# Interview with Hans-Dietrich Genscher

QUENTIN PEEL AND MICHAEL STÜRMER

Michael Stürmer: Occasionally, and very pointedly, you have described yourself as 'the man from Halle'. What does Halle stand for in your life?

Hans-Dietrich Genscher: It is the city that has moulded me. It is a very defiant, revolutionary city, with a great tradition in the Enlightenment, in the Reformation, but also in the labour movement. So it is no surprise that on 17 June 1953, the centre of the uprising, outside Berlin, was in Halle. But also in the Third Reich there was strong resistance in this region.

Stürmer: When you say the 'region', are you also referring to the political landscape?

Genscher: Yes, also the political landscape. It always had a strong liberal element.

Stürmer: Did this central position also, subconsciously, inform your political perspective? Looking towards the east, west, north and south?

Genscher: Not really. My views were formed by my mother's father. My father died when I was nine years old. But this grandfather had done his military service in Lorraine in the late nineteenth century, and came back as a fervent supporter of close German–French cooperation. For him, war was a curse. Though at home, down the Elbe, one was very much looking towards England. It played an important role also in the lives of my mother and my parents' generation: *What are the English doing?*

Stürmer: England's first cultural toe-hold stands in Dessau-Wörlitz on the Middle Elbe, and not far away is the first English garden, the first English Palladian country house in Germany. Was something in the air?

Genscher: This is to do with a great open-mindedness in the region. Not something one would expect of such a land-locked part of the country.

Peel: Fast forward, if I may. When, as a politician, did you first pay attention to the British role in Europe?

Genscher: Not as a politician, but as a politically interested person. You have to imagine, when Hitler came to power I was six years old, and when he left, I was 18. In March 1945 I turned 18. And the generation that returned home was different. There were those who had been in the war from the beginning, and us. My generation was sceptical.

*International Affairs* **88**: 6 (2012) 1205–1218

Stürmer: The title of the book by Schelsky, *Die skeptische Generation*.[1]

Genscher: Absolutely. That is very apt. We were sceptical and were thinking: 'What can we do now, so this won't happen again?' In the Soviet-occupied zone, this of course led automatically to new confrontation. The battle for the universities was brutal, with great sacrifices. Back then, one could still receive newspapers from the West. In the beginning, one could receive an English newspaper, the *Guardian*, and listen to the radio. The speech that Winston Churchill gave on Europe impressed me in particular.

Stürmer: The Zurich speech?

Genscher: Yes. We were enthused about Europe and thought it was great that a man like Churchill called for it, and clearly included us Germans. We wanted that and would have liked to be proper democrats, but of course weren't accepted as such. Then in autumn 1946 an Englishman comes along, gives a speech in Switzerland and says: 'But the Germans need to be part of it.'

'You Germans and French,' he said. You have to imagine, that makes you feel altogether different. This was a very important event for us. I don't know what my peers' attitude was. For us, it was enormous.

In the autumn of 1946, there were two significant speeches: Churchill's in Switzerland, and the speech by US Secretary of State [James F.] Byrnes in Stuttgart,[2] which basically proclaims the Marshall Plan, named after his successor …

Stürmer: … and in which Byrnes says, 'We will stay as long as we are needed.'

Genscher: Yes, precisely. And he includes Germany in the reconstruction of Europe, and deliberately gives the speech on German soil. By the way, this was in the Staatstheater, where the FDP [Freie Demokratische Partei / Free Democratic Party] usually meets. This was the only great hall that had survived in Stuttgart.

Peel: But was it apparent in Churchill's speech back then, when he talked about Europe, that Great Britain would not be part of it?

Genscher: When I think about this speech today, it was made at a time when *The Times*'s overseas section included Continental Europe. That was a different view. It was, in British eyes, the same geographical distance to Europe as to the US.

Stürmer: If the British could determine their GPS position as they wished, they would be located mid-Atlantic.

Peel: Perhaps somewhere near Iceland.

Stürmer: But Great Britain is needed for Europe's balance of power, isn't it? A sentence by Konrad Adenauer from 1953 has been handed down—internally—in the minutes of the CDU [Christlich Demokratische Union / Christian Democratic Union] party executive. It says that he [Adenauer] would like to have the British on board in a unified Europe, so as 'not to be alone with the ever-hysterical French'. This somewhat contradicts the prevalent story of Adenauer wanting to go with the French at almost any cost. In fact, he seems to have thought more in terms of the European balance—within the great Atlantic one.

[1] Helmut Schelsky, *Die skeptische Generation: eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend* (Düsseldorf: Eugen Diederichs-Verlag, 1957).

[2] 'Restatement of policy on Germany', Stuttgart, 6 Sept. 1946, available at http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga4-460906.htm, accessed 17 Oct. 2012.



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

Genscher: I don't know what he really thought regarding this question, though quite a lot seems to support your interpretation. I can only speak from my own point of view, of course. My generation was incredibly open towards Britain. Britain and America meant the future.

Stürmer: Britain? Wasn't it in a long period of decline?

Genscher: We didn't see it like that at all. Only later did I learn that the Second World War and its consequences had also meant the end of [the British] empire. With no other politician was this as apparent as with Mrs Thatcher. I really don't know what she resented us Germans for most, but I believe that was it.

In my particular case, it mattered that this grandfather of mine had had a very Francophile influence on me. That loomed large. For me, grandfather was the authority in the family, and he used to say: 'Never again war with France! In future, always go with the French.' He was the first farmer in the village to have a giant radio set, so that he could listen to French stations, because he wanted to continue listening to the French language. He subscribed, for as long as possible, to a French newspaper. On Sundays he wouldn't go to play *Skat* at the pub, but read a French newspaper. And he made it plain to me how important this was. Perhaps it is also because my year at school was the first to have English as their first foreign language. You know, Hitler had sidled up to England in two ways: the naval agreement of 1935, and English, rather than French, was to be the first foreign language at school.

Peel: I would like to talk a bit more specifically about Britain and Europe. In 1963, de Gaulle delivered the first veto against the British. What did you think of that, from a German point of view?

Genscher: I thought this was simply behind the times, and explained it to myself with the treatment de Gaulle had received during his time in England.

Stürmer: In exile in London?

Genscher: In my opinion, he *hadn't* been treated properly. A lot of things would have gone differently if de Gaulle had sat at the table in Yalta in 1945. He would have been capable enough of playing a stronger European card with Churchill.

I had many long conversations with [Henry] Kissinger about how to account for the relationship between Roosevelt and Stalin. I could understand that one might take any partner to fight Hitler. But being this wrong about someone? At least Churchill said: 'I believe we have slaughtered the wrong pig.'

Stürmer: He is *supposed* to have said.

Genscher: Supposed? In all probability he did.

Stürmer: There are internal diaries of Churchill's staff, where he gets very close to this issue, where he says: 'What will then lie between the white snows of Russia, and the white cliffs of Dover?' He went on to say that if the RAF continued to bomb Germany, there would be nothing left in between, and then the Tatars would return like the Golden Horde, and goodness knows when they would leave. This is what Churchill said—shortly after Yalta.

Genscher: Let me tell you the following: On 1 January 1946 I went to my grandfather's to wish him a happy New Year. And there was this Russian major



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

staying who was a specialist in German studies. He was a secondary teacher in Leningrad where he taught German. His German was very good, and together with three other men he was billeted at my grandfather's house. The major came along with a litre of vodka and said we should raise our glasses to peace, the New Year and the peace-loving Soviet Union. I said that I had never had vodka. He was pouring it into water glasses, emptying the bottle. And then he said to me in a very friendly way: 'If you don't join us drinking, you are an enemy of the Soviet Union, and you know what that means.' So I joined in.

Stürmer: 'Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein, so schlag ich dir den Schädel ein.'[3]

Genscher: When he left the room, I said to my grandfather: 'I hope they'll get the hell out of here soon.' And then my grandfather, who really was a great authority, though here I thought he was wrong, said to me: 'My boy, believe me: they'll stay for 50 years.' Almost! Unification almost took that long. That was when I thought: 'Well, granddad?'

Stürmer: The last Russian soldiers were withdrawn in 1994. That came very close.

Genscher: Yes.

Peel: In 1963 de Gaulle used his veto against England, and Germany was very disappointed. Germany wanted Britain to join the Common Market.

Genscher: Yes, that's right. Public opinion [in Germany] was clearly in favour of Britain. I believe that back then the Germans also saw Britain as a bridge to the US. They felt that if the British were part of it, the Americans would be too.

By then Germany's prevailing concern was whether the Americans would stay or not: it had become a case of all or nothing. You only had to look at West Berlin and the presence of the Americans there. So there was a strong feeling in Germany: Britain should be part of it.

Peel: So the British were important to Germany because of their special relationship with the Americans, not in spite of it?

Genscher: Yes, precisely.

Stürmer: And they were also based at the inner-German border, while the French, in Baden-Baden, remained rather in the background. You don't have to be a great strategist to see the significance.

Genscher: For that very reason the French had to be involved.

Peel: When you entered the Bundestag in 1965, were you aware that Germany was so anxious to involve the British?

Genscher: Our coalition partner, the Christian Democratic Union, also had its internal disputes, between Atlanticists and Gaullists. If you look at the debate about the German–French Elysée Treaty in 1963, the Free Democratic Party was quite clearly on the side of Gerhard Schröder,[4] the Christian Democrat spokesman for the Atlanticists. He backed cohesion with the Anglo-Saxons. That was very important.

[3] 'If you don't want to be my brother, I'll crack your skull'—a mocking rhyme derived from the French Revolution's original slogan 'Liberty, equality, fraternity, or death'.

[4] Foreign minister and senior CDU politician.

Stürmer: Did German business associations figure at all [in the debate], or the Anglo-German Königswinter Conference?

Genscher: Arguably, yes.

Peel: When later it was Edward Heath's turn and the British again said that they would like to join the Common Market, what did Germany do to convince the French?

Genscher: There was a different Frenchman in the Elysée.

Peel: Georges Pompidou.

Genscher: I don't believe we could have convinced de Gaulle, had he still been around. I don't believe that ultimately he would have had a different stance. But I can't assess that.

Stürmer: Joan of Arc still waged war against British occupation?

Genscher: [*Laughs*.]

Peel: Pompidou was different. But relations between Pompidou and Willy Brandt actually weren't good. Or were they?

Genscher: No. But they weren't bad either. But you need to understand: back then this relationship wasn't at the centre of our attention. The question of *Ostpolitik* was the be-all and end-all, and whether it would change Germany's footing in the West. Our [the FDP's] assessment and judgement of this was very positive. For us, it was crucial for our participation in *Ostpolitik* that we went as far as the Social Democrats did.

Peel: But looking west again, where did this pro-British attitude in Germany come from?

Genscher: Somehow the Germans were fascinated with Britain—again I can only speak for myself. For me, Britain was the new Europe. It was different. In addition to this, even though we had fought against Britain in the First World War, we had never had border disputes. We are a [nearly] land-locked country, we are the country with the most neighbours in Europe. And Britain was not a neighbour. And in the immediate sense of neighbourhood, there were no territorial concessions to Britain after the First World War. So the attachment had many emotional elements.

Peel: Already in the nineteenth century the Germans had, if not a great love for Britain, an admiration for its liberalism.

Genscher: Yes. And somehow, for me as a young man, Britain was associated with fairness. The British *way of life* encompassed fairness.

Peel: Weren't you afraid that the British might see Europe altogether differently from how France and Germany saw it? For Germany and France, Europe was the guarantee—as your grandfather said, 'Never again war.' But the British, with their pragmatism, were only thinking of the economy.

Genscher: Yes. I mean, later when people would sneer at British policies, especially in economic matters, I would pursue this question much more. In the beginning I hadn't seen the problem. Later I said: let's imagine how our two nations, Germany and Britain, arrived at the European table. Then we'll understand better why the British think differently about many issues. Sitting down at the table of the European democracies, for Germany, this meant a return to the



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

community of civilized nations, and for Britain, sitting down at the European table meant farewell to empire. And if you consider these two perspectives, you can understand that the British have a different perception of European unification from ours in Germany. This was personified in particular by Thatcher, and I could understand that.

Stürmer: The French were also in the process of losing an empire.

Genscher: But that was different. The colonies had a different significance for France and for England.

Stürmer: That's true. Twenty-five years ago, a book on German–British relations was published entitled *The quiet alliance*,[5] in contrast to the 'loud alliance' with France. How was this noticeable during your time as foreign minister?

Genscher: To begin with, an essential ingredient of the 'quiet alliance' was the fact that in questions of economic and fiscal stability Germany and Britain were very close. Interestingly, that was not affected by changes in the ruling party in either country. There was always a high degree of agreement. And then we didn't have a problem with Britain regarding America—which wasn't always true for France.

Apart from that, I became friends with all my British colleagues. The first was [James] Callaghan, then [David] Owen, and the last ones were Geoffrey Howe, John Major and Douglas Hurd.

Peel: With whom did you have the best relationship?

Genscher: Well, actually with the first and with [Peter] Carrington. And especially Douglas Hurd.

Stürmer: That was in the decisive phase, in 1990?

Genscher: Exactly.

Stürmer: How important are personal relationships in politics, especially in the German–British relationship?

Genscher: They're important simply because they make it possible to talk about things at a different level. But more important than the personal relationship is trust. When I became foreign minister, [Günther] van Well—who later became ambassador to the US and then president of the German Council on Foreign Relations—approached me. He must have thought: 'Here comes one of these domestic politicians'—I had been minister of the interior, after all. It was interesting that when I became foreign minister, half the European Community's foreign ministers had previously been interior ministers, including Callaghan.

Van Well said to me: 'Herr Bundesminister, I wanted to tell you one thing: Never agree to anything that you can't go through with. This *Kränzchen*, he said, this coffee circle of the world's important foreign ministers is small, and the reputation you enjoy within it is important for our country.' I'll never forget that. And I never had to go back on anything. There are always some who promise what they cannot deliver. Apparently they find that more convenient, though in the medium term it is rather damaging.

[5] Karl Kaiser and John Roper, *Die Stille Allianz: deutsch–britische Sicherheitskooperation* (Bonn: Europa Union, 1987).



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

Stürmer: May I borrow Mr van Well's notion of the *Kränzchen*, the coffee circle? Would it not have been easier if a kind of directorate [of the big three] had been established? At least at the level of, say, the 'sherpas'? That is what happened later, after all, in the form of European Political Cooperation.

Genscher: I encouraged something like this, but it was executed in an altogether different way. I'll tell you in a moment. Soon after I arrived, a NATO summit took place in Ottawa, and I was being prepared for that. I prepared with the utmost thoroughness. And then I was told, the evening before the NATO meeting, there would be a meeting about Germany and Berlin.

Stürmer: With four participants?

Genscher: With four participants: the three Allied forces plus Germany. We [Germany] sat at the table—but not really. Only afterwards did we really sit at the table. The three gentlemen were sitting by themselves for a little while.

Stürmer: Genscher at the children's table?

Genscher: Not quite at the children's table. But I reported on the situation in Germany as a whole and in Berlin. That was a report which they had known about beforehand and it was briefly discussed. It was passed around the four embassies, and then the host asked us to take our places. Later, at dinner, we no longer talked about Germany as a whole, but about what was on the agenda for the next day at NATO, and what the East–West relationship entailed. I participated in this once but I somehow felt like an outsider, summoned to give a report.

After this I was in the US and said to Kissinger: 'If I may be frank: I did not appreciate this, considering that we gathered on the eve of a NATO conference, at which Germany is the most important country after the United States, at least in terms of military strength. Yet Germany was not being treated as an equal. Kissinger says: 'How do you mean?' So I said: 'I would appreciate it if we could also talk about confidential questions within this close circle, which cannot be dealt with in the NATO circle.' For instance, the question of a potential revolution in Portugal had come up; the Americans were considering landing from the north via Porto. And I said: 'Wouldn't it be nice if we could remodel this into a meeting of four?' Kissinger found this very interesting and said: 'I'll discuss it with the others.' Thus the whole thing took on a different shape. It turned into a steering committee.

Peel: But it didn't succeed long term, did it?

Genscher: Well, yes, it did. You need to understand, it wasn't easy to keep this alive after German unification. But before then, there was another occasion in Brussels in 1989. You will remember that the Russians suddenly demanded a meeting of the Allied Control Council, here in Berlin. I received the message. I was being presented with this, and I said: 'What do they want to talk about?' The response was: 'The Allies have already thought about what they want to talk about. They want to talk about air connections to West Berlin.' I said: 'Are they mad? We're having a peaceful revolution in Germany, which everyone has been waiting for, and as a response to that they reopen the Control Council with the Russians.'



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

The next morning the four of us sat together for breakfast and I said: 'I have seen the pictures of your ambassadors sitting next to the Soviet high commissioner. I didn't like that picture.' James Baker put his hand on my arm and said: 'Hans-Dietrich, there's no need to continue, we understand.' There were no further meetings of the Control Council.

Stürmer: Regarding the Control Council: you mentioned 'Germany as a whole'. That's the wording from the Potsdam Agreement, *Germany as a whole*, the shadow of the German Reich so to speak.

Genscher: Which was being maintained.

Stürmer: And that, to all intents and purposes, was the framework in which you'd been summoned to report?

Genscher: Yes, about the relationship with the German Democratic Republic. You see, for us it was important to hold onto it.

Stürmer: Absolutely.

Genscher: Interestingly, there was one other country for which this was important. You know who that was? Moscow. There was a contradiction between the Soviet argument of the absolute sovereignty of the GDR on the one hand and their [the Soviets'] holding onto their rights for Germany as a whole on the other. Symbolically, this was established through their military mission in Baden-Baden and somewhere in Westphalia. It was about the right to travel around in military patrols under diplomatic protection, like the Allies did in the GDR. They kept to it. But for us it was about holding on to Germany's unity.

Stürmer: As well as holding onto the Allies' responsibility for a long-term solution.

Genscher: Precisely.

Peel: So it was possible to bring together Germany, France and Great Britain with the Americans for matters of security, for NATO matters. But within the EC, establishing such a grouping with Germany, France and Great Britain never really succeeded?

Genscher: No.

Peel: Was it too dangerous? Was it not always a French idea?

Genscher: No, no, the French were always interested in joining forces with Germany. But I'm not sure if they were thinking of consulting Britain. Probably not, I'd say.

Peel: But the British are very irritated with the German–French relationship. They want to be part of it, but at the same time they don't. I think it's more about trying to separate Germany from France. They want to have closer bilateral ties with France in the area of defence and security, and tighter bilateral relations with Germany in the economic sector. Overall, they mistrust the German–French relationship.

Genscher: There is also some common ground [between Britain and France]: both are nuclear powers. Both were powers responsible for 'Germany as a whole'. Both are permanent members of the Security Council. This mustn't be underestimated.

Peel: Yes, it seemed a bit awkward for the three to join forces, but would you have liked to have seen this? A trilateral relationship steering the EC?

Genscher: We would have liked to do that, but didn't think it a realistic objective, as Britain was mentally too far removed.

Peel: When did you realize that?

Genscher: Well, I was of the opinion that Britain would get increasingly involved in European affairs. And I also have to say that cooperation with England within the EC was very good.

Stürmer: Was?

Genscher: I'm talking about my time.

Peel: In the 1980s, midway through your time, Mrs Thatcher was UK prime minister. She fought very hard for her budget rebate: 'I want my money back!' She was in favour of the single market, but turned into a Eurosceptic at the same time. How did you understand her politics?

Genscher: In Germany, assessment of Mrs Thatcher was rather mixed. I thought she was a remarkable woman. If she were a man, I would have said, statesman. She was a stateswoman. First and foremost, I thought that the modernization of Britain was her greatest achievement. The reforms which she implemented were indispensable. But she didn't really achieve any of her foreign policy objectives.

Peel: What were her objectives, actually?

Genscher: That I don't know.

Stürmer: To be mid-Atlantic with a European hinterland, also to strengthen the British position towards the US, perhaps. Did you perceive the 'special relationship' as more of a myth or as a reality of security policy, data acquisition, nuclear coordination?

Genscher: Yes. And also as Britain's wish to be, if no longer chief of the world, then at least vice-chief. With Mrs Thatcher this was very pronounced indeed. You see, this was why in the process of German unification I didn't consider her scepticism a very crucial factor. For one, it was clear that her government didn't share her scepticism. At least my colleague Douglas Hurd—whose behaviour was very commendable during this period—didn't. Nor did the entire Foreign Office. Nor did the Labour Party. I've read minutes of the House of Commons Question Time which were remarkable with regard to Mrs Thatcher.

But with her I was always sure: if the Americans were in favour of German unification, there wouldn't be any conflict whatsoever with the British about it. That was why, internally, I used to say: we shouldn't take this so seriously. If the Americans say yes, she won't say no. She won't like saying yes as much as the Americans, but say it she will.

Peel: And George Bush—senior—his position was quite clearly in favour of German unification?

Genscher: He was clear, as was James Baker. Baker saw further than Bush senior's emotionality, looking at things strategically, realizing that Germany's unification really meant Europe's unification, and thus the end of Soviet predominance beyond Soviet borders. That was the strategic crux.



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

Stürmer: Both, Baker and Bush, acted within the American tradition of 1848, 1919 and 1945–9, being in favour of a German centre in Europe, if it was democratic.

Genscher: Yes, but careful. If you look at twentieth-century American politics, the Americans left Europe after the First World War. What that led to in Europe we know. Then they stayed in 1945, thank God, and I would also like them to stay now, after the Cold War.

Peel: Why?

Genscher: Because I think, to put it differently: now of all times the Atlantic mustn't get wider. Instead, we Atlantic citizens, on the western and the eastern shores, share a task of shaping the 'new world order'. In that, America is no longer big enough on its own, nor is Europe. But together we form the two models of global actors for the twenty-first century.

There is the model of the big state like the US—but also Russia, China, India, Japan, Indonesia or Brazil—and there is the model of medium and smaller states joining in regional federations—like the EU. The same applies to ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as Latin America. In southern Africa, too, we will see this model. But of these regional federations, Europe is the most advanced. That means, these two models will be the global players. The global players are combined [in the Atlantic community], represented by the US on the one hand and Europe on the other. And together we have a role to play in shaping [the world order] which neither can fulfil individually. This needs to be understood in the United States.

Stürmer: As well as over here.

Genscher: Yes, but quite differently. On our side, Europe's significance in this regard is altogether disregarded, whereas, if you listen to the representatives of the Republican Party, their belief in American global dominance remains unchanged. But this belief is no longer realistic. It would be, however, if in the place of dominance there was a combined counterweight of the relatives on the two sides of the Atlantic striving towards a world order that could be universally perceived as just.

Peel: But the Americans are very frustrated with the slow decision-making process in Europe, especially in the current euro crisis.

Genscher: Whoever is the next [US] president will have to solve immense problems in America.

Peel: May I come back to German unification? François Mitterrand and Mrs Thatcher were both instinctively against rapid unification.

Genscher: No, you're not doing Mitterrand justice there. I believe Mrs Thatcher is right to blame him in her memoirs for having left her high and dry in preventing reunification. I was in Paris on 29 November 1989. I was in Washington, London, Paris and Moscow, in fact, asking: 'What do you think of German unification?' And Mitterrand was very honest. He said: 'France! France speaks through my mouth.' Only a French president can say that. Anyway, he said: 'France considers German unification a historical necessity. This is why, as always, we stand on Germany's side on this matter. Minister, I have one question for you: What path



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

will a unified Germany take? Will it tread again on old paths, or will it continue the Federal Republic's European course? If you now say that you will tread old paths again, I say to you: because German unification is a historical necessity, even then we will not oppose it. But our reply would then be different nevertheless: we will revive the old alliances.' That was the [meaning of the] meeting with Gorbachev in Kiev.[6]

Peel: Mitterrand was looking for a counterbalance?

Genscher: You need to take into account something that was being disregarded in Germany at the time: six countries were involved in the foundation of the EC, three small ones and three big ones. This was a piece of luck, as for the first time the big ones had to learn to deal with the small ones as equals, at eye level. But it was also a historical piece of luck that the three big ones carried more or less the same weight in terms of population: Italy, France and the Federal Republic of Germany.

As it were, German unification ended this balance. This started with relatively minor issues, such as how many seats does Germany have in the European Parliament? You have to look at this psychologically. To a man like Mitterrand, who thought in terms of symbols, this was very important. For that reason, we treated the question of German seats in the parliament with caution, so as not to arouse unnecessary emotion.

You also have to look at Poland. Poland is invaded in 1939 and not much happens. France and Britain declare war, but that's about it, which the Poles of course didn't consider much support. Well, how could they have? After 1945, they're moved westwards. Stalin gets the country's eastern half. That was what he had agreed with Hitler. Exactly the line he had agreed with Hitler in fact, before they embarked on the joint invasion of Poland, that is what he got.

Stürmer: The old Curzon Line.

Genscher: Indeed, the old Curzon Line from the end of the First World War. The westwards move compensated the Poles in the West, but at the same time this meant uncertainty for the Poles: would that continue to be the case? Therefore the question of recognizing the border was very important. But this question remained unanswered for the Poles.

And now, German unification means freedom for the Poles. The morning after the fall of the [Berlin] Wall, I was with Lech Walesa and [Bronislaw] Geremek, who was his foreign policy adviser at the time, and Geremek said: 'The fall of the Wall, that means a unified Germany.' And he added: 'This is a great day for Germany, but also a great day for Poland, because if Germany is united, Poland will be a neighbour of NATO and the European Community.' He had fully recognized the strategic significance. The same was true in the Czech Republic: the first post-*Wende* (turning point) foreign minister, [Jiri] Dienstbier, had written about this, in the boiler room where he used to work, five years before unification, when he noted the significance of German unity for Czechoslovakia.

[6] Mitterrand met Gorbachev in Kiev on 6 December 1989, when the French president warned Germany not to upset the balance of power in Europe by pushing for unification.



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

Peel: I would like to quiz you again on the British budget rebate and its fallout. Do you think that the British introduced a dangerous disease into the EU with this idea of *juste retour*—that each member state should get out roughly as much as it puts into the budget? Now Germany is suffering from this disease, and the Netherlands, too. But initially this thinking came from Great Britain. Was it a big mistake that the British succeeded in implementing this concept of *juste retour*?

Genscher: No. I remember exactly how we solved this back then. For us it was important that the British stay on board, and we therefore went further than would have appeared sensible. At times Mrs Thatcher was made fun of, but ultimately what determined the German position was: what she's doing might be outrageous, but we need Britain in the European Union. For us, that was absolutely crucial.

Stürmer: For greater balance? Or for regulatory policy reasons?

Genscher: For the many agreements with Britain on regulatory policy, especially in economic and fiscal matters, but also because Britain was a protecting power for Berlin. You must never forget that during this period, that always loomed very large for us—the stance of the United States, France and Britain. But the problems we have today have nothing to do with that. Historically and psychologically, all that is filed under 'Thatcher'. It was a different phase of British policy towards Europe.

Peel: So you don't see a connection? Do you believe it was a mistake to let the British into the EC in 1973 in the first place? The British are always the odd ones out, the awkward squad, sitting on the outside. Most recently last December they refused to sign the fiscal pact, this time with the Czechs.

Genscher: In the Czech Republic this is a matter of personality. Once Vaclav Klaus is gone . . .

Peel: Yes. But with the British it's a different matter. Do you believe the EU can function effectively with the British as a member that refuses to be a full player?

Genscher: Yes, it could. I think that British membership, as long as the British believe it is in their own interest, always outweighs non-membership and the problems this would bring about.

Stürmer: But aren't we currently going in two opposite directions? With the Tories, a referendum on EU membership seems almost inevitable. On the Continent, conversely, it looks as if the fiscal pact will lead to a lot more integration than the British want. The British want to repatriate rights. We clearly have to continue on the path of integration. Is 'Thank you and goodbye' plausible?

Genscher: No. I believe that Britain will stay. First of all, I am convinced that if the EU is able to solve its current problems, and it will solve them, this will leave an impression on the British stance. It will make the EU more attractive. Britain will assess its interests correctly.

Peel: Ultimately, British interests are all about the economy.

Genscher: Of course. And the single market is so attractive! Especially for countries like Germany and Britain. To maintain a common market like this is a great thing. It is the market with the most purchasing power in the world.



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

PEEL: Yes, but in 1957 the British stayed out because they believed that they'd be stronger on their own. They didn't want to be part of it. There is an interesting quote by a senior British civil servant in 1949. Sir Henry Tizard said: 'We are not a Great Power and never will be again. We are a great nation, but if we continue to behave like a Great Power we shall soon cease to be a great nation.' The British have believed for too long that they could remain a Great Power, don't you think?

GENSCHER: Historically I can understand that.

PEEL: Do you believe that the British ever understood the motivation of their European partners for the foundation of the EU? The motivation of France and Germany in particular?

GENSCHER: Churchill understood, as his 1946 speech shows.

PEEL: Yes. But did other British leaders, later? They have forgotten this history.

GENSCHER: Don't you find it interesting that the two great impulses for European unification were both Anglo-Saxon?

STÜRMER: Or rather three, counting Truman!

GENSCHER: Yes; I mean, those two *speeches* are essential. Back then they influenced the political class greatly, even me, though I wasn't a part of it. At the time I was a law student in Halle, at Martin Luther University.

PEEL: There is the possibility of a referendum being held in Britain in the foreseeable future. The British did that for the first time in 1975. Immediately after those major negotiations of 1971–2, the British wanted to renegotiate. Was it a big disappointment for you that the British wanted to review everything straight away?

GENSCHER: No. I wasn't surprised, you see; I knew the mood in Britain. It's like this: if I had had inner reservations about British membership at that time, it would have upset me. But I saw it instead from a different angle, namely, how to avoid harm to European unification and at the same time retain British membership. For me, you see, that was more important, because I was of the opinion that Britain was part of it. That opinion remains unchanged. I would think it a grave mistake, damaging even, if Britain were not inside.

STÜRMER: And where do you see Great Britain's relationship with the EU in ten years' time, and Great Britain's with Germany?

GENSCHER: Assuming, as I do, that the EU will ultimately resolve its crisis, Britain won't be able to step off the path of success. For Britain, cooperation—in any area, it doesn't matter which—will appear more attractive than today. And that can only have a positive effect on German–British relations. Indeed, for the most part the German–British relationship seems to be problem-free.

STÜRMER: The 'quiet alliance'?

GENSCHER: Yes.

PEEL: But the British don't understand Germany. Take Margaret Thatcher . . .

GENSCHER: She had a bogeyman image.

PEEL: Clearly. But it also exists in the British media. In the 1975 referendum, the British still voted for Europe. Today, the great majority have become Eurosceptics. Why?



*International Affairs* 88: 6, 2012

Genscher: That is Europe's own fault, because it doesn't present itself as so attractive as it really ought to be. When I look at what Europe has essentially achieved since the end of the Cold War, with the inclusion of the states in the East—look at Poland today, Poland is Europe's economic motor. It is a gigantic historical achievement that 27 countries align themselves with each other, and that Europe is so strong that this rapid accession has been possible. Of course, it happens at different speeds, according to individual [countries'] politics. I believe that this hasn't really registered with many people.

This also has to do with politicians' cowardice. Because when decisions need to be justified it is easy to say: 'We have to do that, because of Brussels.' Some people talk about Brussels as if it were an occupying force from a different planet that dictates how we have to live. But we sit in the Commission, in Parliament, in the European Council, in the Council of Ministers, and we are not clueless. When you check afterwards, you will find that we agreed to everything in the first place. But this deference to a supposedly anonymous power, which is supposedly not democratically legitimate, causes everyone to offload their frustration on to Europe. So we should stand up for Europe more.

Stürmer: Well, in my opinion, the widespread disregard of the subsidiarity principle, which has to be a basic European principle, is one of the disappointments with Europe. The interference with even the smallest aspects [of life], this micro-management from Brussels, this instinct of the bureaucratic state to regulate everything, the nanny state is even more at home in Brussels than in Berlin. The light-bulb ban, for instance, harms the European Union massively!

Genscher: Indeed. Yes, this brings us to the crux of the matter. It's not as if there is one person who devises and executes all of this by himself and the others are only spectators. I don't dare to think of who has had a say in what. You are completely right, these examples do exist. But this is not something home-grown in Brussels, these are European decisions. Europe is all of us. The Germans, the British, the French, the Poles, the Greeks, the Norwegians, the Italians, and all the others.

Peel: Thank you very much, Mr Genscher.