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Art exhibitions as an instrument of cultural diplomacy

Elena Korowin MA, Karlsruhe University for Arts and Design

Abstract:

The proposed paper intends to analyse West German and Soviet/Russian cultural relations based on art exhibitions. The aim is to show ways in which art is used as the means of diplomacy to pursue political, social and economic interests. By the beginning of the 20th century, Germany and Russia were already cooperating on many levels. In the twenties many Russian intellectuals lived in Berlin and important mutual exhibitions were also held at that time. Such exhibition projects never base solely on the initiative of private individuals - they are always a political issue. A close examination of the general framework can provide a clear picture as to why and for which party an exhibition was of interest in the given time period. An exchange of art takes place in order to build up contacts and relationships, or to convey a certain image of oneself. Projects that were initiated and supported by economic enterprises and political leaders may serve as examples. With the growing importance of corporate identity, the commitment to cultural events grew. In my dissertation I want to examine the period 1950-2010 referring to influentual exhibitions which were partly shown in West Germany and in Russia. With this research I try to figure out different strategies of self-representation of states with different political terms during a long period, how and whether these strategies develop and finally if they worked out. Germany and Russia were both associated and apart from each other for a long time. Given that it is interesting to see how the first exhibitions tried to show the concerned country from its best side.

Key words: exhibitions, cultural diplomacy, Soviet Union Russia, Germany,

Since Willy Brandt's time as chancellor foreign cultural and educational policy in Germany is called the "third pillar of foreign policy", the other two are the "security policy" and the "foreign trade policy". The program of the foreign cultural policy of the Federal Republic of Germany includes the dissemination of education, science and art in the host country. Another task is the presentation of a country's cultural inheritance. In my work, I deal exclusively with the meaning of art for foreign cultural and educational policy and bilateral cultural exchange. Fine arts have always been a proven way to strengthen the authority of the ruling party. Kings and Lords collected art to show their superiority, and even today, many politicians like to have their portrait taken in front of the works of their favorite artists. The arts affirm an existing reputation and can help to create a new self-image. This subject has been researched by the cultural theorist Wolfgang Ullrich - in several publications he dealt with the theme of power and art or rather economy and art.¹ The exhibition "Showing power. Art as a strategy of authority" in the German Historical Museum in Berlin 2010 was curated by Ullrich and dealt explicitly with the outlined topic making a point that art is a symbol of power. What works out in the individual case, can also be applied to an entire nation. Leonid Brezhnev once said: "Art is the best instrument for international understanding". But not only politicians use the arts as a status symbol and an instrument for diplomacy. Economics know as well about the power of art for advances in business. For decades, corporate identity has been a keyword for success and because of that cultural commitment became more and more important. A German Frankfurt based bank is a pioneer in the area of art collecting in Germany - by now its collection counts more than 50 000 artworks of modern and contemporary artists: Deutsche Bank generated touring exhibitions which attracted both public and media attention and made the bank's dedication to art famous in different countries. Furthermore, the company works together with foundations and grand museums: e.g. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Eremitage in St. Petersburg and the Städel Museum in Frankfurt. Based on these wellknown facts, I began to examine a specific situation. In my research I follow the development of the cultural exchange between the Federal Republic of Germany and Russia (or former Soviet Union). Timewise I examine the 2nd half of the 20th century. I decided to examine this long period in order to be able to follow the multiple changes in the cultural policy of the cold war and the period that came thereafter. The image of two examined states changed several times fundamentally during the 20th century and this is an other interesting aspect. They were both Allies and enemies and had suffered enormous damage after two great wars. Russia and Germany were bounded with a long and productive history. After the First World War there were intensive contacts - many poets and intellectuals lived in Berlin at that time and in 1922 the "First Russian exhibition of fine arts" was shown in the van Diemen Gallery in German capital. In the same year a counter-exhibition of German art went to Moscow. Germans could see the suprematists' and constructivists' works for the first time, while in Russia George Grosz, Otto Dix and many others have been exhibited. These projects were largely made possible by the political environment. They were organized in the moment of rapprochement between the two states, which were outlaws in the international politics. The reactions were varied: In Moscow the critical and unsparing art from Germany caused mostly negative reactions, while the Russian artists El Lissitzky, Marc Chagall and Iwan Puni got a lot of positive attention in Germany after their exhibition." This approach should have come to the end very soon and the image of the Russians or rather Germans should change drastically for decades. The course of historical events led to a long stagnation in the official cultural exchange between Germany and the Soviet Union. This period ended officially in the 1970s. Willy Brandt and Walter Scheel were also the leading initiators here. They gave a new meaning to the term "Eastern policy". It was an attempt for convergence of the Federal Republic of Germany and the states of the Warsaw Pact.ⁱⁱⁱ The new "Eastern policy" was equated with the Détente. The first official contract on a bilateral cultural agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the states of the foreign cultural policy and the cultural exchange have a bride spectre of ranges of effectivity – my interest is dedicated to exhibitions, which showed Russian/Soviet art in the the Federal Republic of Germany. In my research I exclude the exhibitions of the so-called German quangos. The Goethe Institute, ifa and other organisations act according to the specific program, which is subsidized by the government. A precise discription is given by the German political scientist Barbara Lippert:

"Quangos are organisations, which in compliance with administrative standards and mainly financed by governmental benefits, administrate governmental abandonings in the sphere of foreign cultural policy, but without being a part of collateral or direct state administration. However quangos work together closely with these in different forms."^v

For my analysis I use great exhibitions which were initiated by politicians or members of the economy directly and were staged as unique cultural events. In many projects one is accompanied by the other. Certainly this situation was eminently pronounced at the time of the real existing socialism in Russia, because the economy belonged to the state. The international understanding, to which the art-exhibitions belong as well, has following paradigms:

- understanding through more information, contacts and exchange
- reconciliation through reworking on historical guilt and enmeshment
- · overcoming of prejudices and concepts of enemy
- creation of supra- and transnational loyalities
- intercultural learning^{vi}

If we add these five paradigms, the examination of exhibitions as an instrument of foreign cultural policy becomes eminently efficient, when the two observed states have different political systems. There were many important exhibitions which used the listed categories in the period 1950-2010. A suitable abstract of the different perspectives on the cultural policy in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union is given here:

"Summing up one can declare, that in the socio-scientific research in the West and in the historio-materialistic research in the East, a broad concept of culture was achieved. For the USSR and other socialistic states an instrumental understanding of culture as an instrument of politics for achieving the Marxist-Leninist ideology has to be assumed, in which the CPSU had the absolute leading role in the cultural sphere as for politics and economy. This understanding of culture and cultural policy is an antagonism to the concepts and legal foundations developing in the democratic constitutional state."^{viii}

The exhibition

"Russian Realism 1850-1900"

From November 24, 1972 till February 25, 1973 the State Kunsthalle in Baden-Baden showed an exhibition of Russian realists from the 19th century. Several aspects made this exhibition exceptional for the beholder: For the first time in the history of Germany works of these artists were presented in a group exhibition. The other peculiarity was, that for the first time after Second World War major Russian museums lent works to the Federal Republic of Germany. Altogether 150 loans from 37 artists came from the State Tretjakov Gallery in Moscow and from the State Russian Museum in Leningrad. The exhibited works belonged to the so-called "critical realism", which developed in the 2nd half of the 19th century in Russia. This movement was influenced by the novel "What is to be done?" by Nicolay Chernyshevsky, in which the author asks how idealistic people can change the world. He turned against the idealism and saw the duty of art not in the forgery of nature, but in the use of nature as an objective basis for committed art.^{viii} The young painters reacted to this problem: they left the academy in St. Petersburg, dissociated themselves from traditionalism and founded their own union. This happened in 1870; the correct name of the group was "Community of artists for the arrangement of touring exhibitions" or in short "Peredwizhniki" (The Wanderers). Their aim was to display the real life of people and to fight social injustice. They painted their motives on huge canvases and exhibited them all over Russia. In Baden-Baden some of the main and famous works of this movement were exhibited:

"The Drowned" 1867 by Vasili Perov, "Officials on the lunchbreak" 1872 by Grigoriy Myasoedov, "Sudden attack" 1871 by Vasily Vereshchagin and "Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman Empire" by Ilya Repin.

Klaus Gallwitz writes in the foreword of the catalogue:

"Up until today, picture book prejudices and picture book sympathies are still characteristic for the most naïve relation to the Russian culture."^{ix}

He explains his decision for Russian realism with the fact, that most of the exhibited artists were completely unknown in Germany, while their friends the writers and composers of that time have a great audience in the West. This imbalance occurred because of deficient intercession. They were ignored by Western art history because they did not have an exhibition in Western Europe.

"The consistent and brilliant development of French art has finally given the tenets of our aesthetic. The first large exhibition of Russian realists in Western Europe will force many comparisons. It is not difficult to make an identification of the numerous suggestions, which the "Wanderers" took from Germany, Italy and France. But as clearly this will stand out the peculiar, sometimes blatant determination of their art."^x

Gallwitz speaks about a desired extension of a horizon in two directions: a historical one and a spatial one. Historical, because this exhibition will add Russian realists to the Western arthistory of the 19th century, and spatial because both galleries, which lent the works, would gain bigger publicity in West Germany. Gallwitz complains that tourists in Russian museums always seek for the familiar and hence barely know the State Russian Museum and the State Tretjakov Gallery, where only Russian art is collected and exhibited. Another problem is the German attitude towards the art of the 19th Century. He elaborates on this:

"We've been told too long that these pictures belong to the depots of our museums. We have passed by too long the early Menzel, Leibl and his circle, Thoma and Böcklin, to be curious about the realists of Russian origin."^{xi}

This view belongs to the past, Gallwitz thinks. Therefore it is important to make Russian art of the 19th century wellknown in the Federal Republic of Germany. Based on the intentions of the organizers, it is now important to examine the media coverage of the exhibition.

"Russian Realism 1850-1900" in the media

There was a lot of response by the public and rhe media to the exhibition. This was also due to the fact, that it was under the patronage of the Soviet Ambassador Valentin Falin, he officially opened it with a speech. Gallwitz reports to the Soviet news service "TASS" on February 16, 1973, that no other exhibition has gained so much media attention.

The official visitors were Minister-President (Hans Filbinger) and Landtag-President (Camill Wurz) of Baden-Württemberg as well as different diplomates from Stuttgart and Bonn. Gallwitz writes about this situation:

"Without any doubt the exhibiton was essential for strengthening interest and sympathies between German and Russian people."^{xii}

This statement could be true, but regarding to the impact of art primarly, an ambivalent picture appears in the media reports. The exhibited works are perceived very differently. The Nassauische Landeszeitung from Limburg writes:

"Genrepictures of every kind, painted in mostly homespun, plain manner control the walls, and the one who takes peinture of the 19th century as a benchmark, the French Impressionists or just the German Leibl, Menzel and Liebermann - this person will not get his money's worth as the German-Soviet politicians who are active in cultural affairs, do. [...] This realism appears anecdotic, almost idyllic today and is till our presence an indispensable agent of the Russian history."^{xiii}

The reporters of "Spiegel"-magazine could not miss the opportunity pass by, to critisize the imported art:

"The picture harvest (from late Cézanne-convertings to naïve peinture in its worst meaning) excuses in turn the traditional scepticism of Western art-observers and the occasional faintheartedness of Eastern functionaries..."xiv

In Hannoversche Allgemeine the attitude towards Russian art is modified by the history of the country:

"The works of Russian artists are yet much more authentic and persuasive than all, that Leibl, van Gogh and Gauguin made in some periods of their lives; Russians were still close to the Middle Ages, which lasted there until the beginning of the 18th century."^{xv}

Other reports took offence on the method how Soviet Union dealt with its own art history. The catalogue is mentioned in many cases as an example. The manuscript was made in the USSR, with essays from Lidia Yovleva from the Tretjakov Gallery and N. N. Novouspenski from the Russian Museum. Thereby the criticism expanded towards the director of the State Kunsthalle, who adopted these essays altogether with the catalogue for the exhibition:

"Realism over 50 years? The term is understood by the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden not in a Western but in a Soviet way, the reasons might be naïve enthusiasm or gratefulness towards the conferrors; according to that - realism means not a style but a certain programm [...] And this realism takes effect until today, the adjournment of the "art of the revolution" has been erased to get a clear development from 19th century until today."^{xvi}

The stylization of the socialist realism as a direct successor of the art of "Peredwizhniki" in a direct evolution, without Alexandre Benois[´] "Mir Isskustva" (World of art) or without the whole movement of the Russian avant-garde is criticized by many reporters (FAZ, Stuttgarter Zeitung and other).^{xvii}

"The Russian realism got the epithet 'critical' to distinguish it from after-revolutionary Soviet realism. Here it is obviovsly meant, that because of its relation to society contents 'critical realism' is seen as a pre-stage of socialist realism and the last is, of course, an evolution of the earlier one. This construction is obviously wrong. One will see, if people responsible for Moscow's culture will be courageous enough to deliver the descend to the meta-artistic hollows of socialist realism, after this successful presentation of great realistic art."^{xviii}

A TASS-correspondent in contrast praises the outstanding exhibition, the prudent essays in the catalogue and expresses a wish for a comparable exhibition of Socialist realism in the Federal Republic of Germany.^{xix} Such a review was shown only two decades later in Germany.

The Arrangements

As mentioned earlier, there was a turn in diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Willy Brand's "New Ostpolitik" and the signing of the "Treaty of Moscow" on 12th of August 1970, created a new basis for cultural relations between the two states. Its meaning for détente and the preliminary normalization of relations to the USSR is unquestionable.^{xx}

"Brezhnev and Gromyko stressed the static elements of the treaty in the first place, during official comments (territorial and political status quo in Europe. Including the border between GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany). They also appreciated the Federal Republic's 'Turn towards realism' as a due for peace in Europe'^{xxi}

Brandt in contrast accentuated more dynamic elements: peace, requirements for a better collaboration and advantages for Berlin. The treaty did not include direct cultural dimensions. Because of this, it can be seen only as a starting point for exchange relations, which followed directly by ratification.^{xxii} The analysed exhibition serves as an example for

this circumstance. "Russian realism 1850-1900" took place in Baden-Baden from 24th November 1972 till 25th February 1973. The exhibition was preceded by four years of preparations of by the director of the Kunsthalle Klaus Gallwitz. On his first academic journeys to the Soviet Union, he got many new impressions, which were so strong, that he wanted to share them with people of West Germany. He made preliminary work by building up a network at the Intourist-agency during his journeys. He also went on auditions to his colleagues in the grand Russian museums, to line up an exchange. The idea of presenting Russian art in West Germany grew. The location Baden-Baden appeared to be eminently helpful, because this city for Russian people is a synonym for a peaceful health resort and at the same time it is a solid concept in the Russian history of 18th and 19th century.

"This was the right place. I could always say to my dialog partners at the ministerium: Please - Baden-Baden is not the revanchistic Federal Republic, it has a long Russian and French history."xxiii

At the same time Gallwitz was in proceedings with colleagues from the State Tretjakov Gallery in Moscow and the State Russian Museum in Leningrad. At this point the question was raised: Which Russian or Soviet art should be exhibited in Baden-Baden? It was clear, that the official art (socialist realism) could not be exhibited at this time. Icons were not allowed to leave the territory of the Soviet Union and restorational guidelines did not allow it either. The Russian avant-garde from the first two decades of the 20th century was banned and kept in the depots. It was only possible to ask the Soviet Union for something, that was in compliance with the party policy. After this process of elimination only art of the 19th century remained as an option. The art of "Peredwizhniki" was considered in the Soviet Union as great cultural heritage and was, as I already mentioned, seen as the ancestor of social realism. In addition, the halls of the realists were the main attractions in the Tretyakov Gallery and the Russian Museum.^{xxiv}

The city of Baden-Baden played a particular role in the history of "Peredwizhniki" - they were close friends with the writers, who used to spend their summer in Baden-Baden. Never before in Russia have artists worked so closely together with authors and shared the same beliefs. In Baden-Baden writers like Dostojevsky, Turgenev, Gogol and others left many traces. With the agreement on the exhibition of "Peredwizhniki" both sides were satisfied. Klaus Gallwitz won so much trust in the Soviet Union during his preliminary work, that he was able to choose about two third of the works himself. Of course his Russian colleagues helped him with that. The other path led to the Foreign Office, where Gallwitz's proposal was quickly accepted. From the beginning, preparations for the exhibition were diplomatic labour. The Soviet Union cooperated in this period with the West only after a definite pattern – one can call The Soviet authorities were very accurate it "eye-for-an-eye"-policy. and authoritative: An exhibition of Russian realists in West Germany had to be supplemented by a counter-exhibition in the Soviet Union. That should not be a problem, as member and Chairman of the Advisory Council for Cultural Affairs of the Foreign Office Gallwitz was in a favourable position. He could agree with his colleagues from the Committee on a forthcoming counter-exhibition with loans from the Federal Republic, and mentioned it in the negotiations with the Soviet Union. Gallwitz managed the loans for the Soviet Union itself and sent the counter-exhibition "German Realists in the 19th century" to Moscow and Leningrad in 1974.

Some newspapers reported, that Gallwitz's exhibition in Baden-Baden was incorporated into the cultural policy and that he planed it long time before the cultural agreement and before the debate about realism in West Germany started.^{xxv} This is only partly true: The exhibition was not incorporated into the cultural policy, but one can say that Gallwitz reacted at the right time. He was always aware of the fact, that he operates with his efforts in the field of cultural policy and as diplomats, military officers and politicians appeared at the opening of the exhibition, he certainly knew that he had reached his goal. Only in May 1973, the official cultural agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union was signed.^{xxvi} The exhibition of Russian realists led in the next few years to several satellite exhibitions, e.g. in Rosenheim, Dusseldorf and Munich. Other major projects then followed. It was not long before the first works by Malevich and Tatlin were borrowed from the Soviet Union for West German exhibitions.

Concluding Remarks

The exhibition in Baden-Baden in 1972 to 1973 can be called a starting point of the history of art exhibitions as means of cultural diplomacy between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union in the 2nd half of the 20th century. Before "Russian Realism 1850-1900" there was no comparable exhibition with official loans from the Soviet Union, which was widely noticed. After first contract between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union more and more large exhibition projects have been implemented. Gallwitz continued his work with the USSR in 1976, by issuing a successor exhibition in his new working place, in the Städel Art Institute in Frankfurt. "Russian Painting 1890-1917" was the next stage of arthistory after the Russian realism. This exhibition was also based on the principle of exchange: A great variety of Russian art of the 20 year-long period before October Revolution was shown in Frankfurt. This time some smaller works of Kandinsky, Tatlin and Malevich have been borrowed. This generosity of the Soviet Ministry of Culture had to do with the fact that two years earlier in Düsseldorf, a major exhibition of works from the George Costakis collection was shown. This collector was able to build up an impressive collection of Russian avant-garde after the end of the Second World War. With the help of

his close contacts in the West, especially in the Federal Republic, he made the first presentation of his collection in 1974 in the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, supported by Deutsche Bank and Mannesmann AG. After this exhibition, it was not a big taboo to borrow to the Federal Republic some minor works of the forbidden avant-garde artists. These exhibitions were the first beginnings in the 1970s. In the next decade there was a real boom of Soviet, or rather, Russian art exhibitions in Germany.

"Russian Realism 1850-1900" is an example for an exhibition, which was realized because of a private initiative. At the same time it became part of the history of cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany. On the one hand because Gallwitz' preparation and concept could have been called diplomatic work, and on the other hand because the exhibition was understood as a cultural political event in the media and by the politics. Two months after the end of it, official contracts about a cultural exchange were signed. Gallwitz' exhibition and counter-exhibition were appreciated as an adequate format for cultural diplomacy. He was asked to create a similar project under similar circumstances. The result was the mentioned exhibition in Frankfurt. If we take media-reports as THE echo of the exhibition of Soviet art history. The topic of censorship and the unfree art in the Soviet Union as well as the naiveté and crudity of the socialist realism were the main and most popular topics for the media-reports from the exhibitions that I have analysed. This trend stayed constant and did not change even after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. In the 1980s more points of critique appeared with the first exhibitions of Peter Ludwigs new collection of Soviet art. This time the quality of art was critisized.

If we take a look at the attendance of the exhibition "Russian Realism 1850-1900", we can certainly say, that the audience had a big interest in this art. There was obviously a need to see Russian art. Another attraction was the rarefaction of the exhibition - two of the main Russian museums lent their masterpieces to West Germany for the first time and with this they made an exhibition possible, which has never been shown in Western Europe in this form before. The effect of these assumptions was another reason for about 40.000 people to visit the exhibition. If we add all these aspects together, we observe a diverse situation: The exhibition presented for the first time artworks in the West, which interested a broad audience. The project is officially supported by the authorities. The approach of this exhibition is to achieve a better understanding of Russian art, but it is manipulated by the texts in the catalogue. The risk of failure. So we have here an aim for cultural approach which is bound to many compromises. This situation is heavily critisized by the media, and so the expected impression of the project is finally modified.

This short analysis of the basic conditions of an exhibition, which is integrated in the cultural exchange can be used for most exhibitions between 1950 and 2010, which were brought from the Soviet Union to the Federal Republic of Germany.

- vi Cf. Ibid. S.29
- vii Ibid. S. 19

^{viii} Cf. Nicolay Chernyshevsky "What is to be done?" 5. Aufl. Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin and Weimar 1979

^{ix}, Klaus Gallwitz (publ.) Catalogue "Russischer Realismus 1850-1900", C. F. Müller Großdruckerei und Verlag, 1972, S. 7 ^x Ibid.

xi Ibid. S.8

xii Gallwitz to Igor Maslow (source: Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, Sign. 550 Nr. 136) 30.06.2011

xiii Mathias Schreiber "In Baden-Baden sind die Russen" Nassauische Landeszeitung Limburg, 07.12.1972

- xiv "An Haß grenzende Unzufriedenheit" in Spiegel Nr.50, 4.12.1972
- ^{xv} Niels von Holst "Malerei zur Dostojewski-Zeit" Hannoversche Allgemeine, 29.11.1972
- ^{xvi} "Malerei in Rußland, 1850-1900", Neue Zürcher Zeitung 8.12.1972

xvii Cf. Helmut Schneider "Das Schöne ist das Leben" Stuttgarter Zeitung, 29.11.1972; Ursula Binder Hagelstange "Der schöne

- Frieden und die Ungerechtigkeit" Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 7.12.1972
- xviii Helmut Schneider "Das Schöne ist das Leben" Stuttgarter Zeitung, 29.11.1972
- xix source: Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, Sign. 550 Nr. 123, Eingesehen am 30.06.2011
- xx Cf. Lippert, S. 231
- xxi MID (Hrsg.), SSSR, S. 66-69, quoted in Lippert, S. 232
- xxii Cf. Lippert, S. 232-233
- xxiii Interview with Gallwitz, 02.08.2011 in Karlsruhe
- xxiv Catalogue "Russischer Realismus 1850-1900", 1972, S. 9

xxv Cf. Hans Otto Fehr "Leben unterm Zarenadler" Nürnberger Nachrichten, 6.12.1972; Werner Gilles "Der 'kritische Realismus' in Rußland" Mannheimer Morgen, 5.12.1972;

xxvi Cf. Lippert, S. 34

Elena Korowin studied art sience and art history, philosophy, curatorial practice, exhibition design and aesthetics at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design. She finished her Magistra Artium with a work about the differences in German and Russian receptions of art exhibitions in the post communist time. Now researching for her PhD project she works as a freelancer and journalist. Lives in Baden-Baden (Germany) and St. Petersburg (Russia).

¹ Cf. Wolfgang Ullrich "Mit dem Rücken zur Kunst, Die neuen Statussymbole der Macht." Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, Berlin 2000; "Tiefer hängen. Über den Umgang mit der Kunst." Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, Berlin 2003 ⁱⁱ Cf. Roland Enke "Die Russen schwirren um die Gedächtniskirche wie die Fliegen", in db.art-info 07, 2003

ⁱⁱⁱ Barbara Lippert "Auswärtige Kulturpolitik im Zeichen der Ostpolitik. Verhandlungen mit Moskau 1969-1990." (Diss.), Lit Verlag, Belrin 1996, S. 2

iv Cf. Ibid. S. 34

v Cf. Ibid. S. 173