

Rachèle Raus, Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and European integration

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and European integration

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Studies of the post-1945 foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) are often divided into those focusing on its European integration policy and those which cover its policy of openness towards Eastern Europe, putting more emphasis on the latter, the 'Ostpolitik', than on the former, the 'Europapolitik'. However, with recent studies confirming the role of European integration in peacemaking within Europe and the involvement of the Ostpolitik in the East-West détente process, this imbalance in the historiography of West Germany can no longer be justified.

It is important to determine whether these two policies both addressed the same desire to soothe post-war tensions and to promote the establishment of peace in Europe. The extent to which they overlapped was clearly illustrated with the implementation of the foreign policy pursued by the FRG's Minister for Foreign Affairs, and later Chancellor, Willy Brandt, who closely reconciled the Ostpolitik and the Westpolitik and declared in 1969 that the Ostpolitik was the 'eastern component of his European policy'. Two vital questions therefore confront the historian. Was it the development of the policy of openness towards Eastern Europe which benefited from a period of renewed momentum in European policy after 1969, or was it the implementation of the Ostpolitik which helped to put an end to the crisis which affected the European institutions in the second half of the 1960s?

I. In search of a European settlement: reconciling national interests and European issues

The 'German question' at the centre of European concerns

Against the background of the Cold War, when France, the FRG, Italy and the Benelux countries signed the Treaty of Paris in April 1951, they established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), thereby creating the 'Europe of the Six'. This was to facilitate the pooling of economic and political resources and contribute to the rebuilding of Europe. The creation of a community of interest based on widespread economic integration — the political organisation was to follow later — took place alongside the activities of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which was created in April 1948 for the purpose of managing US aid and supporting the United States and its allies in their power struggle with the Soviet Union.

Post-war Germany was not at any time neglected during the rebuilding of Europe, and it benefited fully from Marshall Plan aid from 1947 onwards. After the failure of the London Conference in December 1947, which demonstrated the impossibility of securing an agreement on the future status of Germany, the West decided not to tackle the 'German question' directly but to speed up the rebuilding of the Western zones in order to bind Germany to the West. They wanted to avoid the possibility of the FRG adopting a policy of alternating its alliance between the East and the West or of it establishing itself as a neutral entity in the heart of Europe. Accordingly, Germany was a crucial issue during the Cold War. The fear of a renewed German threat existed in all of its neighbouring countries, particularly in France, where the 'myth of Rapallo' remained omnipresent. The solution to the 'German question', therefore, could not come without the participation of Europe and the United States.

The FRG owed its reconstruction to its commitment to the Atlantic Alliance and to the rigorous controls established by the Allies which placed its foreign policy under supervision and forbade any rearmament. However, it was Adenauer's loyalty to European integration that allowed the FRG to regain its national sovereignty. During the 1950s, with East-West tensions increasing, the 'German question' became closely linked with the issue of European security in international negotiations. The negotiations on the European Defence Community (EDC) reopened the controversy surrounding German rearmament. Following the failure of the EDC, the Paris Conference of 23 October 1954 ended the FRG's status as an occupied territory and allowed it to rearm. From that point onwards, the FRG could define its European policy more independently and take its national interests into account. The economic recovery that was taking place in the FRG at the same time strengthened Germany's position in Europe. As a result, during the discussions

which led to the Rome Treaties in 1957, the FRG succeeded in negotiating guarantees concerning the reunification of Germany and a protocol on German internal trade.

Foiling all of the USSR's attempts to destroy Western solidarity, the FRG refused to risk isolation by responding to Soviet offers of reunification in exchange for German neutrality. The West German leaders had no choice but to turn towards the West. It was the FRG's participation in the European Community that allowed it to regain some of the authority and the traditional powers of a nation state.

The 'German question' and the European question: the same issues?

Although the Federal Republic of Germany's European policy had been laid down ever since the country's creation in 1949, it transpired that, by virtue of its status as a divided nation in the centre of Europe and because of the undefined nature of its eastern borders, a policy that focused on Central and Eastern Europe was a natural consequence.

The policy towards 'the other Germany' (Deutschlandpolitik) was inherent in the division of the country. Enshrined in the Preamble to the Basic Law, the solution to the 'German question' was presented as the main objective of the public authorities. The FRG did not recognise the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and believed that it alone should represent the German nation. The West German leaders watched with concern the Sovietisation of the GDR and the deterioration in the living and working conditions of its people. With the establishment of the 'magnet theory' ¹, they hoped to undermine the totalitarian system of the GDR. They sought to isolate the East German leaders and to prevent any legitimisation of the GDR on the international scene by establishing the Hallstein Doctrine in 1955.

The Deutschlandpolitik was an integral part of the West German policy of openness towards Eastern Europe (the Ostpolitik). In 1945, Germany maintained tense relations with the satellite countries of the USSR. The conflict with Poland over the Oder-Neisse Line and the disputes with Czechoslovakia concerning the 1938 Munich Agreement hindered the development of their political relations. These countries' siding with Moscow also prevented the renewal of diplomatic dialogue. In addition, pressure groups consisting of German refugees or persons expelled from the former Eastern territories prevented a policy of rapprochement with Eastern Europe.

As a result, the Ostpolitik got off to a slow start during the 1950s. Christian-Democrat leaders (CDU/CSU), taking their lead from Chancellor Adenauer's stance on the subject, were of the opinion that any step taken towards Eastern Europe should be compensated by progress in reaching a solution to the 'German problem', that is to say both Germany's status and its borders. Accordingly, until the mid-1960s, normalisation of relations between the FRG and the Eastern European countries took place only with regard to economic and commercial transactions. This was the background against which, in 1961, the 'policy of movement' took effect, drawn up by Gerhard Schroeder, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who signed a series of commercial agreements with the countries of the Communist bloc except for the GDR and Moscow.

The debates concerning the status of the City of Berlin constituted another part of the FRG's Ostpolitik. The quadripartite status of the former German capital city and its location at the centre of the territory of East Germany meant that it became the focal point for the Ostpolitik, the Deutschlandpolitik and Federal Germany's European policy.

The European policy and the FRG's Ostpolitik were characterised by a broad convergence of interests. In February 1966, French President de Gaulle stated that 'the German problem is the European problem *par excellence*'. In December of that year, Willy Brandt wrote: 'The trench that divides my country also divides Europe. Anyone who fills this trench will also help my country. Our only hope is to overcome this division of Europe' ². In reality, however, tensions remained between integration into Western Europe and the search for stronger links with Eastern Europe.

Brandt: a pragmatic perception of Western and Eastern policy

In 1963, when Willy Brandt, the Social Democratic (SPD) Mayor of Berlin, put forward the basic principles of his German and Eastern policy to the Academy in Tutzing and established a 'small-steps' policy, he referred to his extensive political experience spent in exile and in Opposition.

The priorities of Brandt's policies were the post-1945 reconstruction of Germany and the strengthening of Europe. In his opinion, these were complementary aims. However, the European policy seemed to him to be a preparatory phase for progressive rapprochement between Eastern and Western Europe³. Brandt's long-term intentions were the creation of a unified, democratic and, where possible, Social Democratic Germany, whose aim was to be integrated into Europe⁴. A normalisation policy with Eastern Europe had to be devised as part of a strategy involving Europe as a whole. The substance of Brandt's European and German policies was therefore laid down before the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, the date that is traditionally cited as marking the beginning of his Ostpolitik.

Nevertheless, it was after the events in Berlin and from 1963 onwards that Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr, his closest aide, formulated the 'new Ostpolitik', which broke away from the Government's dogmatic approach. Brandt devised a 'small-steps' policy in order to improve relations with 'the other Germany', without making German reunification a precondition, and he placed more importance on technical aspects than on political considerations.

With reunification no longer on the agenda in the medium or short term, Brandt's objective was to establish peace for Europe. During the 1960s, the term 'European peace order' was employed by most European political leaders. De Gaulle spoke of an overall settlement for Europe and another for Germany. The Ostpolitik was defined from then on as a policy of 'normalisation' with the countries of the East, by the pursuit of a 'European peace order' based on full diplomatic recognition of the sovereignty and the existing borders of the countries of Eastern Europe⁵ and by the almost complete recognition of the countries of Central Europe. The objectives of the West German Ostpolitik and European integration intersected as they both sought the establishment of a 'European peace order'. Germany's allies were in no great hurry to see reunification achieved in the short term, not before they found an organisational model for a Europe capable of incorporating a reunified Germany.

Brandt, aware that the reunification of Germany could not take place without the support of its Western neighbours and having seen the impasse in which German policy had found itself as a result of the uncompromising approach taken by the CDU/CSU leaders, opted for a resolutely pro-European and Atlantic approach for the solution of the 'German problem'. Accordingly, as long as reunification was not on the agenda and the FRG remained committed to the Atlantic Alliance, there was no contradiction between his European policy and his Ostpolitik. But did this mean that two policies complemented each other? This question requires further study into the extent of their mutual influence.

II. Discord between the European integration policy and the policy of openness towards Eastern Europe

Europeanisation of the East-West conflict and emancipation of Europe

As regards international politics, Brandt's Ostpolitik was developed following the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. After fearing a third global conflict, the American and Soviet leaders decided to redefine their relations around the principle of 'peaceful coexistence'. The installation of the 'hotline' between Washington and Moscow, in addition to the Treaty of Moscow signed on 25 July 1963, marked the beginning of strategic dialogue between the two superpowers. The mid-1960s were, therefore, characterised by the establishment of détente in East-West relations, despite the war of attrition in South-East Asia. In fact, East-West tensions moved towards Central Europe, the line of demarcation passing through Germany and through Berlin. East-West relations took on a distinctly European character. This feeling was reinforced by a speech about Germany given by President Johnson on 7 October 1966 in which he stated that, from that time onwards, it was a question of unification and no longer of reunification on the basis of self-determination⁶.

These changes in international politics led to adjustments in relations between the European countries and

their protecting power. The fear of an American withdrawal from Europe increased, especially after the adoption of the graduated response policy by the United States in June 1962. What is more, the European powers, that is to say France and Germany, did not want to risk the United States and the Soviet Union reaching an agreement on European questions without their participating in the negotiations.

There was, however, no joint reaction from Europe to this situation. It was clear from the negotiations for the Élysée Treaty in 1963 that France and the FRG did not share exactly the same priorities. In his determination to free Europe from the influence of the United States and in pursuit of the objective of creating a Europe that stretched from the Atlantic to the Urals, General de Gaulle entered into direct negotiations with Moscow that excluded Washington. The FRG, while remaining loyal to its American protector, hoped to establish a foreign policy commensurate with its economic power. Brandt's new Ostpolitik should be considered as an element in Europe's policy of emancipation. The appropriation of the East-West conflict by Europe was therefore concurrent with Europe's policy of independence.

At all events, European policy made virtually no progress during the 1960s, and it seems that it was the policy of openness towards Eastern Europe that compensated for this lack of political integration.

The policy of openness towards Eastern Europe as a substitute for a European integration policy?

General de Gaulle's European emancipation policy did not receive a universal welcome in all of the countries of the Six. Although France and Germany remained the central axis of the European Economic Community (EEC), the Élysée Treaty showed that the Germans were not willing to abandon their friendship with the Americans. The failure of the Fouchet Plan in April 1962 resulted in a serious reversal in European integration policy. In 1963, de Gaulle opposed Britain's accession to the EEC, and, between June 1965 and January 1966, the 'empty chair crisis' prevented the EEC from promoting the integration of its Member States' foreign policies. The disagreement between the Member States of the EEC was such that it became known as the Community's latent crisis, and this was intensified in November 1967 by France's second veto on the resumption of negotiations for enlargement.

It was in this climate of tension within the EEC that Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik gradually became established. It allowed him to secure independence for Germany whilst remaining loyal to the Atlantic Alliance and the EEC. On taking office as Chancellor on 28 October 1969, Brandt, supported by his Liberal coalition partners, announced the introduction of a Government programme built around the Ostpolitik. Henceforth, Brandt accepted the coexistence of two German nation states and made known his wish to continue discussions with the Soviet Union. At the same time, during the Hague Summit on 1 and 2 December 1969, Brandt contributed to the revival of Europe. European integration was one way for him to regain some political power within Community Europe. The FRG used the EEC for its own domestic purposes. The 'Ostpolitik begins in the West'⁷. However, after 1969, Germany also took a leading role in European integration policy, to some extent because of the way in which the Ostpolitik operated⁸.

The two policies did complement each other, but they did not necessarily influence each other. Tensions within the EEC in the mid-1960s did not prevent the West German leaders from pursuing their own policy towards Eastern Europe. However, 1969–1973 was the period in which West Germany's Ostpolitik was most energetically pursued. The rapid development of the Ostpolitik from 1969 onwards may be largely explained by the change in the FRG's leadership, which strengthened the dialogue with Moscow and East Berlin. International events also favoured the development of the Ostpolitik. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 by Warsaw Pact troops, the Soviets became more conciliatory. It was henceforth clear that any rapprochement with countries within the Soviet Union's sphere of influence would need to be approved by Moscow. Accordingly, Brandt entered into discussions with the Soviet leaders, which led to him signing a treaty renouncing the use of force with the Soviet Union in August 1970. The Moscow Treaty marked the beginning of the series of treaties known as the Eastern European Treaties which included the Warsaw Treaty of December 1970, the Treaty with Czechoslovakia signed in December 1973, as well as the Basic Treaty with the GDR in December 1972 and the Four-Power Agreement on Berlin in September 1971.

With regard to Community policy, the Hague Summit held in December 1969 established the threefold aim of ‘completion, deepening and enlargement’ and announced the revival of the EEC. At that Summit, it became clear that Community Europe existed principally at the level of economic integration. The measures required for strengthening the process of political unification were, indeed, brought up, but they remained below expectations for the supporters of a political Europe. What is more, the early 1970s were also marked by a serious international economic crisis as well as a European monetary crisis. During this period, it appears that at no point did the deep disagreement over monetary union hinder the conclusion of the Eastern European Treaties or the signing of the quadripartite agreements⁹. Brandt, however, never acted against European integration in the name of his Ostpolitik. In actual fact, whether it was at The Hague, with regard to the policy of openness towards Eastern Europe including the four-power negotiations on Berlin, defending European political cooperation (EPC) and the Davignon Plan in 1970 or the meetings in preparation for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the FRG always championed the defence of the policy of European integration.

Conclusion

The Ostpolitik and the policy on European integration were pursued at the same time and involved the same participants — both in terms of States and individuals. They cannot be studied independently from each other, although the extent of the influence that they had on each other remains difficult to establish. What is most remarkable is, no doubt, the similarity of their objectives. They were both devised after 1945 in order to rebuild Europe and to provide the European powers with a ‘European peace order’. What is more, they were drawn up and established by the same political figures. They were both drawn up in accordance with a pragmatic model, that is to say moving forward in stages, in ‘small steps’ and beginning with a process of economic integration, which was destined to be pursued at a political level. Accordingly, Brandt’s foreign policy may be qualified as ‘pragmatic realism’ based on the fact that its implementation often made use of the economy and because of its innovative nature compared with the actions of his predecessors in the CDU/CSU.

Notes:

1. This theory argues that the prosperity of the FRG would be an irresistible attraction to the GDR and would bring it into its sphere of influence.
2. Quoted by T. Garton Ash, *Au nom de l’Europe. L’Allemagne dans un continent divisé*, Paris, Gallimard, 1995, p. 34 (translated from the English: *In Europe’s Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*, Random House, New York, 1993).
3. A. Wilkens, ‘Willy Brandt, die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen und die Europapolitik (1969–1974)’, from H. Möller, M. Vaïsse (eds), *Willy Brandt und Frankreich. Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Munich, Oldenburg, 2005, pp. 199–214.
4. H. Haftendorn, ‘Transformation und Stabilität’, from H. Möller, M. Vaïsse (eds), op. cit., pp. 1–21.
5. T. Garton Ash, op. cit., p. 48.
6. Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Europe 1961–1970 series, (FRG), vol. 1608.
7. National Archives of France, 5AG-2, vol. 104, Entretien Brandt-Pompidou du 30 janvier 1970 [Meeting between Willy Brandt and Georges Pompidou on 30 January 1970].
8. H. Mayer, ‘L’Allemagne, la politique de coopération européenne’, from E. Du Réau, R. Frank (eds), *Dynamiques européennes. Nouvel espace. Nouveaux acteurs (1969–1981)*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002, pp. 129–150.
9. A. Wilkens, ‘Willy Brandt, die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen und die Europapolitik (1969–1974)’, op. cit., p. 203.

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