

## ***"Ostpolitik – the Hidden Agenda"***

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One might compare the "New Ostpolitik" of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr with a coin: the currency, or ultimate goal, imprinted on it is called "unification" (for obvious reasons Brandt refused to speak about "re-unification", preferring "unification" or "Zusammenwachsen" – growing closer). The coin itself represents the two long-term strategies to achieve it. Undermining Communism by exposing the people under its rule to Western values was one side of the coin. However, the eventual break-down of the Communism itself would not suffice to guarantee for German unification. The other side of the coin was therefore to devise an all-European Security System, taking care of the legitimate security concerns of all nations concerned by a prospective unification of the two German states. This, and only this it was argued at the time, could possibly ease the way to unification after an eventual collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe. Of course, with a secret agenda like this, Brandt and Bahr had to play their cards very close to their chests. This is the reason why the best evidence for this double sided-strategy is not so much found in the German archives (for obvious domestic and party political reasons) but in the archives of the Western allies, particularly in Washington and Paris, where this strategy had to be "sold" and defended, and those in Eastern Europe, where the success of the strategy – once it was recognised – became a reason for great concern. In the following, I will try to summarize some of the arguments deriving from the inter-archival, inter-national research approach of our project on "Ostpolitik and Détente" at the University of Mannheim:

- *The "New Ostpolitik" was built upon American and French strategies instituted from 1960/61*

As a strategic planning game, Ostpolitik was an intelligent, early reaction to the new approaches developed under de Gaulle and Kennedy. Seen from Berlin – but not only from Berlin – these approaches offered real alternatives to the prevention-of-reunification-concept of the then Adenauer government. Within this new strategy, two aspects can be clearly distinguished: one is the search for the holy grail (i.e. a unified Germany) in a new European Security System (proposed by de Gaulle as early as 1959/60, and followed up by him with concrete policies as from 1961/62); the other one is the idea of an intensive ideological

struggle through, above or under the Iron Curtain, something thought up by Kennedy, or much more likely by the team around his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, back in 1961.

- *The concept of ideological struggle/confrontation/"competition" goes back to Kennedy and Rusk and was continued under Johnson*

The catalyst for the development and continuing refinement of that strategy appears to have been the – at least in American eyes – catastrophic summit between Kennedy and Khrushchev in Vienna. The young president had hoped to meet a sovereign practitioner of power, with whom he could strike a deal on the status quo, at least in Europe if not on a global basis. Instead, he encountered a dogmatician, a Kremlin ruler precariously endangered at home – whose rhetoric was more than at a par with his own. In the following years, Dean Rusk kept on talking to Brandt about the West's ideological superiority and that one should rather look forward to ideological "competition" than shy away from it.<sup>1</sup> All sorts of human contacts, culture and, above all, the exchange of information would be the most appropriate means in that struggle. However, looking at the White House and State Department papers, one finds very little material on this below the level of the President or Secretary of State, not even for internal purposes. One reason for this might be that, during the Johnson years, "Deutschlandpolitik" was almost exclusively the prerogative of the Foreign Secretary's own office. Whether this concept was handed over to the following administration, and, if so, to what extent it influenced the Eastern policies of Nixon and Kissinger, is still an open question. Seeing how these concepts were developed under Kennedy, there can be very little question of a fundamental shift in US policy towards Germany in the LBJ speech of October 1966, as has been argued by Ernest May in recent years.<sup>2</sup> At the very best, Johnson (who otherwise thought little about German policies and left it almost entirely to Dean Rusk), perhaps encouraged by the latest developments in Bonn's own German policy, felt rather less obliged to follow the long-established bilateral terminology.

- *French fears of German (re-)unification were at the heart of de Gaulle's all-European security concept and of Pompidou's rejection of any subversive Ostpolitik tactics*

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<sup>1</sup> Well covered in the latest volumes of the official American edition of documents on the Johnson-era: Foreign Relations of the United States - 1964-1968, Washington 1996-2001. Particularly illuminative in this respect are vol. XIV, The Soviet Union (ed. by David S. Patterson, David C. Humphrey, Charles S. Sampson, Washington 2001); vol. XV, Germany and Berlin (ed. by David S. Patterson and James E. Miller, Washington 1999); vol. XI, Arms Control and Disarmament (ed. by David S. Patterson, Evans Gerakas, Carolyn B. Yee, Washington 1997); and vol. XVII, Eastern Europe (ed. by Glenn W. LaFantasie und James E. Miller, Washington 1996).

A very clear confirmation of Brandt's and Bahr's tactic of "Socialdemocratism" is found in the Pompidou papers. During the very first months of his presidency, Pompidou's closest adviser, Raimond, wrote three lengthy memoranda on German Ostpolitik. In them, reunification by ideologically undermining the regimes in the East and by military neutralisation, even unification itself, is deemed incompatible with French national interests – and therefore appropriate counterstrategies are advised.<sup>3</sup> When compared with the de Gaulle era, Pompidou's hasty reactions are a clear indication that the three most important determinants of France's German and Eastern policy, even of its entire foreign policy, were undergoing a fundamental change. De Gaulle propagated a concept of German unification in a changed European framework. This meant – at least in the understanding of his contemporaries – that the actual event of unification was put off to the indefinite future. This of course was a clever trick by de Gaulle, because it defused the potential rift over that question in Franco-German relations. Now, however, Pompidou, Jobert and Raimond conceded that the new and more independent German Ostpolitik made for a far greater probability of success regarding the unification of East and West Germany. This of course represented a forthright danger to France's role as a mediator between the governments in Bonn and in Eastern Europe (a role much cherished by de Gaulle himself). Additionally, France appeared to be no longer in a position to veto British entry into the EEC, at least in the medium term; in addition, the latest shifts in the balance-of-power in – or by – East-West relations seemed to militate strongly against the prolongation of such a Gaullist stance. British entry, however, would weaken France's key position within the EEC and, at the same time, Paris was losing its – sometimes illusionary – role as a mediator between East and West due to the new focus of the East European states on Bonn. However, practical consequences for French policy stemming from that analysis took some time to emerge, probably first showing in Pompidou's deep mistrust of Brandt in 1973.

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest May, *Das nationale Interesse der Vereinigten Staaten und die deutsche Frage 1966-1972*, in: Gottfried Niedhart, Detlef Junker, Michael W. Richter (eds.), *Deutschland in Europa – nationale Interessen und internationale Ordnung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Mannheim 1997, pp. 271-284.

<sup>3</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'Attitude de Georges Pompidou face à l'Allemagne*, in: Association Georges Pompidou (Hrsg.), *Georges Pompidou et l'Europe – Colloque 25 et 26 Novembre 1993*, Paris 1995, pp. 267-314; the same, *Präsident Georges Pompidou und die Ostpolitik*, in: Niedhart, *Deutschland in Europa*, pp. 171-179.

In agreement with the interpretation of this analysis is Marie-Pierre Rey, *La Tentation Du Rapprochement – France et URSS à l'heure de la détente, 1964-1974*, Paris 1991; the same, *Georges Pompidou, l'Union soviétique et l'Europe*, in: Association Pompidou, *Colloque 1993*, pp. 141-170. Other works on French foreign policy of this era often neglect this aspect: Reiner Marcowitz, *Option für Paris? Unionsparteien, SPD und Charles de Gaulle*, Munich 1996, outrightly refuses any "speculations" about the goals of de Gaulle's German policy. Similarly descriptive is also Andreas Wilkens, *Der unstete Nachbar – Frankreich, die deutsche Ostpolitik und die Berliner Vier-Mächte-Verhandlungen 1969-1974*, Munich 1990, for the Pompidou-era. See also the same, *Ostpolitik allemande et commerce avec l'Est-objectifs politiques et enjeux économiques d'Adenauer à Brandt*, in: *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique*, vol. 113 (Paris 1999), pp. 205-241.

- *Therefore, both strategic concepts embedded in Brandt's and Bahr's new approach to Ostpolitik were of limited originality*

This, of course, means that Bahr in his famous 1963 speech at Tutzing ("Wandel durch Annäherung" – change by rapprochement) merely accepted the realities of a bi-polar world and the German need for a protective power in it, relating it to the specific conditions and objectives in Berlin and Germany as a whole. Following from this observation, the original contribution of Brandt and Bahr would be twofold: on the one hand, it would be the realisation that Germany, and particularly the SPD, were able to play a special role in this Western strategy, and, on the other hand, it would consist in a very perceptive connection of the German dream of unification with this Western strategy (instead of silently accepting the elimination of this goal from the Western agenda) <sup>4</sup>. Bahr called this strategy "socialdemocratism" – a term that would either have to be put into question in the light of what has been said before about the original elements of the strategy, or would also have to contain a second delimitation towards the West. The fact that, for the FDP (the German Liberals), Schollwer also started working on plans to achieve unification within a European Security System as early as 1962/63 is yet another proof for the need to track the origins of the international-system strategy within the new Ostpolitik to an earlier date; it is also a further indication of the external influences on its makers. <sup>5</sup>

- *The strategies combined in the New Ostpolitik served both as a glue and as a catalyst for the breakdown of the Grand Coalition between the conservative CDU/CSU and the SPD – depending on the perspectives of the individuals involved and the various problems to which it was applied*

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<sup>4</sup> With regard to the concepts elaborated upon by Brandt and Bahr during their time in Berlin, new ground has been chartered by a number of recent works: Gerhard Kunze, *Grenzerfahrungen, Kontakte und Verhandlungen zwischen dem Land Berlin und der DDR 1949-1989*, Berlin 1999; Peter C. Speicher, *The Berlin Origins of Brandt's Ostpolitik 1957-1966*, PhD Cambridge 2000; Wolfgang Schmidt, *Willy Brandt und die Deutschlandpolitik 1948-1963*, Opladen 2001; Arne Hoffmann, *Willy Brandt and the Berlin Crisis, 1961-1963*, PhD London School of Economics 2003. Particularly Schmidt remains unconvincing in his claim to have detected *the* origins of Ostpolitik. For a wider framework see Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace – The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963*, New Jersey 1999.

<sup>5</sup> A very detailed account can be found in: Mathias Siekmeier, *Restauration oder Reform? Die FDP in den sechziger Jahren – Deutschland- und Ostpolitik zwischen Wiedervereinigung und Entspannung*, Köln 1998. For the further importance of the Schollwer-concepts in an era of liberal-socialdemocratic rapprochement over the FRG's Eastern policy between 1968 and 1970 (the apparent ease of this rapprochement surprised many outsiders) see Gottfried Niedhart, *Friedens- und Interessenwahrung: Zur Ostpolitik der F.D.P. in Opposition und sozial-liberaler Regierung 1968-1970*, in: *Jahrbuch zur Liberalismus-Forschung*, vol. 7, Baden-Baden 1995, pp. 105-126.

The two different aspects of Ostpolitik as a path to unification (i.e. ideological undermining and changing the international framework) were functional not only for the further development of German-American and German-French relations, but also for the support of Brandt's Ostpolitik in the Cabinet of the Grand Coalition (until opposition to it mounted beginning in spring 1968). Thus far, research on the Grand Coalition has failed to cut a clear distinction between the two aspects of the new Ostpolitik and their respective virtues and pitfalls.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, current interpretations of Kiesinger's Eastern policy are still very general in character and remain fairly unsatisfactory. Even the ultimate objective of this policy (Germany's unification) is rarely associated with its creators in the older literature, if at all, and this goal still remains somewhat clouded in the latest publications on the subject.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the relentless fight within the conservative parties over the eventual candidate for the next general elections (Barzel, Strauß, Schröder – 1969-1974) has continued to be disregarded as a major factor in the course of Ostpolitik – and has developed into something of a blind spot of historiography.

- *Gomulka (the Head of the Polish Communist Party) looked through the smokescreens provided by Brandt and Bahr – realising the potential threat of "Socialdemocratism" to Communism in Eastern Europe, often neglected or underestimated by other leaders of the Warsaw Pact*

Perceptions of the New Ostpolitik varied hugely among the various member states of the Warsaw Pact – dependent upon current political necessities, like Pankow's thirst for

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<sup>6</sup> The importance of the conflict between Kiesinger and Strauß for the realisation of Ostpolitik is completely ignored by Clay Clemens, *Reluctant Realists: the CDU/CSU and West German Ostpolitik 1969-1982*, Duke University 1989; and Andrea H. Schneider, *Die Kunst des Kompromisses – Helmut Schmidt und die große Koalition 1966-1969*, Paderborn 1999. (who at least mentions the impact of this personal struggle without any greater details). Dirk Kroegel, *Einen Anfang finden! – Kurt Georg Kiesinger in der Außen- und Deutschlandpolitik der Großen Koalition*, Munich 1997, analyses the fight of the epigones within the Union in its interrelation to Ostpolitik, but fails to distinguish between the strategical approaches involved. In the end – despite its programmatic title – Kroegel's book does not offer a coherent explanation of Kiesinger's goals and strategies towards the East – unless Kiesinger himself was a dedicated follower of the panta-rhei-theory.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from contemporary conservative literature, even academics sympathising with Brandt found it difficult to believe in the continuation of the primacy of German unification – as demanded by the Federal German constitution. For Karl Kaiser, one of the most sensitive analysts on the British side, the ultimate goal was at the very best a strategy of biting time, because unification seemed no longer a priority of the new Ostpolitik. Karl Kaiser, *German Foreign Policy in Transition – Bonn Between East and West*, Oxford (RIIA) 1968. Quite similar Ernst Kuper, *Frieden durch Konfrontation und Kooperation – Die Einstellung von Gerhard Schröder und Willi [sic] Brandt zur Entspannungspolitik*, Stuttgart 1974. And even Peter Bender kept himself remarkably covered on this aspect in the original edition – and still in the fourth edition in 1996 – of his standard work: *Neue Ostpolitik – Vom Mauerbau bis zum Moskauer Vertrag*, Munich 1986. Even in Heinrich Potthoff's work from 1999, *Im Schatten der Mauer – Deutschlandpolitik 1961 bis 1990*, Berlin 1999, neither the strategy of undermining Communism (through the so-called Socialdemocratism) nor the perceived European Security System are seen to play a role. Instead, despite his exclusive access to the Wehner-papers – or perhaps because of it – Potthoff declares Wehner's much more limited concept of an orderly co-existence („geregelten Miteinanders“) as the leitmotif of Bonn's Eastern policy between 1966 and 1973.

international recognition or the Kremlin's need for large-scale economic cooperation. Yet only the Polish leadership appears to have realised the ambiguity in Brandt's Ostpolitik (i.e. the attempt to gain unification through the – temporary – recognition of the status quo) and to have thought this through to its ultimate consequences.<sup>8</sup> Tomala – a leading thinker behind the making of Polish foreign policy at the time – even lists a number of sources in his memoirs<sup>9</sup> which seem to prove that Gomulka not only knew about the tactic of "Socialdemocratism" (using a policy of enhanced contacts "to punch holes", "to soften up", and "to undermine" the East) – but actively tried to counteract it. This offers, in turn, an entirely new interpretation of the so-called "Iron Triangle" – Gomulka's device to further economic integration between Poland, the GDR and the Czech Republic (which is again something which the Sovietologists – often ridiculed as Kremlinologists or astrologists – attempted to decipher in vain back in the 1960s). Ulbricht and then Honecker rejected this concept of intensified economic integration outright, because trade with the FRG effectively as part of the EEC clearly offered the prospect of more hard currency. When Gomulka realised this, he estimated that the GDR would merely survive another 10-15 years, accepting at the same time that the work of his life – securing Poland's Western borders – was in jeopardy. When the Soviet Union and the GDR intensified their contacts with Bonn in early 1970, Gomulka had to act. Isolated by his own allies, he had to salvage whatever he could (the Oder-Neisse-Line, economic arrangements with the West) as quickly as possible, in cooperation with the new Brandt government. This interpretation would also offer a logical explanation for the sudden end of Warsaw's complete lack of official communication in reacting to the secret approaches by Egon Bahr.<sup>10</sup> What an irony: the only Eastern European ruler who realised the danger coming from "Socialdemocratism", and who actively tried to prevent it, had to become a pathmaker for detente!

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<sup>8</sup> The first time this conclusion was presented in German or even Western literature was in 1982, in a highly detailed analysis of Polish publication by Dieter Bingen. See Dieter Bingen, *Die Bonner Deutschlandpolitik 1969-1979 in der polnischen Publizistik*, Frankfurt/M 1982; the same, *Die Polenpolitik der Bonner Republik von Adenauer bis Kohl 1949-1991*, Baden-Baden 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Mieczyslaw Tomala, *Deutschland - von Polen gesehen, Zu den deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1945-1990*, Marburg 2000. Tomala was not only a professor at the Polish Institute for International Affairs, but also worked as a consultant and interpreter both for Gomulka himself and the Polish Foreign Ministry. A number of private and official documents are reprinted in his book at full length.

<sup>10</sup> Hansjakob Stehle, *Eine vertrackte Vorgeschichte – Zum Warschauer Vertrag: Wie ein Schlüsseldokument verschwand und wiederauftauchte*, in: *Die Zeit*, 7.12.1990, pp. 41f. (reprinted in: Dieter S. Lutz (ed.), *Das Undenkbare denken – Festschrift für Egon Bahr zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, Baden-Baden 1992, pp. 103-112). See also Karl-Heinz Schmidt, *Dialog über Deutschland – Studien zur Deutschlandpolitik von KPdSU und SED, 1969-1979*, Baden-Baden 1998. However, this analysis should be used with utmost caution as it is entirely based on GDR sources.

- *European integration, and particularly the British application to join the EEC, served London, Paris and Washington as insurance against West German "adventurism", and Bonn as a guarantee of a secure "anchoring" of the Federal Republic in the West ["anchoring" being the term used in Washington, "Westbindung" the term coined in Bonn]*

Another crucial aspect – entirely neglected by international historiography until today – is the interrelation between Ostpolitik and the British negotiations for entry to the EEC.<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding the East-West conflict, the British government had poor intelligence on current thinking in Eastern Europe – indeed, it almost seemed blind-folded – after its massive expulsion of Soviet diplomats for spying against the country and the reciprocal expulsion of British diplomats following this. Within the EEC, it had to rely on German mediation. If, however, Brandt's Ostpolitik was in reality a "Deutschlandpolitik", and if "Deutschlandpolitik" took priority over other policies (as he himself had maintained), then this was an advantageous situation which needed to be exploited or even to be prolonged. This, in turn, would also offer an explanation for the different approaches taken by Brandt and Kiesinger to de Gaulle's European policies. Bonn as a "good European" was, of course, also a guarantee against any adventurist Ostpolitik – something that was instrumentalised by Bonn as a kind of guarantee ("Ostpolitik starts in the West") and required and even conceptualised by the three Western allies – each in turn with its own national interests and strategy deriving from it. This also shows, *prima facie*, the extent to which the EEC was actually designed as an instrument of control over the Germans on both sides of the Wall. In open contradiction to the widespread myth that the EEC was a Catholic-conservative device aimed against communism in Europe, there was no discourse whatsoever invoking this perceived role of the Community during its crisis in 1963, when the future of European integration hung for several months on something even less than a silk thread. There was no such discourse on the – perceived – anticommunist role of the Community by the British, the French, the Germans, the Americans or even the Dutch – not even in internal papers.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Journal of European Integration History, the most likely forum for any such analysis, featured very few articles on the interrelation between European integration and Eastern policy in the past, none of which referred to a connection between Britain's entry bid and West German Ostpolitik; among them – despite its promising title - Andreas Wilkens, Westpolitik, Ostpolitik and the Project of Economic and Monetary Union – Germany's European Policy in the Brandt Era (1969-1974), in: Journal of European Integration History, Baden-Baden 1995, pp. 73-102; and Beatrice Heuser, The European Dream of Franz Josef Strauss, in: Journal of European Integration History, Baden-Baden 1997/1998, pp. 75-103; Heuser offers no sources whatsoever on her topic, avoiding any discourse on Ostpolitik.

<sup>12</sup> S. Oliver Bange, The EEC Crisis of 1963 - Kennedy, Macmillan, de Gaulle and Adenauer in Conflict, London 2000.

Partly due to a whole series of spy cases – "solved" under the public gaze – the British remained fairly isolated in the continually-intensifying exchanges between East and West in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Something neither the French nor the Americans intended to change for the sake of their own objectives in détente. It was only in 1975, as a kind of by-product of the CSCE process, that the first British diplomats realised that "exposure to Western values (could have) a long-term impact upon Eastern Europe"<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, what Anne Deighton sees as an important contribution of the British to the Ostpolitik of the West, appears in retrospective to have been merely a declaration of insolvency.

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Deighton, Ostpolitik or Westpolitik? – British foreign policy, 1968-75, in: *International Affairs*, vol. 74,4 (1998), S. 893-901. Because Deighton works exclusively from the documents in the DOBPO-volumes the realities of the West's Eastern policy remain somewhat blurred. The self-gratulating, almost euphemistic style of writing of FCO-officials is taken for granted without much criticism – a classical pitfall of mono-archival research on international relations.

Brian White, *Britain, Détente and Changing East-West Relations*, London 1992, at least concludes a „gradual failure to adopt to a changing pattern of East-West relations in the 1960s“ – despite an ostentatious lack of sources (and claims to the contrary).

For London's dependency on the much more active German Ostpolitik in this era see Gottfried Niedhart, *Auf dem Weg zur Anerkennung: Die DDR in der britischen Politik 1967-1973*, in: Arnd Bauerkämper (ed.), *Britain and the GDR – Relations and Perceptions in a Divided World*, Berlin 2000, pp. 15-172.