



JENNY BAUMANN

Ideologie und Pragmatik.
Die DDR und Spanien 1973-1990
(Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte,
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reviewed by

XAVIER MARÍA RAMOS DIEZ-ASTRAIN, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Until recently, the history of relations between Spain and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was a little-studied topic in historiography. The secondary position of both players in the Cold War meant that neither Spanish nor German historians paid much attention to bilateral relations between the two countries. In recent years, however, several studies have shed new light on the role of subordinate actors in the bloc dynamics of the Cold War. In this context, several studies on relations between Spain and the GDR have been published, most of them in Spain.¹ Jenny Baumann's study »Ideologie und Pragmatik. Die DDR und Spanien 1973–1990« from 2023 is the first major contribution on this topic from German historiography (although there had already been some previous studies on partial aspects).² Her work reflects a broad knowledge of both areas, supported by a solid analysis of the sources.

The book's subtitle seems modest in relation to the book's content, as »Ideologie und Pragmatik« deals quite extensively also with the period between 1949 and 1973. In those years, Spain and the GDR had no direct relations and did not officially recognise each other. However, their mutual existences were very relevant for both. The GDR based part of its self-portrayal as anti-fascist state on the struggle of several German interbrigadists in the Spanish Civil War, which was seen as a vital episode of the anti-Hitler struggle in Germany itself. In addition, there was constant East-German support for the anti-Franco struggle of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). Franco's anti-

¹ Cf. *José M. Faraldo/Carlos Sanz Díaz* (Eds.), *La otra Alemania. España y la República Democrática Alemana (1949-1990)*, Granada 2022; *Xavier María Ramos Diez-Astrain*, *A través del Telón de Acero. Historia de las relaciones políticas entre España y la RDA (1973-1990)*, Madrid 2021; cf. *id.*, *Las relaciones entre España y la República Democrática Alemana: un campo de estudio en auge*, in: *Blog del CEPC*, 22.11.2022, URL: <<https://www.cepc.gob.es/blog/las-relaciones-entre-espana-y-la-republica-democratica-alemana-un-campo-de-estudio-en-auge>> [24.05.2024].

² Cf. *Andreas Jüngling*, *Alternative Außenpolitik. Der Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund der DDR und Franco-Spanien (1947-1975)*, Berlin 2017; *Tim Haberstroh*, *Die DDR und das Franco-Regime. Außenpolitik zwischen Ideologie und Pragmatismus*, Schkeuditz 2011; *Michael Uhl*, *Mythos Spanien. Das Erbe der Internationalen Brigaden in der DDR*, Bonn 2004.

communist regime, for its part, found an important ally in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in its rapprochement with the European communities and NATO. It was therefore particularly zealous in its support for the West-German Hallstein Doctrine. Against this difficult background, only lukewarm economic and cultural relations developed.

The establishing of diplomatic relations between Spain and the GDR in 1973 was then, as Baumann reconstructs, the result of a combination of internal and external factors, such as the relaxation of the West German position and the loss of influence of the most ideological actors on both sides. The GDR was the first socialist country to establish diplomatic relations at the highest level with Franco's Spain. But the relationship remained difficult. The GDR suspended relations again as early as 1975 in a gesture of protest against the last five executions in Spain; a gesture which, in the author's opinion, was essentially propagandistic and whose consequences were not properly assessed. Diplomatic relations were not re-established until April 1977, when Spain (in the midst of transition to democracy) had already normalized its relations with the other Warsaw Pact states.

From 1977 onwards, Baumann distinguishes two phases in relations between Spain and the GDR. The first phase corresponds to the period of government of the Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD) from 1977 to 1982, a coalition that included the reform-oriented factions of the former Franco regime. The author describes how the SED regime built up a network of contacts in Spain with a large number of dialogue partners during this period, while the Spanish government showed only little interest in the relationship. Among these dialogue partners was also the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), which won the 1982 elections under the leadership of the young Sevillian lawyer Felipe González. Under the González government, relations between Spain and the GDR underwent a phase of expansion. The GDR paid close attention to relations with Spain, despite its entry into NATO in 1982 and its ratification in a referendum on 12 March 1986. For its part, Spain maintained a friendly attitude towards the GDR and other socialist states despite its increasing integration into the Western sphere (including joining the European Communities in 1986), but without giving it priority. When the East German regime went into terminal crisis in 1989, Spain concentrated its efforts on supporting unification.

Reconstructing effectively the general features of the history of relationships, the book reveals many strengths but also some weaknesses. The main challenge for a study that deals with a topic that has already been investigated is to bring novelty to it. This is not always achieved by Baumann. Nevertheless, »Ideologie und Pragmatik« does provide some relevant new perspectives. One of the aims Baumann sets herself in the introduction is to analyze the relationship between Spain and the GDR, including the triangular relationship with the Federal Republic - and in doing so to take into account above all the East German endeavour to take an independent, not secondary, position as a state representative of German culture in Madrid. Meticulous work on the sources makes this aspect (which has been dealt with in lesser depth in other studies) perhaps the most striking aspect of this book. In contrast, »Ideologie und Pragmatik« does not shine as brightly in its analysis of GDR-Spain relations as part of the socialist countries' relations with Spain. Multilateral issues are somewhat blurred compared to the weight of bilateral aspects. The role of the GDR as an integral part of the Warsaw Pact is present in the book, but does not form its actual backbone. Greater attention to the efforts of the GDR and the Soviet bloc to prevent Spain's entry into NATO or to qualify its membership of the alliance would contribute, however, to a better understanding of some issues. These include, for example, the efforts made by the GDR to win the recognition of the Spanish public through cultural and propaganda activities (in competition with West Germany), or the willingness of the SED to reorganize relations with the PCE when the latter had lost its former significance.

Another strength of »Ideologie und Pragmatik« is its detailed analysis of the many different factors in the relationship between the GDR and Spain. Baumann has done a great job in weighing up the weight of the various political and social actors, both internal and external: the respective governments, political parties, cultural actors, social organizations, economic actors, and, in particular, the FRG. The book thus quite convincingly combines a very comprehensive overview with the transnational approaches of recent historiography of international relations. However,

the result has also some weaknesses. Occasionally there is an excess of zeal in the individualization of each actor in the play. This is the case, for example, with the PSOE leaders involved, whose differences (which were sometimes simply based on different functions in the apparatus) lead the author to differentiate between »friends« and »sympathisers« of the GDR and the rest. Alfonso Guerra can hardly be considered a friend or sympathiser of the GDR or of communism in general. Moreover, the separate consideration of the individual actors and factors leads to numerous leaps in time, which often make it difficult to follow the narrative thread (especially for reader unfamiliar with the subject).

As already noted, the work on sources is very extensive and meticulous. With references from thirteen archives and fifty-two periodicals from Spain and Germany, Baumann has accomplished an overwhelming feat in analyzing primary sources. In addition, there is an abundant bibliography. However, the bibliographical apparatus could have been strengthened, which in turn would have made the work more robust. What is missing is a stronger dialogue with the existing literature on the subject, which is scarcely considered, and especially with the literature that deals with other issues of relations (political or economic) between Spain and Eastern Europe. This would also have helped to avoid some minor errors, such as the assertion that the bilateral trade agreement was denounced by Spain in 1986 as a consequence of the declining attractiveness of the East German market (in reality, it was a consequence of Spain's entry into the EEC, which monopolized this type of agreement, and had been anticipated by the GDR). It would also have been useful to pay more attention to the abundant literature on Spanish communism.

Finally, it is worth mentioning a problem that affects this book as well as other research on this subject. Access to Spanish sources is considerably more difficult than to German sources. As a result, all studies tend to overemphasize the East German perspective over the Spanish one, whose actors cannot be examined with the same meticulousness. It is to be expected, however, that the gradual opening of Spanish sources will resolve this problem sooner rather than later. As for »Ideologie und Pragmatik«, Baumann's efforts to circumvent this limitation as far as possible should be emphasized.

Despite some weaknesses, »Ideologie und Pragmatik« is a solid, coherent work that makes valuable contributions to knowledge about relations between Spain and the GDR. Its differentiated approach sets it apart from other works on this and similar topics. As such, the book is highly recommended reading.

Zitierempfehlung

Xavier María Ramos Diez-Astrain, Rezension zu: Jenny Baumann, *Ideologie und Pragmatik. Die DDR und Spanien 1973–1990*, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Berlin/Boston 2023, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* (online) 64, 2024, URL: <<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/afs/81996.pdf>> [24.5.2024].