

Political Science in the German Democratic Republic

Karl-Heinz Roeder
Academie der Wissenschaften der DDR

I.

It was not until 1974 that the political scientists of the GDR set up their own scientific association—the Nationalkomitee für Politische Wissenschaft der DDR (National Committee for Political Science in the GDR)¹—which does not mean that political science in the GDR has not had a longer tradition than that. It goes farther back into the history of German science than the year 1949 when the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was founded in the wake of the Second World War. Political science in the GDR is based on the doctrines of Marx, Engels and Lenin. There is no doubt that these thinkers created a fundamentally new approach to modern political theory. This approach has already been adopted in many parts of the world. Our commitment to the Marxist approach does not mean we neglect or reject other ways of political thought as non-scientific. Marxist political science develops in theory and methods—as other sciences do—by taking part in international scientific communication. It takes critical note of the research of other schools of political science, adopting them if they contribute to our knowledge. This learning from one another, a process of give and take, naturally presupposes openmindedness on the part of the other main school of thought. In all honesty we admit, though, that some in the GDR rejected all non-Marxist theories and methods in dealing with past and especially with present-day events, passing the sweeping judg-

ment of “non-scientific” on all of them.² This tendency has been overcome. Today the whole heritage of German political science is studied for its contribution to our scientific knowledge and our understanding of politics.

This opens up a wide field of research which might be of international interest as well. Take, for example, the two emigrants to the U.S., Francis Lieber (1800-1872) and Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, whose activities have received too little attention up to now. F. Lieber had been appointed at Jena University (present GDR territory) before leaving for the U.S. in 1827, where he played a role in the establishment of American political science. F. A. Muhlenberg was the first Speaker of the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress. His ancestors also came from a town now in the GDR. Nor has GDR political science failed to look into the legacy of the great German scientist Max Weber (1864-1920), who was born in Erfurt, now also GDR territory, and taught at the universities of Berlin, Freiburg and Heidelberg. He completed, among other things, studies of the Weimar constitution and the different types of government, analyzed the phenomenon of bureaucracy, the relationship between protestantism and capitalism, and made contributions to Marxist theory. With this remarkable work he promoted the development of political theory and methods in the 20th century.

II.

It is not possible in this article to provide a complete survey of what has been done in political science in the GDR and what is going to be done. Political scientists in the U.S. may find it of interest, though, to learn something about our research into GDR foreign policy and international rela-

tions. Research and planned projects on the political system of the GDR and its domestic policy might meet with the same interest. Unfortunately neither can be examined in this one article. They may be dealt with in a separate article or even in direct talk, if desired.

*Today the whole heritage
of German political
science is studied for its
contribution to our
scientific knowledge and
our understanding of
politics.*

Since the 1970s researchers in the GDR have been studying the history, foreign policy, and the political system of the U.S. This research enjoys recognition among the scientific community in our country and has met with great public interest.³ Political scientists in the GDR are of the opinion that research on the U.S. should be extended because of its political significance as a world power, because of its role in Europe and the need for it in formulating GDR foreign policy.⁴

Political science in the GDR generally places great significance on European studies, since it is vital to this country, at the center of Europe on the borderline between NATO and Warsaw Treaty, between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), to have close economic, political and cultural relations to all European nations, both in the East and the West. Consequently, it is Europe, with its long historical traditions, problems and conflicts, that is the main subject of our foreign policy and thus of political science. The fields of research are the political, economic, social, and military realities in present-day Europe. There are currently 34 large, medium-sized or smaller nations

in the territory of Europe. The majority of these nations belong to different political, military and economic alliances; a few are neutral or non-aligned nations. One of the European realities is the existence of two German states, both firmly bound to their alliances. Yet, the European nations understand that despite all their socio-economic and political differences they are linked to each other in many ways and have quite a number of common interests. This new perspective is expressed in the term the "common European house," the subject of current political research and debate. The concept of the "common European house" has emerged in the background of a number of interdependencies, which in their turn have resulted from post-war circumstances and are now increasingly influencing the overall situation in Europe.

The question of peace or war is the sphere where these interdependencies make themselves felt more dramatically than anywhere else. There is no denial that Europe has piled up more nuclear and conventional weapons than any other continent in the world. Should this arsenal ever come to be used—be it by human error or technological failure—then life on this continent is certain to become extinct, with all the other continents most likely suffering severe damage, as well. Knowing this, the Europeans want their "common house" to become a house of security for all and not of security against all due to confrontation. Security for all countries in east and west, as seen currently by GDR political scientists, requires stability in political relations across the borders of the systems, including talks with all European countries, the U.S. and Canada, which would have to be continued even in times of crisis. This dialogue, however, will only have meaning if all sides are willing, in spite of all differences and contradictions, to regard the other side not as an opponent but as a necessary partner for the solution of common problems. It is obvious that the concept of mutual security in Europe includes military deliberations. As this most complicated matter cannot be gone into here, it should be mentioned that political scientists in the GDR have published a long list of relevant literature, which we would be

pleased to provide for those interested.

The "common European house" can only be built on a stable economic foundation. The reality is that the majority of the European states are economically integrated into either the EEC or the CMEA. Europe has its historically developed division of labor and a variety of commercial relations. Europe accounts for four-fifths of the total East-West trade.

Within the context of its European policies the GDR is very interested in closer relations between the EEC and the CMEA, and between the EEC and the GDR itself. The establishment of diplomatic relations between the GDR and the EEC is expected to promote closer contacts. The "European domestic market" of the EEC, which will come into being by 1992, raises questions concerning European development as a whole. As political scientists in the GDR see it, East-West trade relations will become strained if the existing barriers to the EEC market are not lifted but are even tightened due to the "European domestic market."

A wide area of interdependence in Europe is ecology. Recently the GDR has started to devote part of its European research to ways of coping with present ecological problems and the prevention of further damage to the environment that may be caused by giant industrial projects and the introduction of new research and manufacturing technologies.

Another important but also highly controversial problem, dealt with in all debates on how to shape future relations among the European countries, is cooperation in humanitarian questions. Evidently, the "common European house" cannot exist if humanitarian problems are neglected. Since the completion of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in 1975 a great deal has taken place in this area. Both East and West have been looking for common positions in solving the most urgent problems and finding a sound and long-term policy on this issue, despite their disagreement on what is understood by human rights. The advances that have been achieved by compromise and consensus are immense, yet, a lot remains to be done. As far as theory is concerned,

political science in the GDR has a long tradition of studying the human rights question. Political scientists in the West, however, have scarcely taken note of this research—as is the case in many other fields. The cooperation under way now between political scientists in the GDR and in the U.S. as well as in other European countries may help do away with ignorance on both sides and pave the way for useful talks on this matter.

III.

Political research in the GDR is done at the Academy of Sciences of the GDR, the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the Academy of Government and Law, the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the SED, and at the universities and colleges. Planning is medium to long range. In some cases there are even 10-year plans.

The main directions in political research are laid down in the Central Research Plan for Social Sciences. The current "Central Research Plan for Social Sciences of the GDR 1986 to 1990" (see Figure 1) is the fourth of its kind. This kind of research planning was started in 1971 so that by now we are experienced enough to recognize its advantages and disadvantages.

*Political science in the
GDR generally places
great significance on
European studies . . .*

One of the first questions likely to be asked may be how these plans are made. The Scientific Councils (see Figure 2) are responsible for this task. These councils include the leading researchers in their respective disciplines, the leaders of research teams and the heads of the research institutes at the academies and of the university departments. The councils are presided over by the chairman, the deputy chairman and some other re-

**Figure 1. Research Complexes and Main Research Directions of the
"Central Research Plan for Social Sciences of the GDR, 1986-1990"
(Political Science Section)**

01 Shaping of modern socialism

- 0101 The heritage of Marx, Engels and Lenin—its significance for modern socialism
Scientific Council for Marx-Engels research
- 0102 Theoretical fundamentals of modern socialism (interdisciplinary research program)
Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of SED
- 0103 The political system of socialism
Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of SED
- 0104 Socialism and Peace (interdisciplinary research program)
Academy of Sciences of the GDR
- 0105 Philosophical, social and economic questions of the technological revolution in socialism
(interdisciplinary research program)
Academy of Sciences of the GDR
Technical University of Dresden

02 Political and economic development of socialist countries

- 0201 Analysis and theoretical generalization of the social development in the socialist countries
Scientific Council for economy and politics of socialist countries
Scientific Council for research of foreign policy
- 0202 Theoretical questions of economic integration of the socialist countries
Scientific Council for questions of economic integration of the socialist countries
- 0203 Socioeconomic development, domestic and foreign policies of China
Scientific Council for research of foreign policy

03 Social structure and demographic development

- 0301 Technological, economic and social development, social structure
Scientific Council for sociological research
- 0302 Way of life of various social groups
Scientific Council for social politics and demography
- 0303 Demographical trends in the socialist society
Scientific Council for social politics and demography

04 State, law and democracy in modern socialism

- 0401 State and law in the political system of socialism
Council for research of state and law

05 German history and GDR history

- 0501 History of the GDR including the history of foreign policy
Council for historical research
Scientific Council for research of foreign policy
- 0502 German history up to 1945
Council for historical research

06 International relations

- 0601 Theory of international relations
Scientific Council for research of foreign policy
Scientific Council for research of capitalism
 - 0602 Policy of peaceful co-existence
Scientific Council for research of foreign policy
Scientific Council for research of capitalism
-

Figure 1 (continued)

0603	Trends in world economy and the restructuring of international economic relations Institute for International Politics and Economics Academy of Sciences of the Central Committee of SED
0604	The political system of the capitalist industrialized countries Scientific Council for research of capitalism Council for research of state and law
0605	Politics and economy in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America Scientific Council for research of foreign policy Council for research of Asia, Africa and Latin America

Figure 2. Scientific Councils Responsible for Doing Political Research in the GDR

Scientific Councils	Affiliated to
Scientific Council for philosophy	Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the SED
Scientific Council for Marx-Engels research	Institute for Marxism of the Central Committee of SED
Council for historical sciences	Academy of Sciences
Council for research of state and law	Academy of Sciences
Scientific council for sociological research	Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of SED
Scientific Council for economy and politics of the socialist countries	Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of SED
Scientific Council for research of capitalism	Institute for International Politics and Economics
Scientific Council for research of foreign policy	Institute for International Relations
Scientific Council for peace research	Academy of Sciences
Council for research of Asia, Africa and Latin America	Karl-Marx-University Leipzig

searchers. Each scientific council has a number of working groups where the senior university staff (lecturers and professors) and the scientific co-workers of the academies are represented. So all scientists have a say in the discussions on future research.

Generally, discussions begin at the institutes of the academies and the university departments. The proposals put forward there are passed on to the working groups where they are discussed first of all under the aspect of specialization and cooperation at the institutes involved. Finally the proposals are considered by the Scientific Councils, where more than one session is necessary to deal with the numerous proposals submitted. The Scientific Councils have to decide on the main directions of research and specific projects. Emphasis is

laid on essential topics which add to our knowledge and support interdisciplinary cooperation among social sciences, as well as between social sciences and natural sciences.

Evidently, the "common European house" cannot exist if humanitarian problems are neglected.

The central research plan for social sciences is subject to approval by the Politbureau of the SED and is supervised by the same institution. What has become clear is

that research planning in social sciences in the GDR is done at two levels: the institutes where research plans are put forward by the scientists in their respective fields, involving broad discussions, and the Politbureau level where the plans are approved. Once the central research plan is approved, it is binding for the scientific institutes. After approval the Scientific Councils are responsible for administering its implementation. This means that the approved projects are "defended" in the working groups or the Scientific Councils themselves, before starting and on completion of a project. Defense at the start means a critical analysis of the conception, a projection of the scientific advance expected to be brought about as well as ways of putting the project into practice. Defense on completion examines the results achieved. If there is no successful final defense with approval by an expert committee, then the work is regarded as unacceptable. If there are no good reasons for the failure, it can lead to a serious examination of the institution carrying out the project and even lead to cuts in salary.

*The central research plan
for the social sciences is
subject to approval by
the Politbureau of the
SED and is supervised by
the same institution.*

At present the Scientific Councils are preparing the "Central Research Plan for Social Sciences 1991 to 1995," which in its main research directions cannot just be a continuation of what has been done so far.

About the Author

Karl-Heinz Roeder is Professor of Theory and State and Law and acting director of the Institute of Theory of State and Law at the Academy of Sciences of the GDR. He is a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the GDR, President of the National Committee for Political Science in the GDR, and a member of the Executive Committee of IPSA.

Notes

1. When the National Committee for Political Science in the GDR was set up in 1974 it was supposed to provide an institutional basis for the political scientists of the GDR to participate in international scientific communication. The establishment of diplomatic relations between the GDR and all western industrial countries (to U.S. in 1974) provided the inter-governmental prerequisites for cooperation of GDR scientists in international scientific organizations. In 1975 the National Committee for Political Science of the GDR joined IPSA.

2. Conversely, there were concepts in western political science denying Marxist political science its scientific character.

3. The following publications should be mentioned here: Rudiger Horn and Peter Schafer (1986), *Geschichte der USA 1914-1945*, Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften; Claus Montag et al. (1986), *USA Aussenpolitik in der Gegenwart*, Berlin: Staatsverlag; Karl-Heinz Roder et al. (1987, 3rd edition), *Das politische System der USA Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Berlin: Staatsverlag.

4. U.S. research in the GDR has been upgraded due to study stays of political scientists from the GDR in the U.S., the number of which has increased since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1974.

Many thanks are owed to the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) in Princeton, N.J., who has sponsored most of these stays.