
Enrico Heitzer

DEALING WITH MULTIPLE PASTS: CONFLICTS AND MEMORY POLITICS IN THE SACHSENHAUSEN MEMORIAL SINCE 1989

This article gives a brief introduction into conflicts over the memory of the Nazi Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen (1936–1945) and the Soviet Special Camp No. 7/No. 1 (1945–1950), which was built using parts of the latter. Such conflicts evolved in the years after the collapse of communism in the GDR. Following an outline of the history of the Concentration Camp and the Special Camp, with references back to the controversies of the Cold War, the text considers interpretations of the struggle since 1989 to find a reasonable assessment of the Soviet camps. Neither the one nor the other can be trivialized, or white-washed as a result of this comparison. This discussion looks to navigate through sensitive questions regarding appropriate memory policies of the Nazi crimes, the involvement of a significant number of the Special Camp detainees in the National Socialist system, a high number of deaths in the camps after 1945 and later developments in the East German one-party state.

Key words: Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen; Soviet Special Camp Sachsenhausen; memory politics; totalitarianism theory, Politics of Memory

In the Memorial commemorative year, which marked Celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Sachsenhausen, which took place in 2005, were blighted by a scandal. Members of the far-right party *Deutsche Volksunion* (DVU, German People's Union) planned to lay down a wreath at Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January in the Sachsenhausen memorial with the inscription: "To all the victims of the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp – Eduard Stadler, Karl Heinrich, Horst Graf von Einsiedel, Heinrich George, Emil Unfried, Otto Nerz, Erich Nehlhans. The DVU faction in the Brandenburg parliament." Apart from errors, such as the fact that said Karl Heinrich was not imprisoned in the

Enrico Heitzer – Ph.D., Research Assistant, Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum, Brandenburg Memorials Foundation, Oranienburg, Germany. Email: heitzer@gedenkstaette-sachsenhausen.de

Soviet camp Sachsenhausen (he died in the Special Camp Berlin-Hohenschönhausen), and that Erich Nehlhans had lost his life in a camp in the Soviet Union, this event was also connected with the history of Soviet Special Camps in Germany. What was planned as a dignified commemoration threatened to become a scandal. A few days earlier, another extreme right party in the Saxony parliament, the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), had made a speech on the revisionist history of the so-called "Holocaust of bombs" unleashed by the Allies on Dresden and other German cities during the Second World War. Victims of National Socialist terror saw this as an insult. In the view of the then head of the Jewish community in Berlin, Albert Meyer, it was neither physically nor mentally possible for Jews to tolerate the appearance of the DVU alongside the Holocaust Remembrance in Sachsenhausen (Scheliha 2006a). The same thing happened again in 2015 when during the Memorial Day, which commemorates the liberation of the National Socialist extermination camp Auschwitz, the right leaning political party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany) intended to lay a wreath in the Buchenwald Memorial. In the wording of the AfD, the victims of the Concentration Camp and Special Camp Buchenwald were named in the same sentence (Malzahn 2015).

In coordination with the President of the Brandenburg Parliament and the Chairman of the International Advisory Board of the Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen the director banned the members of the DVU group from the memorial site for this special day. The DVU laid down the wreath in Sachsenhausen one day after the ceremony. It was immediately removed. In Buchenwald in 2015 the AfD withdrew from the Holocaust Remembrance Day after protests against its equation of the National Socialist Concentration Camp with the Soviet Special Camp.

These scandals are just some of many incidents which have taken place in the years since 1989 at the Sachsenhausen Memorial Site (and also in Buchenwald), where there were not only National Socialist Concentration Camps between 1936/7 and 1945, but also "Special Camps" of the Soviet Narodnyi Kommissariat and later the Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del (NKVD, MVD), which ran the camps from 1945 to 1950. They exemplify how controversial the issue of the Soviet Special Camps is in the German culture of remembrance and debate on the memory of the Nazi Concentration Camps and injustices in the Soviet Zone of Occupation/GDR. The central question here is whether the Nazi Concentration Camps and the Special Camps of the Stalinist Soviet occupying power were essentially of the same essence, and whether the latter was a likely consequence of the former. Battles over interpretation flare up time and again. It seems that in the last 25 years a primarily political consensus has emerged that prefers to see the Special Camps through the lens of politically trivialized and instrumentalized totalitarianism theory.

The article will address mainly two points; firstly, the history of the Concentration Camp and Special Camp and their historical contexts. Secondly, a brief

history of the "interpretation struggles" in the years after 1989/90 will be provided. It interprets the events in terms of a theory of social and public action and tries in a concise way to connect real history with the approaches of discourse and media analysis. This, in turn, provides a starting point for an analysis of the long ongoing battles over interpretation, especially in the history of their ups and downs and to reveal their formative elements. This research identifies the main actors and their positions and arguments. It also tries to show the specific context of the major debates that have taken place in Germany since reunification, but also within a global and European Union framework. In brief, the process being examined is how the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism are negotiated in Germany's national and, at the same time, increasingly Europeanized memorial culture. The paper tries to incorporate debates relating to the renaissance of totalitarianism theory and the trans-European discussion about the character of Nazism and Soviet Communism, coalescing in heated debates about a "European Remembrance Day for the victims of Totalitarian and Authoritarian regimes" on August 23, which is strongly advocated by Eastern European states. Conflicts over the Sachsenhausen Memorial are indicators of this domestic and trans-European conflict. On the other hand, these conflicts are used by historical revisionists to diminish National Socialism in relation to GDR socialism as well as by those seeking to locate the misdeeds of the GDR in the official culture of commemoration.

Multiple pasts

A new phase in the development of the Concentration Camp system began in 1936 with Sachsenhausen. The Esterwegen, Lichtenburg, Sonnenburg and Berlin-Columbia camps were dissolved and the prisoners moved to Oranienburg. Here, in the summer of 1936 during the Berlin Olympic Games, they cleared 80 hectares of open forest between Oranienburg and the municipality of Sachsenhausen. Within a year, they had built 100 buildings: prisoner barracks and SS barracks, outbuildings and SS settlement houses (Morsch, Ley 2011; Morsch 2014).

In early 1937, the SS had finished the area of the "cell block", which was separated by a wall from the rest of the camp. In the T-shaped prison building, there were 80 cells. The SS used it to enforce penalties and to conduct interrogations. The camp punishments included the dark cell, "pole hanging" (hanging a prisoner on his wrists tied behind his back) and corporal punishment. Many prisoners did not survive the ordeal. In the prison building, the SS held prisoners, including Georg Elser, who attempted to assassinate Hitler, the theologian Martin Niemöller, the Ukrainian nationalist Stepan Bandera, Stalin's son Yakov Dzhugashvili and other political prisoners from abroad.

In 1938 the Concentration Camps Inspectorate, which centrally administered all Concentration Camps in the German sphere of influence, moved to Oranienburg. It was responsible for the conditions of detention in all Concentration Camps, it decided questions related to penalties, medical experimentation, forced labor and

murder. It played a leading role in the organization of the Destruction of the European Jews (Holocaust), in the genocide of the Romani people ("Gypsies") and the mass murder of Soviet prisoners of war. From 1942, it also coordinated the use of Concentration Camp prisoners in the war economy.

Among those incarcerated in the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp were thousands of German political prisoners, opponents of the Nazi regime, Jews, Romani people as well as resistance fighters from areas occupied by the Germans troops: Polish, Czechs, Dutchmen, Belgians, Danes, Norwegians, French, citizens of the Soviet Union etc.

From the very beginning murders were committed in the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. From 1939 public executions of camp inmates were carried out. In 1941 killing facilities were erected, in which more and more people were murdered. The so-called "Station Z" was completed in May 1942. Cynically the SS named the installation, which meant death for the prisoners, with the last letter of the alphabet. "Station Z" included an extermination area with a "Genickschußanlage" (neck shooting facility), four crematoria for burning the dead and from 1943 a gas chamber. The camp wall separated the place located in the "Industrial Yard" from the rest of the camp's grounds. The SS murdered Concentration Camp prisoners here as well as people who were brought to Sachsenhausen especially to be murdered (Morsch 2005). The largest mass murder took place 1941. About 13,000 Soviet Prisoners of War (POW) were shot within ten weeks.

The Concentration Camp, where tens of thousands of people did not survive, was largely "evacuated" in April 1945 with "Death Marches", which claimed many lives shortly before the war ended. Such marches were carried as the SS wanted to avoid prisoners falling into the hands of the allied troops. On 22–23rd April 1945, the 3000 remaining prisoners in the main camp were liberated by Soviet and Polish troops. In the following weeks, while freed prisoners were still onsite, the place was used by the NKVD as a "Screening and Filtration Camp". The NKVD often kept freed POW and forced laborers to be repatriated in such camps for assessment, before their return home.

In early August 1945 the "Special Camp No. 7" was established by the Soviet secret service NKVD in the core area of the former Concentration Camp, which used 15% of the area the former camp had occupied. The area where the mass murder facilities of the Concentration Camp had been located during the Nazi years, for instance, was not used. A similar practice was very common at this time also by the other allies of the Anti-Hitler Coalition (Henke 1991). In their case this practice was set down formally in the Allied Decrees, with the signatories of the Potsdam Agreement of August 1945 committing to it. The American occupation authority, for example, established an internment camp for Nazis in the former Concentration Camp Dachau and the British used the former Nazi Concentration Camps of Neuengamme and Esterwegen to incarcerate Nazi functionaries and alleged Nazi and war criminals (Hammermann 2003). The numbers of people interned by the victorious allies of the Anti-Hitler coalition were very similar. On the principle of "automatic arrest"

the Americans and the British interned 100,000 and 90,000 persons in often harsh conditions (Niethammer 1995). The Soviet occupation forces interned about 143,000 Germans (Mironenko et al. 1998, Mironenko 2001).

Like the other special camps in the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany, the Soviet Special Camp Sachsenhausen operated in two contexts that were inter-linked and overlapping to such an extent that they are retrospectively sometimes hard to disentangle. Firstly, they were subject to inter-Allied agreements on denazification, political purges and mass internments, which were proceeded in accordance with mutual agreement between the victorious powers of the anti-Hitler coalition (Heitzer 2015b). Secondly, they bore the hallmarks of the Stalinist tradition of political repression; the Soviet administration mixed radical measures to overcome Nazism and install their version of order and security, combined the retaliatory attitudes of the victors with specific Stalinist repressive and terror methods. Such governing practices were already common practice in the Soviet Union at this time (Erler 1994).

Until the spring of 1946, the majority of prisoners in the Special Camp Sachsenhausen were connected to the Nazi system, to the party, the state or the terror apparatus or those who were alleged to have been preparing to launch a guerrilla war against the occupying authorities. The largest group of prisoners, which included about 30,000 persons, who were referred to as "internees" and were not entitled to a judicial investigation or trial. In the spring of 1946 more than 6,000 German army officers from the Wehrmacht, who were released from captivity in Western Germany, were caught by the Soviets when crossing the border into the Soviet occupation zone and were immediately taken into custody at the Special Camp. They were detained without trial, but in late summer and autumn of 1946 were transferred to Soviet POW camps, where they were forced to work in the rebuilding the extensively destroyed Soviet Union. From September 1946 the number of convicts sentenced by Soviet military tribunals and sent to the Special Camp Sachsenhausen increased considerably (Prieß 1997, 1998). Statistically this group was younger than the Wehrmacht officers and "internees". They were less linked to the Nazi system and more frequently arrested for political causes (Morsch, Reich 2005). However, this does not mean that the convicts were exclusively anticommunist resistance fighters. Among the tribunal convicts in Special Camps there were also many who were sentenced for mistreatment of Soviet POWs and forced laborers or for participation in the murderous anti-partisan operations in the German-occupied parts of the Soviet Union (Jeske, Schmidt 2003; Weigelt et al. 2015). Another large group of 7,500 were foreigners, mostly citizens of the Soviet Union, who had allegedly collaborated with Nazi Germany, for example in units of the "Russian Liberation Army", better known as the "Vlasov Army." There were also Soviet soldiers who allegedly violated military discipline or were accused of being deserters. The Special Camps in Germany were connected to the Gulag system from August 1948. The last three camps were closed down in early 1950. About 60,000 people passed through the Sachsenhausen Special Camp. 12,000 of them

did not survive the inhuman conditions of detention. They died of hunger, lack of hygiene and disease (Morsch, Reich 2005, 2010).

The third phase can only be mentioned here. The GDR rulers, several of whom had been imprisoned in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, used the memorial as proof of their official narrative of the anti-fascist state. After 1990, the memorial has had to deal with multiple phases.

Struggle over interpretation

This article cannot present a comprehensive history of conflicts, scandals and provocations regarding the interpretation of the camps in Germany, nor is it sufficient to start in the years 1989/90. The first interpretations of the Soviet Special Camps can be traced back to the early days of their existence and are closely connected to the escalation of the Cold War. Although the Soviet Secret Service tried to maintain a strict regime of secrecy, from 1946 the mass arrests, disappearances and the Special Camps appeared on the front pages of the press, despite the fact that representatives of the Western Allies attempted to halt critical reports about Soviet internment practices. As the people of the Soviet occupation zone could still buy newspapers printed in the Western sectors of Berlin, the Soviet-controlled press in East Berlin and the Eastern zone of occupation came under pressure for failing to offer an explanation. In 1948, with the blockade of West Berlin, the Cold War in the media broke out. The West Berlin press denounced the "red Concentration Camps", which seemed to embody the injustice Soviet system (Scheliha 2006b).

Leading in this field was the militant anti-Communist "Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit" (KgU, "Fighting group against inhumanity"), which was founded in 1948, which coincided with the first large wave of releases from the Soviet Special Camps. In the fall of 1948 and spring of 1949 the KgU organized a series of rallies, at which released prisoners spoke about the harsh conditions in the camps. It is important to say that at this time only very few were interested in the concerns of survivors of the Nazi Concentration Camps. The KgU took the statements of released prisoners for political polemics against the Soviet occupation zone and later GDR. The KgU spoke consistently of "Red Concentration Camps" as a "continuation" of the Concentration Camps of the Nazi period. It systematically equalized the camps of the post-war period with the Concentration Camps to the extent that it claimed that systematic and targeted mass murder took place in the Special Camps as in the Concentration Camps of the Nazi era. One of the main slogans of the KgU in this matter was "TBC [i.e. tuberculosis] replaced Zyklon B." But the KgU, which later attracted massive attention in East and West due to its militant actions against the GDR, such as sabotage, terrorist activities and espionage, was by no means in isolation in seeing the Soviet-occupied part of Germany as the "big Concentration Camp of the Eastern Zone." The Social Democrats and Willy Brandt, later known for his policy of detente, used a very similar vocabulary at this time.

The Eastern press used every method of propaganda to defend the Soviets' actions and to justify the "Internment Camps" as an appropriate punishment for Fascists. The conflicting images that were created at this time, on both sides, still affect the debate about the Special Camps today. For the Cold War-era debates after 1945, Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald seemed to confirm totalitarianism theory – Nazism and Communism were similar forms of rule. After the construction of the Berlin Wall the Special Camps faded into the background and in the West they were more and more forgotten. Even so, it was not only right-wing extremists who used the "red Concentration Camps" as an argument to play down the Nazi crimes. At the time of the partition of Germany, the Special Camps were, of course, not included in East German memorials, which were shaped by an "antifascist" narrative. Following the collapse of the SED dictatorship in 1989, mass graves from the Special Camps were discovered and the camps came again into the sphere of public interest. The term "red Concentration Camps" experienced a partial renaissance. At the same time, the discussion about the character of the Special Camps and their historical classification into different types of prison camps was rekindled.

The debates in and around the Sachsenhausen memorial were accompanied by a bigger controversy about the interpretation and the relation of the "two German dictatorships." In short there are two opposing positions. Many researchers and, more importantly, politicians followed one of the many forms of totalitarianism theory, which basically postulates that National Socialism and Communism were more or less the same, because their systems of rule were rooted in very similar structures and methods of governing society. In Germany there is one important difference, which some try to summarize in the following way; the Nazi Reich left "mountains of dead" while the East German dictatorship mainly "mountains of files" (Walthert 2007). It doesn't matter if one shares this interpretation, the Third Reich unleashed the bloodiest war in history and the industrial mass killing of the European Jews and other groups, while the GDR mainly spied on and suppressed its own citizens. Throughout the 1990's a number of expert commissions were set up, where historians, politicians and former victims tried to deal with the difficulties of the German past. The Bundestag set up two Enquete Inquiry Commissions, which mainly did research about the GDR, but covered the Soviet Special Camps (Beattie 2008). The 2nd Enquete Inquiry Commission in 1998 postulated that the Special Camps had "nothing to do with denazification" (Enquete Commission 1998: 606). I do not share the unambiguity of this politically influenced judgment (Heitzer 2015b). The main achievements of the Enquete Commissions were (1) the establishment of a mainly state sponsored memorial culture, which had not existed in West Germany before German unification and (2) the fixation of the "Faulenbach formula", which is the basic consensus regarding German memorial culture since then (see also Siebeck in this issue). The Faulenbach formula, that neither the crimes of the one dictatorship nor the other can be trivialized, or made light of through comparisons – is still predominant, even though it has recently been the target of criticism (Beattie 2013).

The history of the ten Soviet Special Camps on the territory of the Soviet occupation zone in Germany and the GDR (1945–1950) has only been the subject of systematic scientific research since the early 1990s. Following the exhumation of those who died in the Special Camps in the spring of 1990, the pressing need for research on this topic was obvious. These developments had the greatest impact on the Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen memorials. In Brandenburg the government set up a historical commission, which discussed several concepts to reshape the memorials Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück. On the one hand they had to free the presentation of the camp's history from the ideological burdens of the past years and prepare the current state of research accordingly. On the other hand they also had to consider the history of the Special Camp appropriately, which followed on from the National Socialist Concentration Camp, which entailed adhering to the Faulenbach formula.

However, the tense atmosphere surrounding this question complicated their task. In 1990, for example, neo-Nazis marched unhindered by the police and civil society in front of the Sachsenhausen memorial, gave the Hitler salute and erected a "memorial to the victims of socialism" on the mass graves of the Special Camp (Der Stern 1991).

In the following processes, there was both constructive cooperation and confrontational clashes. In 1992 in front of the Sachsenhausen memorial a large display showed the following inscription:

Dear visitors!

This memorial was built and designed for the memory of the victims of Nazi criminals by the communist authorities before perestroika and the change-over [in the GDR].

The end of communist rule and the unification of our country in peace and freedom make it possible also to remember those in the resistance who sacrificed their freedom, health and lives after 1945 under the Soviet occupation forces and the illegitimate East German state.

The necessary redesign of this memorial is under preparation.

In the early 1990s the victim organization "Association of Sachsenhausen 1945–1950" designed cemeteries to commemorate the mass graves of victims from this period. The debate in Oranienburg ignited in the second half of 1990s and was conducted in increasingly strong terms, including court disputes between associations for the victims of Stalinism and the memorial.

There were repeated conflicts (Haustein 2006). In 1996 parts of the mentioned "Association" tried to hold a ceremony in honor of the 101st birthday of doctor Prof. Dr. Hans Heinze, a leading scientist and euthanasia enthusiast, who actively participated in the murder of mentally disabled children and adults in the years up to 1945 (Ley 2012). Heinze was imprisoned by the Soviets in the Sachsenhausen Special Camp as a Nazi criminal. This led to serious conflicts in the committees and bodies of the Foundation, which were followed closely in the

media. A representative of the victims' association explained the partial withdrawal of its organization from the ceremony, not due to the findings on the Nazi perpetrator Heinze and the media coverage, but to the fear that his organization would face counter-demonstrations and protests. The wreath-laying ceremony for Heinze took place anyway, but in a private setting.

This was followed by long discussions about alleged Soviet plans to systematically kill the inmates of the Special Camp, which in fact did not exist (Heitzer 2015b). The culmination of the protests was the opening of the Museum of the History of the Soviet Special Camp in December 2001. Without any group having seen the exhibition a week before opening, a spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry spread the rumor through the news agency TASS that the exhibition organizers would try "to whitewash the atrocities of Nazi criminals" (Morsch, Reich 2005: 481–482). He insinuated that the intention was "to place the crimes of fascism and the actions by the Soviet occupational forces <...> on the same footing" (Morsch, Reich 2005: 481–482). On the opening day a members and representatives of the Special Camp victims' association staged a further protest, saying that not only had they been considered to be lifelong "second class" victims but that some of them would now be definitively and unfairly labeled as Nazis (Morsch, Reich 2005: 481–482).

The victims of the concentration camps and their associations still largely refuse to commemorate their suffering together with the former prisoners of the special camp. In the view of the victims' associations of concentration camp prisoners, many of the special camp inmates were Nazis and Nazi criminals. In 2006, another scandal broke (Knigge 2006) when the conservative interior minister of Brandenburg, Jörg Schönbohm, spoke at the commemoration ceremony of the 61st anniversary of the liberation of the Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen. In speaking to survivors of the Nazi terror about the suffering of German prisoners in the Soviet Special Camps, the International Sachsenhausen Committee called his speech "outrageous". Schönbohm's remarks caused a crisis in the Brandenburg state government, which was then a coalition of Social and Christian Democrats. His resignation was demanded even by three Social Democratic parliamentarians. The Director of the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation in January 2007 brought a thesis paper to the Parliament, in which he defended the Faulenbach formula and the decentralized concept of the Sachsenhausen memorial, which precisely separates the different phases of history but resists the practice of historical comparison that has often led to a wrong equation of concentration and special camps (Morsch 2007). His paper was accepted in the parliamentary committee for science, research and culture.

In January 2009, survivors of numerous international committees met in Berlin to establish a legacy aimed at future generations. They did this in the understanding that their status as authentic witnesses of National Socialist crimes will soon come to an end. This "legacy" refuses to equate the National Socialist and Communist regimes in the context of the new European politics of memory:

Correspondingly, we reject any attempt to render equal or homogenize the varied memories that exist. That is why we are categorically against the introduction of a collective "Day of Remembrance for the Victims of All Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes" [in the European Union]. As exemplified by the choice of date – 23 August, the anniversary of the Hitler-Stalin Pact – such attempts at homogenization result in dubious forms of historical relativism. Historical events are removed from their contexts; causes and effects become confused. This day of remembrance does not serve to bring the various memories of war and terrorist regimes into dialogue. Quite the contrary, it entrenches discord, tears open old wounds and is leading to fresh conflict and confrontation. This is not a worthy way for a free and pluralist Europe to commemorate <...> the millions who have fallen victim to state crime (Bordage 2011: 16).

In recent years, conflicts around Sachsenhausen were carried out with less sharpness. But they emerge time and again, as when in March 2013 the author gave a public lecture on the search for mass graves of the Special Camp Sachsenhausen. There were loud protests from the ranks of the survivors and victim organizations when the point was made that we must assume after the meticulous searches of the 1990s that all the mass graves of the Special Camp had been found and no further deaths will be added to the number, a fact that is known and proven by a research project. The question of the number of deaths is emotionally moving for many former inmates, but on the other hand is also of importance for political activists who are trying to relativize the historical significance of the Concentration Camp. During the research for a book on those died, the contemporary Soviet figure of nearly 12,000 dead in this Special Camp was confirmed, about 20 percent of the detainees (Reich 2010).

Conclusion

Until the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Special Camps were a political symbol of the Cold War and Communist injustice almost for the whole "West". In this view it had nothing to do with denazification but all with Soviet crimes. Each opponent in the outlined conflict emphasized certain aspects of the Special Camps, while others were relegated to the background. Primarily this concerned the question of the Nazi connections of the Special Camp inmates as well as the thesis of the similarity of "brown" and "red" Concentration Camps. The conflicting images that were created at this time, on both sides, still affect the debate about the Special Camps today. On both sides images were created, reflecting only a part of the history (Morsch, Reich 2005; Scheliha 2006b).

It should be noted that, with regards to the special camp issue, more research is still very necessary. For example, not enough is known about the "prisoner's society", which could help provide accurate estimates on the role the Soviet post-war camps played in the process of denazification and in the repression of political opponents.

During the Cold War the Special Camps were an excellent field for the confrontation of the westward-oriented FRG with the Soviet Union and the GDR,

because the signal words "Buchenwald" and "Sachsenhausen" suggested a comparison with the Nazi system. In the political polemic both camp systems have been systematically identified, which fulfilled important functions: In Germany and especially in West Berlin, in light of the Soviet threat, equating the two could strengthen the will of the population to persevere. At the same time, in accusing the Soviet Union of similar crimes, the Germans could be relieved of some of the guilt of their own involvement in Nazi crimes (Scheliha 2006a).

After the collapse of the GDR, this debate, which had already changed dramatically during the discussions in the times of the policy of détente ("Ostpolitik") and other social and political processes in West Germany, could not be continued. After 1990 in Germany it led to a partial revival of totalitarianism theory, which provides the framework for the efforts to equate Soviet Special Camps and Nazi Concentration Camps. But research on the crimes of National Socialism had made a huge progress since the 1950s, making it more difficult to promote the described interpretations which at least equalize Nazi Concentration Camps and Soviet Special Camps, especially since the German reunification, as this was not accepted by society. This led to the partly embittered reactions of the former Special Camp prisoners, who had hoped that, after 1989, the importance of the Special Camp topic for the public could be restored to the status it enjoyed in the early part of the Cold War.

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