

## Carrying a German Flame: the Olympic Torch Relay and its Instrumentalization in the Age of *Ostpolitik*

*Christopher Young* \*

**Abstract:** Sport was immensely important to the GDR because of its potential to symbolize ideological superiority. Prior as well as during the Olympic Games at Munich in 1972, the GDR tried in different ways to beat its hated West-German counterpart. Winning more medals than the FRG was one thing, but at the same time East Germany tried to obstruct the games in several propagandistic ways. The article centers on the GDR's failure to sabotage the planned route of the traditional torch relay through Eastern Europe.

### 1. Introduction

In the German cold-war experience, sport was anything but normal.<sup>1</sup> In the 1960s, as the world leant gently towards détente and gradually learnt to live with the post-war status quo, German-German attitudes crystallized out into an intractable and ever irascible stalemate. For Bonn and East Berlin, sport provided front-line action in a general political order that had become increasingly wary of real confrontation. Thus, from the late 1950s, the Americans and Soviets could revel in the televised hype of an annual track and field meet that pitted the prowess and potential of one system against each other within the

---

\* Adress all communications to: Christopher Young, University of Cambridge, Pembroke College, Trumpington Street, CAMBRIDGE CB2 1RF, Great Britain; e-mail: [cjy1000@cam.ac.uk](mailto:cjy1000@cam.ac.uk).

Author's note: I would like to thank Lorenz Peiffer (Hannover) and Kay Schiller (Durham) for their very kind help and support during the research for this article. Writing time was made possible, once again, by the generous support of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung.

<sup>1</sup> This essay, which sticks to a narrative of high political intrigue, will go no way towards following up Mary Fulbrook's (2005) recent admirable attempt to examine the normality of life within the GDR's 'participatory dictatorship'.

safety of an athletic arena.<sup>2</sup> Macroscopically, sport served as a surrogate realm for the playing out, and even celebration of ideological tensions. Microscopically, by contrast, when it came to German-German relations, sport had a much harder edge. The number of free-standing cross-border contests dwindled to a trickle after the erection of the Berlin Wall, and these were matched, virtually, in the mid 1960s by the enforced play-offs for places in the united German team imposed on both countries by IOC regulations.<sup>3</sup> German-German sporting contests were played for high stakes in a game of elimination and prestige on the international stage.

International sport was immensely important to the GDR not just because of its potential to symbolize ideological superiority but also due to its implicit and jealously guarded principle of universality.<sup>4</sup> Operating via non-governmental organizations which enjoyed growing autonomy from superpower interference and an increasing sense of their own importance across the 1960s, sport provided the GDR with the opportunity to stage its own acceptance in international networks, a process otherwise ruthlessly stymied by the Federal Republic in almost every other realm. By definition, then, Bonn was as interested in sport and its quirky international rules of engagement as East Berlin. The IOC's decision to permit a separate East German team to compete at the 1968 Mexico Olympics and, then, to grant the GDR a fully sovereign team at the 1972 Games in Munich ushered one round of sporting attrition towards its conclusion. On the surface, this resolution to a decade and a half's wrangling over recognition should have harmonized seamlessly with the SPD's election victory in 1969 and Brandt's new policies towards the East. Instead, the latter merely opened another set of contentious encounters in the run-up to the ultimate show-down in Munich.<sup>5</sup> From 1969 to 1972, the Munich Olympics and Brandt's rapprochement with the East combined to keep sports functionaries and politicians on both sides of the German border in a permanent state of anxious activity.<sup>6</sup>

It has been suggested that sport enjoyed an easier relationship with politics under Brandt than had hitherto been the case in the history of the Federal Republic.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, the days of mutual suspicion and institutional bullying that characterized the CDU's and the Grand Coalition's treatment of the Deutscher

---

<sup>2</sup> Turrini (2001).

<sup>3</sup> In 1961 there were 738 cross-border contests. This number dropped to 52 in 1966, 48 in 1967, and 32 in 1968. At the same time, the last two Olympics at which a united German team participated (Summer Games in Tokyo 1964 and the Winter Games in Grenoble 1968) required 60 play-off competitions between the FRG and the GDR. Blasius (2001); Peiffer (2002.)

<sup>4</sup> Excellent overviews are offered on this topic by, amongst others, Balbier (2004), Blasius (2001), Geyer (1996), Kilian (2001), Krebs (1999).

<sup>5</sup> For a general overview of the Munich Games, see Young (2006).

<sup>6</sup> For a full account, see Schiller and Young (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Blasius (2001, pp. 307f.).

Sport Bund (DSB), its teams, and representatives were over. But the GDR's campaign to erode the cultural-political capital of the Munich event meant that Bonn continued to pay close attention to its own sporting representatives' interactions in the international sphere. Such caution was understandable, as the onset of *Ostpolitik* and the public relations effort necessitated by the hosting of an Olympic Games involved the latter in increased international contact, not least with the East. In the GDR too, the unfolding of these two processes – the sporting and the political – over several years gave the SED leadership much to consider. The FRG, it was feared, would use the Munich Games to 'veil its aggressive, imperialistic and revanchist aims',<sup>8</sup> push its claim for *Alleinvertretung* to mediate against the growing international authority of the GDR, and increase its influence in international federations in order to underpin its "imperialism" with sporting achievements. At the same time, *Ostpolitik*, which involved direct deals with Poland and Czechoslovakia in addition to the USSR and the GDR, would be handing it a tool with which to drive a wedge between the GDR and its Warsaw Pact allies and thus undermine Eastern Block solidarity.

*Ostpolitik*, of course, had indeed shuffled the pack in East German politics.<sup>9</sup> Not only did it encourage Moscow to play double bluff with its satellite states, but drew the GDR hierarchy into duplicitous games of poker with the Soviet leadership. For Ulbricht, who still harboured hopes of a united socialist Germany, and Honecker, who viewed increased contact with the West as the Trojan horse that would bring the GDR down, the stakes were raised to political survival. Both men had a great interest in sport: the former, a gymnast in his youth, was a declared fanatic, the latter – following custom in the GDR – held sport within his remit. Both had starkly differing views of what should happen in sport.

This became apparent on Christmas Day 1970, when Ulbricht hosted the country's leading sports functionaries (minus Honecker) at his home. Over Frau Ulbricht's coffee and cake, the First Secretary sought to persuade his guests of the need for a more flexible political and indeed sports-political approach in the new climate.<sup>10</sup> The view of the GDR's sports history that Ulbricht expressed that day, whilst not inaccurate in its broad outline, would certainly have been too *gesamtdeutsch* in its premise to harmonize with the burgeoning Honecker-Brezhnev axis. East Germany's international sporting success, thus Ulbricht, should be portrayed as a natural consequence of the GDR's policy after 1945 of simply pushing along the grain of established German traditions:

---

<sup>8</sup> Thus read many statements from the period issuing from the GDR.

<sup>9</sup> Of the many books on *Ostpolitik*, the followed were particularly helpful: Kaiser (1997), Potthoff (2002), Sarotte (2001).

<sup>10</sup> Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv Berlin (henceforth SAPMO) DY 30/IVA2/18/-11: Zusammenfassung über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Walter Ulbricht am 25. Dezember 1970 in Oberhof, 5 January 1971.

“im Grunde genommen wurde eine Vereinigung der Arbeitersportbewegung mit der bürgerlichen deutschen Turn- und Sportbewegung vorgenommen.” Sport, Ulbricht argued, was another fine example of the GDR’s truth claim to German nationhood; for him it was clear that “der sozialistische deutsche Nationalstaat unter den Bedingungen des entwickelten gesellschaftlichen Systems die Interessen der deutschen Nation vertritt, während die BRD diese Traditionen über Bord geworfen hat.” Ulbricht’s concrete suggestions for Munich were also diametrically opposed to those already taking shape under Honecker’s guidance. Whilst the First Secretary proposed: “[d]er sozialistische Sportler der DDR muß im Ausland als deutscher Humanist erkannt werden, der seinen sozialistischen deutschen Nationalstaat würdig vertritt”, his deputy’s team had appealed to the allies to take part in the cultural festival “nicht vorwiegend mit Werken des humanistisch-demokratischen Kulturerbes, sondern vor allem mit Beiträgen der sozialistischen Kunst und Kultur”.<sup>11</sup> Whilst the former wanted the country’s athletes to take the trouble to visit “die Stätten deutscher Nationalkultur” and treat Munich “wie jede andere ausländische Großstadt”, the latter had even declined an invitation for East German former gold-medallists to join their Western counterparts in attending the Games as guests of honour.<sup>12</sup>

But it was not long until Brezhnev had decided to take Honecker to the negotiating table with him, and Ulbricht was removed from power. However, that is not to say that the new First Secretary would have it all his own way when it came to Munich. As with the course of the political negotiations themselves, there were many twists still to come, with Moscow distancing itself and intervening at turns as best fitted its overall strategy at any given moment. Such strategic decisions often concerned the mood of the satellite states, which in general were beginning to weary of their East German comrades’ entrenched and censoring attitude to the Federal Republic.<sup>13</sup> The remainder of this article will exemplify the varied and shifting influences that came to bear on sports events at this particular juncture in the Cold War by focusing on one particularly high-profile instance: the Olympic torch relay at the Games of 1972.<sup>14</sup> Here eastern-block duplicity and discontent, Soviet power-games, the East German ‘anti-fascist imagination’ and West German economic might form the weave of a story in which ultimately the power of sport plays more than a decisive role in influencing and undoing political machinations.

---

<sup>11</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/2.028/-38: Bericht über den Besuch einer Arbeitsgruppe des Ministeriums für Kultur beim Kulturministerium der UdSSR zur Durchführung konsultativer Gespräche in Vorbereitung der Olympischen Sommerspiele 1972 in München und Kiel, 23 February 1970.

<sup>12</sup> SAPMO 02/IVA2/18/10: R. Hellmann to E. Honecker, 10 December 1970.

<sup>13</sup> See Schiller and Young (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> A preliminary account of the Torch Relay is given by Staadt (1994).

## 2. The 1972 Olympic Torch Relay

Three Warsaw Pact countries – Rumania, Hungary, and Bulgaria – had little to gain directly from their allies' negotiations with the FRG, but equally did not wish to be left in the political and economic cold. For this purpose, they were prepared to lose some credit with the GDR, gambling probably that their individual moves might fall into an appropriate cycle of Moscow's oscillating policy towards its most awkward protégé. Historically, their relationship with the GDR had been unremarkable compared to that of Poland and Czechoslovakia, but, paradoxically, in terms of the Munich Olympics, it was to prove most uneven. The major bone of contention was the route of the torch relay. During the course of 1970, the socialist countries had reached agreement on participation in the culture and youth programmes of the Games relatively easily,<sup>15</sup> but these events affected only a tiny proportion of the respective populations that were permitted to travel to Munich. Domestically, the passing of the flame through socialist territory represented both a larger political risk if accepted and a potential for massive popular disappointment if denied. Poland and Czechoslovakia joined the GDR and the USSR in refusing the OK's invitation, the latter two feigning initial interest before spinning out their ultimate replies for almost a year in a deliberate plan both to create maximum organizational disruption and dangle a carrot for West German support for Moscow's for the 1976 Games.<sup>16</sup> However, at a meeting of brother parties in Moscow in December 1970 (a meeting, incidentally, of which Ulbricht had been unaware on Christmas Day), it was decided that the socialist countries should abstain from hosting the relay and argue that it should follow the shortest route from Olympia to Munich. This decision, confirmed immediately afterwards at the socialist countries' sports conference in Varna,<sup>17</sup> contained two major flaws. The first was that the notion of the shortest route had been vague and therefore open to redefinition.<sup>18</sup> The second was that Rumania, Hungary and Bulgaria had al-

---

<sup>15</sup> For further details, see Schiller and Young (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Carl und Liselott Diem Archiv, Olympic Research Institute of the German Sport University Cologne (henceforth CULDA), XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: Letter from W. Daume to H. Schöbel, betr.: Olympischer Fackellauf 1972, 27 October 1969. SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/2.028/-35: Aktennotiz – Weg der olympischen Flamme 1972, 15 December 1969. CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: Letter from W. Daume to K. Andrianov, 9 March 1970. Ibid.: Letter from W. Daume to K. Andrianov, 10 July 1970. Ibid.: Übersetzung des Briefes von K. Andrianov vom 31.7.1970. Ibid.: Letter from H. Schöbel to W. Daume, 1 August 1970.

<sup>17</sup> SAPMO, 02/IV/10.02/19: Information über die gegenwärtige Haltung einiger sozialistischer Länder zum Fackellauf anlässlich der Olympischen Spiele 1972 in München, 3 February 1971.

<sup>18</sup> At a meeting in the GDR embassy in Budapest on 27 January 1971, for instance, the Hungarians pointed out: "Während der Beratung in Varna im Dezember 1971 sei angeblich nicht exakt gesagt worden, was unter dem 'kürzesten Weg' zu verstehen sei. Die Meinung der VRU ist dazu: der kürzeste Weg sei per Flugzeug oder über Jugoslawien und Österreich

ready broken ranks and given their consent to the OK the previous spring.<sup>19</sup> In Moscow, however, only the traditionally recalcitrant Rumanians chose to point this out.

Whereas Rumania had let the side down badly before, most notably by establishing diplomatic relations with the FRG in 1967, Hungary and Bulgaria obviously found themselves in a predicament in Moscow. When the GDR had paid them a visit earlier in the year, it had found them, unlike the Rumanians,<sup>20</sup> largely co-operative. The Bulgarians had agreed with their guests' arguments, requested further consultations and proved their pedigree by refusing an all-expenses paid trip to the Kieler Woche to inspect the site of the Olympic regatta.<sup>21</sup> In Hungary too there was a detectable will within the Foreign Ministry to follow the East Germans' general line.<sup>22</sup> Both countries, however, had intimated that they might take part in the relay. As well as citing the domino effect of the other's possible participation, each put forward reasons of their own. The Bulgarian Foreign Ministry informed the GDR ambassador that it would like to host the relay should Moscow win the Games of 1976, and feared – somewhat spuriously – that refusal to do so in 1972 would disqualify it on the later occasion.<sup>23</sup> Arpad Csanadi (Deputy Chair of the Hungarian Association for Körperkultur und Sport) argued that hosting the flame would prove socialism's nurturing of the Olympic ideal and could be used simultaneously to influence the Hungarian population directly in the Olympic cause.<sup>24</sup> The East Germans

---

nach der BRD! Das würde jedoch nicht der Unterstützung der olympischen Idee entsprechen. Deshalb werde in Erwägung gezogen, die Flamme auch über einen kleinen Abschnitt des Territoriums der VR Ungarn zu führen." (SAPMO, 02/IV/10.02/19: Information über die gegenwärtige Haltung einiger sozialistischer Länder zum Fackellauf anlässlich der Olympischen Spiele 1972 in München, 3 February 1971.)

<sup>19</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: Letters and telegrams to W. Daume in April and May 1970, re. acceptance of participation in the torch relay: Luxembourg (13 April), France (14 April), Switzerland (13 April), Italy (8 April), Austria (14 April), Yugoslavia (15 April), Rumania (20 May), Bulgaria (16 April).

<sup>20</sup> The East Germans' limited contact with the Rumanians over Olympic issues bear this out. See: SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-17: Vermerk über eine Konsultation mit dem Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der SRR im Zusammenhang mit der Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Olympischen Spiele 1972, 22 July 1970. SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Auszug aus einem Inf.-Bericht der Botschaft Bukarest vom 5.1., 18 January 1971.

<sup>21</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-17: Vermerk über Konsultationen im MfAA der VRB, 23 March 1970. SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-17: Auszug aus einem Vermerk über ein Pressegespräch des Beauftragten des MfAA der Regierung der DDR für die Olympischen Spiele, Botschafter Böttger, am 21.3.1970 in Sofia (no date).

<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless the Deputy Chair of the Hungarian Association for Körperkultur und Sport, Arpad Csanadi, was judged to be clearly underestimating the danger of West German imperialism. SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-17: AG 72 – Vermerk über Konsultationen im Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der UVR, 3 June 1970.

<sup>23</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-17: AG 72 – Kurzinformation to Wildberger, ZK der SED, 5 May 1970.

<sup>24</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-17: AG 72 – Vermerk über Konsultationen im Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der UVR, 3 June 1970.

were unimpressed with both positions, and took up the Hungarians' invitation to prove that the West Germans were intending to misuse the flame for political purposes. Put on the spot, they convinced them that the organizers were planning to split the torch before it reached Munich and send it across the GDR to Berlin.

It was apparent, however, that the need for a watertight argument about the flame had become acute and its conceptualization was put on the agenda of the next meeting of the GDR's special Olympic commission.<sup>25</sup> By the time of the Moscow meeting in December 1970, the GDR had a two-pronged argumentation in place.<sup>26</sup> First, it pressed the emotive issue of West Berlin, arguing that the organizers had informed them that should they wish to bring the torch to East Berlin, it would have to traverse the western part of the city as well.<sup>27</sup> Second, it posited – contrafactually, given that the relay was actually inaugurated in 1936 – that the organizers of the Berlin Games had contravened the Olympic tradition observed by all subsequent host cities and invented “der ‘lange’ Fackellauf”, which had provocatively and unnecessarily crossed Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Austria and Czechoslovakia in a route of over 3075 kilometres. Although in Moscow, the GDR persuaded its allies – superficially, at least – that the flame should travel as directly as possible from Greece to Germany with the aid of motorized transport, either by plane (for which it cited the examples of 1952, 1956, 1964) or by ship via Italy, Switzerland or Austria (as in 1960 or 1968),<sup>28</sup> neither of its arguments stood up to the facts of Olympic history or the Munich organizers' planned itinerary. In point of fact, Berlin 1936 represented one of the most direct routes in Olympic history. An alternative path following a strict crow line, would merely have swapped Albania for Bulgaria.

Subsequent Games might have benefited from the assistance of transport, but they were nearly always much more extravagant in their psycho-geographi-

---

<sup>25</sup> For details of the formation of this committee, see Schiller and Young (forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/2.021/-124: ZK der SED, Büro Mittag – Was beabsichtigen die herrschenden Kreise der Bundesrepublik und die Organisatoren der Olympischen Spiele in München 1972 mit dem Fackellauf?, 5 February 1971. SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-17: Without title, speech on the torch relay (1971, no exact date).

<sup>27</sup> The GDR had not in fact been contacted by the FRG about Berlin. However, it is unclear whether they had invented a plausible scenario or were acting on recent intelligence information derived from the West German Foreign Office. A letter from early 1971 shows that although Berlin had been definitely ruled out of consideration before the Soviet Block's meeting in Moscow, it had nonetheless been in discussion: “Das Auswärtige Amt war von Anfang an gegen die geplante lange Strecke. Für den Fall, daß der Lauf durch die DDR gehen und dabei Ostberlin berührt werden sollte, hatte es lediglich vorsorglich darauf hingewiesen, daß dann auch Westberlin zu beteiligen sei. Durch den erwähnten Beschluss des Fackellaufausschusses vom 2. November 1970 ist das Problem Berlin hinfällig geworden” (Source, Archiv des Instituts für Sportwissenschaft, Universität Hannover, Handakten Martius: Letter from Martius to the Foreign Minister, 23 February 1971.)

<sup>28</sup> SAPMO 02/IVA2/2.028/35: Letter from A. Norden to E. Honecker, 4 February 1971.

cal projections.<sup>29</sup> In 1952, for instance, the flame had stopped in both Munich and Düsseldorf, where it was honoured on the tarmac by speeches from the cities' respective mayors before flying to Aalborg, whence it skirted the northern Danish and western Swedish coast to Copenhagen, Malmö and Gothenburg before zigzagging, partly in a special-terrain vehicle, across and up the east coast to its apex with Finland. There it was conjoined at Tornio with a flame lit above the Arctic Circle in Pallastunturi from beams of the midnight sun, before tracing its way south again to Helsinki. In the case of Rome 1960, too, the ship from Greece disembarked its symbolic cargo in Syracuse, allowing for a long route through the south of Italy. The torch's further-flung destinations merely provided increased scope for the celebratory imagination. On its way to Melbourne in 1956, it stopped off in four countries (Calcutta, Bangkok, Singapore and Djakarta) before beginning its long Australian trek from Darwin. Not to be outdone, the Tokyo organizers of 1964 took the torch on tour to Istanbul, Beirut, Teheran, Lahore, New Delhi, Calcutta, Rangoon, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Hongkong and Taipei before splitting it in four to send it through all regions of Japan. The most recent Games, in Mexico City four years later, had been no less expansive in their quest to trace out the advent of European culture to the New World. Combining the routes of Christopher Columbus and famous Spanish sailors, the Mexicans brought the flame to Genoa (Columbus's birthplace) and Barcelona (the site of his homecoming) and, after a relay through Spain concluded by a descendent of Columbus, proceeded along the explorer's route to the Canary Islands and San Salvador in the Bahamas, where relays were also held. It then followed the path of conquistador Hernando Cortés, via Veracruz to Tenochtitlan (the forerunner of the Mexican capital) in whose environs it merged with Aztec culture by lighting a flame dish on the Pyramid of the Moon.

Initially, the Munich organizers' retained the option of a grand scheme. One early sketch outlined the possibility of a relay covering 27,000 kilometres (only 4000 of which by plane), lasting 110-120 days at an estimated cost of DM 3.5 million.<sup>30</sup> There were also suggestions – which fused the memory of Mexico (where the torch merged with Aztec culture on the Pyramid of the Moon in Tenochtitlan) with an aspiration to the technological cutting edge – of letting

---

<sup>29</sup> The following facts are taken from Borgers (1996).

<sup>30</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, IV.2: Vorlage zur 17. Vorstandssitzung des Organisationskomitees am 21./22. November 1969. (The matter, however, was not dealt with at this session). The proposed route was: Olympia – Athens – Sofia – Bucharest – Belgrade – Budapest – Vienna – Linz – Innsbruck – Milan – Florence – Rome – Naples – Messina – Palermo – Tunis (ship) Algiers – Oran – Casablanca – Tangiers (ship) Algeciras – Lisbon – Madrid – Barcelona – Montpellier – Marseille – Lyon – Paris – Brussels – Rotterdam (ship) Dover – London – Birmingham – Manchester – Harwich (ship) Amsterdam – Bremen – Flensburg – Fredericia (ship) Nyborg – Korsör (ship) Copenhagen. From there by plane to: Oslo – Stockholm – Helsinki – Leningrad – Moscow – Minsk – Warsaw. Then run again: Prague – Leipzig – Frankfurt/M. – Augsburg – Zurich – Munich.

the flame orbit the earth in a satellite.<sup>31</sup> But these were soon reduced to narrower, albeit still ambitious dimensions.

The idea of going to Africa was floated, but after initial enthusiasm on both sides, gently dropped. In March 1970, the relay working party, in full awareness of the event's "political character" and buoyed by the initial interest of the Soviets and East Germans, planned a 6,022 kilometre run through Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Rumania, touching the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia before entering Hungary, Austria, northern Italy, Switzerland, and skirting eastern France before its descent to Munich.<sup>32</sup> The decision by the USSR and the GDR to protract their withdrawal over this period and later to argue for the shortest route was undermined, however, by an unforeseen and unrelated intervention. In mid 1970, Turkey asked for Istanbul to be included, thus shifting the centre of gravity definitively to the East with obvious practical consequences for the definition of the 'shortest route'.<sup>33</sup> Soon the President of the 1972 Organizing Committee, Willi Daume, could argue in the face of Eastern block criticism – almost with impunity – that some socialist countries lay on the direct path.<sup>34</sup> Vitally, there was never any real plan to take the torch to Berlin. In 1967, a very early draft had contrasted two options, a 'shortest route' (2925 kilometres via Vienna, Passau) and one with an additional loop via Prague, East Berlin and Leipzig.<sup>35</sup> The thinking behind this was still just in keeping with West German foreign policy and practice and reflected the long-term German vision of IOC President Avery Brundage:<sup>36</sup> "Die Einbeziehung der DDR in den Fackel-Staffellauf könnte den Gedanken und das Bewußtsein eines

---

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Kai Braak, an advisor to the OC, suggested that the flame "in einer Raumkapsel die Erde umkreist, bevor sie in München für die Zeit der Spiele festgehalten wird. Ein Flug um die Erde ist ja auch einfacher zu realisieren (z.B. mit einem Passagierflugzeug). Wichtig ist bei beiden Vorschlägen, dass der Staffellauf, der Olympia möglichst direkt mit München verbände, aufgegeben oder doch stark reduziert wird zugunsten der Durchdringen des technischen Fortschritts (Raumfahrt) mit dem olympischen Gedanken. Es wäre gut, wenn vor der ersten Atombombe die Flamme des Friedens im Weltall herumflöge. Das wäre eine Gemeinschaftsaufgabe für die Atommächte, die nützlich und in ihrer psychologischen Wirkung vielleicht nicht zu unterschätzen ist". (CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.3: Einige Gedanken über Eröffnungs- und Schlussfeier bei den Olympischen Spielen 1972 in München von Dr. Kai Braak, Oberspielleiter am Staatstheater in Kassel, 23/ 27 February 1968.)

<sup>32</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: 1. Sitzung Ausschuß-Fackellauf, 2 March 1970.

<sup>33</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: 2. Sitzung Ausschuß-Fackellauf, 15 June 1970. The notion of the direct route seems to have been approximate rather than strictly geometrical.

<sup>34</sup> This was: Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria. (Source: CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: 3. Sitzung Ausschuss-Fackellauf, 2 November 1970). Although this is the route eventually followed, the actual direct route from Istanbul would have been: Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria, Federal Republic.

<sup>35</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: Vorschlag und Entwurf für den Olympia-Fackelstaffellauf 1972, 18 July 1967.

<sup>36</sup> On Brundage, see the seminal biography by Guttmann (1983).

geeinten Deutschlands nur vertiefen. Die Olympische Idee würde hier – unter Berücksichtigung des besonders gelagerten deutschen Verhältnisses – eine weitere Erfüllung finden.” But when planning began in earnest in 1969, Berlin never seriously entered the agenda,<sup>37</sup> and attention turned more to gaining maximum exposure for the flame along the Alpine holiday routes in the south.<sup>38</sup> In mid 1970, the Auswärtige Amt advised that East Berlin would cause political problems and Daume wrote to the IOC with three options relating to the GDR, none of which included the city.<sup>39</sup>

Hungary and Bulgaria might have been embarrassed into silence in Moscow, but the GDR’s well-laid plans began unravelling just weeks later at a meeting of relay host countries called by the Munich organizers in January 1971. This was attended by NOC members from each of the participating nations, except Bulgaria, which had sent a telegram ten days earlier withdrawing altogether due “to unforeseen circumstances”.<sup>40</sup> Daume announced that the organizers had been the victims of a GDR smear campaign, and the participants, including the Hungarian representative,<sup>41</sup> demanded a letter be written to the Bulgarians expressing their consternation at the politicization of a neutral event. With the GDR’s strategy exposed by telegrams and international press releases,<sup>42</sup> Hungary and Bulgaria were left with a high-profile and difficult decision to make. The Hungarians, who had not actually withdrawn but simply withheld their final acceptance,<sup>43</sup> found themselves in the easier position. A joint paper put forward by the Central Committee and the Hungarian sports association, which located Hungary as an integral part of the shortest route, was

---

<sup>37</sup> The first working party meeting mentioned Berlin as a problem, but significantly did not include it on any of the routes it discussed. (Source: CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: 1. Sitzung Ausschuss-Fackellauf, 2 March 1970.)

<sup>38</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, IV.2: 19. Vorstandssitzung des Organisationskomitees, 17 April 1970.

<sup>39</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: 2. Sitzung Ausschuss-Fackellauf, 15 June 1970. The suggestions were: 1. Munich to Kiel through the GDR; 2. Olympia to Munich via GDR; 3. Dividing the torch at Kassel, with one going north to Kiel via Magdeburg, Rostock, Wismar, one going south via Erfurt and Leipzig.

<sup>40</sup> Deutsches Olympisches Institut Berlin (now Frankfurt/M.) (henceforth DOI), Daume Nachlaß 600: Telegram from V. Stoytchev to W. Daume, 6 January 1970: “Badauere dass unvorhersehbare Umstände das BOK verhindern den Olympischen Feuerstaffellauf durch bulgarisches Territorium zu organisieren [sic].”

<sup>41</sup> This was Biró, because Arpad Csanadi was involved in a consultation with the three IOC Vice Presidents on questions of amateur status.

<sup>42</sup> DOI, Daume Nachlaß 600: Telegram from W. Daume to V. Stoytchev, 11 January 1971. SAPMO DY 30/IVB2/18/-27: APP report – Brundage: Olympische Flamme nicht nach Westberlin, 20 January 1970. DOI, Daume Nachlass 600: Letter from Daume to Martinsky, 18 February 1971.

<sup>43</sup> Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin (henceforth PAAA), B42 / 1338: Betr.: Besuch des bulgarischen Außenhandelsministers Abramow; hier: Olympische Spiele München 1972, 10 February 1971.

discussed in the Politbüro in March 1971.<sup>44</sup> Thus, using one prong of the GDR's argument to undermine the other, a path was cleared to confirm their participation to the Munich organizers.<sup>45</sup> A month later, the Hungarians put up their own smoke screen, giving the GDR conflicting information about the state of their deliberations.<sup>46</sup>

This will have been of little surprise to the East Germans. At their initial consultation the year before, they had noted a split in the degree of cooperation they might expect from the helpful Foreign Ministry on the one hand and the politically less supine sports department on the other.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, they had discovered that sport in Hungary enjoyed a semi-autonomous position that was reasonably protected from excessive government intervention. The reason for this relative freedom was the regime's recognition of sport's vital role in modern Hungarian identity, which boasted the world's best football team of the 1950s and a fine Olympic record.<sup>48</sup> The general decline in Hungarian sport in the early 1960s had provoked widespread discussion amongst the population and political circles alike, with the so-called "period of stagnation" being brought to an end with the dissolution of the state sports apparatus and its reconstitution on a communal basis.<sup>49</sup> The new system had proved hugely successful, Hungary coming third in the medal chart at the Mexico Games, and earning special mention at the beginning of the Official Film. Preparation for Munich was no less intense. With the agreement of the party, the Association for Körperkultur und Sport had launched a highly successful global initiative with the World Association of Hungarians to raise money via lotteries and prize draws to cover the costs of sending its delegation to the Games. Benefactors from all political hues were expected to make the journey to Munich or take up their prize trips back to the homeland. In Hungary, therefore, sport's leading cultural role reduced its pliability to outside sources, and as the Games approached, the GDR became increasingly disenchanted with its ally's stance on Munich. Critical comments in the Hungarian press were passed on merely

---

<sup>44</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: AG 72 – Information über eine Mitteilung der Botschaft der DDR in Budapest vom 10.3.1971, 10 March 1971.

<sup>45</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: Letter from S. Beckl, President of the Hungarian NOC, to W. Daume, 23 April 1971.

<sup>46</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.07/-18: Information für das Sekretariat des Zentralkomitees – Information über den Aufenthalt einer Delegation des Zentralkomitees der Ungarischen Sozialistischen Arbeiterpartei zum Studium der Erfahrungen der SED auf dem Gebiet der Sportpolitik, 3 May 1971. SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: DTSB – Information, 12 May 1971. SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Botschaft der DDT in der UVR – Notiz über ein Gespräch des Genossen Prof. Norden mit dem Mitglied des Politbüros des ZK der USAP Genosse Komócsin am 14.5.1971, 14 May 1971.

<sup>47</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-17: AG 72 – Vermerk über Konsultationen im Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der UVR, 3 June 1970.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Kasza (2004, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Information über die Vorbereitung der Ungarischen Volksrepublik auf die Olympischen Sommerspiele 1972 in München (Übersetzung aus dem Slowakischen), 7 April 1971.

as reports from other Eastern block countries and gradually faded into the background.<sup>50</sup> The chief of publicity for the 1972 Games, Hans Klein, was treated leniently when he made his official publicity visit, and the public revelled in their journalists' enthusiasm for the Games' organisation and infrastructure.<sup>51</sup> In March 1972, the Hungarian football team played the FRG in front of 50,000 supporters in Budapest, and the event – as reported with resignation by an East German source – had turned into the “massenwirksamste Ereignis”.<sup>52</sup>

If the shape of the residual documentation provides an accurate reflection of events, then it is clear that the GDR focussed its efforts on Bulgaria rather than Hungary.<sup>53</sup> Tactically, removing one piece in the geographical jigsaw would cause sufficient organisational havoc. Additionally, diplomatic structures dictated that the East Germans stood a better chance of unhinging Bulgarian rather than Hungarian co-operation with the Munich organizers. Of all the Soviet satellites, Bulgaria enjoyed the most uncomplicated relation with Moscow.<sup>54</sup> In the 1960s the influence of the USSR had grown to such an extent that Bulgaria could scarcely be conceived of as an independent state.<sup>55</sup> On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the foundation of the Republic, for instance, an observer in the West German Trade Mission noted that the Soviet State President, N. Podgorny, was “in einer Form hofiert [...] und selbst so auftrat, als mache das Staatsoberhaupt einer Großmacht einen Besuch in einer seiner Provinzhauptstädte.” Politically, the potential thaw of doctrinal Stalinism and opening to the West of the mid 1960s had begun to freeze over again in 1967 and had hardened in particular after the Prague Spring. Any burgeoning flirtation with the Czech model was quashed: unruly youths were dealt with harshly and agitation about Western subversion and ideological diversion went into overdrive. Soviet bookshops abounded and the media merely filtered the output of their Soviet counterparts into Bulgarian.

---

<sup>50</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Botschaft der DDR in der UVR – Bemerkungen zur Darstellung des Sports in der DDR und zur Behandlung der Olympischen Spiele in München in den Massenmedien, 8 August 1971.

<sup>51</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: AG 72 – Information über eine telegraphische Mitteilung unserer Botschaft in Budapest vom 15.6.1971, 16 June 1971.

<sup>52</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Auszug aus Information der Botschaft Budapest vom 25.5.1972 über die kulturellen Beziehungen UVR – BRD 1972 (no date).

<sup>53</sup> This notwithstanding an East German strategic suggestion at the beginning of February 1971 that it might be worth concentrating on Hungary. (SAPMO, 02/IV/10.02/19: Information über die gegenwärtige Haltung einiger sozialistischer Länder zum Fackellauf anlässlich der Olympischen Spiele 1972 in München, 3 February 1971.)

<sup>54</sup> Sources: PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: 25. Jahrestag der Volksrepublik Bulgarian, 12 September 1969. PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: Fünf Jahre Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Sofia, 29 August 1969.

<sup>55</sup> See Crampton (1997, p. 199) and Bell (1991, pp. 187-188).

In foreign policy terms, Bulgaria operated as the “verlängerter Arm Moskaus”, sending aid and technical expertise it could ill afford to third world countries when it suited the Soviet Union to maintain a low profile. Accordingly, relations with other countries mirrored those of Moscow. Yugoslavia and Rumania, for instance, were treated coolly, the GDR, by contrast, with considerable warmth. Since the completion of the Friendship Pact, the influence of East Berlin had, in the view of the FRG, “increased alarmingly”. Hemmed in on both flanks by the Soviets and the East Germans, the FRG enjoyed virtually no room for political or cultural manoeuvre. Despite the Bulgarians’ genuine affection for the German people, the West German Trade Mission had found itself, both diplomatically and socially, held at arm’s length. It had found it impossible to get beyond ministerial doorkeepers, whilst the population had been confused and intimidated by countless show trials of alleged spies and reports of intense Western subterfuge. For nearly a year, *Ostpolitik* altered nothing. After a brief ceasefire in the wake of the Bundestag election, the Bulgarian press returned to its usual form of attack,<sup>56</sup> targeting the West Germany military and “expansionist” economy and caricaturing its ministers on television.<sup>57</sup> By mid 1970, despite ministerial visits to the FRG from Warsaw, Budapest, Belgrade, and Bucharest, the Bulgarians still avidly avoided the major political topic of the day and showed no inclination to discuss anything beyond economic practicalities.<sup>58</sup> Typically, it was only after the signing of the Moscow treaty in August 1970 that the FRG slipped down the list of Bulgarian propaganda targets.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> In September 1969, for instance, at Bulgaria’s twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations, the Russians whipped up a storm with reports of militaristic-revanchist powers in the FRG and vaguely defined “aggressive circles” that intended to make the Balkans the “powder keg” of Europe again. The head of the East German delegation, Herrmann Matern, was even more vitriolic in his attack on the FRG, but thanked the Bulgarians for their vital support. (Source: PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: 25. Jahrestag der Volksrepublik Bulgarian, 12 September 1969.) A month later, an article from the Polish press re. revanchism had re-appeared in the Bulgarian army publication “Narodna Anmija”, a general symptom of what the FRG interpreted as the Bulgarian press’s “nie erlahmende[] Lust zur Hetze gegen die Bundesrepublik”. (Source: PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: Bulgarische Presseveröffentlichungen gegen die Olympische Spiele in München, 17 October 1969.)

<sup>57</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr. Bulgarische Presse über die Bundesrepublik, 2 February 1970.

<sup>58</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: Eindrücke nach viermonatiger Tätigkeit in Sofia, 25 June 1970.

<sup>59</sup> On the National Holiday on the anniversary of the Bulgarian Revolution on 8 September 1970, for instance, the polemical sharpness had disappeared from the main speech, delivered by the Interior Trade Minister, Peko Takow. The FRG was mentioned only in connection with the completion of the Moscow Treaty. Emphasizing Moscow’s role in spreading socialist peace, Takow noted: “wo Anfang des Jahrhunderts zwei verheerende Weltkriege entstanden sind, weht ein warmer Wind”. The usual anti-American barb was largely missing from the banners that accompanied the military parade. FRG and China, in contrast

From the GDR perspective, Bulgaria's Achilles heel – in addition to its willingness to sway with the wind from Moscow – was its economic vulnerability. Although it enjoyed more prosperity than the USSR, its standard of living lagged behind that of the other satellites. In 1966, the FRG had become its second largest exporter, and, with an exchange of goods worth DM 600 million, the country's fourth largest trade partner overall (behind the USSR, GDR and Czechoslovakia).<sup>60</sup> One hundred Germans had lived in Jambol working on large-scale DMT and polyester factory projects run by the Krupp and Lurgi companies, and their presence had helped to correct the image of the FRG in an underdeveloped part of the country. On the eve of *Ostpolitik*, the Head of the West German Trade Mission deduced, prophetically as it turned out, that “handelspolitische Entscheidungen nicht aus tagespolitischem Geschehen getroffen werden dürfen, da sie in die Zukunft hineinwirken”. The softening of tone with regard to *Ostpolitik* in Sofia will have given the GDR pause for thought. Three weeks of discussions in Sofia in October-November 1970 had led to the formulation of a long-term trade agreement between Bulgaria and the FRG. This concrete progress had been accompanied by a plethora of positive statements in the Bulgarian press on *Ostpolitik* in general and the possibility of close ties between the two countries. Previous hard-line statements about the strict multi-lateral conditions under which diplomatic relations could be resumed had been modified to the point where it was publicly intimated that nothing stood in the way of bilateral recognition.

Between the socialist countries' Olympics meeting in Moscow in December 1970 and the Bulgarian's withdrawal from the relay in early January 1971, Willi Stoph, the Chair of the GDR's Ministerrat, arrived in Sofia without prior announcement for an unofficial visit on 19 December.<sup>61</sup> After discussions with Todor Schiwkow (the head of the Bulgarian government) and Iwan Popow (the Chair of the Committee for Science and Technology) a treaty was signed in East Berlin on 21 December aimed to increase trade exchange between the two countries by a dramatic 83 per cent over four years running up to 1975. It was rumoured amongst Western sources that the Bulgarians had asked for considerable loans, to which the East Germans' consent had been made conditional on the settling of “some unresolved issues”. Stoph's visit, following on from

---

to previous years, escaped unabused. (Source: PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Telex from Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, 11 September 1970.)

<sup>60</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: Fünf Jahre Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Sofia, 29 August 1969. PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: AA, der Leiter der Politischen Abteilung – Aufzeichnung dem Herrn Staatssekretär mit dem Vorschlag der Vorlage beim Herrn Bundesminister, betr.: Stand und Perspektiven der deutsch-bulgarischen politischen Beziehungen vor dem Besuch des bulgarischen Außenhandelsministers Awramow, 2 February 1971.

<sup>61</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1339: Telex from the Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: Besuch Willi Stophs in Bulgarien, 23 December 1970.

Schiwkow's trip to the GDR in May 1969, was interpreted by West German observers as an indication of an intensified desire for close co-operation on issues beyond the economic. Certainly, the political implications of the trip were underscored by an article in the party organ "Rabotnitschesko Delo", which attacked the FRG's relation with the GDR in tones that "had gone out of fashion" since the beginning of *Ostpolitik*. In the immediate aftermath of the Bulgarian withdrawal from the relay and amidst Daume and Brundage's appeals,<sup>62</sup> the East Germans sought further to strengthen their allies' loyalty with particular reference to the domain of sport. On 14 January, Ewald and Hellmann brought greetings from Honecker to high-ranking officials of the Bulgarian government in Sofia and suggested an extension to their already existing joint project "Freundschaft" in Bulgarian Belmelken to secure high altitude training for their athletic programme until the year 1996.<sup>63</sup> The Bulgarians, however, surprised and frustrated their guests with objections to the contract already in force and stipulations that the camp would revert to Bulgarian ownership at the end of a fixed period.

It is not clear whether the recent revelation of the GDR's lies about the torch relay played a role in the Bulgarians' uncharacteristic reticence. The previous day, however, Ewald and Hellmann had been summoned by a Candidate for the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (Genow) and told that the Bulgarians, whilst maintaining the common line agreed in Moscow, were worried about the undesirable affect a withdrawal might have on their hosting of the IOC congress in 1973.<sup>64</sup> Congresses, as opposed to the annual – and in Olympic years, biennial – IOC sessions, occurred only rarely and, as well as the usual IOC members, consisted of representatives of the individual sports federations and NOCs. The event planned for the Varna Sports Palace in 1973 would be the first since Berlin in 1930 and was set to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Bulgarian Olympic Committee. Its IOC member Stoytchev, confident of his government's backing of several hundred thousand dollars, had set about planning to receive 1000 participants.<sup>65</sup> Towards the end of the month,

---

<sup>62</sup> Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois (henceforth ABC), Box 118: Telegram from A. Brundage to the NOC of Bulgaria, 16 January 1971.

<sup>63</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/18/-11: Niederschrift über eine Aussprache mit dem Mitglied des Politbüros und Sekretär des ZK der KP Bulgarien, Genossen Weltschew, am 14.1.1971, 19 January 1971.

<sup>64</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/18/-11: Abteilung Sport – Information über ein Gespräch des Genossen Genow, Kandidat des ZK der Bulgarischen Kommunistischen Partei, mit Genossen Ewald und Hellmann am 13.1.1971 über den Fackellauf zu den Olympischen Spielen 1972 in München, 18 January 1971.

<sup>65</sup> IOC Lausanne, Minutes of the Executive Board of the IOC: Dubrovnik, 23-27 October 1969. In fact, only 307 official delegates, albeit from 81 countries, attended. Despite the growing unrest of the NOCs and the international federations, this was a productive conference, that although it passed no resolutions, had many healthy discussions of the major issues of the day – politicization, gigantism, technical manipulation of the athletes, commercialization. The hosts wanted its motto to be Sport for a world of peace, but its title became:

meetings took place at embassy and Deputy Foreign Minister level,<sup>66</sup> but to the East Germans' consternation, the Bulgarian Delegation would not be drawn on the matter. Convinced of their ally's intention to participate, Albert Norden urged Honecker to consider immediate further action, such as involving the Soviets or sending Mittag during his forthcoming holiday in Bulgaria to visit Shiwkow. By this stage, however, the Bulgarians were listening to serious overtures again from the Federal government.

In February 1971, the Bulgarian Minister for Foreign Trade, Awramov, became his government's first representative to visit the Federal Republic since the Second World War, and Minister Schiller (on a reciprocal invitation to the Plowdiv Trade Fair) the first equivalent West German official to travel to Bulgaria since 1966.<sup>67</sup> The purpose of Awramov's visit was to sign the new trade agreement, and whilst it is highly unlikely that the deal would have risen or fallen on Bulgaria's participation in the relay, the Foreign Office had determined to use the occasion to express its disappointment and request the Minister's intervention with his NOC.<sup>68</sup> A keen former sportsman, Awramov was well known to Daume and, vitally, held the post of Vice President of the Bulgarian NOC. The Bulgarians, however, proved deft of foot when faced with the awkward question and no response was forthcoming.<sup>69</sup> In March and April, the

---

Future of the Olympic Movement and embraced three key strands: redefinition of the Olympic Movement and its future; relations between the IOC, international federations and NOCs; plans for future Olympic Games. (Sources: Höhne [1973], Müller [1980; 1994, pp. 149-158].)

<sup>66</sup> SAPMO, 02/IV/10.02/19: Information über die gegenwärtige Haltung einiger sozialistischer Länder zum Fackellauf anlässlich der Olympischen Spiele 1972 in München, 3 February 1971.

<sup>67</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: AA, der Leiter der Politischen Abteilung – Aufzeichnung dem Herrn Staatssekretär mit dem Vorschlag der Vorlage beim Herrn Bundesminister, betr.: Stand und Perspektiven der deutsch-bulgarischen politischen Beziehungen vor dem Besuch des bulgarischen Außenhandelsministers Awramow, 2 February 1971.

<sup>68</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1338: AA, Notiz für Herrn Dr. Platz (II A 5), betr.: Absage Bulgariens für den olympischen Fackellauf, 20 January 1971. PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: AA (II A 5) – Aufzeichnung, betr.: Gespräch mit dem Leiter der Abteilung Westeuropa im bulgarischen Außenministerium, Tschernew, am 10.2.1971, 9 February 1971. PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1338: Betr.: Besuch des bulgarischen Außenhandelsministers Abramow; hier: Olympische Spiele München 1972, 10 February 1971.

<sup>69</sup> Whilst Brandt maintained his usual diplomatic distance on points of detail, the West German Foreign Minister did not shirk the Olympic issue. A direct reply went missing, however, amidst the Bulgarians' declarations of desire to increase contacts with the FRG on the level of ministerial, parliamentary, cultural and technical exchange and of intentions to found a mixed commission on the basis of the new economic agreement. In a separate discussion, Parvan Tschernew, Leader of the Abteilung Westeuropa in the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry was equally deft of foot. (Sources: PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Rolf von Keiser, Handelsvertretung Sofia, z.Zt. Bonn – Vermerk über das Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers mit Minister Avramov am 12.2.1971, 15 February 1971; *ibid.*: Betr.: Gespräch des Herrn Bundesministers mit dem bulgarischen Außenhandelsminister Awramow am 12.2.1971 (no date); *ibid.*: Betr.: Gespräch von Herrn Dg II A mit dem Leiter der Abteilung Westeuropa im bulgarischen Außenministerium, Tschernew, am 10.2.1971, 16 February 1971.)

West Germans were still waiting. A meeting between the Munich organizers and the Bulgarian NOC, promised in January, did not materialize,<sup>70</sup> and the Trade Mission could only report that the Bulgarian press formed a perfect match with Moscow's slow grind about treaty ratification.<sup>71</sup> In late May, however, Brundage wrote to the Bulgarian Prime Minister (Todor Givnov), encouraging him to remember his hosting of the forthcoming Congress,<sup>72</sup> and Bulgarian NOC President Vladimir Stoytchev attended a meeting of the relay hosts (as part of a conference of European NOCs in Austria), informing them that a decision would soon be taken.<sup>73</sup> It looked likely that the Turkish representative at the conference would have to curb his enthusiasm for the flame circumventing Bulgaria on its way to Konstanza in Rumania by means of a naval destroyer.

Earlier in the month, the East Germans had seen their last hopes of disrupting the relay crumble in dramatic fashion. A Bulgarian government delegation had flown to East Berlin, having already informed a GDR embassy official at Sofia airport that they held little hope of reaching agreement with their East German comrades.<sup>74</sup> Convinced that the FRG harboured no revanchist intentions, they had held discussions at brother party level with Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the USSR.<sup>75</sup> In East Berlin, which repeated the request that they had made in the name of their Central Committee across the Eastern block, to be released from their previous veto. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had given their consent, and the Soviets, whilst maintaining their original stance, decided not to interfere with Bulgaria's decision. The Bulgarians argued that the conclusion of the Treaty negotiations with the USSR and Poland meant that "einige Fragen realistischer eingeschätzt werden müßten", and stressed the desire to normalize their own relationship with the FRG.

---

<sup>70</sup> In April 1971, Daume wrote asking why he had not heard from the Bulgarian NOC since their telegram of 20 January 1971. (Source: DOI, Daume Nachlaß 586: Letter from W. Daume to the Bulgarian NOC, 14 April 1971).

<sup>71</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: Feldzug der bulgarischen Presse gegen die Sender "Radio Free Europe" und "Liberty", 3 March 1971. PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr.: Bulgarische Presse zur Frage der Ratifizierung der Moskauer und Warschauer Verträge, 21 April 1971.

<sup>72</sup> Avery Brundage Collection, Box 118: Letter from A. Brundage to T. Givnov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria, 28 May 1971. Brundage imagined that "you will be eager to cooperate, particularly as Bulgaria will have the honor or acting as host to the first Olympic conference in 40 [sic] years".

<sup>73</sup> CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: Tagung der Vertreter der Europäischen Nationalen Olympischen Komitees in Baden bei Wien vom 6.-9. Mai 1971, 25 May 1971.

<sup>74</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Botschaft der DDR Sofia – Notiz, betr.: Besuch der Gen. Genow und Martinski in Berlin am 4. und 5.5.1971, 11 May 1971.

<sup>75</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Information über ein Vorgespräch, das die Genossen Rudi Hellmann, Manfred Ewald und Ühlmann am 3. Mai, von 16.00 bis 18.30 Uhr mit der bulgarischen Parteidelegation im Gästehaus des ZK der SED führen.

Withdrawing from the relay would be out of the question, not least because “man diesem Lauf keine überhöhte politische Bedeutung zusprechen könne”. The East Germans were incandescent with rage and vowed not stand idly by as the “enemy” drove a north-south wedge through the socialist block. Just two days after the highly disgruntled Bulgarians left East Berlin,<sup>76</sup> Manfred Ewald flew to Moscow under instruction from the Central Committee of the SED to conduct talks at the Department of Propaganda in its Soviet counterpart. The GDR’s request that Moscow call a meeting of Central Committee representatives at the highest appropriate level to resolve the matter met with little enthusiasm.<sup>77</sup> A month later, although stalling on giving an official government response, the Soviets reiterated the fruitlessness of shutting the stable door after the Hungarians and Bulgarians had so obviously bolted.<sup>78</sup> Finally at the beginning of July, with the Bulgarian press commenting positively on the SPD’s “first half” in government and the FRG’s burgeoning relationship with the USSR,<sup>79</sup> Stoytchev gave Daume the all-clear for the relay.<sup>80</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

The East Germans, despite trade deals and high diplomacy, were outdone by Hungary and Bulgaria. Several factors contributed to their defeat. First – and not to be underestimated – was the role of sport. In Hungary, sport tended towards structural autonomy and was therefore relatively insulated against external political pressure, whilst in the figure of Vladimir Stoytchev its Bulgarian counterpart possessed an Olympic idealist and national personality whose actions and convictions carried not inconsiderable weight: Stoytchev, like Brundage, was an avid fan of the 1936 Games and all things German when

---

<sup>76</sup> On his return to Sofia, Genow informed the same GDR official who had accompanied him to the airport that, despite the East German Central Committee’s disapproval of their action, the Bulgarians had been appalled at the way in which the GDR had tried to bully the delegation into accepting their wishes in Berlin. The East Germans had contravened protocol by neglecting that Genow and his party had been representing the views of the Bulgarian party leadership. (Source: SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Botschaft der DDR Sofia – Notiz, betr.: Besuch der Gen. Genow und Martinski in Berlin am 4. und 5.5.1971, 11 May 1971.)

<sup>77</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: DTSB Präsident – Information über eine Besprechung in der Abteilung Propaganda des ZK der KPdSU am 7.5.1971, 9.30 Uhr, 11 May 1971.

<sup>78</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/10.02/-18: Information über eine [sic] Gespräch des Genossen Gontscharow – Leiter des Sektors Sport im ZK der KPdSU (Abt. Propaganda) – mit Genossen Rudi Hellmann – Leiter der Abt. Sport im ZK der SED, 10 June 1971.

<sup>79</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: Handelsvertretung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Sofia to the Auswärtiges Amt, betr. Bulgarischer Kommentar auf die Bundesregierung, 8 June 1971.

<sup>80</sup> Bundesarchiv Koblenz (henceforth BAK), B125 /1924: Telex from Keiser, Sofia, to the AA, 5 July 1971. DOI, Daume Nachlaß 586: Letter from Daume to Stoytchev, 7 July 1971. CULDA, XX. Olympische Spiele München 1972, 3.1: Generalsekretariat, Abt. IV – Vermerk, betr.: Besprechung mit der bulgarischen Delegation über Fragen des Olympischen Fackellaufes 1972 auf bulgarischem Gebiet am 3.8.1971, 3 August 1971.

it came to the Olympic movement.<sup>81</sup> Either with (as he argued when confronted by the GDR's investigation<sup>82</sup>) or without (as Bulgarian politicians maintained<sup>83</sup>) his government's explicit support, his acceptance of Daume's invitation at the earliest opportunity in April 1970 helped cast the dye for later events. Whether they believed it or not, Bulgarian officials could argue, when political circumstances changed, that Stoytchev's original acceptance turned their supposed refusal into an impossibly impolite withdrawal. Second, in the case of Bulgaria, lucrative contracts with a Western economy proved too alluring.

Third, Moscow, in the midst of its own blurred cultural rapprochement with the Federal Republic, decided to grant its satellites a freedom of choice on the relay issue. As a West German Foreign Office assessment of the two key links in the chain suggested, neither Hungary nor Bulgaria could have taken any significant step without Moscow's approval.<sup>84</sup> (Indeed in 1984, Bulgaria became the first country to join the Soviet-led boycott of the Los Angeles Games, also cancelling a heavily publicized governmental visit to West Germany.<sup>85</sup>) And it is clear in the course of 1971 that the Soviets took no action to prevent the two southern states breaking ranks from their northern German ally. This assessment fits with the broader diplomatic picture at the beginning of that year. In January 1971, the Soviets instructed the GDR strictly to avoid blocking the political process with excessive demands of their own. Their ambassador (Falin) advised Foreign Minister Winzer that the SED should become more tolerant of the FRG's non-political forms of representation, such as economic and cultural relations.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps convinced of the right to hold onto concessions already won the previous month at the Olympic forum in Moscow, or keen to flex its own negotiation muscle within the Eastern block – Winzer had tried in vain with his Soviet counterpart Gromyko to assert the GDR's right to strike its own deals with the FRG –, the East Germans had bitten into the relay issue and

---

<sup>81</sup> For further details on Stoytchev, see Schiller and Young (forthcoming).

<sup>82</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/18/-11: Aktennotiz über ein Telefongespräch mit dem Präsidenten des NOK Bulgariens, Generaloberst Stoitschev, Mitglied des IOC, am 19.1.1971 gegen 10.30 Uhr.

<sup>83</sup> SAPMO DY 30/IVA2/18/-11: Abteilung Sport – Information über ein Gespräch des Genossen Genow, Kandidat des ZK der Bulgarischen Kommunistischen Partei, mit Genossen Ewald und Hellmann am 13.1.1971 über den Fackellauf zu den Olympischen Spielen 1972 in München, 18 January 1971.

<sup>84</sup> PAAA Berlin, B42 / 1337: AA, der Leiter der Politischen Abteilung – Aufzeichnung dem Herrn Staatssekretär mit dem Vorschlag der Vorlage beim Herrn Bundesminister, betr.: Stand und Perspektiven der deutsch-bulgarischen politischen Beziehungen vor dem Besuch des bulgarischen Außenhandelsministers Awramow, 2 February 1971.

<sup>85</sup> Bell (1991, p. 190).

<sup>86</sup> Sarotte (2001, pp. 102-103).

refused to drop the baton with canine obstinacy. The Soviets simply let them chase their tail.<sup>87</sup>

On the organisational front, the West Germans had achieved exactly what the GDR had most feared when it first called for a combined diplomatic strategy within the Eastern block: “eine Differenzierung im sozialistischen Staatenlager”.<sup>88</sup> As the GDR set its sail on a course of strict “Abgrenzung”, its Warsaw past allies followed the general current of *Ostpolitik*, loosened their tack and, to differing degrees, opened up culturally to the Munich Games. The torch relay – precisely because the GDR had raised the stakes so high and was so obviously double-crossed by its allies – was its most humiliating diplomatic defeat.

## References

- Balbier, Uta Andrea, “Als Deutschland gegen Deutschland spielte”: Die Bedeutung des Sports in der deutsch-deutschen Beziehungsgeschichte der 1960er Jahre, in: Jörg Calließ (ed.), *Die Reformzeit des Erfolgsmodells BRD: Die Nachgeborenen erforschen die Jahre, die ihre Eltern und Lehrer geprägt haben*, Rehbürg-Loccum 2004, pp. 385-398.
- Bell, J. D., *Bulgarian-Soviet Relations*, in: Richard F. Staar (ed.), *East-Central Europe and the USSR*, London 1991, pp. 187-202.
- Blasius, Tobias, *Olympische Bewegung: Kalter Krieg und Deutschlandpolitik 1949-1972*, Frankfurt/Main 2001.
- Borgers, Walter, *Olympic Torch Relays 1936-1994*, Kassel 1996.
- Fulbrook, Mary, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, New Haven and London 2005.
- Crampton, Richard J., *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, Cambridge 1997.
- Geyer, Martin H., *Der Kampf um nationale Repräsentation: Deutsch-deutsche Sportbeziehungen und die “Hallstein-Doktrin”*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 44, 1996, pp. 55-86.
- Guttmann, Allen, *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement*, New York 1983.
- Höhne, Erhard, *Coubertin und die Olympischen Kongresse*, in: *Theorie und Praxis der Körperkultur* 12 (1973), pp. 596-600.
- Kilian, Wolfgang, *Die Hallstein-Doktrin: Der diplomatische Krieg zwischen der BRD und der DDR 1955-1973: Aus den Akten der beiden deutschen Außenministerien*, Berlin 2001.
- Kaiser, Monika, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker: Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur in Konfliktsituationen 1962 bis 1972*, Berlin 1997.
- Kasza, Peter, *Fußball spielt Geschichte: Das Wunder von Bern 1954*, Berlin 2004.

---

<sup>87</sup> In June 1971, when approached by Albert Norden, who was seeking a further crisis meeting on the relay issue, the Soviet Ambassador Abrassimow raised the stakes inordinately by suggesting Honecker should address the issue directly with Brezhnev at a meeting of delegation leaders from the socialist block during the Parteitag der SED. (Source: SAPMO, 02/IVA2/2.028/35: Letter from Norden to Honecker, 9 June 1971.)

<sup>88</sup> SAPMO, 02/IVA2/2.028/35: Letter from Norden to Honecker, 28 June 1971.

- Kasza, Peter, Ungarn – Deutschland: ZWEIZUDREI – oder: Diese Angelegenheit da in Bern, in: Markus Hesselmann and Christopher Young (eds), *Der Lieblingsfeind: Deutschland aus der Sicht seiner Fußballrivalen*, Göttingen 2006, pp. 165-175.
- Krebs, Hans-Dieter, Die “doppelten Deutschen” (1965 bis 1988), in: Manfred Lämmer (ed.), *Deutschland in der Olympischen Bewegung: Eine Zwischenbilanz*, Frankfurt/M. 1999, pp. 267-299.
- Müller, Norbert, Idee und Geschichte der Olympischen Kongresse, in: *Stadion 6* (1980), pp. 129-56.
- Müller, Norbert, *One Hundred Years of Olympic Congresses 1894-1994. History – Objectives – Achievements* (translated from the German by Ingrid Sonnleitner-Hauber), Lausanne 1994.
- Peiffer, Lorenz, Die Madrider Entscheidung des IOC im Oktober 1965: Ein Wendepunkt in der Geschichte der deutsch-deutschen Sportbeziehungen, in: Arndt Krüger and Wolfgang Buss (eds), *Transformationen: Kontinuitäten und Veränderungen in der Sportgeschichte II*, Hoya 2002, pp. 118-124.
- Potthoff, Heinrich, *Im Schatten der Mauer: Deutschlandpolitik 1961 bis 1990*, Berlin 2002.
- Sarotte, Mary Elise, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik 1969-1973*, Chapel Hill and London 2001.
- Schiller, Kay and Young, Christopher, *Munich 1972 and the Making of Modern Germany*, forthcoming.
- Staat, Jochen, Die SED und die Olympischen Spiele 1972, in: Klaus Schroeder (ed.), *Geschichte und Transformation des SED-Staates: Beiträge und Analysen*, Berlin 1994, pp. 211-232.
- Turrini, Joseph M., “It was Communism Versus the Free World”: The USA-USSR Dual Track Meet Series and the Development of Track and Field in the United States, 1958-1985, in: *Journal of Sport History* 28, 2001, pp. 427-467.
- Young, Christopher, “Nicht mehr die herrlichste Nebensache der Welt”: Sport, West Berlin and the Four Powers Agreement 1971, in: *German Politics and Society* forthcoming, 2007.
- Young, Christopher, Munich 1972: Re-presenting the Nation, in: Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young (eds), *National Identity and Global Sport Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup*, New York 2006, pp. 117-132.