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Since the delineation of the Polish-German boundary in 1945, and the displacement of the original German population, the city of Szczecin (Stettin) has been situated in the periphery of Poland and close to, but inaccessible from, the German territories. Szczecin is by far the largest and most lively city in the area. It has, however, fallen behind comparable Polish cities which share its history of being located in what used to be German territory, e.g. Poznań, Gdańsk and Wrocław. Furthermore, the future of Szczecin’s main industry, the shipyards, is bleak – to say the least. In order to flourish, Szczecin needs an economically vigorous hinterland on the German side of the border.

In the seventies the border became more open, a development that was later re-enforced by the events of 1989, and by Poland joining the EU in 2004 and the Schengen Union on December 21, 2007. Possibilities have opened up for cooperation with the neighboring German areas, in matters such as formal politics, trade and personal relations. But this openness has also revealed, resurrected and created old and new conflicts between – and within – the two sides of the border.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze Szczecin’s situation, in relation to the possibilities of conflict or cooperation with its cross-border hinterland. Relations to surrounding central places (such as Warsaw and Berlin) will also be taken into account. Three factors that influence border relations will be analyzed: Political relations, market relations and individual relations, as well as their reciprocal linkages. The question is how these factors interrelate, and to what extent existing opportunities and hindrances create the present human, political and market relations in the border area.

**Background to the present situation**

In 1912, in an early geographical analysis of the cities around the Baltic Sea, the Swedish geographer Sten De Geer described Stettin as a typical, single-river-bank settlement, located on the steep left-hand bank of the Oder. According to De Geer, the lack of urbanization on the other bank was explained by the marshy character of
the Oder Valley\(^1\). However, Stettin was served by a number of railway lines that led in all directions, including a circle line on its western side, which led northwards\(^2\).

Stettin’s zone of influence varied according to the type of market and the existing means of transportation. For instance, the shipping routes created contacts further south, while e.g. the Uecker-Randow area, including Pasewalk, belonged to the ‘Speckgürtel’ (zone of rich commuters) of Stettin\(^3\).

The major German towns and cities, located further west of the border, such as Greifswald and Neubrandenburg, had historical contacts with Berlin, to their direct south. Even before the war, their horizontal ties with Stettin were limited, while Stettin flourished as a port city for Berlin and as an export harbor for Schlesien (Silesia).

So, the northern stretch of the Oder-Neisse line is a state boundary which has no historic precedent. Pomerania was long a German territory, but as its place-names suggest, it has a Slavic past. Over the centuries, the area has been divided into different realms, not least because of Swedish involvement.

The demarcation of the provisional boundary between areas under Polish and Allied (i.e. Soviet) administration as of September 21\(^{st}\), 1945 in Schwerin\(^4\), left Szczecin and the towns of Świnoujście, Police and Nowe Warpno on the Polish side of the border towards the Soviet Occupation Zone of the remaining German territory. The reasons were purely strategic. The Oder, and further south, the Neisse, were meant to constitute a new boundary between Germany and Poland. But it was considered inexpedient to have the two sides share control of the ports and the river access to the Baltic Sea. Thus, the former German ports of Swinemünde and Stettin were incorporated into Poland, as was the territory that separated them. The decision to put the city of Stettin on the Polish side of the new border was the last detail of a post-war agreement on Germany reached by the victors of World War II\(^5\).

During the years that followed the demarcation, the border remained relatively closed, even after the agreement between Poland and the GDR that was signed in Zgorzelec on June 5\(^{th}\), 1950\(^6\).

### Analyzing the border and its impact on relations and movements

After a long period of academic disinterest, due to the bad reputation of ‘geopolitics’, boundary studies are becoming increasingly popular in the social sciences and humanities. In contrast to earlier studies, which concentrated on territorial confron-

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2. *Ibidem*, p. 78f and map supplement.
tation or the legalities of demarcation, modern studies (at least when the subject matter is Europe) focus on the impact of relatively open boundaries on the local population. One approach to boundary theory is to juxtapose two principles, the state as a limited territorial and hierarchical organization (the authoritative principle), and the theoretically unbounded market of goods and services (the market principle), and to these add mutual closeness and network relations of the inhabitants in a boundary area. In this essay, we will try to show how these principles create incentives for cooperation but also conflicts of interest.

The authoritative principle: The state is a territorial, mostly hierarchical, regulatory organization that claims monopoly on the use of force within its domain. It provides services to its members (citizens and/or residents), e.g. infrastructure, protection and education. In return it demands loyalty, membership fees (taxation) and certain services (e.g. military and civil defense service). In certain respects, the independent state attempts to make its territory homogeneous, in particular with respect to the authority of laws and the responsibilities of the inhabitants, in most cases the state’s citizens.

The market principle: the Central Place Theory, developed by Walter Christaller and August Lösch, presupposes rational behavior which, on the one hand, is based on the friction of distance, and, on the other, on supply and demand. This principle results in a hierarchical and symmetrical ordering of the market places, ranging from low-order village markets to those of the major world cities. Each central place has a market hinterland. The authors realize that their presuppositions – that the central places have equal geographical areas, populations, wealth and accessibility to their hinterlands – are virtually non-existent, but they use them as a starting point for discussions about the factors that make reality deviate from theory. One such factor is the political aspect, especially at a boundary between states with border restrictions and different market regulations. Another factor is accessibility, which, in turn, is greatly influenced by infrastructural arrangements, the latter mostly being planned for the purpose of integrating each individual state’s territory.

For any central place, the theoretical region of influence would encompass an area whose boundary reaches as far as to the halfway point between that place and Szczecin.
any city of comparable size. The state boundary will always be a hindrance, in time, effort and because of problems caused by custom regulations or differences in political guidelines. In consideration of the above-mentioned imbalances, the political divisions heavily influence the real central place system in the actual area. An article by Professor Stanis³aw Ciok outlined both the theoretical development of the hinterlands during the periods before and after 1945, in the relative openness of the 1990s and after Poland’s entrance into the European Union, and also the theoretical hinterland areas of the main central places Berlin, Szczecin, Poznañ and Wroclaw.

While Szczecin’s suggested periphery of dominance, west of the city, would reach just 10 kilometers east of Stralsund, its boundary towards Berlin would be almost at the suburban outskirts of Szczecin, due to the great attraction of, and easy access to, Berlin11. It should be born in mind that central place theories do not attempt to explain other spatial activities of the population, but that market and other relations mutually interact.

The human individual is a creature with biological, social and economical needs and desires that relate to the physical and social environment. As many of these needs and desires are available at specific locations, the individual has to relate to the surrounding world by moving, forming daily, annual and life-time trajectories in time-space12. In the relation between the individual and the environment, three sorts of resources are at hand: physical, human and social capital13. State boundaries, as well as – but to a lesser extent – other boundaries, mark a change in the ‘landscape of opportunities’, physically, economically, socially and psychologically. The fact that this landscape looks entirely different according to which side of the border it is seen from, leaves room for potential conflicts and makes cooperation essential.

In order to measure the actual impact of the state boundary as a barrier or incentive, we need the means to measure functional integration. An obvious difficulty is to define reliable and simple measures for this kind of integration and growth. One analytical framework of interest suggests two sets of conditions for overcoming barriers, the degree of interdependence and the degree of transactions. Interdependence includes both hardware conditions (like nature, infrastructure) and software conditions (culture, language etc)14. Transactions include capital and goods, services, employees, students, customers, tourists etc. but also contacts, e.g. between local and state authorities in the area.

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The impact of German-Polish official relations

The new boundary was soon recognized by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Polish People’s Republic, both of which were members of the Warsaw Pact and under Soviet domination during the Cold War. In spite of their mutual membership in the Warsaw Pact, the border contacts between the GDR and Poland were quite limited from 1945 to 1990 (except during occasional political ‘thaws’) and the attitude was, on both sides, resentful. There was little economic activity and hardly any personal contacts15. In the West, the Federal Republic of Germany found it hard to accept that the most eastern quarter of pre-war Germany had to be given over to Poland (or, in the case of the northern part of East Prussia, to the Soviet Union). The Oder-Neisse line was not recognized until 1970, when the treaty between the Federal Republic and the People’s Republic of Poland was signed, and again when a treaty was signed by the united Germany in 1990.

The 1990s saw positive developments in German-Polish relations, both in general and in the border areas. The border treaty and the subsequent signing of the German-Polish Friendship and Cooperation Treaty formed the foundation for various contacts, also related to Poland’s intention to join the European Union. So-called Euro-Regions were established along the border. By making most bilateral efforts part of the EU pre-membership strategy, PHARE-CBC funding from the EU could support the efforts, and simultaneously dampen Polish fears of a “peaceful Germanization”16.

However, official Polish-German relations seem to be a perennially sensitive theme17. Germany was consistently, from the mid-1990s and onwards, during the negotiations leading up to the Central and Eastern European countries’ accession to the EU, the strongest proponent of Polish EU membership. The new open climate on the border culminated in Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004, and finally its accession to the Schengen Union in December 2007. However, transitory regulations that, until 2011, limit the free movement of labor into Germany from the new member states, Poland included, constitute impediments to cross-border mobility and interaction.

There are other lateral conflicts as well. During the first decades after the war, those Germans who came from the previously German areas in the east, campaigned quite vigorously for their right to return. Although the border is now finally recognized, claims for compensation, or for the right to return, have not faded away completely18. Today, however, the great majority of Germans with eastern

roots are no more than interested visitors to western Poland. Also, EU-involvement, beginning with pre-membership accession funds like PHARE, had a soothing effect on bilateral relations.

A border of hierarchical asymmetry

Poland is a unitary state with a centralized, four-tier administrative system in which the voivodship level is characterized by a diarchic structure, having a centrally appointed authority (wojewoda) and a regionally elected leader (marszałek). The German system has, also, on its lower levels, elements of this sort of double structure. In spite of these similarities, and an almost identical structure at the municipal level in both countries, it is the state quality of the German Länder (with their own governments and – within certain limits – the right to have their own foreign relations) that leads to certain discords in cross-border cooperation. Germany, on the other hand, is a federal state with a four- or five-tier system, and the distribution of authority between its different levels differs greatly from that of Poland\(^{19}\). These differences account for hierarchical asymmetries and discords in the lateral relations on a local level\(^{20}\).

The post-socialist era has so far seen varying degrees of engagement in Polish-German cross-border cooperation in the Szczecin region, with e.g. some of the city’s mayors being more interested than others. Certainly the ambitions and orientations of the actors involved are significant, but the current administrative structures are already an impediment to cooperation. Although, in the past two decades, an ongoing decentralization has been taking place in Poland (especially the gmina, or municipal level, has been strengthened) it remains a centralized country, in stark contrast to Germany with its great regional autonomy. Hence, many Szczecin-related issues require negotiations between Warsaw and the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (MVP), and this is perhaps one of the more difficult connections: Schwerin (MVP’s capital) and Warsaw are 860 kilometers apart, and quite some distance from Szczecin as well.

Also, MVP has two middle-sized port cities, Rostock and Stralsund, and is not particularly interested in encouraging competition from the much larger Szczecin. Because of its location, and because of the attractiveness and dynamism of Hamburg and Lübeck, Schwerin with surroundings, over the past two decades, has been far more engaged in re-establishing its links to the west. There are even those who think that MVP would be better off if it belonged to Brandenburg, but as it is 


tremely difficult to modify any Länder-boundaries (this would require changing the German constitution\(^\text{21}\)), the option has never been seriously discussed. Internally, MVP is going through a lingering administrative-territorial reform process, while, in the Polish voivodships (hence, also, in West Pomerania), the roles of the Marshall and the Voivod are still being negotiated. One might assume that these processes also detract attention from cooperation with the respective neighboring areas.

The levels most engaged in cooperation are, then – apart from the EU, of course – the lowest ones. Border contacts and border region developments are driven on a local, regional, state territorial and super-state territorial level through the EU.

**Infrastructure and structural economy**

The physical infrastructure is part of the ‘opportunity landscape’ that makes possible – or impossible – movements, contacts and provisions with and to the population of the border area. Much of the infrastructure was damaged at the end of World War II, and from 1944 to 1948, the Red Army even dismantled the railway lines that connected Szczecin to the west and southwest\(^\text{22}\). Due to the non-promotion of cross-border contacts, the remaining roads were, until recently, left to decay and to run into dead ends at the border. As the interest in border contacts was limited, roads that crossed the new border west of the Oder were left unattended. As late as in 1963, GDR maps of the area showed no roads crossing the boundary\(^\text{23}\). Nevertheless, after an apogeeum of atomism in the early 1950s, even among the socialist states, the number of cross-border contacts began slowly to increase in the late 1950s, leading to a complete opening of the borders between 1972 and 1980\(^\text{24}\).

With the political changes of 1989-90, a number of infrastructural changes were planned and implemented. On the German side, the major road investment was the new Autobahn from Lübeck to the Uckermark (Brandenburg), which also interconnects with the old Berlin-Szczecin Autobahn, which had been built about seventy years earlier.

The new motorway A20 crossing Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is reported to have less traffic than any other German Autobahn and its eastern half has hardly any traffic at all\(^\text{25}\). The Autobahn practically functions as link for transit traffic coming from the east and heading towards Hamburg, not as a means of making regional interconnections.

For Szczecin, the Autobahn and the parallel railway offer quick contacts with Berlin, and thus reinforce the old links to Germany. Berlin is only two hours’ drive

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\(^{21}\) S. Marschall, *Das politische…*, op. cit. See also: M.G. Schmidt, *Das politische…*, op. cit.


\(^{24}\) K. Stokłosa, *Grenzstädte…*, op. cit., p. 56ff.

from Szczecin, and there is regular shuttle service to airports and bus stations\textsuperscript{26}. A journey from Szczecin to Warsaw, on the other hand, takes six hours. The Polish authorities seem to have de-prioritized a projected highway between Szczecin and Gdańsk. This reinforces Szczecin’s orientation towards the west, or more correctly, towards the south-west.

Today there are three border crossings in Szczecin’s immediate surroundings – one serves the “Autobahn” and two serve regional roads on either side of it. Among the local cross-border connections, the regional B104 road in particular, which passes westwards through Linken and Lücknitz in the direction of Pasewalk, would need more attention; this, still very narrow, road has lately become extremely congested as more and more Szczecinners have moved to the German side; most of these commute to Szczecin daily (see below).

Until recently, there was not one border crossing for motor vehicles further to the north of the city. A major road with a border crossing was opened northwest of Szczecin at Hintersee, as part of the Schengen accession, linking Ückermünde and Police. On the German side, the local authorities had long opposed this opening. Immediately after the festivities on December 21, 2007, however, it was closed on the Polish side, because of a missing security procedure (“natura 2000”), and because some repair work remained to be done. The road was finally opened, with half a year’s delay, on June 5\textsuperscript{th} 2008\textsuperscript{27}.

Inside Poland, there are as yet no bridges across the northern Oder, e.g. at Police, to facilitate local or regional cross-border contacts. There are only bridges in the immediate neighborhood of the city for traffic from Szczecin, further east into Poland.

The GDR invested heavily in transforming Rostock into its main port city, while, in the newly reshaped Polish state, this function was filled primarily by Gdańsk. This meant that Szczecin’s harbor lost part of its historic hinterland and markets, which again resulted in primarily negative regional development.

On the European level, there were plans to establish a South Baltic transport corridor called ‘Via Hanseatica’ between St. Petersburg and Lübeck, and the recently finished German motorway A20, connecting Lübeck and Szczecin, is part of this link. But the Szczecin-Gdańsk section of Via Hanseatica has not been included in the transeuropean transport network TEN/TINA. And the evaluation report of the follow-up project does not even mention the Via Hanseatica. A look at Poland’s road and railway priorities makes it clear that this passage does not rank highly. Instead, Polish authorities seem to be committed to enlarging the highway from Szczecin to Bydgoszcz\textsuperscript{28} and Poznań, which are more centrally located in Poland. These priorities also diminish the potential benefits of the newly (re)built German motorways A11 (Berlin-Szczecin) and A20, since these links do not continue eastwards.

\textsuperscript{26} See e.g.: www.BERLinia.eu, 16.02.2009.
\textsuperscript{27} Amt am Stettiner Haff, telephone message, March 10, 2009.
\textsuperscript{28} P. Heise, Euroregion Pomerania, interview 14.01.2009.
Infrastructure is crucial to the market situation of Szczecin. The city is unevenly linked to the surrounding areas, with priority given to southern contacts inside of Poland and to Berlin. Szczecin is an attractive goal for shopping- and service trips to the local German hinterland. The city itself, however, does not benefit from the differences in price-levels and regulations. Rather, the profit goes to shopping centers at the border.

Local cross-border relations

On the micro level, border relations on the ground have been studied quite extensively on the central “front” – in divided cities like Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice and Guben/Gubin. The Szczecin area, by contrast, is less researched and its structure differs from that of river boundary areas further to the south. The area is characterized by imbalances. On the Polish side: dense population, recent (multi)ethnic settlement, industrialized urbanization, religious faith, marginality in relation to the state capital. On the German side: sparse population, an agricultural and recreational profile, unemployment, secularism, and relative proximity to the state capital.

Education

Cooperation was initially limited to initiatives to provide emergency services, coast-guard duties, public health service and water purification. The most ambitious initiatives have been in the school sector, with German-Polish classes in a limited number of German high schools (particularly at Löcknitz: see below). As a result of the population decrease on the German side, the rationale for school cooperation has often been defensive (recruitment from across the border in order to get enough students) rather than oriented towards future development. Unfortunately, the education system does not automatically help fight prejudices. In Poland, the geography and history of the Polish nation has a strong place in the curriculum, whereas in Germany, because of the Federal system, local Länder aspects are highlighted. In none of the school systems does the local trans-boundary reality receive much attention.

A project to establish a campus of Szczecin University at Eggesin (Landkreis Uecker-Randow) has not been completed, as a request from the University to the Ministry of Education in Warsaw of 2007 has received no reply. Eggesin has premises, while Szczecin University lacks space.

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31 D. Gutgesell, Landkreis Uecker-Randow, interview..., op. cit.
**Human interaction**

The far-reaching political decisions of 1945 severed the strong and close links that for centuries had united the regions east and west of the Oder and Neisse, and which also united Szczecin with the area that today contains the counties of Ucker-Randow, Ostvorpommern and Uckermark. The ethnical “homogenization” east of the border seems to have put an end to any substantial human interaction across the new borderline for the foreseeable future.

Thus, because of the shifts in population after World War II, the German-Polish border is one of the sharpest linguistic boundaries in Europe. There are no significant natural or resident language minorities on either side, with the exception of a small group of recent Polish immigrants on the German side (see below). The lack of linguistic competence, the history of expulsion and settlement, and the present economic problems become the basis both of mutual distrust and of the realization that co-operation is essential. Further south along the river boundary, twin cities, particularly Frankfurt/Oder and Słubice, have developed fruitful co-operation, not least in the university sector. In the Szczecin region, the above-mentioned imbalances make relations more complicated. German-Polish relations are even, by some observers at least, said to be at their very worst in these border areas.

Traditional Polish fears of a new “Germanization” of the area are here mirrored by a growing German fear of a new “Polonization”. Far into the new, 21st century, there is, in the city of Szczecin, an underlying and specific suspicion that the Germans have not yet accepted the fact that Szczecin now is a Polish city. Because of poverty and limited population, the northeastern parts of Germany have, to some extent, developed into centers for political extremism. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has the highest figures for xenophobia (about 64 per cent in recent opinion polls) in all of Germany. In villages in the border area immediately west of Szczecin, for which Stettin, up until the end of World War II, was the obvious metropolis, rightwing nationalists received up to 30 per cent of the vote in recent regional elections. In these groups, there is resistance to increased contacts with Poland. Regional integration is mistrusted as leading to even more of the region being sacrificed to Polish interests. Similarly, on the Polish side, there is skepticism, perhaps even fear of the German neighbor, particularly among lower-class citizens. Anti-Polish acts by German extremists are covered exhaustively in the Polish media.

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However, the recognition of a common regional problem provides for more constructive initiatives. The existence of the European German-Polish Grammar School Löcknitz has even been so successful that Polish parents have moved to Szczecin in order to send their children there. Pupils from Polish Police commute daily to the school in Löcknitz, in the framework of organized cooperation between the two towns 35.

The most remarkable sign of an emerging, new cross-border culture is the substantial increase, after 2004, of Polish settlers on the German side of the border, in particular after Poland’s accession to the Schengen Union in 2007. Germany is otherwise richer than Poland; in this area, however, housing prices are lower than they are in Polish Szczecin. It is estimated that about 2,400 Poles live in the German part of the metropolitan area. Löcknitz has long been able to attract Polish settlers (about 8% of 3,000 inhabitants). But for as long as the German ban on Polish (and other) job-takers is in effect – that is, until 2011 – the number and selection of settlers will be restricted.

Still, on balance, it is surprising to see that the area around Szczecin shows evidence – now, only a few years after Polish accession to the EU – of a new, and old, pattern of cross-border development, which distinguishes this area rather markedly from other parts of the border region. The agglomeration as such seems to be able to restore its own “Speckgürtel”, and to once again surround itself with a coherent circle of, somehow dependent, smaller entities. The German side of the border is developing fast, both as a residential and recreational area for the Polish “metropolis”. (An odd but delightful case is the Ückermünde Zoo, which has quickly been turned into the local Szczecin Zoo, with the leading local Polish daily, “Kurier Szczeciński”, as its primary sponsor 36.) To some extent, the otherwise hard linguistic border 37 is here softening faster, because of the agglomeration’s size and economic force. Here, the need to learn the neighboring language seems to become palpable sooner than it does elsewhere. As evidence of this development, one can cite, on the one hand, the advanced German-language courses that are being offered in Szczecin (somewhat reduced, recently, because of the German labor restrictions that are in force until 2011), and, on the other, the increasing demand for Polish lessons on the Western side of the border 38.

Also, with respect to the issue of ethnicity, the pure size of the agglomeration, when combined with the mechanisms of the common market (freedom of movement), apparently make possible a Polish-German mélange that is not seen in other

35 G. Scherer, Director of European German-Polish Grammar School Löcknitz, interview 14.01.2009.
37 T. Lundén, Language landscapes and static geographies in the Baltic Sea area, [in:] M. Andrén, T. Lindkvist, I. Söhrman, K. Vajta (eds), Cultural identities and national borders, Centre for European Research, Göteborg 2009, p. 90.
38 Cf. Interview with Rainer Dambach, mayor of Pasewalk, Jan. 12th, 2009; this general tendency is also true for Świnoujście, see Coleen Clement 2003: 79.
Map 1. Szczecin region

Source: GIS laboratory, Södertörn University, Christopher Zetterberg.
parts of the Oder-Neisse-border. It is less surprising to see local protests against the development, than to observe the fundamental ethnic and political changes that have taken place, and the rapidity with which old settlement and dependency patterns have reappeared on the Western side of the border. As these new settlement and economic activities were not steered from above, they seem to indicate the intense force of certain, apparently inherent patterns of spatial self-organization.

Conclusions

Szczecin has a unique location, as a border city with a weak hinterland on the German side. The infrastructure that used to link the town with its region was destroyed in World War II and its aftermath. After 1989, the unification of Germany, Poland’s entry into the EU and the Schengen Zone, the material and legal possibilities for cooperation across the State boundary have increased. However, the level of cooperation is still low, and uneven. Some factors contribute to this situation:

– The administrative-political situation is characterized by hierarchical asymmetry, which hampers cooperative initiatives.
– The different hierarchical levels on both sides have different interests in relation to cross-border contacts and relations. The state level, for example, especially in Poland, has an understandable interest in an infrastructural homogenization of the country, which leaves Szczecin in the periphery.
– The levels most interested in cross-border relations seem to be the local ones, but here the asymmetry with respect to size and political power is most noticeable.
– Szczecin’s role as a market centre for the theoretical hinterland is unevenly influenced by the boundary. In some ways, as a result of differences in market regulation, the border itself has attracted consumers of goods and services, but this has not, to any significant degree, led to political or individual contacts.
– Individual relations are, on the whole, peaceful but weak. They do, however, include some examples of interaction and cross-border activities, but also of minor conflicts, often exaggerated by activists and the press.