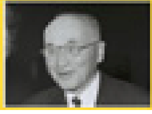


Hans-Dietrich Genscher: West Germany's "slippery man"

Hans-Dietrich Genscher – the Western world's longest serving Foreign Minister – has been a protagonist of European détente and a staunch advocate of human rights. A fresh look at the historical records of his biography in the period 1969 to 1975 challenges the traditional interpretation of the European history of human rights.

By Sara Lamberti Moneta

The focus of this article is Genscher's political life between 1969 and 1975, in particular in 1974-75 when he as West Germany's Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister played a major role in fostering an international human rights regime at the Helsinki Conference (1973-75). The present analysis aims to examine the interrelation between Genscher's personal experiences and his political choices. It does so in the light of a broader exploration of biographical studies with a view to problematising which type of narrative – chronological or thematic – is most suitable to understand Genscher's policy on human rights. Moreover, the analysis of Genscher's policy on human rights is relevant in the context of historiographical debates about the way in which European contemporary history is narrated. The contribution of this article is that it shows that behind the European Community's (EC) common policy on human rights lay different understandings and motivations by its protagonists that can be investigated through new historical biographical research.

Genscher, Cold War *détente* and human rights advocacy

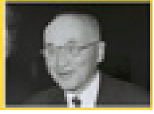
The 1970's marked a qualitative shift in the Cold War in Europe, called *détente*: human rights were put on the European political agenda, the dialogue with the Eastern bloc bore fruit both at bilateral and multilateral level, the EC developed somewhat more of a collective political identity, and began to be more independent from the US.

As stated in the Report of the NATO Council "The Future Tasks of the Alliance", also known as the Harmel Report, Germany lay at the core of European *détente*: "The *present division of Europe is one of the main obstacles on the road to this goal. It manifests itself most clearly in the division of Germany. The two problems are indissolubly connected*".[1] Genscher grappled with both these political problems. He belonged to the generation of German politicians who shaped the Cold War *détente,* and ultimately contributed to overcome Germany's partition. His early life was spent under Communist rule in the Eastern part of Germany, yet he lived to see the reunification in his home country. The change that he witnessed and partly designed was as vast as hard to foresee: the German partition crumbled down and just dissolved in less than a year. Understandably, for most of his life, Genscher did not know that the story would have a happy ending close to what he had dreamed of, nor could his fellow Germans. As the historian Sarotte claims, "It was nearly inevitable after a certain point that the old Soviet regime would collapse. But there was nothing at all inevitable about what would follow" (Sarotte, 2009: 202).

Genscher's political career started soon after the Second World War, in 1952, when he fled to West Germany and subsequently joined the Federal Democratic Party (FDP). It is during the early years of Genscher's life that lies the key to understanding a politician who the ambassador of the United States, Richard Burt, in the early 1980s, called a "slippery man": his tactical thinking, his "voluble" and "cloudy" discourse, and his political correctness made him very hard to pin down (Joffe, 1998). For these reasons he provides an excellent vantage point from which to address some of the conceptual and methodological conundrums linked to political biographical research. This will be discussed through an analysis of Genscher's early life in what came to be the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and of his subsequent policy towards human rights.

The second part of the article analyses Genscher's role in what has been regarded as the acme of *détente*, namely the Helsinki Conference (1973-75) and the creation of an international human rights regime. This analysis will serve two purposes: on the one hand, it will spur further considerations on the methodology involved in writing and using political biographies, and on the other, it will provide an alternative vantage point on the history of human rights in contemporary

[1] Harmel Report, NATO, http://www.nato.int/archives/harmel/harmel01.htm, November 25th 2009.



Europe. Human rights are nowadays mostly regarded as part and parcel of a linear European integration narrative towards a more democratic Europe. However, if one gets rid of such teleological interpretative lenses - also called Whig interpretations of history (Butterfield, 1931; Gilbert, 2008) - and thus tries to get away from the idea that European integration develops down a path of steady progress, Genscher's concept of human rights emerges as not necessarily entrenched in the idea of a progressive European integration process. It rather stemmed from the liberal underpinnings of his political thinking, which was not focused on the EC, but on a more universalistic idea of human rights.

This article thus argues against the scholarly literature that so far has presented EC member states' advocacy of the principle of protection of human rights as conclusive evidence of the emergence and development of European core-values and finally of a European identity (Thomas, 2001; Romano, 2009). The literature has basically disregarded the analysis of the EC members' national policies, largely relied on EC sources, and jumped to the conclusions that the coordination of the EC countries was the evidence of a common understanding of human rights. I argue that the study of the individual actors promoting national policies on human rights is indeed crucial, as it leads to a revision of the existing European integration narrative.

Trying to "nail jelly to the wall"[2]

Great men – if the expression may still be used about political leaders – do not stand outside history as "*Jack-in-the-boxes who emerge miraculously from the unknown to interrupt the real continuity of history*" (Childe, 1947:48). Biographies of political key figures are instead crucial to grasp their ideas, the élan driving their actions and the environment which inspired them. Genscher was one of the protagonists of Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Genscher was born in East Germany in 1927, but in 1952 left for West Germany and became a member of the FDP. During Brandt's government (1969-1974), Genscher was Minister of the Interior and firmly engaged in East-West *détente*. He lived to see his highest ambition - the reunification of the two Germanies - come true.

As mentioned above, Richard Burt called Genscher a "slippery man". This tag was telling of Genscher's political behavior: his powerful and skilful rhetoric made it impossible to tell what he really wanted, or which direction he was taking:

"Genscher approached his goals so obliquely that his complicated moves occasionally obscured the purpose animating them, and that may well have been his design. There was the danger that, in less subtle hands, the Genscher style might have evolved into maneuvering between two sides, had the collapse of the Soviet Union not removed that opportunity at least for a time." (Kissinger, 1999: 615)

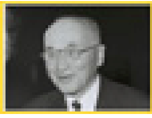
Writing Genscher's biography seems thus to be quite a challenge for historians. Most works devoted to his life develop according to a traditional chronological pattern. Collected works on Genscher (Lucas, 2002) also tend to present a chronological narrative or focus on a single aspect of his political life. Biographical studies provide an essential understanding on Genscher's early life, which is almost completely disregarded in his autobiography. Still, despite the wealth of information the links criss-crossing Genscher's life seems to fade away: chronological analyses provide for a clean and linear narrative, and yet I believe that integrating the latter with a thematic narrative may offer an alternative understanding of "slippery" personalities.

Some open questions

Two major issues come to the fore when dealing with Genscher as a subject of historical, biographical analysis. First, Genscher's biography remains partially unexplored territory and an interpretative challenge for the historian. His own autobiography is, predictably, a long chronicle which attests to Genscher's rather crude nature as a politician, and it is fairly scarce in personal insights: Genscher devotes for instance only nine pages to the years preceding his election at the German *Bundestag* (first as Minister of the Interior) and flinches from giving details of this personal life. He presents himself as a politician, and his life as a successful accomplishment of a political plan, i.e. German reunification. Through this account, he thus aims to provide a theme tune for his own life - that is, his commitment to the plan of "rebuilding a house divided" - but leaves the historian with no more than a detailed, progressive and rather superficial account of his political career.

Genscher was somewhat of a nightmare for the media of his time. He was a "press manipulator" (Kissler and Schulze, 1990:187), a master of oratory, as well as of "verbal discipline" (Lucas, 2002:378). In line with Adenauer and Brandt, he fully realised the major role of show-politics: "there was no Minister of Foreign Affairs that was so dependent on publicity. Genscher's relationship to the media and to Bonn's journalists is on the one hand of amusement, on the other of resentment" (Filmer and Schwan, 1993:307). It should thus come as no surprise that his contemporaries puzzled over his real political objectives. In former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's words:

[2] Lucas, 2002: 387.



"Genscher's turned out to be the rare phenomenon of a man who, coming to diplomacy late in life, shows an extraordinary talent for it. He understood that Germany's exposed position permitted no complicated maneuvers yet." (Kissinger, 1982:1194)

Primary historical sources may come to some help, yet Genscher's speeches and writings do not actually provide any major breakthrough as his prolix style may even prove cryptic to some readers. Genscher's biography, moreover, touches upon conceptual and methodological issues involved in biographical research. This debate on biography is part of a wider debate which has driven a wedge between historians of the recent past, and it has put into question the very narrative of history. Causality and chronology, the very foundation of historical narrative, are abandoned as they impose on the past a logic and a coherence which do not reflect the indeterminate nature of the past and the fragmented nature of the subject under scrutiny and of his/her polyphonic identity. Therefore historians "Instead of 'recreating' the past, [historians] are told to 'create' it; instead of 'reconstructing' history, to 'construct' or 'de-construct' it" (Himmelfarb, 2004:24). In the case of biography, this means opening the gates to multiple stories for a single individual. What are the implications of this line of reasoning for Genscher's biography? Does the seemingly elusive nature of the subject of analysis reinforce the argument for multiple identities of historical actors, which are to be investigated thematically and not necessarily chronologically? Or, slipperiness notwithstanding, is a chronological narrative similar to the *Bildungsroman*? It is true that:

" no historian does, and no sensible historian claims to, communicate the whole truth about a man, since there are many things about any man living or dead which no human being, not even the man himself, knows" (Hexter, 1973:53)

That said, which methodology communicates "more truth"? I will explore fragments of his life that seem relevant to grapple with these questions and argues that in order to understand Genscher as man *and* as politician, a chronological *and* thematic approach seem to be still valid.

Pater familias at the age of ten

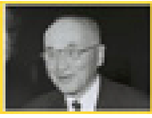
In this section I have selected some episodes in Genscher's childhood and youth which may shed new light on the background of his following decisions as politician. In 1937, Genscher's father died. Hans-Dietrich was then a boy of ten, and from that moment on he became the man in the household with a certain responsibility for his mother. When father Kurtz died, Genscher's mother Hilde was thirty-five and had no one else to rely on: the son would now have to look after her, protect her and commit himself to the preservation of harmony in the family. A close relationship developed. Hans-Dietrich seemed to be aware of his mother's weakness and of his new role as *pater familias*: Hilde was an easy prey of anxiety, and the young boy made great efforts to avoid causing further suffering: he would eschew fighting and bullying typical of his age and would never, according to his autobiography, be confrontational at school and at home (Genscher, 2000).

In February 1943, the young boys born in 1926 and 1927 were deployed in the anti-craft artillery gun emplacement and in big cities such as Halle and later on Leipzig. Genscher, who was born in 1927, had to join in. At the end of the war he was asked whether he wanted to stay in the American sector or leave for the Soviet one. He chose for the latter as his mother was there. In the light of this close mother-son relationship, Genscher deeply resented the separation from his mother when he fled GDR soon after obtaining his degree (Genscher, 2000:104). The "emotional core" of "Genscher the politician" seems to be the painful partition from Halle and mother Hilde.

It is possible to assume that Genscher transferred the responsibility towards Hilde into a responsibility for alleviating the plight of his fellow Germans in the East not just because of his political commitment to a society based on true democracy and freedom, but also because of a deeply entrenched sense of responsibility developed in his early life when he took up the role of *pater familias*. Other early experiences shaped the "Genscher politician". For instance, when he was responsible as Foreign Minister for the Romanian-German negotiations on the departure of the Germans from Romania (*Ausreiseproblematik*), he would remember what he had learnt in his young age at his mother's house. After his father's death, a young Romanian lady entered the house to keep his mother company. It was through her that Genscher's learnt about the German minorities in Siebenburgen and in the Banat in Romania. Many years later, that vivid memory would give him a deeper understanding of the sensitive issues at stake in the Romanian-German negotiations.

A choice for Freedom and Democracy

Soon after the end of the Second World War, Genscher felt the urgency to live in a free and democratic country, but it was not until 1952 that he moved to the West. On 30 January 1946, when still in East Germany, he joined the German Liberal-Democratic Party (LDPD). He made up his mind to join at a meeting of the LDPD where Harald W. Esche, the editor in chief of Halle's liberal newspaper, *Liberaldemokratische Zeitung*, claimed



that “liberalism is the most comprehensive alternative to all forms of oppression”. Those words caught Genscher’s attention, not least as one of his uncles had been abducted and vanished in the Russian area of liberated German and he now looked for a democratic alternative to the communist rule. Still, as soon as he realised that LDPD “adapted too easily to the prevailing state of affairs” (Genscher, 1997: 21, 22) he stopped any political activity already by the end of 1946. It therefore did not take him long to realise that freedom and democracy could not be achieved in the GDR. When the first elections in 1950 turned out to be a farce, he invalidated his vote. He began to realise that he had no option but to leave the country. On 9.30 a.m. on 20 August 1952, Genscher and two fellow trainee lawyers met at Halle railway station. They had nothing but one suitcase, as if they were leaving for a short holiday. It had been a very painful and hard decision to take as he was to leave his main points of reference: his home town and his mother.

History and psychobiography

The examples above put forth a more general question: how can historians carry out biographical studies now, in the 21st Century, at a time when history turns to transdisciplinarity for fresh perspectives, traditional boundaries fade away and the study of nation-state is shelved almost for good? What alternative theories and methodology may be used to brush up biographical studies? In this context, I believe that the discipline of psychobiography may give historians food for thought, as it urges them to rethink how biographies can be analysed and narrated. It has to be pointed out that psychobiography is not a new discipline: it was launched by Freud’s *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* in 1910, and major debates on theory and methodology in the 1980s (Runyan, 1982, 1988) and in the 1990s (Elms, 1994) breathed new life into this branch of studies. In particular, the role of psychoanalysis was critically assessed, and the most frequent criticism of psychobiography concerned its:

> “heavy dependence on psychoanalytic concepts and its tendency to unraveling through them a complex personality and fall prey to simplification” (Elms, 1994:8) ... As psychobiographers look for pattern in the weave, for the keys to a padlocked personality, for the clues that will solve a psychological mystery, they seek to reduce complexity to simplicity.” (Elms, 1994:11)

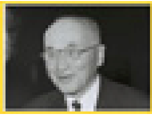
In addition, a Freudian interpretation – the most pervasive feature of psychohistory – falls inevitably short of evidence: tracing back childhood experiences often prove simply impossible. Psychoanalytic theory has been *the* theory for psychobiography, but has been indeed a magnet for criticism. It has been seen as based on insufficient evidence as materials on the subject’ childhood may be scarce and therefore reconstruction might be based only on flimsy evidence. As paramount importance is given to psychological factors, it has been criticised for distortion, and an oversimplification of history as social and historical factors are fairly neglected (Runyan, 1982:192-222). However, psychoanalytic theory has been gradually regarded rather as a toolkit whereby historians can construct interpretations, and non psychoanalytic contributions (from personality psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology) have become equally valid tools in psychobiography. In a nutshell psychobiography is not necessarily coterminous to psychoanalytic method, but is rather and more generally “the use of systematic psychology as a significant advance over the commonsense psychology traditionally used in biography” (Runyan, 1982:192).

The main thrust of the argument is that mapping individual lives may require different, additional tools than mapping the past, to use the historian John Lewis Gaddis’ words (Gaddis, 2002), and that today’s historians are left free to pick up the theory of their choice from the bountiful realm of psychobiography. Focusing on theory and methodology in psychobiography brings unremittingly back in the question on what sources have to be used, as traditional primary sources may not be insufficient: as already mentioned, in the case of psychobiography based on psychoanalytical theory, tracing down substantial data on individuals’ childhood may prove arduous, and may lead to an arbitrary reconstruction of the past. As for non-psychoanalytical biographies, alternative sources – of different kind, according to the chosen psychological theory – and additional “sympathy, intelligence and imagination” (Paret, 1988: 121-125) are key to penetrate individuals’ personality.

Genscher’s policy on human rights

At the time of European *détente*, Genscher first held the office of minister of the Interior during the chancellorship of Willy Brandt’s (1969-74), and subsequently the offices of Vice-Chancellor as well as Foreign Minister when Helmut Schmidt became chancellor in 1974. Cold War détente between East and Western Europe reached its zenith at the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) from 1973 to 1975, and Genscher was called to take the lead of the Conference at its final and most contentious stage.[3] An analysis of Genscher’s

[3] Part of the literature regards Genscher as a mere tactician. For a different view, see Filmer, W. And Schwan, H. (1993) pp 304-305. The authors argue that Genscher had indeed a political strategy.



political design and of his human rights policy serves three purposes. Firstly, it sheds light on the importance of the human agency in the negotiations. Secondly, it offers a fascinating insight into Genscher's biography. Finally, it spurs a re-assessment of traditional narrative of European integration that has not lent much relevance to national policies and individual actors but rather depicted the Helsinki Conference as a collective achievement of the Nine.

The long way to Helsinki: a far-away diplomatic parade

The Helsinki Conference had a two decades-long gestation period. A pan-European conference was first proposed by the Soviet Union in 1954, but was subsequently rejected. It was then re-tabled in 1955 and in 1957: the latter was the so-called Rapacki Plan, from the name of the Polish foreign Minister Adam Rapacki that advanced the idea of a nuclear weapon-free zone in central Europe. Further proposals followed in the 1960s. In 1964, the so-called Gomulka Plan was launched, and in 1966 the Warsaw Pact states issued the Bucharest Declaration, a call for a security conference with the aim of overcoming the antagonism between military blocs in Europe. However, it was only after the agreement on the status of Berlin in September 1971, the ratification of the Moscow treaty, the Warsaw treaty in May 1972 as well as the bilateral *détente* between the superpowers, that the conditions for the opening of the conference were met. From November 1972, representatives from the original 35 nations met over a period of nearly three years to work out the arrangements and the framework for the conference.

The conference was a unique event in post-war Europe in many respects. Firstly, it was rather long. The foreign ministers of the participating states officially opened the conference on 3 July 1973 and gathered for four days in Helsinki. However, the conference officially began in September 1973 in Geneva and came to a close on the 1 August 1975 when the Final Act was signed. Secondly, the conference was impossibly complex in its functioning. During the second stage, which took place from 18 September 1973 to 21 July 1975 in Geneva, diplomats worked in 16 working organs (three main committees, eleven sub-committees and one special working group)? Thirdly, the negotiations were not in the spotlight. Once the foreign ministers gave their speeches in Helsinki in July 1973, the lights faded, and during the further working stage, the delegations worked in Geneva in a more informal setting: the essential negotiations took place within the subcommittees and often informal gatherings such as coffee breaks and recesses proved crucial to make the negotiation proceed (Maresca, 1985:127, Fischer, 2009: 330-1). No official minutes were taken of these meetings.

The Baskets

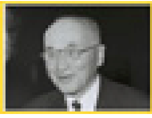
Three groups of topics were tabled and discussed, called baskets: security (Basket I); economic, scientific, technological, and environmental cooperation (Basket II); human and civil rights, and cultural and information exchange (Basket III). Helsinki's most far-reaching effect was the formal recognition of the principle of protection of human rights: Principle VII in Basket I (Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought conscience, religion or belief) and Basket III (cooperation in humanitarian and other fields) set forth a new framework in international relations in Europe and marked a new stage of development in the post-war international community.

It is thus worthwhile to investigate the motives which led national politicians to advocate human rights and to trace the complex array of different political and human factors which lay behind the Western common stance. Genscher's thinking in this matter is a good example.

Genscher and the principle of human rights

The real battle between West and East was fought in the third committee in order to get Soviet acceptance of concrete measures within the field of human contacts and information. In a nutshell, the Soviets wanted to maintain these as strictly domestic affairs. Following Soviet intransigence, the negotiations were stuck until April 1974. Finally, on 2 July, by exploiting the willingness to finish the conference, the texts on human contacts and information were formally presented to Committee III and put eventually on record.

Genscher became Foreign Minster on 17 May 1974 when the Helsinki conference was already ongoing, and made his debut on the Helsinki stage only in 1975 when the Final Act was signed. As it has been pointed out, diplomats were hitherto involved in the negotiations. At Helsinki he would pursue a "realistic *Ostpolitik*" (Genscher, 1976b:42, 77) and a "foreign policy of responsibility", *Verantwortungspolitik*. A foreign policy of responsibility opposed to the traditional *Machtpolitik* was a recurrent theme in Genscher's politics and stood for a blend of restraint, humanitarianism and multilateral cooperation. The concept caught the essence of West Germany's foreign policy at the time. According to Genscher's analysis at the time, every move had to be carefully considered: the country could not overstretch towards the East and acquiesce to any sort of demands of its Eastern counterparts, nor could it scare Western allies with the prospect of a Soviet-friendly West Germany, wedged in the heart of the continent. A realistic



politics of responsibility had to set itself practical goals: it had to achieve what was possible. Change in Europe could proceed only gradually: improving life conditions was thus a perfectly realistic goal, high on Genscher's political agenda.

A closer analysis of Genscher's biography may provide a deeper understanding of his political stance. Firstly, he had been interested in human rights well before engaging in politics: after his degree in law Genscher started a PhD on "crimes against humanity". As from November 1946 he joined a group of trainee lawyers who used to meet in the library of the district court. Secondly, he had experienced the third Reich and growing up during the early days of the Second World War. In what had become the GDR, he experienced how law could be used to scare people into submission and destroy freedom. In the GDR that Genscher had seen, German people were denied human rights, they were denied the right to reunite with their families, and denied the right to choose where to live. In 1952, he was also denied the right to leave the country as a free man, and so he decided to flee and leave his mother behind. Genscher was familiar with the importance of human rights not only for having studied the subject, but also for having his own human rights trampled upon. In that sense, he shared the suffering of many German families. During the last part of the Conference, he was aware that he had to play his cards right to steer *détente* to West Germany's benefit:

"We have to be clear: détente policy is a complex, difficult policy as the Federal Democratic Party (FDP) understands it, it is a policy of down-to-earth realism; it doesn't gloss over, but faces the hard reality of the East-West Germany differences, it is geared to what is possible, but does not lose sight of what is wishful".[4]

Those benefits would come only if the focus was on the people of the two Germanies and if the ultimate goal was to alleviate their condition:

"the German people (of both Germanies) do not want to understand the word détente in an abstract way, but for them détente has a value only if it consists of more human contacts; in the overcoming of the painful consequences of the severed Europe and also of their severed countries"[5]

Therefore, to Genscher, the Helsinki Conference entered perfectly into the picture. While diplomats did the main part of the negotiations, the heads of delegations had a central role at the final stage. Genscher would stress the importance of Basket III, as he explicitly stated to his British colleague, James Callaghan. Basket III touched straight upon Genscher's "emotional core": in front of the Bundestag, Genscher stated that:

"Basket III...is about issues that regard directly the life and destiny of innumerable people. It is about, whether people can visit their families, if families, which are severe, reunite, if people, who love each other, can get married, if the people can get to know more about each other across Europe, if they could better understand each other ... the value of the conference will be assessed accounting to the practical effects of these provisions".[6]

In the end, Baskets I and III enshrined the principles for a new Europe, a continent where human security was on the same level of military security, and where individuals were not mere objects of state power but were empowered with a wide range of rights.

The European Community at Helsinki

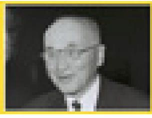
The principle of human rights was introduced by the EC states through the agenda proposal presented on January 15, 1973. It was included in the extended list of principles guiding relations between states, considered to be the basis of European security. According to the established literature, credit must be paid to the cohesive action of the EC member states. As the United States administration lay fairly dormant during the main part of the Conference, the EC member states eventually succeeded in "speaking with one voice", and firmly endorsed the principle of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Daniel, 2001:39-54). According to that standard account, the EC members' advocacy of human rights appears as conclusive evidence of the emergence and development of European core values, and perhaps even of a European identity. Still it might be questioned whether a coordinated EC foreign policy really entail a common EC understanding of human rights. Or had human rights policies rather different purposes and implications for each countries? In the case of human rights at the Helsinki Conference the story goes that the EC member states acted in harmony, and this would provide evidence for the emergence of an EC core of shared values.[7] This ar-

[4] Genscher H.D. (1976)"Die zentralen Aufgaben der deutschen Aussenpolitik", in *Deutsche Aussenpolitik (I)*, Stuttgart 1977, p. 16 (author's translation, S.L.M.).

[5] Helmut Schmidt Archives (HSA), file n. 6656, Bulletin 26 July 1975, nr. 94, p. 889, "Die KSZE: eine Chance für Europa" Interview of the Minister of Foreign Affair for the „Frankfurter Gespräch" of the "Hessischen Rundfunk", 26.07.1975.

[6] HSA, file n. 6656, Bulletin 26 July 1975, nr. 94, p.889, , Statement of the government on the CSCE, delivered by the Minister of foreign affairs in front of the Bundestag, 183 session on 25.7.1975.

[7] For a latest contribution in this respect see Romano, *From détente in Europe to European détente: how the West shaped the Hel-*



gument, however, is not fully convincing: the story of EC values is mostly studied through the lenses of the European Political Cooperation (EPC), a mechanism created to coordinate foreign policy of the EC countries. A story of human rights narrated from this perspective suffers from an innate bias and leads to write the story of the successful battle for human rights of the EC states, therefore disregarding the national differences that yet did matter, let alone biographical details. European mythology looms large: tracing the origins and providing the evidence of EC core values would upgrade the EC from an economic entity to a community of values. This can however be questioned by looking at the way in which Genscher, as foreign minister of one of the largest EC member states, looked at the situation.

Genscher and a European community of values

European integration lay at the core of West Germany's foreign policy as it provided more room for maneuver and was thus instrumental in making West Germany more influential on the international scene. Through the EC, it was believed that West Germany could achieve "milieu goals". Due to international cooperation and the promotion of values such as human rights, West Germany could re-shape in the long-term the international environment where it acted in concert with the EC countries (Wolfers, 1962: 73-76). However, when Genscher mentioned European values, he did not necessarily mean values within the EC, but he rather expressed his ideas from a pan-European perspective. Accordingly, European countries across the Iron Curtain had universal common values. The EC was not just an addition of single state's power, but it was a "community of values", as Genscher called it, representative for a common culture of the continent.[8] From his perspective Europe was a broader common project of peace and freedom.

In a nutshell, *Deutschland* and *Europa-politik* came together: by carrying out a policy open to the East and by presenting the EC as just a bridge towards a more universal Europe of democracy and freedom, Genscher left the door open to the good-willing Eastern states without risking to jeopardise West German relations with the East: not surprisingly, during the last stage of the negotiations Genscher was cautious and did not stress the issue of human rights before the end of Helsinki. Human rights represented a dream of a common European home and of a peace order to which the European Political Community and EC were instrumental. In his speeches, Genscher used to stress the European dimension for his political idea of United States of Europe (Genscher, 1976b). From this perspective he was an engaged pan-European, as he advocated that a common core of values was potentially there and was common heritage of all Europeans. He hoped that the EPC would lead to the creation of a European foreign policy, and EC to the development of economic interregional cooperation so to finally carry out the political project of a common European home where Germany could be one again.

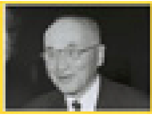
Conclusion

Genscher has been labelled a "slippery man". Being "slippery" was at the time the best way to pursue German national interests. On the international stage, West Germany was sandwiched between two mightier players, USA and USSR. It was well entrenched in the West and yet needed to get closer to the East. Genscher rose to the challenge of conducting a more assertive foreign policy on the international stage by prompting others to do for his country what he could not openly do himself. Biographical details add up to a deeper understanding of Genscher's political stance. Genscher was a staunch supporter of human rights: doubtless this was in line with West Germany's New *Ostpolitik* and with the call for European *détente*. Still, political considerations notwithstanding, his personal background seems to have been crucial. Human rights were at the time advocated by the West, but did not resonate with equal force for any of their promoters. The same expression was used, but had different connotations. And those different connotations boiled down not only to different state preferences but also to different life-stories of the protagonists. As a closer analysis of Genscher's biography shows, the battle for human rights for the West Germany's foreign minister had a complex meaning and was not only the result of crude political planning. Genscher's early experiences shed light on his later political stance and seem connected by a strong thematic link.

In this article I have made two major points. Firstly, Genscher's biography makes a case for thematic, psychobiographical narrative; however, further studies have still to be made. The analysis of Genscher's advocacy of human rights as West Germany's foreign minister encourages to adopt an alternative narrative in order to link key-episodes from his youth to his campaign for human rights. Secondly, by shedding light on Genscher's complex biography, I urge for a broader reassessment of the EC narrative of human rights in the 1970. The idea of a common EC core of values, among which the principle of protection of human rights was

sinki CSCE, Euroclio. Etudes Et Documents /Studies and Documents, Peter Lang Pub Inc., 2009.

[8] Genscher, H.D. (1985) "Deutsche Aussenpolitik", speech 24.5. 1979, in: *Selection of speeches and articles 1974-1985*, Bonn 1985, p. 212.



high on the list, does not stand the test of a closer analysis of the individual EC member states' policy. As for West Germany, the foreign policy carried out by Minister Genscher stemmed from a pan-European idea rather than from some EC common cause. A sharper focus on Genscher's policy on human rights thus helps to adopt an alternative vantage point on European contemporary history and urges to assess anew the dominant EC narrative. Human rights at Helsinki were doubtless endorsed – more or less fiercely – by EC countries. Still, motivations for human rights advocacy varied, as the concept itself resonated for European leaders with different historical and personal significance. So far the story of contemporary Europe has been often synonymous with the story of European integration, *i.e.* of EC. A reflection on Genscher's approach to the EC and Europe encourages to reassess this narrative and offers an alternative perspective on *détente* in Europe where the EC is but a piece of a more complex picture.

Sara Lamberti Moneta is a Ph.D.-candidate at the School of International Studies, University of Trento, Italy.

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