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*Paper title:*

## Communist era travel screening as inverse veto structure

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### **Abstract for the NISPAcee conference and practitioners:**

The history of communist state travel controls is an essential context for contemporary citizens’ participation in inter-regional cooperation. How do travelers perceive their own role in relation to the state? Which expectations does the state have on individual autonomy in the context of international travel? These are important questions for international cooperation. However, to understand how historical experiences may affect today’s practices, we first need to know how travel administration worked during the communist era.

This paper maps the historical administrative structure of political screening of individuals who were permitted to travel abroad for work during the 1970s and 1980s in historical communist East Germany. Since the state administration in East Germany (the GDR) was modeled on the Soviet experience – and constructed under Soviet supervision – the case study of East German travel controls provides a vital exemplar for future research into the administrative systems of other communist states.

Notably, the East German state regarded all individuals who traveled for work – whether they were university researchers, ophthalmologists or industry specialists – as delegates of the state. The goal of rigorous political screening was to ensure that every individual would represent the communist state’s world view and politics while abroad. Arguably, this system had a substantial long-term impact on how individuals in other countries perceived the communist states (Hedin 2019).

The paper analyzes the architecture of the travel screening process with the help of veto theorizing, as a series of veto points manned by veto players (Ganghof 2011; Tsebelis 2011). This theoretical approach helps explain how communist state administration remained stable, in the sense that it failed to reform, despite substantial societal pressure for increased freedom of travel.