France and the German Question, 1945–1990

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Bericht von: Constanze Buyken, Bochum/ Konstanze Schiemann, Mannheim

The international conference, „France and the German Question, 1945–1990", organised and hosted by the German Historical Institute in Paris together with the University Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris 3) and the University Panthéon-Sorbonne (Paris 1) took place from the 7th to the 9th of February 2013. The conference aimed to point out the centrality of the German question in France's international policies and, conversely, the importance of France's role and that of Franco-German relations in the evolution of the German question within the wider contexts of the European construction and the Cold War between 1945 and 1990. As STEFAN MARTENS (Paris) and FRÉDÉRIC BOZO (Paris) emphasized in their opening addresses, against the backdrop of the 50th anniversary of the Franco-German Elysée-Treaty, Germany's and France's positions and their relationship were, of course, central throughout the event.

The first session focussed on France, the „long" Cold War, and the German question. LILY GARDNER FELDMAN (Baltimore) argued that the reconciliation of Germany with Czechoslovakia, France, Israel and Poland was the main political theme in these countries after the Second World War and that it has been a necessary policy in order to build a long-term peace between former enemies. ANN DEIGHTON (Oxford) critizised Gardner Feldman's methodical approach – which she claimed to be a comparative historical analysis – because the conditions in the four states mentioned were too singular to be comparable. In his contribution, THOMAS ANGERER (Wien) argued that after the Second World War France's political intercourse with Germany and especially with Austria was affected by an *Anschluss* syndrome, a diffuse fear of the construction of a „German bloc", due to several historical bad experiences. The interest of Angerer's approach and the importance of the psychological dimension in the French perspective on the German Question, as well as the longue durée of his study, were emphasized in the discussion, but the relevance of accentuating to such an extent the role of „small countries" in the political and historical issues of 1945–1990 was questioned. MATTHIEU OSMONT (Paris) presented a part of his PhD-thesis and contrasted the individual influence of the French ambassadors in the „Bonn group" during the Cold War period with the decreased influence of diplomats in Bonn afterwards. This activated a debate about a decline of French power in general after the end of the Cold War. The following contributions dealt with the contacts between France and, on the one hand, Poland and the GDR on the other. PIERRE-FRÉDÉRIC WEBER (Szczecin) underlined that Charles de Gaulle's insistence on the condition of the recognition of the Oder-Neisse Line to the German reunification was an important aspect of this policy and the French opening to Eastern Europe on which France's *Ostpolitik* relied. ULRICH PFEIL (Metz) analysed the relation between France and the GDR, meaning an informal GDR policy in France since he questioned the existence of an official French GDR foreign policy in general because France never recognised the GDR as a fully sovereign state. HÉLÈNE MIARD-DELACROIX (Paris) elaborated the theory that the difference between France's relations with Poland on the one hand and France and the GDR on the other was based on France considering Poland as a double victim (of Nazism and of Communism) and the GDR as a possible double enemy (German and communist state).

JOACHIM SCHOLTYSECK (Bonn), as chair of the third panel, asserted in his opening statement that the European Union was in fact initiated before its institutionalization by post-war Franco-German trade relations, with which he set the tone for the following contributions. RAINER HUDEMANN (Paris) gave an insight into the evolution of historiography concerning Franco-German relations in the early post-war years. He placed great emphasis on the perception filters that have

guided the interpretations of researchers and public alike of French policy in occupied Germany. Through a methodological process, many unseen aspects and misinterpreted facts were uncovered and the view of French policy changed until the 1980's: whereas it was earlier characterized as restrictive and economically exploitive, French policy now was discovered as showing vast democratization efforts, though limited by conflict and the difficult situation in post-war Germany. Hudemann concluded by saying that it was as early as the summer of 1945 that the framework for Franco-German cooperation, which finally led to the Élysée-treaty, was established. Following up, FRANÇOISE BERGER (Grenoble) addressed economic policy as a further layer to the study of French policy in the occupied zone. She outlined four phases of the French economic project in Germany in which the conflict of interest between safety-keeping and economic reconstruction evolved. Berger concluded by pointing out the importance of not comparative research regarding the occupied zones but also consideration of the fact that French economic policy was not strictly limited to its zone of occupation but must be seen in interaction with France itself as well as the other allied zones. In his commentary, ERIC BUSSIÈRE (Paris) seized this impulse and described the German Question as a matter of multiple layers that have to be isolated in order to be analysed. He highlighted the contradiction between objectives and constraints in French policy and linked this diagnosis to a question about the role of idealism in this matter.

Introducing the next panel, which picked up the military aspect of the cold war especially concerning German rearmament, Joachim Scholtyseck discarded the idea that France was solely a blocking element in the international relations. This view has been held up by prejudices and MICHAEL H. CRESWELL (Tallahassee) took on the task of dismantling this myth. He rejected the assumption that France opposed German rearmament and interpreted its hesitation in that matter as a product of a strategic approach. French political leaders on the one hand had to deal with a public that still vividly remembered the military powerful Germany of the Nazis, and on the other hand wanted to hold the US in Europe which is why they tried to move slowly on the German rearmament. Following up, GEOFFREY ROBERTS (Cork) took on the point of view of the Soviet Union and declared that the policy of German reunification and neutralisation was not, as often presumed, propaganda but has to be seen as authentic. The Soviet Union saw France as their natural ally in the task of constraining Germany and could not comprehend the French pro-Atlantic policy which they considered to be short-sighted and not in its best interest. JEAN-CHRISTOPHER ROMER (Strasbourg) sharpened this argument further as he concretized that while the US were seen as the theoretical enemy by the Soviet Union Germany was actually the main threat. Romer also addressed the problem of continuity in Soviet policy, especially concerning Stalin and Khrushchev, and the general obsession on the Soviet and French side over the German Question for the ten post-war years.

In response to the title question, "A de Gaulle Factor?", GARRET MARTIN (Washington) traced the General's changing approach to the German Question after his return to power in 1958. Even though Charles de Gaulle viewed the polarizing division of Europe and the Cold War as a transitory situation he believed the strengthening of Western European cooperation to be vital as a counterpart to the two superpowers to the East and West. Martin highlighted 1963/1964 as the high- and turning-point in Franco-German relations that were marked by not only certain points of conflict concerning both nations' attitudes towards the U.S.A. but also willingness to make concessions in the relationship with the Soviet Union. In the time after the Élysée-treaty the disagreements between Germany and France aggravated and de Gaulle's position lost its strength and persuasive power. PHILIP BAJON (Jerusalem) rendered more precisely the conflict points between France and Germany and situated the power struggle of the antagonists de Gaulle and German Minister of Foreign Affairs Gerhard Schröder in the centre of the empty-chair-crisis of 1965/66 which he identified as an essentially Franco-German issue. Interpreting the topic of the German ques-

tion a little differently to his fellow speakers, BENEDIKT SCHÖNBORN (Tampere) talked about the French and German approaches towards the reunification in the long run. He drew the conclusion that de Gaulle put an honest effort into helping Germany with the reunification question but he also used the German question to promote France's own interests. In contrast to Martin, Schönborn stressed the aspect of continuity instead of change in French policy. Some participants stressed the methodological problem that the ambiguity of Charles de Gaulle's speeches poses, which according to them makes it hard to pinpoint his position towards the German question.

Dealing with the 1970's, ANDREAS WILKENS (Metz) contextualized the German question in a larger framework of changing international patterns unfolding around the increasing uncertainties present in 1973. Particular importance was assigned to the relationship between Willy Brandt and Georges Pompidou. NICOLAS BADALASSI (Paris) picked up on this train of thought and analyzed Franco-German relations in connection with the CSCE. He pointed at the French desire to channel but at the same time support the German *Ostpolitik*. The following panel addressed the matter of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's singular attitude concerning the German „problem" as he was, as GEORGES-HENRI SOUTOU (Paris) claimed, the only one who took a definite negative stance towards reunification. Giscard's objective was to maintain a balance of power in Europe and he saw the Soviet Union as France's natural ally in restraining Germany from becoming too strong a political and economical power once again. GUIDO THIEMEYER (Cergy) focused on the strong economic growth of Germany and thereby introduced an important aspect to the conference's topic. Thiemeyer extracted the elements of French policy in reaction to German economic growth and distinguished a bilateral solution as the most important pattern, which was however dependent on German cooperation. Furthermore, there was also an internal effect in that sense, that France put an effort into strengthening its own economy to provide a counterbalance to Germany and to keep the relationship on equal terms. In the debate, the significance of the U.S.A. and Jimmy Carter in this matter was discussed and it was stated, that thought the agreement between Helmut Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing grew stronger as the friction with Carter increased, the role of the U.S. at this time is commonly overstated.

The last session demonstrated the tendency of the conference to point out the importance of individuals among statesmen, diplomats and politicians. BERND ROTHER's (Berlin) contribution emphasised the importance of Willy Brandt's role in this context, even before he had any official political position. He also pointed out the difficult relations between German social-democrats and French socialists who overestimated the importance of German reunification for the SPD. GEORGE SAUNIER (Paris) underlined the interest of this paper, especially for French scholarship where the Brandt topic is not well known. CHRISTIAN WENKEL (Paris) on his side focussed on Mitterrand's policy towards the GDR and questioned whether his trip to East Berlin really can be considered as a symbol of the failure of his policy of not recognising the GDR as a sovereign state as many historians did. He also insisted on the continuity between de Gaulle's and Mitterrand's GDR-policy. ILARIA POGGIOLINI (Pavia) focussed on the „clash" of continental (Mitterrand), British (Thatcher) and Soviet (Gorbachev) views on European construction and German Unification. She underlined that Britain did not value European integration as much as France and that Thatcher did not believe in German unification in the short term. ANDREAS RÖDDER (Mainz) stated that it would have been interesting to also study Thatcher's influence after the end of the Cold War in order to balance her less outstanding role within this period. The United States, as a factor in French policies in the German question, was eventually discussed by JEFFREY ENGEL (Dallas) and MARY SAROTTE (Los Angeles). Engel illustrated George H. W. Bush's positive vision of postwar Germany and his approval of German reunification based on his Cold War policy of preserving a strong Atlantic alliance guaranteed by a strong Europe including a reunified

Germany as a NATO-member. Sarotte on her part discussed the American vision of the presence of American troops in Germany and of nuclear weapons as a guarantee for peace in Europe as an element of discord on the German question between Bush and Mitterrand, who was more concerned about Soviet sensibilities than his American counterpart. In the discussion, Sarotte indicated the link between German reunification and monetary union as a desideratum in US scholarship and appealed to an influence by European research.

Several questions continued to be the subject of discussion during the entire conference. There was the general definition-problem of how to conceptualise the term „state", as a country never is a one-dimensional factor. Depending on whether one examines the official policy or the opinion of the population of a state one must come to differing conclusions. Therefore, the participants spoke of the „double German policy" of France, for example the public scepticism regarding German strength and the understanding on government level, that the rehabilitation of Germany and its economic restoration were inseparably linked. It became apparent that the personal convictions of the state leaders often played a decisive role in determining their countries' foreign policy. De Gaulle's ideal conception of the nation state that shaped his view on the German question could exemplify this point. There were also differing concepts of what the „German question" implied. A distinction between the German question as a strategic concern and the German Question in a philosophical sense as a greater concern was outlined during the conference. Containing many aspects, like democratisation, rearmament or the status of Berlin, reunification was certainly the most important and most discussed during the conference. Thereby the speakers tried to overcome existing stereotypes, mainly about the French attitude towards Germany that often seemed to be hidden by a divergent official policy.

The role of politically „minor states" – as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Austria were all referred to on multiple occasions – as relevant actors in the context of the German question was one of them. Among the most contentious issues certainly was that the point of view of the so called „superpower" has been too much neglected in the conference and that the influence of the USSR on the decision-making of its satellite states has been underestimated in many contributions. This reproval has been vividly discussed with the speakers who rather warned against overestimating Soviet influence. Still, in her conclusion of the conference, MARIE-PIERRE REY (Paris) underlined that the German question has been studied in this conference in its European and global context. She also highlighted the new interpretations about personalities, leaders and personal perceptions that the conference encouraged as one of its dominant topics, especially in a longue durée perspective. However she pointed out that cultural aspects of the German Question had not been mentioned in the conference for lack of convincing propositions and appealed to the participants to encourage such research topics.

Conference Overview:

Welcome addresses

Frédéric Bozo, Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle, Paris 3

Stefan Martens, Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris

1 France, the „Long" Cold War, and the German Question

Chair: Stefan Martens, Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris

Lily Gardner Feldman, American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, Johns Hopkins University: „The Possibilities and Limits of Reconciliation with Germany during the Cold War"

Thomas Angerer, Universität Wien: „Banned From but Bound With: The Austrian Problem and the German Question in French perspective"

Matthieu Osmont, SciencesPo: „The French Ambassadors in Bonn and the German Question, 1955-1990"

Pierre-Frédéric Weber, University of Szczecin: „France, Poland, and Germany's Eastern bor-

der (1945-1990)“

Ulrich Pfeil, Université de Lorraine: „France-GDR relations and the German Question, 1949-1989“

Comment: Anne Deighton, University of Oxford / Hélène Miard-Delacroix, Université Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV

2 The Early Cold War and the German Question

Chair: Joachim Scholtyseck, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

Rainer Hudemann, Université Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV/Universität des Saarlandes: „France and the German Question 1945-1950. Reflections on the evolution of research and interpretations since the after-war years“

Françoise Berger, Sciences Po Grenoble: „Economic and industrial issues in France's approach to the German question in the post-war period“

Michael Creswell, Florida State University: „France, German Rearmament, and the German Question 1950-1955“

Geoffrey Roberts, University College Cork: „France, the German Question and European Collective Security: The View from Moscow, 1953-1957“

Comment: Eric Bussière, Université Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV / Jean-Christophe Romer, Université de Strasbourg

3 A de Gaulle Factor ?

Chair: Maurice Vaïsse, SciencesPo

Garret Martin, George Washington University: „An arbiter between the superpowers: General de Gaulle and the German question, 1958-1969“

Benedikt Schoenborn, University of Tampere: „The German Question in French and German Eastern policies of the 1960s“

Philip Bajon, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem: „'Head-on Clash of Reconciled Hereditary Enemies'? The German Question in the European Crisis of 1965-66“

Comment: N. Piers Ludlow, London School of Economics

4 Détente and Ostpolitik: The German Question revisited?

Chair: Robert Frank, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Andreas Wilkens, Université de Lorraine: „France, Ostpolitik, and the German Question, 1969-1974“

Nicolas Badalassi, Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle, Paris 3: „France, the CSCE and the German Question 1969-1975“

Georges-Henri Soutou, Université Paris-Sorbonne: „Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and the German Problem“

Guido Thiemeyer, Université de Cergy-Pontoise: „Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Helmut Schmidt and the German question 1969-1979.“

Comment: Marie-Pierre Rey, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne / Matthias Waechter, Institut européen Nice

5 The Cold War Endgame

Chair: Frédéric Bozo, Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle, Paris 3

Bernd Rother, Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt Stiftung: „Willy Brandt, François Mitterrand, the German Question and German Unification, 1981-1990“

Christian Wenkel, Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris: „Recognizing the GDR without recognizing German division. The example of François Mitterrand's trip to the GDR in 1989“

Ilaria Poggiolini, University of Pavia: „Britain, France, and German Unification“

Jeffrey Engel, Southern Methodist University: „Bush, Germany, and the Power of Time“

Mary Sarotte, University of Southern California: „Conflicting French and American Visions for the Post-Cold War World“

Comment: Georges Saunier, Institut François Mitterrand / Andreas Rödder, Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

Conclusions

Marie-Pierre Rey, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

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