

EX ORIENTE LUX

THE WORK OF THE KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Bernhard Vogel

Some dates will be forever engraved in my memory – not just 9 November 1989, as is no doubt the case for most Germans – but also 10 November 1989. On 9 November 1989, after long and intensive preparations, Helmut Kohl began his first particularly difficult official visit to Poland as Germany's Chancellor and he invited me to accompany him as Chairman of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. During the evening meal with the new Prime Minister of Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first to be democratically elected since 1945, we received the incredible news of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The next day Helmut Kohl cut short his visit and rushed back to Berlin for this unique event. The opening of our new office in Warsaw, planned for 10 November, had to go ahead without both Kohl and Mazowiecki. For the first time ever, we would be able to work in a Warsaw Pact country with the blessing of its government – truly unbelievable.

In his article in this issue, Peter Molt describes how the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung started its international activities, which led to the founding of the Institute for International Solidarity in 1962. It is hard to believe that was almost fifty years ago! For decades, the Institute focused its work on Latin America, Africa and Asia. But then, over 25 years later, the impossible became reality. The Eastern Bloc collapsed and its countries started to open up, in the process providing an opening for our work.

This new focus dominated all our plans and activities after I was elected Chairman of the Stiftung in February 1989. In addition to the task of setting up educational institutions in the recently resurrected German states that lay within the



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borders of the disintegrated former GDR, the main focus of our activities was the creation of KAS offices in former communist spheres of influence. This was also one of the reasons why, in January 1992, Helmut Kohl and I initially believed I should devote myself exclusively to this new challenge rather than go to Thuringia. "What is Thuringia compared to the rest of the world?" asked Josef Thesing, then Head of the International Cooperation Department.

The Stiftung's board meetings were also dominated by this new challenge. Helmut Kohl himself was fully involved at the time. In the board meeting of June 1989 he had already suggested that contacts with Poland, Hungary and the USSR should take priority. He believed it was vital that Europe should not only be understood in terms of EU Europe or Central Europe. Europe incorporated other central and eastern countries, along with the nations of Northern Europe. When setting up KAS offices, he stressed

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the importance of ensuring they were staffed with the best-possible people and that local partners were carefully selected. If any financial difficulties arose, consideration would be given to closing existing offices elsewhere in the world. In December 1991, he recommended that the Stiftung give priority to working in Poland, Hungary and the ČSFR, particularly as these countries were hoping to join the European Union. He also suggested that we give help to Bulgaria, but not rush into Romania. The offices in the Baltic states should also be thinking about Northern Europe, especially as Sweden and Finland were also keen to join the European Union. For the countries within the former Yugoslavia, he suggested contacts be made through our office in Rome, while contact with Albania could be made through the Athens office. In the board meeting of July 1992 he asked us to put together a comprehensive "special programme for Europe".

The launching point for the expansion of our office network in Central and Eastern Europe was our existing office in Vienna. Today we have over 18 offices in these countries, of which 15 are full KAS offices and three are liaison offices.

What was our interest in all this? Then, as now, the mission of the Stiftung was: "To represent the idea of Christian Democracy in a contemporary way and to promote understanding between peoples, in the spirit of our founder."

Our branching out towards the East began

with some tentative efforts to respond to the process of change that was underway in Poland and Hungary, and also to the calls for more freedom in the GDR. We wanted to advance democratic values and the principles

of a democratic society, to support the necessary transformation processes and promote the recognition of human rights, Christian values and more liberal thinking. We were also keen to support those countries that were interested in joining NATO and the European Union in their efforts to achieve these aims. In the end the changes went much further, happened much faster and were much more sweeping than we ever imagined when we started out. We soon had three regional programmes underway: "New EU Member States", "Western Balkans" and "Russian Federation, Belarus, Ukraine, South Caucasus."

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Naturally, we encountered a wide range of different problems as we tried to implement our plans in the countries we had initially targeted. Some of them seemed insurmountable and took a great deal of time and effort to resolve. We felt it was particularly important for us to have a presence in Moscow and at first there were a great many obstacles to overcome. When I first visited our Resident Representative in Moscow in February 1991, his temporary office was in a tiny hotel room and he had to store all his documents under the bed. Following long, drawn-out negotiations, we were finally able to set up an office in the Institute of Europe at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Since 1993, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has had its own office in Moscow, and initially it also oversaw Ukraine and Belarus from there.

Poland was a much easier proposition, in part thanks to the contacts we had cultivated over many years with political allies and the Church: Professor Stomma, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Mieczysław Pszon, Władysław Bartoszewski, Janusz Reiter, Lech Wałęsa and of course, above all, the Archbishop of Krakow, Karol Kardinal Wojtyła. The Stiftung's first German-Polish conference had taken place in

Sankt Augustin back in February 1985. The early contacts that we made back then, for example with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, John Paul II Catholic University in Lublin and the Willy Brandt Centre in Wrocław, are contacts we still actively maintain today.

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We were keen to contribute to the process of reconciliation between Germany and Poland by helping remove the heavy burden of the past, seeking dialogue, building bridges and, above all, offering practical help in order to support Poland's efforts to achieve economic reform, democracy and pluralism. We sought to forge links with civil society organisations, and of course with churches and state institutions. The main focus of this dialogue was to be on the social market economy and the creation of new structures for communal constitutions, but we also sought to promote opportunities for academics and students to exchange ideas and share publications.

We paid particular attention to the Baltic states, which had now freed themselves from Soviet occupation. One of my first trips took me to Vilnius. The courageous Speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament, Vytautas Landsbergis, welcomed me with open arms. Meanwhile, the commander of the Soviet troops that were still stationed in the country received me politely, if rather frostily. Although the three Baltic states were all working painstakingly at maintaining their new-found independence, for financial reasons we were not in a position to maintain three independent offices in Vilnius, Tallinn and Riga. Our joint office for the region originally opened in Tallinn in 1993. Today it is in Riga, and we also have offices in Tallinn and Vilnius.

Hungary was one of our early priorities because of the special role it had played in the summer of 1989. In May 1989 it began dismantling the border fence to Austria, and on 19 August the "Pan-European Picnic" took place, with all of Europe looking on. On 11 September 1989, the Iron Curtain was opened to allow 11,000 refugees from the GDR to leave. What was once described as the "happiest barracks in the socialist camp" went on to take a leading role amongst Central and Eastern European countries in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the

Warsaw Pact. And of course there was the unforgettable József Antall, who unfortunately died at an all too early age. I stood together with Antall on the steps of the Hungarian parliament when I opened our office there in December 1990: in the very square where men and women had cried out for freedom and been mown down by machine guns in 1956. Prior to this, we had already established initial contacts with Fidesz, a group of dynamic young civil rights campaigners led by Viktor Orbán. The group only accepted members who were under 35 years of age.

Of course we also seized the initiative very early on in Prague. Our office there opened its doors on 1 June 1991. I shall never forget the work achieved by Václav Havel or the thousands of people who fled into the (West) German embassy in the city. In Václav Klaus we found a partner who was always ready to talk, but who could also be very difficult, especially when it came to Europe and the social market economy. Every encounter with him eventually cost the utmost exertions.

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It has been a particular challenge for us to gain a foothold in the Ukraine and Belarus, though we have had an office in Kiev since 1994. In the early years, the Stiftung forged links with political parties that were later to play a decisive role in the Orange Revolution of 2004. I was impressed when I met Yulia Tymoshenko during one of my visits. She urgently appealed for my help, especially in establishing contact with Angela Merkel. The fact that the victors in the Orange Revolution were not able to work together in the long run has hampered our work there ever since. We have so far been unable to establish an office in Minsk. Belarus does not have a democratic government and we have not been able to get permission to work within its borders. Over the years we have – with much dismay – monitored events in the country from our office in Warsaw and, since 2007, from Vilnius.

Fig. 1



In 1990 KAS Chairman Bernhard Vogel met Václav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia, in Prague. | Source: ACDP.

The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia was to present us with a whole new set of challenges. The international community was finally able to bring the terrible Balkans War to an end in 1996 with the painstakingly negotiated Dayton Peace Agreement. However, this did not mean that peace was immediately established between the various nationalities. The situation on the ground immediately after the end of the war was particularly sobering. Within the borders of what had formerly been Yugoslavia, there were huge numbers of refugees, many of whom had been brutally driven from their homes and were now living in emergency accommodations. Window glass had become a scarce commodity, so that people had to make do with tarpaulins provided by the United Nations' refugee organisations. Yet more refugees had fled to other countries, including Germany, often without a passport, carrying only a vaccination card. Many still had fond memories of Germany from spending time there as "guest workers".

The war brought to an abrupt end any peaceful coexistence between the various ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia. This multi-ethnic nation was torn apart by the war. The newly-created states of Slovenia, Croatia and rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) were all too eager to ensure that they had no other minorities within their borders. The newly-created state of Bosnia and Herzegovina was, however, a much more complicated multi-ethnic state, full of

simmering resentments between the various ethnic groups as a result of the war. The war had left deep wounds in the souls of the people: neighbours who had previously lived peacefully together had ended up fighting one another.

As a foundation based on a Christian vision of humanity, it was natural for us to want to be involved and to actively support the political rebuilding of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Stiftung quickly recognised that there was a need for intensive project work on the ground. The office we opened in Sarajevo in 1997 sent regular reports on the day-to-day life of that long-suffering city. Sarajevo had been hit particularly badly by the war. Gas, water and electricity supplies had only been restored in a makeshift way and only functioned in eight-hour cycles. Outside the towns and cities there were often minefields on both sides of the roads, bridges over rivers and whole sections of roads had been destroyed. Some regions were closed to foreigners, with travel only possible in IFOR armoured cars.

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Through its project work in the former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Stiftung has been able to build bridges between the peoples of the Balkans and Germany. It particularly made its mark in Bosnia and Herzegovina by helping to create effective local self-administration. In this way, local administration became real peace work, with people of differing nationalities being given an instrument that allowed them to live together as equals before the law and to work together to shape policies that would affect their lives. This was especially true in multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina, but unfortunately, radicals and fanatics constantly conspired to hamper progress.

While our project work in Bosnia and Herzegovina was already underway, the Slobodan Milošević regime was still in power in Belgrade (rump Yugoslavia), making project work in Serbia impossible at that time. When Montenegro also split away from Milošević, Serbia became politically isolated. The KAS established contact with the Serbian opposition and continued to liaise with them despite threats of reprisals from the Serbian government.

Our project work in Serbia was focused initially on helping to create a powerful opposition. A key role was played by Boris Tadić, later the pro-Europe President of Serbia. His NGO focused on educating young people who could later help to create a democratic Serbia. Once Slobodan Milošević had been arrested and later handed over to the International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague it became possible to expand still further our project work in Serbia. A KAS office was quickly opened in Belgrade, with a liaison office in Podgorica (formerly Titograd). It became clear from our work in the region that all the newly-created states of the former Yugoslavia had their own specific problems that had to be addressed. As a result, the Stiftung decided to open additional offices, first in Zagreb and later in Skopje.

If we look back at more than twenty years of work in Central and Eastern Europe, it is clear that not all the seeds we planted bore fruit. Internal political developments have constantly created new challenges for us, but we have achieved our overall objective. More than 50 years ago, Konrad Adenauer said: "Our goal is to work towards a time when all the differences between the nation states in Europe have disappeared. [...] Our goal is for Europe to become a large house that is home to all Europeans, a house of freedom." We have come much closer to achieving this goal. We have supported many countries in Central and Eastern Europe and made our own contribution to their progress, even if that contribution has often only been fairly modest. For this we should be grateful, and perhaps even a bit proud. A great deal of work remains ahead, but we should be encouraged by what has been achieved so far. Our commitment and involvement is paying off! We have to thank the German government for providing us and the other political foundations with the necessary financial resources, and above all we thank our dedicated staff for the excellent work they have always produced and continue to do, often at great personal sacrifice.