

J. Frère, Germany between East and West


Caption: In this note, J. Frère, Legation Secretary at the Belgian Embassy in Rome, analyses the Federal Republic of Germany's position in East-West relations.

Source: DE VOS, Luc; ROOMS, Etienne; DELOGE, Pascal; STERKENDRIES, Jean-Michel (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques belges 1941-1960, De l'indépendance à l'interdépendance. Tome II: Défense 1941-1960. Bruxelles: Académie royale de Belgique, 1998. 582 p. ISBN 90-6569-670-9. p. 114-121.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU
All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/j_frere_germany_between_east_and_west-en-9d9ed6bo-7391-4bf6-b879-05feacodoc86.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



Germany between East and West

The purpose of this study is to analyse the position of West Germany in the conflict between East and West. What are her hopes? Her future? What resources and room for manoeuvre does she possess? And how will the rest of the world react to her?

Since coming to power, Chancellor Adenauer has worked tirelessly to return West Germany to the family of nations. His statesmanship, helped by the undeniable wish of the Western Allies to relax the controls imposed on the Federal Republic and helped, too, by the threat posed by Soviet Russia, has borne fruit. The results are there for all to see: Germany is involved on an equal footing in four major international undertakings: the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, the European Defence Community, the Schuman Plan and the European Consultative Assembly. She is also negotiating her future status with the four occupying powers, a status which will no longer be forced upon her as has been the case hitherto.

The ambitions of the Federal Chancellor appear to be:

- equal rights with other nations (*Gleichberechtigung*) with, as a corollary, the abolition of all Allied controls;
- peaceful reunification of Germany as a single state, to include those territories currently under Polish or Soviet control;
- the restoration of Germany as an economic and trading power in order to give her political influence.

Equal rights and the abolition of Allied controls would seem to be easily achievable. The human and economic potential of Germany is too great for it not to be harnessed for the benefit of the West, to help organise the struggle against Communism. And, assuming that Germany rearms — which the German Government wants but the German public fears — she will secure equal rights. It seems likely that the treaty agreements currently being negotiated will reflect this so that the only Allied privileges to remain will be a right of scrutiny over German policy on Berlin and the question of reunification.

The controls on German industry and the military security office will shortly disappear in the face of the powerful arguments backing the demand for equal rights, as others call for Germany to bear part of the very heavy burden of costs.

German reunification is a delicate issue which will doubtless not be resolved overnight. It will entail a marked diminution of Soviet power in Europe first.

This diminution will come about only if Western power increases very substantially in proportion, and it is here that Germany will play a key role in Europe. Germany knows it: if she is to attain her distant goal of reunification, she must certainly not put off joining in the process of European rearmament for too long. However, in rearming, it is essential that Germany should be free to rebuild her economic power, which is just as great as her military power in the struggle for influence being played out in Europe between East and West.

Allied controls on industry have to date been ineffectual, but they are vexatious. A nation's capacity for

work cannot be controlled by a piece of legislation. The Germans are much harder-working than the French or British. Given that they have plentiful raw materials and a well-equipped industrial base, it will come as no surprise to see Germany economically dominant in a few years' time. The first signs are already there.

So it would seem that the German policy aims outlined above are achievable on the basis of Germany's own resources and of her skill in exploiting the weaknesses of others.

Let us now consider how the other powers might react to a German resurgence.

France

France is ill at ease with the legacy of her history and her economic and social development. Having long been the leading power in Europe, France cannot break free from the memory of past greatness. She suspects that the intelligence of her people (the celebrated traditional virtues) and the range of her cultural influence may not be enough to make up for her military, economic and social weakness. Her political initiatives are subtle as a result, but they come up against the realism of the other countries, and of the Germans in particular.

French policy is dictated by vanity and fear: fear of the Soviets and fear of the Germans.

It seeks to neutralise all these disadvantages by acts of authority. This policy might pay off if it were backed by real strength. But it is not. Benevolence is seen as weakness, and acts of authority are not taken seriously. Left only with the law, but with no real power, France seeks to cover up her weakness by acts of international law, but she would not be capable of enforcing the agreements reached.

She looks for alliances (USA, Great Britain), but it is ultimately her allies which dictate her policy.

She pushes for European federalism, hoping in this legislative context to use intellectual superiority to control those who are strong or who might become so.

Germany is not fooled by this policy and sees French plans as a way of getting her own growing power accepted by peaceful means.

Things would be different if the economic and social climate in France were to change, if inflation stopped and if the French realised the danger that they face in living next door to a nation which is harder-working and more determined than they are and which has such huge resources.

The French leaders are aware of this danger, but they can do nothing to prevent it because they are incapable of organising themselves and organising their fellow citizens.

In the existing climate, any contract signed between France and Germany will be just a piece of paper, because, in world politics, strength still takes precedence over the law. France can have no deep influence on present-day Germany.

United Kingdom

Britain has never viewed Germany as a hereditary foe. Her traditional policy has been to maintain a balance of power between her continental neighbours, and she has simply allied herself with the weakest in order to contain the strongest.

She is aware of the immediate danger which Communism presents to Europe. Keeping armed forces stationed on the Continent is a heavy burden, because it ties up men needed in other areas of the globe.

So Germany must contribute towards the common defence. This prospect, and that of a strong Germany in future, seem not to alarm the British.

Britain's overseas interests and the difficulties that these cause her mean that the importance she attaches to Europe is reduced accordingly. Britain does not seek to take the lead role in mainland Europe, but she wants to see the Continent's resources mobilised as an effective bulwark against Soviet expansion.

Britain is very sensitive to everything touching on Germany as an economic power. In the current precarious economic situation, she fears German competition more than ever. She will thus continue to favour controls on German economic expansion but will be realistic enough to have few illusions about their practical efficacy.

This accounts for her hard line on the issue of Germany's continued contribution to the costs of occupation. The resources which Germany spends on this may not be used to boost her economic competitiveness still further.

USA

For the USA, the last war with Germany was played out on the biggest stage ever in its world policy. Having defeated Germany, the Americans initially drew the logical conclusion that this dangerous country must never be allowed to be strong again. America lacked this unconscious reflex of the Europeans, who have been accustomed for millennia to view central Europe as a bastion of defence against the Asiatic hordes. Signs of expansion in Asia brought a rude awakening. The Americans again applied the same logic to their conclusions: Europe as the immediate neighbour of the continent of Asia had to unite against the threat from the east. Europe was a necessary buffer to protect the USA, the Atlantic Ocean having become a place rather than a barrier. Without Europe, the front line in any future conflict would be America's eastern seaboard.

It is understandable that the USA should focus her resources for organising Europe on the nation she sees as the most dynamic and the one she can influence most easily since she is already there on the spot, namely Germany.

The Americans think that their presence in Germany enables them to exert pressure more effectively there than in the other countries of Europe.

Through financial aid, they also believe that by pressuring the West Europeans to unite, they will lock Germany into the West and allow her to expand peacefully. This expansion will be contained to the east, for the moment, but is inevitable since the Germans are the most dynamic nation in Europe.

The Americans have no doubt that Germany will be their most dependable ally in Europe against Communism. That is all they care about.

USSR

The current belief is that the USSR aspires to world domination. That is probably true, but is not proven. Marxist teaching certainly argues that Communism can be lastingly achieved only by the removal of capitalism, which suggests that Communist systems must be put in place worldwide. Is this theory the reason behind Soviet expansion, or is it the other way round? It is a fact, looking at the map of the Eurasian continent, that the Soviet leadership must be almost irresistibly tempted to grab what seems to them just a tiny area of land compared with the vastness of their own empire. And that tiny area contains such riches that the temptation is twice as great.

It is hard to know why the Russians hold back.

Maybe the reason lies in the following aspects of demography and Marxist theory: the 'land-dwellers' of Asia seem instinctively to fear the maritime peoples of Europe. This fear may stem from two factors: the unease which the man of the steppes, accustomed to immense distances, must feel when confronted by this people, crammed into a small space and consequently organised to a degree unimaginable to those whose

lives are constantly shaped by distance. He must feel at the mercy of a terrifying mass of potential enemies whose mentality he cannot comprehend. Sparsely populated areas give a feeling of freedom of movement which is unknown to us. Three hundred million Europeans and their industry must seem very threatening indeed to two hundred million Russians, scattered over an immense area of territory.

The second factor might be climate-related. One wonders if the temperate western climate might not have an effect on people used to the rigours of the continental climate. It is striking that all the major Asiatic invasions have petered out in maritime Europe.

The proclaimed doctrine of 'Marxist-Leninist tactics' virtually rules out frontal attack at the strongest point. It is interesting to note that the Communists have always taken the oblique approach. This seems to be because of the specific origin of Communist movements, all of which had clandestine beginnings and a considerable Jewish influence. Knowing how the Jews were persecuted in central Europe over the last few centuries, there is nothing surprising in these methods.

Western Europe offers an interesting application of 'Marxist-Leninist tactics'. If we accept the demographic argument outlined above, one can reason that Russia east of the Urals will not attack Europe head on, because whilst she covets Europe, she also fears it.

She will seek to make it friendly territory by undermining its existing organisation. Having weakened the adversary by subversive means, Europe will fall under Soviet influence without a shot being fired, and the two hundred million Russians will be fully able to impose their peace on the three hundred million weakened Europeans.

Russian interest in the struggle against America derives from the fact that America acts as a kind of magnet to the free world by virtue of her strength and organisation. Winning Europe means decisively weakening America, but Europe must be won without going to war, for the reasons indicated earlier and in order to keep Communist forces intact and ready for the final showdown which will, in theory, take place between the Communist world and the capitalist world.

Germany is an essential pawn in this game. If it seems too dangerous to swallow her up, as may be the case at present, she must be neutralised. Without Germany, Europe would be reduced to a small coastal area, living off its trade with the rest of the world but almost totally dependent on its overseas possessions.

By breaking the links between the metropolitan centres of Europe and the colonies, Russia would place Europe in serious peril, and there would be social unease which would create a climate likely to be receptive to 'people's democracies'. By 'liberating' Africa and Asia to her own advantage and by neutralising Germany, the USSR would conquer Europe without a shot being fired.

So much for Soviet offensive planning. Such plans may sometimes appear rather surprising.

Expansion and imperialism are pursued by nations which are short of space and short of resources. This is not true of Russia, which is short only of capital. Her territory is often inhospitable, but it is vast.

So it would not be surprising to see Soviet action of a 'multipurpose nature', prompted by the fear of invasion by the outside world. This 'multipurpose nature' is apparent in the whole organisation of Soviet industry which can, from one day to the next, switch from working for peace to working to win a war. Might similar ideas underlie her foreign policy? It seems likely.

In defence terms, Soviet policy may be prompted by the following considerations: invasions of Russian territory from the west have been frequent. Whilst the vastness of the territory has defeated the invaders, the damage to Russia has nevertheless been great. It is natural that she should fear invasion and seek to guard against it. A region as sparsely populated as eastern Europe cannot, for lack of manpower, provide a continuous defence against the invader. The invader will always be able to penetrate to the heart of the conquered country and cause damage, the potential scale of which will increase in proportion to the degree

of the country's industrialisation.

The reaction of the Soviet leadership, if we postulate this kind of defensive thinking, is logical: Russia needs to create a kind of protective buffer zone on the Soviet continent. This zone must be deep enough to absorb the shock of an invasion. So it is necessary to push westwards. The defensive tactic becomes imperialism.

The geographical shape of Europe calls for thinking of this kind: as one advances westwards, the front to be defended becomes narrower, it becomes possible to create a continuous line of defence. Accordingly, the chances of deep invasion decrease more than proportionately to the width of the strip of land which can be controlled in the west.

For Europe, this reasoning may explain how it is that a country as sparsely populated as Russia can wish to expand.

In defence terms, the systematic weakening of the adversary by subversive means forms part of the 'hedging strategy' that we assume the Soviets to be pursuing. Thus, Soviet action is probably multipurpose. Whether offensive or defensive, its methods are largely the same.

It is fair to assume that the Russians have not yet made a choice which will be forced on them by circumstances. And Marxist-Leninist doctrine and tactics encourage that attitude.

How does Germany fit into the Russian game plan?

It is clear that the Russians greatly admire Germany's military, economic and human potential. That admiration has repeatedly been apparent since the Soviet Revolution: there have been large numbers of German technicians and specialists in the USSR at various times in the past.

For her part, Germany seems for a long time to have been tempted to subjugate the Slav peoples in order to provide Germany with overwhelming power in Europe and elsewhere. The Russians are aware of the lure of the east to some Germans, and they seek to exploit this. However, Russian admiration is tempered by a fear rooted in history.

In Russian eyes, Germany is a rampart. She is the starting point for an invasion of the Russian steppes, and she is also the key to western Europe. So she must either be conquered or neutralised.

Conquering her seems a very risky venture in the current climate. Whether or not Germany rearms, there are armed forces stationed in that part of Germany not under Soviet occupation. These forces are inadequate, but they are a clear signal of the Allied intention to block Russian expansion westwards. If the USSR halts the expansion of Western military potential by attacking, she will doubtless have little trouble in conquering Europe, but will she be able to restrict the fighting to that objective alone? It is unlikely. Russia's military potential will have been weakened to a degree, she will have conquered a piece of land which may perhaps bring her substantial industrial advantages but may prove a major problem because of her population density. She will find herself ranged against America, with all the resources of the American and African continents.

Moreover, the man of the Asiatic steppes will be in close contact with a civilisation which may soften and weaken him.

Finally, why would the USSR attack at the one point where direct action is sure to result in generalised warfare? That seems so at odds with Communist thinking and doctrine that it appears improbable. It would be conceivable if the USSR had the requisite resources and was facing a threat to her existence. Do the Soviets believe this to be the case? It is difficult to think so when we look at the factors which appear to motivate the Soviet leadership. There seems in fact to be something else which restrains the USSR from violent action: her own organisation. The Soviet regime may be a dictatorship, but it is headed by a group of dictators, the Politburo, in which Stalin appears to act as an arbiter.

When it comes to action entailing such high risks as generalised warfare, one wonders if a collective leadership, which must be the focus of a formidable power struggle, is capable of reaching a clear-cut decision.

The alternative envisaged by Soviet policy towards Germany is to neutralise her, with the ultimate hope of exploiting her for the USSR's own ends. As things stand, neutralising Germany means withdrawing the forces of occupation and abandoning the idea of reunification. Moves towards this are taking shape. Recent repeated calls for reunification by the Government of the German Democratic Republic have just been followed up by a Soviet proposal for a peace treaty with Germany.

Such policy may be easy to imagine but hard to realise. Russia, in line with the logic of her offensive and defensive imperialism, has used Poland as a shield to safeguard her. The USSR has carved up the eastern part of Poland, giving her a piece of Germany in exchange. Will Poland once more have to pay the price of Soviet policy towards Germany? She certainly fears so, and there have been a number of demonstrations in Poland recently in support of a guaranteed Polish border along the Oder-Neisse line. So Russia will have to resolve the Polish question as well as dealing with Germany. She will no longer use the softly-softly approach. Any Western concession on Germany's eastern borders would make things considerably easier for the USSR which could then — unhesitatingly — devote all her energies to neutralising Germany.

A neutralised Germany, without a strong army, would be the vacuum to the west which Russian imperialism wants. Conscious of her superiority in the work of undermining bourgeois regimes, the USSR could then concentrate her tactics of subversion on a Germany which is at present beyond her reach. Helped by the vicissitudes of politics, and seeking to foment unrest on the German domestic political scene, she might little by little draw the whole of Germany into her orbit.

If subversion on its own were not enough, the USSR would have other options: action in Africa or South America, aimed at distracting the West's attention towards these territories and provoking a crisis in Europe's supplies of the raw materials essential to her prosperity.

Germany is sensitive to overseas imports. This would therefore be a way of accelerating a process of breakdown begun by propaganda work conducted in a disarmed and united Germany. Germany represents a golden opportunity to the USSR. She will continue playing that card to the last.

Conclusions

For millennia, the power of Germany and Austria provided a natural bulwark against the perpetual Asiatic threat. By absorbing the waves of invasion from the east, this Germanic rampart enabled western civilisation to flourish. Depending on whether the tide from Asia was advancing or retreating, Germany's western neighbours sought to weaken or strengthen central Europe. By ignoring this age-old lesson for too long, the men who drew up the Treaty of Versailles paved the way for one of the greatest build-ups of military power ever seen. The bulwark has to be rebuilt. This work is under way in Germany, but we must not neglect south-eastern Europe. A strong Germany and strong central Europe are needed to ensure the balance of a Europe under constant threat from the east, but it is vital for the West to harness the strength of Germany in the service of the West. The dynamism of the German nation thus requires a number of sacrifices.

Will the legal systems of the old constitutional states of the West allow them to channel the dynamic energy of Germany? Yes, if there is sufficiently realistic thinking which allows Germany to take her proper place in the scheme of things. Cooperation with Germany must provide enhanced security. We must make the effort needed to resolve ancient differences between Germany and the West at local level. Only then can a measure of security be achieved in Europe. West Germany, which is closer to us than the Germany of Prussia, offers us an opportunity which we must seize. By locking West Germany quickly and securely into the West, we may hope one day to include the East Germans — erstwhile Slavs — as well and push back the western buffer zone a safe distance to the east.

Marxist–Communist theory provides an opportunity for us, too. It constantly claims to be flexible, but it is not: it adheres doggedly to obscure tactics and neglects strategy. Urging the USSR to take direct action at the strongest point in the defences of her self-appointed foes would be contrary to its most basic tenets.

Historical materialism teaches us that economic realities always prevail over political realities. As long as the USSR hopes to weaken her adversaries through tactics and the economy, it is hard to imagine her opting for direct action, the dangers of which are incalculable. The way of thinking and the very structure of this planned and collectively-based state stand in the way of the action which its multipurpose imperialism would otherwise suggest it should take.