*). Both had a common structure, organization, work groups, and so on, as well as a common vision of a united Germany. For the SED, this was regarded as being a truly hostile organization.

Resistance to the GDR regime took the form of a desire for unification. As it appeared not to happen, the GDR churches soon concentrated on GDR-specific problems and topics. In 1969, as political pressure on the protestant churches increased, it became independent of the EKD and formed an association of the protestant churches of the GDR, the Union of the Evangelical Church in the GDR (in German: *Bund*

3 Vu, M., 2005.

4 Kim, S.A., 2007.

5 Yong, I.G.; Lee, S.J., 2007.

6 Open Doors Germany, 2009b.

7 U.S. Department of State, 2009.

Evangelischer Kirchen in der DDR, short form: *BEK*), which was officially recognised by the GDR in 1972. The regime interpreted and propagandized their independence as the formation of a “socialist church”, associating agreement to the political ideology. Although politically neutral, the BEK often took part in political discourses as far as Christians were affected; subjects included e.g. the destruction of churches, youth work or Christian attitudes on military topics. Soon, other groups, such as the peace movement, environmental protection groups, political opposition and people who were willing to defect, evolved. Besides these groups, other groups existed too. Among their members were Christians who also took actively part. There were Third World groups, feminist groups and human rights groups. All these groups were politically alternative and critical, hence regarded by the SED as being oppositional and hostile. Christians belonged to this category as well. Compared to potential defectors who just wanted to leave the country, these groups wanted to advance the GDR by advancing socialism. They called for democratic elections, demilitarization and civil rights.⁸

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the St. Nicholas’ Church in the city of Leipzig organized prayers for peace to counteract the armament at that time. By 1989, after the prayers, the scenery was initially used by opposition groups demonstrating for democracy, freedom of press and freedom to travel. Police reacted brutally but, instead of generating deterrence, the people solidarized. By November 1989, the small group of protesters had already grown to 300 000. Three days later, and influenced by several other factors that should be underlined, the Berlin wall fell. The famous Monday demonstrations in Leipzig were shown in the West German news. Defectors in West Germany, who supported the opposition movement in East Germany with all kinds of technical equipment, made this possible.⁹

Summary

Characteristics of the Christian movement in North Korea and the former GDR are fundamentally different, based on the facts previously presented. While the Christians in the North can only operate in the underground, at risk of being sentenced to work in a labour camp, to torture or even to execution when identified as Christian, the Christians in the GDR were freer, although they, too, suffered from repression. Compared to non-members, they clearly had many disadvantages. However, as a state-independent organization, they were officially recognised and, therefore, an institution that was capable of leading a dialogue with the government. Moreover, they were able to connect themselves to other political alternative groups representing, together, quite a large group that was dissatisfied with the present situation without having the prior goal to overthrow the state. Awareness, dialogue and organization – these factors can be considered as decisive advantages in this process.

As for North Korea creating awareness and dialogue, this seems to be a target for support, even from a humanitarian angle alone. Awareness comes through information and that should be increased, e.g. through mutual development projects, continuous human and food aid or, why not, initiating town twinning? Just to name a few. More contact will generate more awareness and people will start rethinking their attitudes. Even if the elite benefits, it may still have a positive impact. Dialogue is pivotal in order to exchange one’s ideas und rethink one’s standpoints. Thus, a dialogue with the outside world should be maintained and a dialogue among the people within the country should be supported. Time will show if the introduction of mobile phones and the Internet in North Korea will increase dialogue and will finally lead to the third suggested step of grass roots community building – organization. An ecclesial movement alone did not cause the change in East Germany and it will not do so in North Korea. But it provided the important groundwork to connect people and accelerate change in the long run.

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8 Silomon, A., 2009.

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Paper 5 and 6 August 10, 2009 and September 1, 2009

Comparison of the similarities and differences in the diplomatic relationship of the DPRK and the GDR

(Part I)

Among today's and in history's divided countries, such as China/Taiwan, Yemen, Cyprus, Ireland, India/Pakistan/Bangladesh, the similarities between Korea and Germany are remarkable: both countries were divided after World War II and both were divided under the involvement of the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The latter assumed the existence of uniform states which emerged from the declaration of intent of the Potsdam conference in August 1945, as well as the Ministers of Foreign Affairs conference in Moscow in December 1945.¹⁰

Despite the initial similarities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), their further development on a political side – economically and ideologically – almost disappeared in the further progress.

Rudolf Appelt, who published an article in the Socialist Unity Party's¹¹ Magazine "Einheit", was probably the first author who analysed the situation of both countries directly after the war in 1947. The result of his research was that, already in 1947, the political and economic situation and trend in the Soviet occupied North Korea was very similar to the situation in the Soviet occupied East Germany. On the contrary, Appelt discovered similarities between the US occupied South Korea and the occupied Western zones of Germany. Just little time had passed after the founding of the two states until the DPRK recognised the GDR as a state.

The special solidarity of the GDR to the DPRK is exhibited in the political, technical and humanitarian support during the Korean War and beyond that. In the 1950s, the SED initiated a broad solidarity and donation campaign for North Korea. Until 1957, a Korea-committee of the GDR, established especially for this reason, transferred donations at a value of 40 million D-Mark under the slogan "Who helps Korea, helps Germany" to North Korea. But those should not remain the only donations. The sum of the unpaid post-war assistance to rebuild the country was a multiple higher (comp. Tab. 2).

Commencement of diplomatic relations

Already in November 1949, the GDR and the DPRK entered into diplomatic relations and exchanged ambassadors immediately. Similar to the Republic of Korea (ROK), and being inspired by the "Ostpolitik" of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in terms of their policy towards the North (and the communist states of the Eastern Bloc generally), the DPRK took over elements of the reunification concept of the GDR.

After the Korean War, the bilateral relations developed positively and rapidly. Grotewohl, Minister President of the GDR, visited Pyongyang in December 1955. Kim Il Sung, those days Chairman of the Minister Cabinet of DPRK, visited East Germany a year later. Already in 1953, both countries entered into a treaty regulating the financing of non-commercial projects. In January 1955, a second treaty followed establishing the technical and scientific collaboration. In December 1955, two additional treaties were concluded governing the postal services and the telecommunication. The GDR supported the DPRK in terms of reconstruction after the Korean War, in particular the re-establishment of the port Hamhung on the East coast of North Korea. According to estimations between 1953 and 1962, the unpaid development aid of the GDR for the DPRK amounted to a total of 217 to 545 Million Roubles. Hence, East Germany occupied the third rank of the development aid granting states right after the USSR and China (see Tab. 2).

¹⁰ Grabowsky, p. 1.

¹¹ In German: "Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands" (Short form: SED).

Tab. 2: Unpaid aid for post-war reconstruction provided by communist states to North Korea from 1953 to 1962 (Exchange rate at that time: 1 Rouble = 1 USD)

Country	Estimation 1*	Estimation 2**
Soviet Union	2000 ^a	2000 ^b
China	1320	1800 ^b
GDR	545.4	217
Poland	362	164.4
Czechoslovakia	113	113
Romania	65	90
Hungary	25	15.7
Bulgaria	20	20
Total	4510.4	4418.1

Sources: * Yoon T. Kuark, p. 61; ** Glenn D. Paige, p. 41.

a) incl. USD 190 Mio. or 760 Mio. Roubles debt relief in November 1960.

b) Loans included.

In: Grabowsky, 1987, p. 469.

The mutual visits of Grotewohl and Kim Il Sung, their similar fate, the consent on unification policy and the strong support for post-war reparation of North Korea strengthened the solidarity between the two states. The relationship between Pyongyang and East Berlin experienced its heyday in this first phase of their relations, which can be regarded as the years between 1949 and 1961.

Differences in the political development

The GDR and the DPRK showed a set of similarities and differences which initially facilitated the bilateral relations between the two states, but later, however, rather made them more difficult. The separation was common to both states as a consequence of World War II, whereby in the German case, this division was the result of Germany's role as an aggressor, while Korea was rather an innocent victim of the division of Eastern Asia into geopolitical zones of special interests. Demarcation lines separated both the Korean peninsula and Germany into two states. Soviet and American troops faced one another in each case. The GDR could gain a rather semi-sovereign state by means of its foreign and security policy and due to its dependency on the USSR, which deployed military forces on the GDR territory. On the contrary, North Korea could gain far more independence from the USSR. This can be considered a result of North Korea's policy to keep the Soviet Union and China at a distance so that none of them could exercise too much power.

During the post-war decade and under extensive quarrels among parliamentary groups accompanied by political clean-ups within the SED, the Moscow-oriented Ulbricht wing finally emerged at the top of the party. The "special German way to socialism" was already repealed in 1948, and the basic ideological positions of the SED were aligned to the ones of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In the Workers Party of Korea (WPK), on the contrary, the Moscow-oriented communists could not win a majority at any time. In 1945/46, the pro-Chinese "Jenan-Koreans"¹² and Kim Il Sung's followers from the anti-Japanese partisan fight were more influential than the Soviet-oriented Koreans in the North. By end of the 1940s, they already vested an unmistakably nationalistic-Korean profile in the domestic development of North Korea.

Foremost, two factors contributed to a more independent development of the WPK/DPRK compared to the SED/GDR:

On the one hand, during the initial two decades of the post-war period, the security interests of the Soviet Union were unilaterally focused on Europe only. Hence, not much attention was given to the Eastern states.

¹² The Jenan-Koreans were communists who participated at the side of the Chinese communists in the civil war against the Kuomintang and in the Chinese Anti-Japanese liberation war.

On the other hand, before the end of the Korean War, people's committees were spontaneously formed that served as the origin of a revolutionary North Korean state. In Germany, nothing comparable happened. In 1945, after World War II, antifascist committees were founded but remained without an important impact.

The political clean-up of the socialist forces of the SED took place between the years 1948 to 1956 in Germany. In 1956, the victory of the national-communist "Kapsan-fraction"¹³ of Kim Il Sung took place in the North Korean WPK.

The economic preconditions were fundamentally different between the GDR and the DPRK. Already, since the early years of the GDR, its economy has been inferior compared to the West German economy, which was especially appealing to some parts of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie of the GDR. The DPRK was in a better position, since their economy was by far superior to the sister states' economy. That position could be kept until the end of the 1960s when the ROK became economically stronger. The reason for these differences can be found in the initial starting conditions. The heavy industry sector of the former German Reich was not concentrated on the territory of the GDR, neither were there any substantial mineral resources. North Korea, on the contrary, was the base of the heavy industry for the entire country – a heritage of the former Japanese rule. In fact, there have been some structural similarities between the GDR and South Korea during the early years: the major sectors were concerned with agricultural production and, in some areas, light industries.

(Part II)

After the separation of Germany (1949) and Korea (1948) both, the SED and the WPK aimed for a national unification. In 1956/57, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, Walter Ulbricht, and Minister President Otto Grotewohl propagated the idea of a confederation for a united Germany for the first time, i. e. a union of the states by keeping political, economical and social differences. Kim Il Sung picked up this idea as a solution for Korea and proposed it as a unification model to Seoul in August, 1960. Until the end of the 1950s, both parties had demanded nationwide free elections, prepared by a joint commission but without the involvement of the United Nations. Both advocated a claim for sole representation which has been kept by the DPRK even until today. The unification concepts of the SED and the KWP caused no substantial reaction to the governments in Seoul and Bonn and, therefore, failed. But the unification ambitions of the communist parts of the countries did not stop. The SED (in 1957) and the KWP (in 1960) proposed plans for a confederation as an intermediate state of governance in order to prevent a further separation of the states, which took the form of a proceeding stabilisation of the society in the areas of politics and economy.

Although the East German proposal for a confederation had inspired the North Korean plan, it reflected the Korean situation in the 1960s that was characterised by social unrest during the fall of the Rhee administration triggered by a student uprising. The confederation plan of the KWP reflected the domestic political stability of the North and its economic prosperity at that time, and was contradictory to the economically weak and socially fragile South. A comparable situation could not be observed in Germany. Rather the opposite situation prevailed. The East German confederation plan proposed an economic and social weak position. Those positions are reflected in the confederation proposal by the SED and the KWP. Quite outstanding is the SED's emphasis on initial upfront payments by West Germany in order to prove being "confederation-worthy", whereby the KWP did not request any pre-payments but emphasised economic cooperation, which, in the first place, suggested aid programs aiming at being beneficial for the South. Accordingly, the feedback of the North Korean proposal was more positive compared to the East German offer. As a consequence, North Korea continued to propose confederation concepts in different variations, while East Germany gave up that idea completely in 1967. Henceforth, the so-called Two-Nation policy was pursued, which featured the manifestation of two sovereign German states on two territories. North Korea, on the contrary, rejected all attempts that were not directly related to the final goal of reunification.

13 The Kapsan fraction, named after their location of operation in North Korea near Manchuria, fought in the 1930s and 1940s against the Japanese occupation.

In the 1970s, tensions between the communist bloc and the Western world declined. Based on more relaxed relationships between the US and the Soviet Union, as well as the US and China, the inner-German and inner-Korean relationship eased, too. The Basic Treaty of 1972 was concluded in Germany; the North-South Declaration in Korea was issued in the same year. However, in 1985, Korea initially celebrated inner-Korean family visits, whereas in Germany, several contacts on the governmental and private level had emerged since the 1970s.

Dependency of the two countries on the great communist powers differed too. While East Germany was strongly supporting Soviet style Marxism-Leninism, the DPRK was creating its own ideology (named “Juche”), that was interpreted as a further development of Marxism-Leninism in the mid 1950s. Remarkable is the personality cult around the leader, which can possibly be understood with regard to the cultural foundation of Confucianism in the country. A personality cult could not be observed in the policy of the GDR.

Differences in unification questions, as well as their different relationship to the USSR, burdened the relationship during the 1970s. Bilateral relations between the GDR and the DPRK are, to a great extent, to be seen as a function of a relationship within the communist bloc. That became clear when Pyongyang and East Berlin discovered themselves on different positions during the ideological conflict between the USSR and China. Accordingly, the harmonious relationship between the GDR and the DPRK broke up and could be revived only slowly by the end of the 1960s.

However, the discrepancies in the unification policies between the two countries continued to disturb the bilateral relations. Erich Honecker’s visit in December 1977 in Pyongyang can also be tied to the positive relations in the 1950s. Six and a half years later, in June 1984, during Kim Il Sung’s second visit in East Berlin, the GDR and North Korea signed a friendship treaty with a running time of 25 years. However, the treaty lasted only a relatively short time because of the German reunification in 1990.

Picture 1: Kim Il Sung and Erich Honecker, East Berlin 1984



Source: Mittelstädt, Rainer, June 1st, 1984; Bundesarchiv, Picture 183-1984 0601 041.

However, the most important heritage of the East German and North Korean relationship is the result of the peoples’ exchange of both countries in the area of education and science. Relatively many citizens were educated and lived in the respective host country. In the 1950s, approximately 600 war-affected children and orphans were raised and educated to be skilled workers in the GDR. Moreover, between 1980 and 1990, approximately 50 North Koreans received a doctor’s degree, and 610 North Koreans participated in a German language course offered by the Herder Institute. Many of them continued university education in East Germany accordingly.

Summary

The initial phase of the East German and North Korean relations in the 1950s fostered solidarity and a similar heritage as divided countries under the involvement of the USSR and the USA. Post-war reparation aid to North Korea was supported by the smaller countries, especially by East Germany. Ideological constraints of the two communist super powers, the Soviet Union and China, influenced the GDR–DPRK relationship intensively, so that the relationship froze during the 1960s. Although the East German idea of unification in form of a confederation was taken over and maintained by the DPRK, the GDR changed its approach to the later proclaimed Two-Nation theory, hence stating a sharp difference to the North Korean view about a natural need for unification of people of the same affiliation.

Paradoxically, it was the GDR that withdrew early from the unification idea, established a new approach, and failed first anyhow. Finally, it is seldom that a theoretical and/or political idea or concept reunites people rather than the power of the people themselves. However, this is true just as long as they find ways to gain some.

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Paper 7 October 1, 2009

Living and working in North Korea

An interview with the Pyongyang based DAAD lecturer Armin Herdegen

Armin Herdegen, a specialist in German and Romance studies, has been teaching German at the Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang for more than three years. He is the only German teacher at a North Korean University and one of the few foreigners who work and live in North Korea.

How to conceive working life in North Korea?

Actually, it is more normal than you would assume. On an average day, I get picked up at 7:40 a.m. by my driver who drives me directly to the university where I work. The lectures or seminars start at 8:00 a.m. We finish the two lectures at 11:30 a.m. Afterwards, the driver brings me home, which is located at the diplomatic compound where the international community in Pyongyang used to live. I have lunch around that area or in the city and go back to the university, if required, in the afternoon. Teaching is one part of my assignment as a DAAD¹⁴ lecturer. I teach, in the first place, conversation and colloquial language, in order to enable the students to talk to native German speakers. In addition to this, I teach German culture and society.

Are there any other foreign teachers in North Korea?

At present, we are quite well endowed in the area of foreign language studies. There is an Italian teacher, a French teacher and four lecturers of the British Council who are not only teaching English, but also focus on teacher education at three different universities. There is another lecturer who coordinates the programmes we run. English language education has quite a high significance. It is mandatory at the regular school, where English is the only mandatory foreign language, and which replaced Russian.

Where is the geographic academic focus in North Korea in regard to foreign language studies?

It concentrates on Pyongyang. In regard to foreign language studies, there is one university dedicated to this field which is adapted to the German system; it is rather a university of applied sciences. As a matter of fact, the university systems of Germany and North Korea are difficult to compare. But this one university, located in Pyongyang, is a university for foreign studies where actually all my other foreign language teacher colleagues are employed. They offer a big variety of languages. Besides the most common languages, Czech, Mongolian or even Urdu, which is mostly spoken in Pakistan, can be studied.

In addition to this, there is the Kim Il Sung University where I work. It offers foreign languages, too, e.g. German, English, French, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese.

How many students do you teach?

At the Chair of German studies we have about fifty students in total.

Where does the motivation of the students to study a particular language come from? Are the students absolutely free to choose their preferred study subject?

Well, foreign languages, as such, certainly do not play a major role in North Korea. The general public is not exposed to foreign influences at all. Most of the students that study foreign languages at the university used to study at the foreign language school before. Many of them are very talented, or are children of diplomats who already lived abroad. The backgrounds are quite various. Once they finished the language school, they can take an entrance examination for the university, as it is usual in Asia.

Which language is the most popular?

English is surely dominant. In my university there are approximately 200 students enrolled in English studies, at the foreign language university there are approximately 200 students, that makes, in total, 400. Chinese and Russian is popular, too, but among the European languages, next to English, German is the most popular, I think.

14 DAAD = Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, engl: German Academic Exchange Service.

What is the reason?

An answer is possibly that there was a significant exchange in history between the former German Democratic Republic and North Korea. Many North Koreans studied German because they cherish Germany's achievements in the area of science. In the past, especially engineers and physicists studied in the GDR. Almost all of my North Korean colleagues of a certain age at the chair studied in the GDR.

How is the contact to your colleagues? Is it a friendly relationship or rather distanced?

The only problem is that there is rather no opportunity to meet after work. There are actually no opportunities to go out for a beer after work, or meet informally, such as it is common elsewhere. However, on special occasions, mostly official ones, meeting for dinner works. But the relationship is very cordial and friendly. I have seldom experienced such a friendly circle of colleagues as here. This is what my foreign colleagues also experience.

How is the degree of control in general? Can you walk freely through the city or are you permanently under surveillance?

You may wonder, but it is absolutely no problem moving around independently. I have bought a car here, which I can use within Pyongyang and also a bit out of the city, where there are two nice lakes that can be visited on the weekends, for instance. So, I can move freely, there is no one who is permanently attending me. However, you can likely assume that it is known where you are.

Actually, international media report a lot on North Korea, triggered by the current crisis and, especially, about the atomic weapon programme. How do people in North Korea see the situation?

Well, they are proud of having the capabilities. Finally, they just do not understand why the rest of the world is so excited. Other countries, especially the big ones, do have atomic capabilities, but North Korea is just not allowed to. This is how the situation can be described, I think. On the other side, there is not really a dialogue taking place. People do not really critically and openly discuss the situation.

There were many incidents that took place in 2009 so far, such as the two US Journalists who were arrested and held 6 months in North Korea until the former President Clinton bailed them out or the South Korean fishermen and a South Korean employee of the Kaesong Industrial Zone who were held in custody but released later – isn't it dangerous being in North Korea?

Well, compared to my stay, the named examples were connected to illegal activities in the eyes of the North Korean authorities. The situation of the international community inside the country is completely different. We are very welcome and absolutely safe. Personally, I have to say that the North Koreans spend many efforts on making sure that I am doing fine. I cannot complain in terms of safety.

Do you miss anything after three years in Pyongyang?

Sure! Sometimes I miss the German food. And it is just a pity that, except for one's own family, friends are not allowed to visit the country.

Apart from your job as a German teacher, what other tasks are you in charge of?

I coordinate the scholarship programme, by which approximately twenty postgraduate research students are given the opportunity to study in Germany per year.

Which subjects are most popular to study in Germany?

That's quite various. It ranges from e.g. law and building materials science to optical studies. In general, natural sciences and engineering are preferred.

What do you think about the relationship between Germany and North Korea? Is it special compared to other countries?

Yes, I would say it is special. Due to the relationship between the former GDR and North Korea, and also the fact that Germany supports the area of science by scholarships and rather simple forms of university cooperation, is a sign of goodwill. Furthermore, there is a medical doctor's programme with the Charité in Berlin, where many North Korean doctors went for training.

For your German lessons, to which degree are you free to decide upon academic texts?

I have two restrictions. One is that I should not use anti-communist propaganda and the other is sexual allusion that has to be avoided. Otherwise, I can decide on my own and I do it quite transparently by informing my colleagues what materials I use. A new restriction was that I was not allowed to show photos of my last official journey to South Korea, but that was likely due to the current tensed relationship between both countries. However, that was a new restriction.

How is critical thinking pronounced in North Korea in general, not necessarily related to political subjects?

It is difficult. The education system, which is similar to South Korea or China, is embedded in the Confucian social system. Critical skills, creativity, independent work, for example, that relate to the European educational tradition are not to be found here.

You have seen both, South Korea and North Korea, and you just mentioned Confucianism that is pronounced in both countries. Do you see any cultural differences when comparing both countries?

Yes, Confucianism is pronounced equally here and there, and I would say culturally, or in regard to humaneness or by observed behaviour, both Koreas have likely more in common than differences, although both live in different worlds. A comparison between East and West Germany does not suit so well here, it is just more different. North Korea is really separated from the rest of the world. They have really no information about South Korea. O.k., sometimes something leaks through, but this is not comparable with East Germany where there was West German TV or postal services. Even I cannot make a phone call to South Korea. I can call anywhere in the world, US, Japan, China, Russia, but not to South Korea. The information flow is cut. I have the feeling both know very little from each other, North Korea as well as South Korea.

Mr. Herdegen, thank you for this interview.

Paper 8 November 1, 2009

Institutionalisation of post-unification reconciliation in a united Germany An interview with Dr. Anna Kaminsky, Managing Director of the Federal Foundation for the Reconciliation of the SED Dictatorship

Dr. Kaminsky is Managing Director of the Federal Foundation for the Reconciliation of the SED Dictatorship (German: Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur), a government-funded organisation which was established by the German parliament in 1998. The Foundation has 30 employees (consolidated), who are engaged in domestic and international projects. Its purpose is to assess the history of the socialist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the rule of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (German: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands – SED), as well as its impact on the now reunified Germany.

What are the major tasks of the Federal Foundation for the Reconciliation of the SED Dictatorship?

Our mission is quite comprehensive. Broadly speaking, our contribution is done by research on history, cause and effect of the dictatorship in the soviet occupied zone, and the German Democratic Republic. We support to overcome the division and to strengthen the anti-totalitarian consensus within society, as well as the democratic consciousness. In addition to that, we support and actively participate in the reconciliation of dictatorships on an international level. We are also asked to support academic research and the victims of the dictatorship.

When and on which initiative was the Federal Foundation founded?

It was founded in 1998 as a successor organisation of the two Enquête Commissions of the Parliament of Germany, seeking the reconciliation of history and the consequences of the SED Dictatorship, which were being active between 1992 and 1998. They made an appraisal of what was known about the GDR, what was known about the dictatorship, and what consequences should follow. Besides others, one result was a recommendation by the Enquête Commission to establish a foundation that actively supports the dialogue within society. We organise own projects and we work with several other organisations together in order to support, for instance, exhibitions, events, conferences or publications, to name just a few fields of our work. But we understand our role in the first place as a kind of service and information provider. One example is a project we call ‘Memorial places of communist dictatorship’. This is a database currently filled with 6 000 places all over the world, such as memorial places and museums, that remember dictatorship and victims.

Do you also consult or support other countries in the area of reconciliation?

Well, we try to propagate the model we represent as a foundation. For example, especially in countries of the former Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, we experienced that the ones who strive to throw light on the past face difficulties in acquiring financial resources for their projects. The reason is that, on the one hand, structures still tend to be predominantly post-communist. On the other hand, civil thinking and structures simply do not really exist. Some countries are dependent on funds from the US, which in turn let them appear suspect to the general society. An institution like ours, which was founded to act politically independent without any political control, is, according to our opinion, a very promising model.

Does the foundation also take care about personal tragedies or crimes that happened under the SED rule in the GDR?

Only to a lesser extent. We are no criminal investigation agency. The legal prosecution in Germany has been officially completed since 2001/02, whether successful or not can be discussed, though. In the case that in the frame of our projects we would face issues that are relevant in so far as they were penal, we would certainly include the persecutor’s office, as long as the case had not become time-barred. But we as a foundation are neither a criminal investigation nor a persecution office. Other countries take different approaches; for example, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (Polish: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – IPN) which is headquartered in Warsaw. In the first place, this institution files and administrates documents on crimes which have been committed to the Polish society during World War II,

and under the Soviet rule. Besides reconciliation, crimes are actively prosecuted, too. This model consolidates all these aspects, but this is not the approach we take.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, 20 years have passed. Hasn't the interest on what happened during the SED dictatorship in the GDR disappeared meanwhile?

According to our experience, the opposite development actually is taking place. We have observed an increasing demand for inner-German historical information for approximately ten years. In the past, people used to argue that this subject would not appeal anymore. Media rejected broadcasting documentaries on the past, in general. It was in 1999 when the public recognition changed. Our first documentary was about a military jail in the GDR. That was just unimaginable that, beside the regular justice system, a military justice system existed in parallel, which was able to act independently to existing regulations. The reporting on that case was the first documentary we made and which was offered to the broadcasters who all rejected to broadcast it, except of one TV station, that showed it quite late and far away from the prime time. However, to all of our surprise, the film became the most watched historical documentary in the transmission area at that time. It had more than one million viewers and a viewing rate of 20 %. Since that, contribution broadcasters have changed their minds. We seldom had difficulties to accommodate our reports on TV. Even broadcasters started contacting us asking if there was new material available to show. In addition to this, the broadcasting time changed. The films were shown closer to the prime time. Moreover, the demand for other sources of information, such as events and publications, is constantly rising. Generally speaking, we see rather an increase in information demands on inner-German historical topics than a decline.

With which topics and regions is the Federal Foundation mostly confronted in its international work?

That's quite diverse. The German history of division does not play a big role in our international work, since most features are basically well-known to foreign interest groups. If it comes to an information exchange then only on subjects that are known to a lesser extent, for example, on how the secret services have worked together; or how GDR refugees were treated. The Bulgarian border, for instance, was an easier-to-overcome border. It was generally known that if one makes it to Bulgaria, it was easy to escape to the West. However, latest research found out that the Bulgarian border, in reality, was the most intensively guarded one. By the same token, most people who tried to flee were arrested at that border. One reason was that the locals were financially rewarded for turning a GDR refugee to the authorities. These are subjects that are lesser known and, about which, information exchange is taking place. Furthermore, the topic of how to cope with this history is frequently discussed. Which models exist? Why do some countries talk about it, why others do not? Another characteristic that can be found in other post-communist countries is that the former political parties turned from communists to democrats or socialists, but at the same time are just continuing their relationships with the same persons. Albania is a special example. The former communist party was separated into two wings, a conservative and a social-democratic wing. Actors were not exchanged and oppositional forces face relatively big difficulties to raise their voices. Interestingly, a state role model for Albania was, rather, China under Mao, which gained increased popularity after the country initially followed the Soviet Union for a shorter period of time.

Is the situation in Korea of special interest for the Federal Foundation?

Yes, it is. For us it is very interesting to observe how a divided nation prepares for a possible unification based on an unpredictable future. We experienced in Germany, in 1989, ourselves that future projects were extremely unclear. Even on the morning of November 9th, no one could imagine that in the evening of the same day the wall would fall and the borders were opened.

When talking to the Korean colleagues, I have the impression that, in some aspects, the situation is identical: neither a change of the actual conditions nor a regime change itself is imaginable in the North. No more than a smooth process of unification is conceivable. Moreover, fears for the future rise in the case of a possible unification. This is of special interest for us, as well as the fact that a state which is comparable to Germany is actively spending efforts on these challenges that might come up in the future.

Dr. Kaminsky, thank you for this interview.

Paper 9 December 1, 2009

Transformation and privatisation in a planned economy

Experiences of Prof. Dr. Friedhelm Gehrman, Consultant to the German Trust Institution 1991–1996

Prof. Dr. Gehrman is a distinguished German expert in transformation, restructuring and privatisation processes. He is Director of the Steinbeis Institute for Global Consulting & Government and Renewable Energies & Technology of the Steinbeis University Berlin. He has been a consultant to several international authorities, such as the UN in Geneva and New York, EU, OECD, UNESCO, as well as to various governments and ministries in Europe and the Middle East.

In the 1980s, he has been a member of the German delegation of the “Soviet-German Social Science Task Force”, as part of the Helsinki Conference (CSCE). In the 1990s, he was a consultant to the German Trust Institution (German: Treuhandanstalt), where he was engaged with privatisation and transformation processes during the German reunification process.

Which role did the German Trust Institution (GTI) play in the reunification process in Germany?

Well, the GTI was established in order to privatise state-owned firms of the German Democratic Republic, commonly referred to as people-owned enterprises, and to ensure competitiveness. A ministry is not allowed to do this kind of work and likely does not possess all the necessary resources. For such a special task, a special authority had to be established. In 2002, the Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (German: Bundesanstalt für Finanzdienstleistungsaufsicht) was founded in Germany in order to monitor international financial intertwinements. The GTI has managed billions of funds that ministries are just not allowed to.

On which industries did you focus in particular?

These were numerous. Just to name a few, for example, enterprises of the Industrial Association for Vehicle Construction in Thuringia, the textile plant Elsterwerk in Plauen, Jena Pharm, where I was part of the supervisory board that produced the birth-control pill and steroids. In Dresden, I worked with the Sächsisches Serum Werk, which produces vaccine and was sold to GlaxoSmithKline in 2008.

You had the chance to experience the situation of enterprises in East Germany right after the Berlin wall fell, just in the very early phase of the reunification process. What were the characteristics of these enterprises? How was the mood of the employees?

Initially, they were highly de-motivated, angry with, and frustrated by, the former socialist system. Actually, I haven't met one person who defended the former system. Just imagine, people weren't doing financially well in the early 1990s. They had not much to do during working hours because not enough materials were available to ensure a constant workflow. For example, screws were missing during the production process, or other minor but important parts and as a consequence, the production had to be interrupted.

So, people were quite positive and not hostile to the concept of market economy?

Yes, they were happy to work and to achieve something. On the other side, they were not used to an efficient eight hour working day plus one hour break in the early days. That was new and to many of them a new experience. However, generally they did a good job because they were enthusiastic about the fact that things proceeded.

How was the success of privatising the enterprises in the long run? Did the government give financial support in the beginning?

No, not at all. I made a tragic experience I would like to share. In 1993, I went to Elsterberg to a textile plant with 1 800 employees, that I have already mentioned before, in order to support the privatisation. That picture was fascinating, such as in an old Charlie Chaplin movie, excuse me for overstating here a bit. There were 200–300 spinning and weaving machines that we know in West Germany only from the museum, that were making a terrible noise, but they were running perfectly. People in the GDR were

very creative and skilled. I saw an old machine of that plant that was repaired with aptitude and sensitivity and it was running, although it was maybe 80 to 100 years old. However, in order to stay competitive in the textile industry, the old machines were exchanged by fully automated spinning machines of a newer generation. As a result, we produced, with 200 employees, 30 % more than with 1 800 employees before. One may think this is a great result, but do not forget the other employees that became jobless. It was the duty of the GTI staff to inform the vast majority of the employees of that plant that there would not be use for many of them in the enterprise anymore. That was one of the saddest moments I have experienced. Imagine a region that is characteristically quite provincial and labour mobility is low. At the same time, the risk is high that many very skilled workers will not find a job anymore. And this is what finally became true in the case of this company.

What happened to the workers who became unemployed? Did anyone take care of them?

Well, as the GTI task was to focus on privatisation and efficiency of enterprises, there was no space to accommodate these challenges. In the particular case that I have just mentioned, I remember that the unemployed were given occupational retraining two or three years later. But imagine the early 1990s during the reunification, at that time there were not enough official funds available to cover all demands for occupational retraining, nor were enough trainers available that were willing to move to that region. The official German agencies were pretty overloaded with all these demands. However, at that time I was a Professor at an East German university and I was asked if my team and I would teach, for example, cost calculation to a selected group of people, and so we did. But that certainly could only be provided to a limited amount of people. However, the transformation from a planned economy to an efficient market-led economy had a deep impact and led to a reduction of required staff in general. Accordingly, many have become dispensable in their jobs.

If you look back on the early reunification phase, what could have been improved?

There was no alternative, in my opinion. Obviously, it could have been done slower and better planned in advance but this was not possible under the given circumstances. The unification, as such, happened too fast. A gradual unification, conducted step by step, would have been the better option, but in reality this is difficult to achieve. A transformation to efficient processes, likely in most cases, leads to the reduction of employees under a formerly planned economy. That means a huge challenge to the social and financial systems of the affected states.

Prof. Dr. Gehrman, thank you for this interview.

Paper 10 February 5, 2010

Reunion after 47 years – The separation of the Hong family An interview with Renate Hong

A lot has been written about Renate Hong from Jena/Germany, the separation from her North Korean husband Hong Ok Geun, and their reunion after more than forty years. While numerous publications on political and economical analyses concerning the situation in North Korea and its relationship with the former German Democratic Republic keep appearing, the personal experiences of families, as well as their progeny, are often forgotten. Mrs Hong's story is not only a touching private fate. For many other persons concerned, who experienced the same, it is rather encouraging to take the initiative and, hence, to find ways to reveal more about the past.

How did the reunion come to happen after such a long time?

It happened in 2006 when I met a Korean student who did his doctor's degree in history. I told him my story and he published a short article on the Internet. Because of this interview, a Korean correspondent, who was living in Berlin at that time, got in contact with me and wanted to hear my story once again in order to publish it. Through the press release distribution list, the media got to know about me, there upon a lot of German newspapers got in touch with me. Out of this finally developed the idea of the family meeting. Hence, the things ran their course. An unforgettable experience for me was the audience at President Kim Dae-Jung. He told me that he regretted not being capable of doing anything for me because my husband had been living in North Korea. But he also said that my eyes told him that I would see my husband again, one day. This sentence has been accompanying me until today, and I still remember it. Since a lot of information existed about my husband, e.g. his domicile and birthday, it was also possible to find out his address after some time. Thus, with the help of the Red Cross and the Foreign Office, a letter could be delivered. The North Korean Red Cross was also very helpful in organising the family meeting.

Have politics ever been relevant in your relationship?

No, not really. As a student you had to know about the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, but North Korea had already developed its own ideology at that time. Then, I was not aware of that, only later I got to know it. The Juche ideology already originated in the 1950s. And with this ideology and all the developments in Europe, as well as the former Soviet Union, came the break which also affected the diplomatic area. However, the idealistic differences were just too big.

How would you describe the contact to the North Korean students at that time and how were they received in the former German Democratic Republic?

When I was a student, we hardly had any possibilities to see something else. Nowadays, for a student, it is very unproblematic to study in another country for a certain period of time, or to absolve a practical training. When so many students from a totally different country came to us, first of all this was interesting for us. Of course, it was interesting for them, too, because they got to know a completely different culture. At that time, the North Korean students were prepared in Leipzig first for their stay; that is to say, for their studies. A language course was offered, including an introduction about the culture and traditions of the German Democratic Republic. Obviously, they liked it very much how you could behave here as a student, and how relatively free you were able to move. They very quickly settled. In general, the fellow students, as well as the professors and doctors, received them very friendly.

In addition to this, they studied very well and did not attract attention in a negative way. They were very diligent and ambitious. Thus, they were pretty respected.

Primarily, you had planned to follow your husband to North Korea, when he was forced to leave you, the children, and the former German Democratic Republic.

Mainly I had this idea because we did not have any other opportunity to see another country. The thought to go to an unknown country was very appealing for a young person.

Only later, when we were able to travel, I realised that cultural differences could be very impedimental, but at that time, I thought, I was young and I would easily find a job there. Today, I know the situation of women who went along. There were circa fifteen of them who lived some time there. Only few of them learned Korean. For those, it was at most a little bit easier and they were less isolated than the others. Additionally, the living conditions were very complicated. Except of one family, which had been living there until 1973, none of the women stayed.

In my case, our children prevented me from going to North Korea. One was just ten months old and the other unborn. Even my husband advised me, in this situation not to dare step into the unknown. However, everything went much too fast. Quasi over night, he was supposed to leave; 350 North Koreans were recalled on April 14th. We remained the way that I would come with the two sons afterwards. But later on, the authorities advised me not to migrate with the two little children because of the non-ideal circumstances at that time.

Mrs Hong, thank you for this interview.

Paper 11 March 1, 2010

Economic Reform and Transformation in North Korea: The Chinese way or the German way?

An Interview with Dr. Hanns Günther Hilpert, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)

The Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin is a leading German think tank and the founding institution behind the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. The German Institute for International and Security Affairs of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) is an independent scientific establishment that conducts practically oriented research on which basis it then advises the Bundestag (the German parliament) and the federal government on foreign and security policy issues. The analyses and publications produced by SWP researchers and their participation in national and international debates on key issues help to shape opinion in their respective domains.

Dr. rer. pol. Hanns Günther Hilpert is researcher at the Asia division of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin.

Is the economic situation in North Korea comparable to the one in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR)?

Well, basically not. Maybe it was comparable in the first years, when both states orientated their economy towards socialism, accompanied by high growth rates. But finally, the collapse of the economy in North Korea is more catastrophic than it was in the case of the former German Democratic Republic. In North Korea, you have the case that the government is incapable of providing the population with food. Every year there is a lack of one to two million tons of grain that are needed for self-sufficiency. These, then, have to be imported, for which the country does not have the necessary foreign currencies. In addition to this, the Korean agriculture is highly and strongly affected due to over-fertilisation and deforestation, which has never been the case in the GDR. Next point that has to be mentioned here is the status quo of the industrial production. Capital consumption and under-utilisation, for instance, take dimensions which were not found in the former German Democratic Republic.

After all, there are infrastructural differences. The railways, the road network, or the infrastructure of telecommunication are either very weakly developed or very ramshackle.

Well, taking all these aspects into consideration, you can say that in comparison with the former German Democratic Republic, basic structural elements in North Korea are much more ailing.

How did it come that, compared to the economy in the former German Democratic Republic, the North Korean economy stayed so far behind?

Both states are, or to be more precise, they “were” states with a socialist command economy, including all the deficits involved. But the main differences are tied to the fact that North Korea has mainly been focusing on armament and military economy since the 1960s and 1970s. Due to estimations of the CIA, one-third of the gross domestic product is spent on armament and its maintenance. As a matter of fact, this absorbs quite a bit of the gross domestic product, which is consequently not available for private investment and consumption anymore. The former German Democratic Republic did not have such an armament. Furthermore, the GDR benefited from the commercial trade flows and transit traffic and trade with the West. The inner-German commerce was, quasi, an ongoing, open and interest-free credit. Moreover, the Strauß credit prevented the GDR from an early collapse in the 1980s.¹⁵

Additionally, since the collapse of the CMEA trade¹⁶ with the Soviet Union in the 1990s, North Korea has not had any access to the cheap commodities and energy supply from the Soviet Union. These imports have had to be paid with hard forex since then. Almost the same applies to China. These are the main reasons why North Korea’s economic situation is much worse than that of the former GDR.

15 Annotation: In 1983, a federal German credit of one billion D-Mark was made available to the GDR at free disposal, which was hedged by a federal bond. This so-called “Strauß credit”, which was arranged by the name owner Franz-Josef Strauß (CSU), prevented the GDR from financial bankruptcy due to high interest, and amortisation rates for their debts with the West.

16 Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).

Which steps were taken by the government in order to revive the economy? How do you evaluate their success?

In July 2002, there were market-based reform measures initiated by the government. This implied a higher degree of autonomy for state-owned enterprises and combines, as well, the introduction of a pricing system for food contemporary with a price adjustment. From now on, the supply of the population was aimed at functioning mainly on the basis of this pricing system, which, moreover, should replace the public distribution system. This was being tested until 2005, whereas a countermovement arose in which people critically opposed the reforms. Since then, it has been intensely tried to strengthen and foster the former public structures. A lot of aid organisations were driven out of the country and the reforms were cancelled again; private farmer's markets were closed or discriminated against.

All of these measures were only partly successful because the public distribution system is still insufficient for stabilising and guaranteeing the supply situation of the population. So far, these markets have persisted, but it is clear that the state did not want them. Finally, one can say that the reforms, as well as the counter-measures, equally failed. To a great extent it is unclear which direction this will take.

What about the special economic areas? Aren't these promising in order to support the idea for a reform?

Yes, the tourism region Kumgang and the industrial area Kaesong are running on and they yield foreign currencies, which is one of the most important factors for justifying their existence. Admittedly, political conflicts existed under the actual Lee government, though they haven't caused the shutdown of the special economic areas.

Not to forget is the trade with China, which keeps North Korea economically alive and supports the regime. Certainly it is rather lacking transparency. But what is definitely clear is the fact that Chinese enterprises have massively invested in North Korea. Thereby, the North Korean elite primarily profits, but there are also a lot of people who find work and the supply situation improves.

Keyword China: It is often argued that China may serve as a good example for North Korea on the way to market-based reforms. What's your opinion?

On this aspect, the opinions are divided. I'm of the opinion that this way does not suit for North Korea. Today, the basic conditions for a transformation in North Korea are absolutely different from those which China had in 1979, when the privatisation of the agriculture began.

First of all, the agriculture in North Korea is less fertile due to the bad climate and the depleted soil. Moreover, the agricultural mechanisation has already taken place in the 1960s, thus the productivity gains of a privatisation in North Korea can hardly be realised. Second: privatisations wouldn't solve the main problem in North Korea, which is the lack of capital. Capital is just needed for restructuring and modernising farming and industry. And that's, again, where the politics come into play because the courting for investors on the international capital markets requires the political interaction with the USA.

Another political aspect is that China is divided indeed; namely, into a capitalistic Taiwan and a communist China. Nonetheless, Taiwan has never been an option for an alternative system for the people in China. This is different in North Korea.

Would a transformation of the system be taking place, then the knowledge about the living conditions in South Korea would be a precondition. That is to say, some day the North Koreans would realise that the capitalist original in the South is better than the incomplete copy in the North, which thus could offer them a better outlook on life if they brought the South into the North. In principle, this is the German scenario of reunification. Of course, this is known in North Korea and this is also the reason why they are so hesitant with all the reform measures.

After all, from a North Korean point of view, a transformation by establishing a capitalistic system is not the only way. There still exists the opportunity to go on as hitherto: ensuring the own survival with domestic restrictions, ideological coherence and military power. From my point of view, the idea of a Chinese path of transformation is politically unrealistic.

Dr. Hilpert, thank you for this interview.

Paper 12 April 10, 2010

Factors of relative system stability in North Korea

Since the trade activities among the CMEA¹⁷ members disappeared in the 1990s, the economic situation of the DPRK is nearly ruined. The state faces immense challenges in several areas. For example, the food-supply situation for the populace is critical. The famine in the mid-1990s caused many deaths by starvation. The infrastructure is ailing, human rights are ignored and heavily violated and human beings are suppressed by dictatorship, just to name very few examples of generally known shortcomings. Consequently, the question arises: why does the state not collapse, but instead proves relatively stable as such, despite many crises in the last two decades.

In the following, key factors are outlined that influence the relative stability of the state in North Korea. The text below does not represent a complete analysis, but is rather a very brief outline.

Militarization

The military complex influences, together with the party, greatly the domestic policy, the state of economy, the disposal of resources, the shortage of social resources, the societal structure and main features of public life. It destines with the leader the conservative course against reforms, liberalizations and opening. A 'threat of war' syndrome is omnipresent: an excessive enemy scheme and aggressive fighting stance, in sum, a thoroughly militarized public psychology.

North Koreans live literally in drilled communes, spending much time in marching columns during kindergarten and school-time, in army and paramilitary forces, with the call of elder people for marching ups, mobilizations or bunker exercises. About twenty percent of the populace wear a uniform or have it permanently at hand. It is normal to possess a military rank. A large portion of the populace is in active military service, and approximately a third of industry and infrastructure is under military disposal. Far reaching military prerogatives and interferences rule into the sphere of party and administration responsibilities down from the center to the provinces, the counties and cities. The militaristic system denies compromising solutions, impedes protests and rebellions, probable conflicts that tend, that way, to violate events.

The leader system

The institutionalized leader system means the highest degree of a centralized omnipotent power, a commanding and organizing force over all public thinking with prescribed truths, the guidance over party and army, state and society. The leader decisions count as the highest expression of legitimacy. Dictatorship of the leader is as effective as absolutist rule in suppressing the people. The leader system that can be best described as 'Kimilsungistic' gave, from the very beginning, the primacy to military, regime-referred and ideological reasons over economic rationality and socio-political responsibility for the needs of the people. From there roots much of the anomaly in Juche policy.

Behind the propaganda of permanent revolution, Pyongyang's leader system causes an extreme conservatism; the regime's self-preservation demands the principle of unchangeability. From there comes a decided enmity against real reforms and the given archaism of the system. Leader rule, as a type of governance, works essentially against transitions.

Isolation

A feature of the Juche ideology is its self-sufficiency idea that isolates the state and society from the outside world. In order to hinder the development of pluralism, it serves to deny the society knowledge about political and social alternatives beyond the fence. Manipulation and control of the people becomes easy under such circumstances. An enormous protective factor for the dictatorial regime is the rigid ban to receive television or listen to radio stations from South Korea. There are many statements from both leaders against a face-to-face competition with South Korea, notwithstanding all talking about federated unity.

17 Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

There is, until today, the permanent dichotomy between the essential reason of systemic split and the delusion of Juche-revolutionary unification. Basic reforms and transition count, in the mind of ruling cadres, as self-surrender and menace for one's own status.

The confrontation of two systems in one nation determines an either-or constellation for regime survival. Despite all reconciliation images, the DPRK faces it with a 'great fight' perception. Reflections about the past Korean War are much in effect.

The collapse of socialist regimes depends much on the level of influence exerted by competing alternatives. The survival of division states depends first on their methods of dealing with the challenge coming from the systemic alternative of the same nation. That's the reason of the DPRK double faced policy: factually, a rigid two-states-partition policy and verbally, a unification demand.

Surveillance and repression

In North Korea, total surveillance and punishment for every deviation from prescribed or customary rules functions best. Security forces and police act practically in full arbitrariness. The people live under the fear of permanent jail and the threat being sent to a work camp. Additionally, party functionaries claim privileges. Every citizen meets on a multitude of arbitrary controllers.

Incomparable is the maximal mobilization pressure, particularly for military needs, with more labor and devotion exercises resulting in an extreme degree of physical exhaustion, mainly of malnourished people. This extreme exhaustion is handicapping public dynamics.

No citizen is allowed to demand a protected private sphere. The "Kimilsungism" methodically destroyed the borderline between regime power and the individual, such as family rights. Lodging, correspondence, private talking, personal data and much of everything else are to be delivered in full transparency.

The compulsory character of ideological terms and the demand of an anti-pluralistic stance play a large role.

Compared to all repressive systems in socialism, the DPRK has reached an extreme in the submission of its citizen.

The fear of unification

In North Korea, an extraordinary dread factor caused by regime practice determines all public behavior of the human being: the anxiety about their social and political status after the regime changes. Many warnings referring to the breakdown of socialism in East Europe and even to dangers of Chinese reformism were taking place inside the Worker's Party of Korea. Many servants of the regime face revenge from North Koreans for former brutal acts of suppression. Even average North Koreans hide uncertainty about their treatment and fate in case of an overtaking (or absorption) by South Korean elites. Compared to the East German situation, the chances for a non-violent, orderly and legal-bound transformation are very low. In case of a regime collapse, many North Koreans fear a violent internal conflict, as well as an inter-Korean military clash. There is a profound polarization of rationale in the minds of many North Koreans struggling between the existence under the disliked, but known, regime or facing the uncertainty an open end system change.

Summary

Factors that prevent a collapse of the North Korean state take the form of an autocratic dictatorship rule around loyal, military-minded elite, based on the forced unconditional belief in the prevailing ideology, while at the same time exposing people to massive propaganda, threat, fear and permanent control. It should not be forgotten that many North Koreans are alienated from the behavior that would prevail under a civil societal situation. Although in a decreasing scope, many people accept mythological truths, such as the history mythos, leader mythos, anti-America mythos, victory mythos or Juche values mythos. The regime made the populace bear privation, deficits and hunger, keeping modesty and making sacrifices. A system collapse that might be triggered from the initiative of the people is very unlikely.

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Entente cordiale and cultural diplomacy: The influence of non-political events

Around the world, sport teams, especially soccer teams, have huge fan-bases. International soccer tournaments, such as championships, attract more of the general public's attention and touch people's emotions to a much greater extent than official political summits. Organizations, particularly the ones that are concerned with international challenges, such as peace keeping or fairness in trade and commerce, discovered soccer as a soft instrument for relationship-building among people. However, the political dimension of sports is not used to its full potential yet. Which political role does soccer play in North Korea's foreign relations?

The political dimension of sport

It should first be discussed what the political dimension of sports actually is. In German, a suitable term would be *Völkerverständigung*. It is troublesome finding a corresponding English term to describe this German word. To express a friendly understanding between people in different countries, the English language frequently uses the French phrase *entente cordiale*, which is not an exactly fitting equivalent. *Entente cordiale* can be translated as cordial agreement. The term originally refers to several agreements signed between France and England in 1904 in order to reconcile disputes which had been recurring for several hundred years. Another equivalent term with a shorter history would be the term *cultural diplomacy*. The American political scientist Milton C. Cummings defines this term as "the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding".¹⁸ Several German definitions of the term *Völkerverständigung* exist. Dictionaries define the term as "a peaceful agreement, an agreement among the people: a policy of peace and *Völkerverständigung*".¹⁹ Furthermore, it is pointed out that *Völkerverständigung* contributes to the prevention of wars, to reconciliation or to the integration of social minorities. The encounter of people, dialogue and mutual understanding are central elements of the term.²⁰ Finally, no matter if the English, the French or the German term is used, all three contain a political dimension. In the following text, the German term is used because it emphasizes on people and mutual understanding across borders to a greater extent than the other terms.

One instrument of *Völkerverständigung* is often seen in international sports events, such as soccer, which brings together people from different countries. A good historical example can be found in Europe. After World War II, soccer served as an instrument to a rapprochement of the people in Germany, England and France. But soccer does not lead to immediate results in terms of *Völkerverständigung*. It rather has a supportive function in official international relations. A good example of this is the World Championships in 2002, which were jointly hosted by Japan and Korea, but did little to improve the relationship. Both countries still struggle over historical disputes and, so far, the relationship cannot be described as excessively harmonic. Because the Japanese Emperor had not participated in the opening ceremony, the media reported that an important act of *Völkerverständigung* between Japan and Korea had been missed.

Global governance and sports

International organizations discovered sports as an instrument to improve international relations. The United Nations (UN), for instance, regard sports as a promoter for *Völkerverständigung*. Under the UN umbrella, an international workgroup was established and an office with the designation "Sport for Development and Peace" was set up.

18 Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, source: http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy (access: February 2nd, 2010).

19 E.g. the digital dictionary of the German language of the 20th century (German: Das digitale Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache des 20. Jahrhunderts), Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, www.dwds.de (access: February 2nd, 2010).

20 Friedenspaedagogik.de, source: http://www.friedenspaedagogik.de/projekte/fussball_lernen_global/fussball_zwischen_ersatzkrieg_und_voelkerverstaendigung_uli_jaeger (access: February 3rd, 2010).

At the end of 2003, the general assembly of the UN issued a resolution on sports as a mean for the promotion of education, health, development and peace. In this resolution, the governments are, among other things, asked to use sports as an instrument contributing to the implementation of internationally agreed development targets, as well as to broader goals of development and peace. Besides that, the year 2005 was declared the year of sports. The UN Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, Adolf Ogi, points out that sports are no universal remedy for the problems of this world; nevertheless, it can have positive effects and should be promoted politically. Sports shall not be in the service of policy, nationalism, dictatorship or be a subject to boundless commercialization, but an instrument for development and conflict resolution, health, education, lasting development and peace.

North Korea and international sports events

In the case of North Korea, it appears difficult to separate sports from dictatorship. However, that doesn't stop the country from playing a major role, especially in women's soccer. North Koreans are football-enthusiasts and participated in the World Championships in England as early as in 1966. The North Korean women's soccer team, for example, is one of the strongest, not only in Asia, but internationally as well. Women's soccer was founded in 1985 in North Korea by the South Phyongan Provincial Sports Group, as it was called at the time. At the 13th Asian Women's Football Championship in 2001, the team even made it to win the championship. A success they were able to repeat again in 2003 in Thailand, where they won the finals against China with 2 : 1. Key characteristics of the team are said to be its team spirit, fitness and mental strength. They are said to be fast, persistent and physically strong. In addition, they show a never-give-up attitude. On the other side, they are perceived as mysterious by the media, as they usually do not give interviews and if they do so, those lack content and socialist rhetoric shines through.

However, isn't soccer finally a chance to expose the team-members of the soccer cadre to an international environment and to present sportive achievements instead of political attitudes? Wouldn't the participation in international tournaments have a backlash on the people back home? Certainly the achievements of the team might be communicated domestically as a great fight for the country's political direction. However, it is also very likely that real fans might wish to be able to support their team live and see them playing abroad. This wish might be impossible to realize, as fans might not be allowed to travel freely. As a result, the fan's national pride leads to dissatisfaction and the desire for change.

Conclusion

Finally, *Völkerverständigung* has a political dimension and soccer can act as its transmitter. Whereas political dialogue with North Korea frequently runs into dead ends and needs to be put back on track usually accompanied by foreign aid deliveries, events such as soccer are less risky to result in a major conflict. It likely leaves a long-term impact on the people's thinking and possibly results in the desire for change. However, international exposure to North Korean athletes is still low, not to forget artists or musicians. There is still more potential to promote events in the area of sports or the arts for the purpose of *Völkerverständigung*. Maybe in the future the time will come to establish an all-Korean sports team or orchestra. According to Adolf Ogi's opinion, sport, especially, "is an instrument that hasn't been used systematically so far".²¹

21 Ogi, A. (2005): Sport, Entwicklung, Frieden: eine politische Frage. In: Entwicklungspolitik, 19, p. 23.

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