

RESEARCH PAPERS

THE FORMER COMMUNIST
PARTY ARCHIVES IN
EASTERN EUROPE
AND RUSSIA:
A PROVISIONAL ASSESSMENT

Leo van Rossum



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The Former Communist Party Archives
in Eastern Europe and Russia
A Provisional Assessment

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Amsterdam
1997

Introduction

The fall of communism dramatically affected archival institutions in Eastern Europe and Russia. Access improved considerably, and obstacles to publication of the documents found diminished. Other countries also benefitted from the increased openness. Individual Western researchers were offered facilities that would previously have been inconceivable; moreover, West and East European institutions reached collaboration agreements for both sides to provide meaningful contributions in the areas where their supply was ample or even excessive, namely research needs, researchers, and research funding. Decidedly sensational changes affected the archival institutions of the Communist parties that were suddenly prohibited or forced to adjust. Most of these institutions were appropriated through incorporation into the various national state archival structures to resume operations as regular public archives or archival departments following a brief incubation period.

While the changes sketched above were definitely publicized, the focus on the changes in Russia deprived the archives of the East European Communist parties of their share of the limelight. Credit is due to the Polish Directorate of State Archives and its director Dr Jerzy Skowronek (who passed away far too early)¹ for convening a conference where representatives of all East European former central Communist Party archives had the opportunity to report the changes their operations had undergone in the past five years.

Conference Organization

The international conference Archives of Former Communist Parties in Central and Eastern Europe was held from 28 September to 1 October 1995 in the beautifully restored Radziwili Palace at Stara Wieś, one hundred kilometres north of Warsaw.² The conference language was Russian. Representatives came from twelve former East European central party archives (Poland, the three Baltic states, Russia, the Ukraine including the Crimean Republic, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria).³ Representatives of the national central state archival services of 7 of the countries listed also attended the conference.⁴ Not represented were the provincial and local party archives,

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1. Frankly, the conference of Stara Wieś would have been inconceivable without the perseverance of this energetic and at the same time particularly captivating man. His unexpected death in a traffic accident in France on 23 July 1996 was a major loss for the Polish and international archival world.
 2. The official conference proceedings appeared in mid 1996: General naja Direkcija Gosudarstvennykh Archivov Respubliki Pol sha, *Sbornik materialov po Meždunarodnoj konferencii Archivy byv ich Kommunisti..eskich Partii v stranach central noj i vosto..noj Evropy* (Warszawa, 1996); hereafter *Sbornik*). As is growing increasingly common, the proceedings contain the texts of the lectures but not the discussions. Some texts included in the proceedings differ considerably from the version presented at the conference. Cf. notes 22, 23 and 29). Journalist Véronique Soulé described her impressions in *Libération*, 13 October 1995, pp. 33-34.
 3. The proceedings include the party archive of the Crimean Republic among the central party archives, thus listing a total of 13. (*Sbornik*, p. 3).
 4. Poland, Russia, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia.

except for 8 Polish provincial archives.⁵ Representatives of the International Council on Archives, the Hoover Institution on War, Peace and Revolution (Stanford, California), and the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam) were also invited.

The preparations for the conference and its actual course were hardly a model of streamlined organization. Nonetheless, the theme and the chronological boundaries were defined from the outset. While the working title in the letter of invitation was Archives of Former Communist Parties Central and Eastern Europe in the period of Legal and Systematic Transformations, the invited representatives of the former party archives received no guidelines for their lectures. Nor was any attempt made to structure the discussions at the conference. Rather than applying misplaced liberalism, the Polish hosts probably sought the approach least likely to deter potential participants. This strategy was largely successful, as 4 of the 6 East European central party archives that sent no representatives did so with good reasons.⁶ The relatively open invitation had resulted in a more divergent perspective among the papers presented than had been imagined, given the carefully circumscribed conference theme. Nonetheless, in the course of the conference several problems proved essential to all participants and mutually comparable despite the national intricacies. The awareness that all participants were in the same boat was underscored by two panel discussions, chaired by Professor Andrzej Paczkowski and Professor J. Skowronek, respectively, and addressing central issues, such as the relevance of the party archives in studying the social changes of the twentieth century or the credibility of the documents generated by the Communist Party as historical sources.

This paper reviews the problems addressed in the lectures and panel discussions. Unlike the practice at Stara Wieś, where one speaker after another placed his contribution in a national perspective, this approach to the problems is more comparative. The account's scope will extend beyond the conference at Stara Wieś to address publications that appeared subsequently.

Transfer

Although the communist archives in the East European countries represented at the conference were transferred to state ownership and administration (to state administration only in Bulgaria), the processes were far from uniform. The transfer was sudden – virtually

5. Katowice, Upper Silesia, Lublin, Poznan, Cracow, Warsaw, Wrocław, and Siedlce.

6. Nobody was present from the Communist Party archives of Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Albania or from the former GDR (the first four hardly existed as institutions around 1995). The reasons are unclear regarding the absence of a representative of the former party archive of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, which had surrendered all documents regarding the period 1948-1989 to the Hungarian state archive in 1992 but remained operational as the Hungarian Socialist Party Archive with the documentation from before 1948 and after 1989. For an account of the archive's development since 1989, see: Gábor Székely, 'The Institute for History of Politics, Archives of the Hungarian Socialist Party', in: Günter Buchstab (Hg.Ed.), *Das Gedächtnis der Parteien/The Memory of the Parties. Parteiarchive in Europa/Party Archives in Europe. Conference of the Section of Archives and Archivists of Parliaments and Political Parties in the International Council of Archives, Prague, 18-20 November 1994* (Sankt Augustin, 1996), pp. 87-94.

overnight in fact after the coup of 19 August 1991 in 5 member states of the Soviet Union: the RSFRS,⁷ the Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, and Latvia. The transfer proceeded somewhat less abruptly but rapidly nonetheless in Slovenia and Romania (early 1990).

In the other countries, however, this transfer involved a process of negotiation and political struggle that lasted months or even years.

Following the official disbandment of the *Polish United Workers Party* in Poland in January 1990, the majority of the ex-Communists who adopted the designation of Social Democrats had no desire to take over the paper legacy of the former Communist Party. Two months later, they reached a transfer agreement with the Polish state archival service. The agreement covered all communist archives in Poland but conceded authority over access to recent archival material (e.g. documents not older than 30 years) to the following of Al. Kwaśniewski.⁸ Until January 1992, the Central Party Archive retained a special status as the Archive of the Polish Leftists within the sixth department of the *Archive of New Documents* (Archiwum Akt Nowych).

In the Czech Republic the struggle dragged on for almost a year. In January 1990, the *Burgerforum*'s historical committee was the first authoritative body to discuss the need to secure the Communist Party archives. Only in November 1990 did a parliamentary majority support legislation decreeing restitution of the Communist Party's property to the Czech and Slovak people. Section 3 of the act stipulated that the Communist Party had to transfer all party archives to the state archival network before 31 January 1991. The Czech Communist Party subsequently swallowed its pride and presented the archives of the CK and the Institute for Marxism-Leninism to the National State Archive; the provincial and district party archives were transferred to the regional state archives.⁹ In Slovakia the political tug of war lasted nearly a year longer.

In Bulgaria the ex-communist *Bulgarian Socialist Party* stretched the negotiations regarding the transfer of the Communist Party archives until July 1993 before reaching a relatively favourable agreement with the state archival service. The BSP retained legal ownership of all central and local party archives. All processed files (i.e. less than half the total) were entrusted to the state archival service. Examination of internal party documents was possible only with permission from the BSP. Documents concerning personal matters were excluded from the agreement. The BSP creatively used the provision restricting the transfer to material included in the inventory to avoid implementing the agreement in full.¹⁰

In Lithuania, the process was sensational. For a year and a half, MVD troops loyal

7. Lively impressions of the first inspection of the party archive buildings in Moscow appeared in the *Izvestija* of 31 August 1991; in Tver in *Ote..estvennye archivy*, 1992-1, pp. 13-16.

8. Al. Kwaśniewski *et al.* proved more lenient than the state archival service about authorizing work within this thirty-year period.

9. The Czech paper on this subject was disappointingly reticent. Our source is the anonymously published project assigned by the IISH and written by Ladislav Nikliček and Stanislav Šisler *Gegenwärtiger Stand der Literatur zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung und Sozialgeschichte in Bibliotheken, Museen und Archiven der Tschechoslowakei* (Prague, 1992), pp. 73-81.

10. In addition to the lecture by Krāstju Georginov, the deputy director of the directorate of archives of the Republic of Bulgaria, who cautiously criticized the BSP approach (*Sbornik*, pp. 91-92), cf. the contribution by loyal BSP staff member Rima Canacieva 'The Bulgarian Socialist Party Archives', in: G. Buchstab (Hg.), *Das Gedächtnis der Parteien*, pp.103-106.

to Moscow surrounded the central party archive building in Vilnius. Inside, Lithuanian archival employees sympathetic to the new state continued the operations. This Soviet action was part of a broader albeit abortive half-hearted military intervention following the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence on 11 March 1990. Only after the failed coup of August 1991 did the MVD gradually retreat, thereby granting the Lithuanian state archival service freedom to manoeuvre.¹¹

Ultimate Status: Integration in the State Archival Structure

J. Skowronek's final report on the conference lists three options for the definitive status attributed to the party archives after their transfer to the state archival system:

1. Integration of the party archives in the state archival system as distinct structure units with a measure of independence (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Estonia; in these last two countries, unification of the local, provincial, and central archives took place first). The names of these distinct structural units, Department or Branch of Social-Political Organizations, Documentation Center for Modern History, and similar names suggested a new approach. Generally, the new units ranked below their counterpart within the state archive; in November 1991, for example, the party archive for the oblast Tver became a *branch* of the state archive for the oblast Tver and was named *Documentation Center of Modern History*. Its location remained the old party archive building.¹²
2. Integration of the party archives in the state archival system as a department (*otdel*) by rank (urban, provincial, national) in the hierarchy and with forfeiture of every type of organizational independence (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia).
3. As (1.) and subsequently: merge of the party archives with the KGB and MVD archives into a single archive (Lithuania) or steps in that direction (Estonia).¹³

While this overview is certainly enlightening, it suffers from the same shortcoming as any

11. For the paper by Gediminas Ilgunas, Director of the department for archives of the Republic of Lithuania, see *Sbornik*, pp. 38–41. Additional information in: Vanda Kasauskiene, Sources and Historiography of Labour Movement in Lithuania, 1940-1995, paper delivered at the 32nd International Conference of Labour Historians, Linz 10-14 September 1996 (publication in progress).

12. I am using Tver's provincial (party) archive as an example because it was among the first to issue a brief guide of the Documentation Center: *Tverskoj centr dokumentacii novej ej istorii. Reklamnyj spravodnik* (Tver, 1992). In 1994 an English guide appeared covering the entire provincial archive complex, including the Documentation Center and the 36 municipal and district archives in the oblast: *Tver Archives. Russia. A guide to the historical events of the Tver Region, from the 14th century to present* (Tver, 1994). The publication also includes photographs of the current exterior and interior of the party archive building.

13. E. Skowronek, Otčet o Meždunarodnoj konferencii Archivy byvšich kommunističeskich partii v stranach Centralnoj i Vostočnoj Evropy, in: *Sbornik*, p. 4-5. At 3) Latvia is mistakenly indicated for Estonia (cf. *Sbornik*, p. 48).

historical overview by failing to convey the multiplicity of the changes.

During the first few months after the abortive coup of August 1991, the prevailing mood in Russia was hardly conducive to allowing the party archives any independence. As a result, they were fully integrated in the existing network of state archives. But very soon the practice of archival work showed the absence of any prospect of such unnatural integration, and this decision was reversed.¹⁴ This action gave rise to the establishment of over 50 relatively independent provincial documentation centers operating as branches (filialy) of the corresponding provincial state archive. In the other cases (fewer than 20) integration was imposed because of the diminutive size of the former provincial party archive, lack of own storage space, or for other reasons; the former provincial party archive then became a department within the provincial state archive.¹⁵

While the scope of autonomy among documentation centers was consistently narrow within provincial archival services, two documentation centers emerged at the federal level with an organizational force equal to that of the traditional large federal archives, as noted at the conference by the deputy director Vladimir Kozlov of the Russian archival service *Rosarchiv*.¹⁶ These two centers, the *Russian Center for the Preservation and Research of Modern Historical Documents* (Rossijskij Centr Chranenija i Izučenija Dokumentov Novej ej Istorii) and the *Center for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation* (Centr Chranenija Sovremennoj Dokumentacii), had succeeded the CPSU Central Party Archive and the current CK archive, respectively. There was also the former archive of the Politburo, currently the *Archive of the President of the Russian Federation* (Archiv Prezidenta RF). This subdivision of the single archive complex that had existed before 1991 resulted from subjective motives; sooner or later the three archives would have to be merged into one again, possibly as the Russian State Historical Archive of Recent Political History .¹⁷

In Belarus the process was also far from straightforward. There, the reorganizations preceded the transfer of August 1991. They began when the *Party archive of the Institute of the History of the KPB* merged with the *Party archive of the Oblast Minsk* to form the *Central Party Archive* (late 1990). After the changes in August 1991, the provincial party archives of Brest and Vitebsk became departments (*otdely*) within the corresponding provincial state archives, while those of Gomel, Grodno, and Mogilev acquired the more independent branch status within the corresponding provincial state archive. In addition, the *Central Party Archive* merged with the *Central State Historical Archive*, although this hardly seems to have affected the independence of the CPA. The new combination was called the *National Archive of the Republic Belarus*. In 1995 a third reorganization followed.

14. Oleg N. Naumov, 'The Former Communist Party Archives in the System of the Russian Archival Service' in: *Das Gedächtnis der Parteien*, p. 52.

15. Naumov, *Op. cit.*, pp. 51-59.

16. Vladimir P. Kozlov, 'Nekotorye sovremennye problemy integracii byv ich archivov KPSS v sistemu gosudarstvennych archivov Rossii', in: *Sbornik*, pp. 17-22, p. 19.

17. Curiously (or perhaps for the sake of convenience), Kozlov overlooked the fact that the Presidential archive was not within the Russian State Archives Service's sphere of jurisdiction. Kozlov mentioned that 2 other archives (the former party archives of the city and the oblast of Moscow and Leningrad) were too large to categorize as provincial branches. However, he did not indicate a more appropriate status for these archives. (Ibid.)

Fonds from before 1917 were removed from the *National Archive* and placed in a *Belorussian National Historical Archive*. The CPA was officially liquidated. Its archives were included in the Belorussian state archive, which was once again named the *National Archive of the Republic Belarus*. To compensate for the unequal status of the former provincial party archives, the departments of Brest and Vitebsk were awarded branch status.¹⁸

Lack of data preclude covering the different stages of the integration for all countries. As for the highlights of Skowronek's three varieties, most participants supported the second option, which entailed the most extensive possible integration into the state archival system. (The more independent the successor to the party archive, the greater the chance that a resurgent CP would try to obtain control of it.) An organizational merge of the CP and the former KGB/MVD archives was considered decidedly risky. In vain, the Estonian Director General of Archives defended this solution by arguing that such a combination facilitated demonstration of the cooperation between the local CP and the Soviet KGB. This link was essential to the national consciousness of the Baltic States.¹⁹

Even in countries that officially upheld the principle of separate party and KGB archives, the party archives contained KGB documents, especially in the personal files on victims of terror. As late as 1992-93, NKVD records of criminal investigations carried out by security forces in the 1930s and 1940s against inhabitants of Tver were transferred to the provincial Documentation Center.²⁰

Destroying the Documents

An important aspect of the transfer involved the question as to whether political considerations or fear of prosecution instigated the deliberate destruction of archival documents by the parties originally responsible before the change of the guard. The explicit focus concerned the items in the party archives that had been destroyed or that had disappeared since the 1980s. Speculation about archival destruction during earlier periods remained on the back burner.²¹

18. Both R. Platonov, *Archivy byvšej KPb kak istočnikovaja baza po istorii respubliki* and E. Savickij, *Organizacija ispol'zovanija i problemy soveršestvovanija naučno-spravočnogo apparata archivov byvšej KPb*, in: *Sbornik*, pp. 81-87, 93-98 address the archival reorganizations. The authors contradict one another on several issues. According to Platonov, all provincial party archives received the *otdel* status in 1991, and the Minsk provincial party archive was restored to *branch* status in 1995. Since the reorganizations were not Platonov's area of expertise, I follow Savickij.

19. Soulé, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

20. *Tver Archives*, p. 22.

21. While archival destruction certainly took place before the 1980s, few reports remain of such incidents. At Stara Wieś, Inese Lase of the Latvian state archive reported that only part of the archive of the Commission for KPL history at the Comintern's Latvian section, which had been confiscated by the Soviet Union in 1936, was returned after the war (*Sbornik*, p. 44). After the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, the VKP (b) initiated widespread destruction (especially of provincial archival fonds) for fear that such items would fall into Nazi hands. Cf. O. Chlevnjuk, Lj. Ko leva, J. Howlett, L. Rogovaja, *Les sources archivistiques des organes dirigeants du PC(b)R*, in: *Communisme*, 42-44 (1995), pp.15-35, here p. 21, and Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, *Displaced Archives on the Eastern Front*:

In his final report Skowronek concluded that nearly all the party archives remained intact, except for the ones from Poland, Lithuania, and to a lesser extent the Ukraine and Slovakia, which had been purged. The archives transferred during the political change (as in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Russia) were preserved in their entirety.²² Of course, nearly all is subject to interpretation.

On the same subject, director of the Estonian department of state archives Peep Pillak's paper mentioned a guideline regarding the destruction of documents from 1946-1985 that had been adopted by the CK of the CPSU on 29 March 1991. Had the Estonian central party archive followed this guideline, which had been communicated in writing from Moscow on 6 May 1991, nearly half the records would have been lost.²³ Pillak's statement suggests that the CPSU had opted for massive document destruction by early 1991. While this decision seems to contradict Kozlov's statement that no significant destruction of documents took place, the Soviet party center might conceivably have lost control of the national branches by March-May 1991. The national branches, then, successfully obstructed the archival destruction ordered by the old party center.²⁴

The course of events in Czechoslovakia is equally noteworthy. While the Czech central party archives (IML and CK archives) were the ones transferred and the only ones referred to by the Czech speaker Dr Alena Noskova at Stara Wieś, considerable quantities went through paper shredders at provincial and local levels (Česká Lípa, Kutná Hora, Prachatic).²⁵ Much was lost in Slovakia as well. Most of the CK archive's central membership records were withheld by the successor to the Slovak CP, the Party of Leftist Democracy, allegedly because this party needed these data to expand its support base. Moreover, documents had disappeared from the Slovak IML archive and were in the unauthorized possession of persons and institutions.²⁶

Restitution Problems from World War II and its Aftermath, (Research Papers IISG, Amsterdam, 1996). pp. 5-7.

22. Sbornik, p. 4. For these last 3 countries alone, J. Skowronek listed as sources the conference speeches by A. Noskova (the Czech Republic) and Brane Kozina (Slovenia; not present at the Stara Wieś conference; while his lecture is not in *Sbornik*, D. Drnovšek is, cf. note 46), as well as V. Kozlov (Russia).
23. Peep Pillak, *The Archive of the Estonian Communist Party and its Nationalisation*, p. 5. I am referring to the original paper presented at the Stara Wieś conference. The text published in *Sbornik* is considerably less concrete and omits the list of categories marked for destruction (files concerning acceptance of membership, reference files of the party leadership, personal files of punished members, files on state and economic institutions; cf. *Sbornik*, p. 46).
Remarkably, the party decision to destroy documents and the announcement to the Estonian CP were almost 5 weeks apart.
24. I received no answer to my written request or to my reminder to Dr Peep Pillak for permission to examine the two documents mentioned.
25. *Gegenwartiger Stand*, p. 75.
26. Cf. the interesting report about the circumstances of the transfer of the Slovak National Archive by the director at the time (still in office in 1995) Darius Rusnak: *Problematika kompletnosti i ispol zovanija archivnykh fondov KPS*, in: *Sbornik*, pp. 79-81. A slightly different opinion on what was withheld during the transfer is expressed by Maria Sanikova, staff member of the same archive: *Obrabotka i dostupnost archivnogo fonda (deloprizvodstva) Kommunističeskoj Partii Slovakii (CK KPS)* in: *Sbornik*, p. 55. Both share a remarkable acquiescence regarding the fact that individuals and institutions withheld archival material illegally.

At the last communist party congress in Poland (January, 1990), every party member obtained the right to claim his personal file. Many used this opportunity.²⁷ The politburo's minutes for 1982-1987 were also deliberately destroyed, probably following instructions from W. Jaruzelski.²⁸

On the other hand, Peep Pillak's paper for Estonia included specific figures revealing that the funds of the CK of the CP and the Komsomol had been handed over in their entirety.²⁹

Obviously, the transfer involved official documents from party archives, as well as the current records (*deloproizvodstvo*) of the CK and similar bodies in the lower ranks of the CP hierarchy. This material's share in the transfer varied from one country to another. In Poland the premises of the CK were carefully picked through. Everything discovered in closets and on desks was taken for security reasons.³⁰

As for the Russian federation, Oleg Naumov, the deputy director representing the *Russian Center* at the Stara Wieś conference, had reported at a different international conference in 1994 that the current records both in Moscow and in the province had been transferred in their entirety during the months August-December 1991.³¹

As for the Baltic states, Daina Klavinja, the director of the Latvian state archive, reported that many document complexes proved incomplete³² upon retrieving the current records after August 1991. Likewise, in Estonia deliberate destruction of documents meant that the current records of the CK of the CP fell into the hands of the state archival service with considerable gaps.³³

Accordingly, the destruction of archives and current records appears to have been considerably more widespread than Skowronek's assessment that nearly all were preserved. The conference's final resolution, which states that the party archives were characterized by considerable gaps, seems more accurate.³⁴

Remarkably, the papers submitted at Stara Wieś reported virtually nothing about whether the former party archives themselves were moved to the repositories of the state archival services. Transporting such quantities is difficult to imagine. Most likely, only one central party archive (the Polish one), was actually transferred (to the *Archiwum Akt Nowych*); sheer size meant that most central party archives had to remain where they were. Darinka Drnovšek, the head of the Slovenian archive directorate, approved of this outcome, as it eliminated any inclination toward rash purges and averted potential damage in transit.³⁵

27. Eva Rosowka, *Peredača archivov Polskoj obredinonnoj rabočej partii na gosudarstvennoe chranenie metodičeskie voprosy*, in: *Sbornik*, p. 29.

28. Barbara Woźniakowska, *Archivnyj fond dokumentov Centralnogo Komiteta PORP: soderžanie i značenie fonda*, in: *Sbornik*, p.32.

29. Pillak, *The Archive*, p. 6: Of the Estonian party's CK, 45,882 of the 45,916 registered files were retrieved, compared to 20,000 out of 20,006 for the Komsomol. Ten files were missing on the Komsomol district committees. These figures have been omitted from *Sbornik*, p. 46,

30. Rosowska, *Peredača*, p. 29.

31. Naumov, *The Former*, p. 52.

32. *Sbornik*, p. 66.

33. Pillak, *The Archives*, p. 8. This section does not appear in *Sbornik*.

34. *Značitel'naja nepolnota*. *Sbornik*, p. 7 (point 2).

35. *Sbornik*, p. 56.

Few of the papers delivered at Stara Wieś covered the fates of the former staff of the party archives.

A casual remark by a member of the Estonian delegation indicates that all 17 former employees of the central party archive retained their positions.³⁶ Conversely, all 6 members of the Latvian CPA were terminated for not knowing enough Latvian.³⁷ The Russian delegation avoided this subject at the Stara Wieś conference. The 1994 report from Naumov, however, showed that at both the central and the provincial authorities, the former party archive staff (except for a few incidental adjustments) stayed on in the new system.³⁸

Size; State of Processing

Notwithstanding all intentions to make the newly acquired material accessible for consultation and research as quickly as possible, the new administrators had to remove some of the obstacles left by the old administration of the party archives. One of the main impediments was the backlog in processing the material that was transferred. The backlog was twofold. First, document processing in the long-established party archives turned out to be considerably in arrears. Second, the current administration (*deloproizvodstvo*) reflecting more recent activities by the various party organizations proved to be an organized chaos.

In Poland the backlog in ordering documents within the Central Party archive was huge indeed. Assuming that in late 1989 the Polish central party archive (CPA) spanned 1,350 metres (*pogonnye metry*), 315 metres (i.e. the CK archive from the period 1948-1970) were adequately arranged. In addition to the unorganized or insufficiently organized files *within the CPA* (over 1,000 metres), there were the current records from the CK complex. These documents included (a) the settled files, which were more or less registered in the interim departmental archive (*vedomstvennyj archiv*), (b) the papers of the ongoing cases taken by the archive officials from the *Archive of New Documents* from the workplaces within the CK complex in 1990, and (c) sections of the archive of the president of the Republic of Poland. All told, the current CK records spanned 11,500 metres.³⁹ Along this stretch of nearly a dozen kilometres, only the transfer lists reflected an element of order and varied in terms of informative value from extremely vague descriptions of folders to detailed lists of document titles in separate files.⁴⁰

According to the paper delivered by curator W. Janowski from the *Archive of New*

36. *Sbornik*, p. 48

37. Soulé, *op. cit.*

38. Naumov, *The Former*, p. 51.

39. The available figures differ regarding the size of the transfer from the CPA and the CK complex; I use the averages of the figures. Cf. Władisław Mroczkowski, *Informationsquellen über die Geschichte der polnischen und internationalen Arbeiterbewegung im ehemaligen Zentralarchiv des ZK der PVAP*, in: *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts zur Erforschung der europäischen Arbeiterbewegung (IGA)*, Heft 13/1993, S.71-83, here 72; Feliks Tych, *Gegenwärtiger Stand der Quellen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in polnischen Archiven, Bibliotheken und Museen*, (Bonn, 1993), S.4-5; and the Polish speakers at Stara Wieś Wysocki, Rosowska and Woźniakowska (*Sbornik*, pp. 28, 29, 32).

40. Barbara Woźniakowska, *Archivnyj fond*, *Sbornik*, p. 32.

Documents, the holdings of the Polish central party archive had always been accumulated spontaneously rather than in carefully regulated increments. Well into the 1960s, many party activities were never recorded. Some of the records that had been kept were destroyed arbitrarily.⁴¹ Even after a *departmental archive* had been created inside the CK complex as a central point among the 39 [sic] departments and groups on the one hand and the central party archive on the other hand, the central archive's final responsibility for storing the current records was established beyond dispute and a ten-year term agreed for definitive transfer of the documents by the CK departments, document transfer procedures remained far from orderly. Little wonder that the 11.5 kilometres of documents were not yet processed by the fall of 1995.

The Russians also mentioned problems with transferring documents to the *vedomstvennyj archiv*. Vladimir Tjuneev, who became a member of the parliamentary archival commission in August 1991, noted during his inspection of the CK archive at Staraja Pločad in Moscow that by no means all suitable documents had reached the Central Party Archive at that point. The CPA was more interested in scholarship. Accordingly, the documents providing insight into the daily course of events (i.e. the most valuable and most secret aspect of the party apparatus) stayed behind in the CK complex.⁴²

In Russia, the quantities were vast. From September to December 1991, throughout the Russian Federation, the state archival service campaigned valiantly in its ongoing effort to obtain integral state control over the party archives and the current administration. The struggle yielded over 35 million files, thereby expanding the state archival holdings by more than a third, including 5 million that were not organized. This ratio compares favourably with the other countries under consideration.⁴³ Over 1.6 million files concerned the *Russian Center* and approximately 650,000 files the *Center for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation*. The bulk of the increase, however, concerned the party archives in the provinces. In early August 1991, the Tambov party archive, which was slightly larger than the average provincial party archive, contained 640,000 files; between September and December 1991, 421,000 files from the current records of the disbanded party organizations were added.⁴⁴

State archival officials in other countries were similarly baffled by the scope and severity of the disorder in such material.

In the Czech Republic, about half the material transferred from the CK archive and the IML archive (i.e. 1,800 out of 3,600 metres) was unprocessed.⁴⁵ In Slovakia, the records

41. Włodzimierz Janowski, *Voprosy naučno-technikoj obrabotki dokumentov CK PORP (tezisy doklada)*, in: *Sbornik*, pp. 87-89. Likewise, Josapas R. Bagauskas, director of the *Archive of Lithuanian Social Organizations*, complained that some party executives failed to appreciate the value of storing party documents in the 1950s (and even afterwards), *Sbornik*, p. 36.

42. *Izvestija*, 31 August 1991.

43. Kozlov, *Nekotorye sovremennye problemy*, p. 20. Naumov, *The Former*, p. 52 mentions an increase of 75 million *documents*, which defies comparison with files. Naumov reported that 2/3 of this increase involved current records.

44. Naumov, *ibidem*.

45. Alena Nosková, deputy director of the Central State Archive of the Czech Republic, *Vnutrennaja struktura archiva KPČ i ego naučnoe ispol zovanie*, in: *Sbornik*, p. 69; *Gegenwärtiger Stand*, p. 79. The figures for linear metres from the CK and IML archives are quite similar. Nevertheless, *Gegenwärtiger Stand* reports 2,000 m of party membership rolls, as well as some 1,000 m of files

were significantly more disorganized than in the Czech Republic. Finding aids, let alone shipping lists, were virtually never included in the transfer.⁴⁶

The Bulgarian Party Archive was largely unprocessed, especially the documents from after 1973.⁴⁷ Slovenia, on the other hand, which had a central party archive spanning 800 metres, was in much better condition. About 75 percent of its contents had been processed (= up to 1982).⁴⁸ The representatives from the Baltic archival units said little about the takeover of current records. The Latvian delegate Klavinja, however, noted that the documents from 1988-1991 comprised several new categories, such as letters from disconcerted citizens, documents from the opposition movements, and records of the cooperation between chapters of the Baltic communist parties that were loyal to Moscow. After August 1991, a host of interested individuals brought material they wished to rescue from oblivion to the new *Department of Sociopolitical Documents* of the Latvian State Archive.⁴⁹

Registration

Only the representatives from Russia, the Ukraine, and Belarus discussed accountancy (učet) at Stara Wieś. As on several other occasions at the conference, Kozlov was the most explicit of all the participants on this subject. Notwithstanding principle agreements between the state and party archival services in this regard, the party services had developed their own procedures for accountancy: centralized registration was based entirely on the passports of the party archives, not on individual fonds; documents containing state secrets were not registered separately. Moreover, the registration documents for each fond referred only to the files that had been processed and included in the inventory. Only after correcting and satisfying these and other shortcomings, could the party and state archival accountancy be integrated. The passport system adopted after 1991 in keeping with the state archival standards was an important step in the right direction.⁵⁰

L.B. Gurbova, the director of the state archive of the Crimean Republic, submitted that in general the practices for state and party archives differed considerably and criticized aspects of the accountancy similar to the ones mentioned by Kozlov.⁵¹ She emphasized the lack of a separate registration system for the secret (i.e. inaccessible) documents but offered no solution. Since August 1991, the Ukrainians had considered each request to examine documents individually to determine which ones still touched upon

concerning party publications, in addition to the 3,600 m, thus bringing the total to 6,600 m.

46. *Sbornik*, p. 54.

47. *Sbornik*, p. 91.

48. See the report from the department head of archives in the Republic of Slovenia, Darinka Drnov ek, in *Sbornik*, pp. 55-59. Additional observations in: D. Drnov ek, Gradivo fonda KPS/ZKS 1945-1990 in: *ARHIVI*, XV 1992, pp. 60-63.

49. Daina, Klavinja, Director of the State Archive of Latvia, Voprosy obrabotki i ispol zovaniya dokumentov byv ego partarchiva v Gosudarstvennom archive Latvii, in: *Sbornik*, p. 66.

50. *Sbornik*, p. 20.

51. On this subject, Gurbova differed from her close colleague R. Pirog, who tended to minimize the differences between the practices used by state and party archives. See *Sbornik*, pp. 49-51.

state secrets. Nevertheless, these documents were not registered separately and removed from the files before being placed in the reading room. The Ukrainians looked forward to suggestions for improving their procedure.⁵²

The Belarussians were the most specific about their accountancy problems. The speaker Eduard Savickij, deputy director of the state department of archives, explained. The state archival service used 15 registration types (not including the auxiliary types); the party archives used only 6.⁵³ The party archives also contained many small mini-fonds that were easily grouped under a single code.

The problems of the Belarussian state archives were exacerbated by incoherent merges⁵⁴ of former party archives in existing state archive complexes (described above in the section *Ultimate status*). These merges led to double archival fond numbers within the resulting single organization. This parallelism occurred both at the provincial state archives in Brest and Vitebsk, which were expanded to include the corresponding former party archives as an integrated *department*, and at the national archive, where the central party archive and the provincial party archive of Minsk were merged. Eventually, the Belarussians solved the problem with parallel codes by upgrading the former party archives of Brest and Vitebsk to branches and adding an A to the fond numbers of the former party archive of Minsk. Several years were lost unnecessarily.⁵⁵

The representatives of the other former party archives mentioned no specific registration problems. Only W. Janowski from the Polish *Archives of New Documents* used this term in referring to the necessary improvement of the registration documents from the processed section (1948-1970) of the Polish CPA.⁵⁶

Reference Service

Most speakers provided a detailed description of the demand for various forms of reference aids: unpublished inventories (opisi), card catalogues, published guides etc.⁵⁷ The Ukrainian Pirog argued that the traditional party archives had not had an immanent need for a modern reference system because of their restricted access and their concentration on the needs of the CP. Nevertheless, the difference was minimal as far as a few parameters were concerned. The reference system for the party archives has always been based on the inventory (opis), which conforms largely (značitel'no) to regulations set by the state archival service. This particular element of the reference system would enable rapid integration of the basic fonds among the party archives in the state archival structure.⁵⁸ The delegates from the Russian Federation did not share this optimism. The Russian

52. *Sbornik*, pp. p. 50, 62-63.

53. The acquisitions manual, the list of fonds, the fond card, the passport, the files concerning the fond itself. Savickij did not mention or the sixth type of učet. I am referring to his paper delivered at the conference (p. 6); the entire paragraph has been omitted from *Sbornik*.

54. Savickij: Razbros, *Sbornik*, p. 84.

55. *Sbornik*, p. 43.

56. *Sbornik*, p. 89.

57. Combined under the heading *nau..no-spravo..nyj apparat* in Russian archive circles.

58. *Sbornik*, p. 51.

representatives Kozlov and Naumov jointly argued that setting up a reference system intended for public access would take years. Decent overviews – even short, annotated lists of fonds per archival institution – were lacking, except for the guide published by the *Russian Center* in 1993.⁵⁹ Moreover, the inventories needed to be improved and the card catalogues and their indexes expanded to allow normal, civilized use of the documents.⁶⁰

Moreover, the committee formed by the Russian state archival service in 1992 and assigned to analyze the quality of the reference system for the party archives released some interesting findings. Many concerned formal aspects, such as the absence of title pages in the inventories, the lack of reference to fond numbers in the chronological card catalogues of party resolutions. The committee, however, had some more probing criticism as well, including the relevant comment that the party archive institutions were concentrating on providing access to individual archive fonds. The party archival system either omitted references or referred insufficiently to common or complementary data among individual fonds.⁶¹

Virtually all delegates reported that extensive card catalogues were available. Some participants explained that half – and occasionally more – of the party archives consisted of personal files concerning the party's current membership rolls (accession, suspension, expulsion, etc.), nomenclature and promotions among regular party officials, purges, and other personal details. The Russian Center has a card catalogue covering the central registration of the membership of the CPSU (40 million cards).

Card catalogues reflecting all party decrees, all decisions by the Secretariat, the complete agendas for all conferences, etc., arranged chronologically and by subject, were also mentioned as useful forms of access that were lacking among the state archival services.

Expanding the available resources was the main approach to compensating for the reference system's shortcomings. Only two countries (Latvia and Estonia) applied new methods to improve their reference systems. The Estonians were compiling an electronic register of the files from the CK departments with a view toward automation⁶²; the Latvians were working on a systematic access system that would be compatible with the Latvian state archive's service on the one hand and would be based on the international standard archive description (the ISAD) on the other hand.⁶³

Declassification

The issue of the classified (i.e. secret) documents and the need for declassification was probably the most substantial topic of discussion at the Stara Wieś conference. Some

59. Rossijskij Centr Chranenija i Izučeniya Dokumentov Novej ej Istorii, *Kratkij putevoditel . Fondy i kollekcii, sobrannye Central nym partijnym archivom* (Moskva, 1993); published in 1996: *ibid*, *Putevoditel po fondam i kollekcijam li..nogo proischoždenija* (Moskva).

60. *Sbornik*, Kozlov, pp. 20-21; Naumov, pp. 60-61 (the passage quoted on p. 61).

61. L.I. Beljanina, V.G. Larina, N.M. Chimina, Naučno-spravočnyj apparat v byv ich partijnich archivach: sostojanie i perspektivy razvytie , in: *Ote..estvennye archivy*, 1994, No. 5, pp. 3-10.

62. *Sbornik*, p. 47.

63. Klavinja, Voprosy obrabotki , *Sbornik*, p. 67-68.

speakers, such as E. Savickij from Belarus and V. Kozlov from Russia discussed this subject at length in their speeches; the Ukrainian delegate L.B. Gurbova spoke about nothing else.⁶⁴ Even delegates who did not mention declassification in their speeches were very concerned with the issue; it was the sole topic of general discussion at the conference.

The speakers reported that a large section of the material transferred (they mentioned shares between 65 and 85 percent) was sealed from public access. This secrecy ranged from fully secret and to be stored separately, through fully secret and secret, to the less rigid category not for use in the reading room.⁶⁵ The official motivations for this secrecy were concerns about state and party secrets. After the transfer in 1990-91, however, the reasons for the secrecy of some documents proved unclear. Krăstju Georginov, the Bulgarian director of the archives department, stated that the application of the seal of secrecy was both arbitrary and sloppy. Some secret documents preserved in the closed section of the stacks had already been published.⁶⁶

Despite the general agreement regarding the need to declassify the classified documents as quickly as possible, several factors impeded rapid action. First, some documents truly contained state or military secrets (diplomatic agreements, defence plans), as emphasized by L. Gurbova.⁶⁷ Second, all participants stressed their concern for privacy. As indicated above, about half the contents of all party archives transferred regarded personal matters. In the new democratic constellation, this information could be released only after a specific term (75 years from the date the document was drafted in Russia, the Ukraine, and Belarus; 100 years in the Czech Republic), unless the individuals concerned or their heirs allowed otherwise. A complicating factor was that different archivists interpreted privacy in different ways. Should documents proving an individual's collaboration during wartime be considered private? The third problem involved separating items that remained inaccessible for state or personal reasons from collections of documents to be released for research.

These three factors resulted in distinctive paths of declassification in all the former communist countries. In the Baltic states, the state archival services administration brought a quick and easy end to the classification imposed by foreign powers as part of the national emancipation process. (Documents containing private personal data were subject to the standard international conditions.)

The situation was different in Russia. Here, the accessibility guidelines were adopted as upheld by virtually all countries represented at Stara Wieś. The process, however, was both cautious and gradual: tedious verification procedures including the release of files by a top-heavy state committee elicited overt criticism from the participants.⁶⁸ The other countries adopted a variety of intermediate positions. The Czech Republic differed from

64. *Sbornik*, pp. 62-63.

65. Sover enno sekretno osoboj važnosti (osobaja papka), sover enno sekretno, sekretno; ne izdaetsja čital nomu zalu. The full range of secret classifications prevailed in the early 1980s. Cf. Instrukcija po rabote s sekretnymi dokumentami v apparate CK KPSS (Utverždena postanovleniem Sekretariata CK KPSS 12 fevralja 1980 g.) in: Leon Onikov, *KPSS: anatomija raspada. Vzgljad iznutri apparata CK* (Moskva, 1996), p. 177.

66. *Sbornik*, p. 92.

67. *Sbornik*, p. 62.

68. Nonetheless, the Russians progressed faster than V. Soulé suggested in *Libération* from 13 October 1995. Rather than the 450 indicated, the *Russian Center* declassified 450,000 files between January 1994 and September 1995 (*Sbornik*, p. 60).

Russia in that the 30 year statute of limitations for state secrets began in 1970, with limited scope for consultation (but not publication) within this period. In the Ukraine, the effort to pull documents containing state secrets from the archives was abandoned. As indicated above under *Registration*, ad hoc responses were issued to researchers inquiring about documents that were not yet accessible.

Relevance of the Newly Acquired Materials

The historical relevance of the source material transferred was a recurring subject at the Stara Wies conference. Casual references were made during the speeches and the discussion and explicit ones in the two panel debates and the concluding conference resolution.

By general agreement, the former party archives were an important source and sometimes even the basic source for studying all aspects of development in Eastern Europe since 1917 and 1945, respectively; the conference's concluding resolution mentioned archives consisting mainly of important and largely unique collections of primary sources on the socialist experiment [...] that reveal the mechanisms of the power structure in totalitarian states.⁶⁹

Without intending to belittle this assessment, the Polish historian Feliks Tych shared some important heuristic observations. He mentioned that every party archive comprised two source corpora: documents from before and after the seizure of power, respectively. The sources from the first period (called the apostolic period by Georges Haupt) are ideological-programmatic by nature and historically relevant provided they undergo standard source criticism. Conversely, at least three factors complicate the interpretation of the documents from the second period: the changing semantic significance of standard terms (different meaning of class enemy for striking Polish workers), tabooing (circumventing events that conflict with the ideology, such as the cruel expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe in 1944-45), and deliberate forgeries (attributing brisk changes in power among the party's top officials to the will of the working class). An additional problem was that some documents had been destroyed.⁷⁰

The material's relevance was also apparent from the increase (albeit temporarily) in the number of visitors.⁷¹ Several of the institutions administering the party archives initiated publication series independently or with affiliated institutes. In Prague, the *Institute for Contemporary History* (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny) issued an impressive series of publications about the role of the KSČ in post-war Czechoslovakia. In Moscow, the *Russian Center* supplemented the archival guides described above with a few nearly sovietological publications about the politburo and the bolshevist leadership during the Interbellum and co-edited a six-volume source publication about Menshevism.⁷²

69. *Sbornik*, p. 9.

70. *Sbornik*, 90-91. F. Tych presented a more elaborate version of his views at the 32nd International Conference of Labour Historians, Linz 10-14 September 1996 (publication in progress).

71. In Estonia from 510 visitors in 1988 to 1,075 in 1993; in the Russian Center, Archives of the Comintern, from 94 visitors in 1991 to 385 in 1994. On the other hand, the corresponding figure for Slovenia decreased from an average of 800 visitors around 1990 to 300 in 1994. (*Sbornik*, p. 47, 61, 58).

72. Cf. Leo van Rossum, *Sources Editions Concerning the History of the Labour Movement: Prospects for the Future* (Amsterdam, 1995). Typescript, available on request at the IISH.

The Former Party Archives as Modern Documentation Centers: What are Their Prospects?

Although many of the former party archives were designated as documentation centers for recent history following their integration in the national state archival networks, hardly any of the speakers at Stara Wieś mentioned the resulting task of supplementing the administration of the communist party archive with the collection of material from and about the abundance of new political parties and social organizations. Only Valdur Ochmann, director of the *Branch of the State Archives of Estonia*, covered the subject in detail and reported that *Sajãdis* and the *Popular Front* had agreed to deposit their archives with the Branch.⁷³ Did the reticence of the other speakers reflect pessimism about the new function of the former party archives? Indeed, Vladimir Kozlov from *Rosarchiv* openly expressed concerns about continuing the party archives as more or less independent operations. He reasoned that the permanent source of fonds (the CP) had disappeared, and that new parties and social organizations would be loathe to entrust their papers to state archival institutions and would prefer to administer their own archives. Moreover, the former party archives had insufficient staff and funding in the new structure.⁷⁴

The increasing focus on documentary activities among the traditional segments of the conventional state archival service was another obstacle to the development of the new documentary activities. Within the provincial archival network, municipal and district archives had started gathering material from social organizations and local chapters of political parties.⁷⁵ Documentation institutions had also been established outside the state archival service, such as at universities, with municipal institutions, and even within new political and social organizations.⁷⁶

On the other hand, the new archival legislation enacted in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s sort of promoted the new documentary activities of the former communist archives. The new legislation adopted the concept of a national archival fond from the communist era and applied it to all documents generated by the government, corporate industry, and private organizations and individuals that were of historical, political, economic, and cultural value. All private structures, including the political parties and social organizations, produced documents that belonged to the national archive fond; accordingly, they all had to register with the state archival service and were obliged to keep their records according to the requirements of the national archival fond. Private archives could be alienated only with permission from the state archival service, the state had the right of first option, the records of organizations that had been disbanded were transferred to the

73. *Sbornik*, pp. 47-49.

74. *Sbornik*, p. 19. Kozlov was primarily considering the archival hierarchy below the federal level. As noted in the section *Ultimate status*, Kozlov had certainly identified prospects for the two large federal documentation centers, namely the *Russian Center* and the *Center for the Preservation*.

75. L.M. Sorina, O komplektovanii archivov Tverskoj oblasti dokumentami negosudarstvennykh struktur, in: *Ote..estvennye archivy*, 1996-6, pp. 97-102.

76. E.g.: Rossijsko-Amerikanskij universitet (RAU), Central nyj gosudarstvennyj archiv obscestvennykh dvizenii g. Moskvy, Moskovskaja Nezavisimaja Obscestvennaja Biblioteka.

state archival service.⁷⁷

Clearly, five to seven years is not long enough to pass definitive judgment regarding the viability of the new documentation centers.

Conclusion

The conference *Archives of Former Communist Parties in Central and Eastern Europe*, 28 September–1 October 1995 at Stara Wieś was of indisputable importance. The event was the first large gathering between representatives and administrators of the former CP archives. Despite all national differences in social background and concrete situations, the participants agreed on the basic principles for integrating the former party archives in the national state archival structures:

fully integrating the party archives in the state archival network
 adapting registration and access to state guidelines
 improving public access by increasing facilities in reading rooms and
 publishing finding aids and archival material.

They also agreed that continued cooperation with respect to the former party archives was desirable between the East European state archival services. They decided to:

1. Commission a survey by the Latvian and Russian state archival services concerning the fonds of the former party archives; in 1997 the results were to be evaluated at a conference to be organized by Poland and to be published as a general directory of all former communist party archives in Eastern Europe.
2. Use assistance to be requested from the International Council on Archives to organize conferences over a ten-year period with a view toward furthering the integration of the former party archives in the state archival structure.
3. Elicit international support in organizing a discussion to develop a standard international *format* for describing archival fonds featuring an information search system.

An ambitious programme indeed! The first follow-up conference took place in mid 1996.⁷⁸

77. Cf. the texts of the archival legislation adopted in Lithuania (1990), Latvia (1991), the Czech Republic (1992), Albania (1993), Romania (1993), and the *Principles of archival legislation in the Russian Federation* (1993) for Russia, which contain significant parallels in these respects. Published in *ARCHIWUM. International Review on Archives*, XL-XLI (1995-96) [special issues on archival legislation, 1981-1994].

78. The conference *Archives of Central and Eastern Europe in the period of legal and systematic transformations* was held from 28 June to 1 July 1996 in Puławy, Poland. Although the author was unable to attend the conference, the announcement indicates that the two main themes were archival legislation after 1989 and the position of the state archives with respect to non-state records and non-state archives. Except for one speaker, the invitation did not list any contributions that directly addressed

Translated by Lee Mitzman.

the position of the former CPs.