

# **“Berlin’s Competence for Central and Eastern Europe – Prospects and Challenges”**

## **A Conference Report**

October 25, 2002

The conference that took place in the premises of the Hungarian Embassy was organized by the Berlin Initiative Competence for Central and Eastern Europe (*Berliner Initiative Mittel- und Osteuropakompetenz*). This platform was initiated in Summer 2002 and understands itself as an association of networks and umbrella organizations from the economy, science and politics. It consists of the German Society for East European Studies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde e.V. – DGO); the JOE-fixe, a network of 585 mainly young scientists from Berlin and Brandenburg, who are specialized on Eastern Europe and represent over 250 institutions in the Berlin/Brandenburg region; the Berlin branch of the German Social Science Infrastructure Services (Gesellschaft Sozialwissenschaftlicher Infrastruktureinrichtungen e.V. – GESIS); and the international business adviser BAO BERLIN International GmbH.

The conference brought together about 300 participants. Thus it can be considered the biggest event on a battery of questions which, in all the years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, officers from politics, economy and science have pinpointed as one area of activities most important for the future of Berlin.

The majority of participants were students from Berlin and other universities, course participants from Central and Eastern European countries attending the training center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, members of scientific research institutions and associations with interests in Central and Eastern Europe. Another group of participants comprised members of federal ministries, administrations of the Berlin Senate, embassies, etc. Apart from a few representatives from banks, consulting agencies and law firms, the industry was hardly present.

Berlin’s competence for Central and Eastern Europe was illuminated from three perspectives: (1) economy; (2) science; and (3) politics.

### (1) Economic panel

The panel was attended by three representatives from Berlin industrial enterprises, who reported about their experiences “with daily business on the spot,” and by two representatives from public economic institutions.

The speaker of the BAO management, Jörg Schlegel, recalled the dramatic decline in jobs in Berlin’s industry since 1990. Despite, the industry managed to partly attain two-digit growth rates in the export to countries of Central and Eastern Europe. But the export of services, especially important for Berlin, is not included in statistical data collection. For him, Berlin’s East-West competence lies in the plethora of institutions situated in the city. He does not think that a “total networking” among Berlin’s Central and Eastern European actors is feasible. Each of the approximately 250 Central and Eastern European actors in Berlin would contribute his “mite” to the lot. Therefore, Berlin could “proudly carry its East-West competence like a monstrosity.”

Figures about Berlin's exchange of goods with countries in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of the Wall were not given. While German export to countries in Central and Eastern Europe and to CIS countries more than quintupled from 12.15 billion Euro in 1992 to 71.1 billion Euro by the end of 2001, Berlin's eastern export in the same period hardly more than doubled: from 0.528 billion Euro to 1.239 billion Euro. Berlin's share in the German eastern export amounted to 4.34 percent in 1992 but was only 1.74 percent in 2001. If one looks at the markets of the ten EU candidates in Central and Eastern Europe, which are particularly important to Berlin's economy, one can see that German export to this group of countries declined from 3.06 percent in 1992 to 1.82 percent in 2001 (1st half of 2002: 1.37 percent).

In their brief presentations, the representatives from three Berlin-based industrial enterprises which are active in very different businesses and have strong exports to Central and Eastern Europe, *Dr. Reinhard Uppenkamp* (Berlin Chemie AG), *Peter Kurth* (Alba AG) and *Horst Schmidt* (GERB Schwingungsisolierungen GmbH & Co. KG) – also head of the foreign trade commission of the IHK of Berlin (Chamber of Industry and Commerce) – arrived at similar assessments regarding Berlin's East-West competence:

- For Dr. Uppenkamp the Russian staff in the Russian branch of his enterprise are his “best experts for Russia” and the Polish staff of his Polish branch his “best experts for Poland” etc.
- As to Peter Kurth, Berlin's proximity to the markets of Central and Eastern Europe does not account for a “competence for Central and Eastern Europe.” Contrariwise, he frequently notices that cities of Eastern Europe assume that Berlin has a special “Eastern competence.” For him, the great advantage of Berlin and its vicinity (Viadrina) in the East-West business is the diversified supply of well-educated university graduates.
- For Horst Schmidt the focus is not on Berlin's Eastern competence but on his enterprise's professional and technical competence regarding products and processes. Export to the markets in Central and Eastern Europe does not differ anymore from exports to other regions of the world, e.g., Latin America. After the Eastern Enlargement of the EU, expected to happen in May 2004 at the latest, business with these countries will be “a normal affair as all other foreign commercial transactions.”

*Dr. Reinhard Klein* (Deutsch-Polnische Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft – TWG / Society for the Advancement of Economy between Germany and Poland) introduced his binational institution whose activity is unique in this form. Its specific strength is not only the language competence of its staff, but the binational background of experiences in particular. In this sense, for him the TWG is also a contribution to Berlin's competence for Central and Eastern Europe.

## (2) Scientific panel

Professors from two universities with special relationships to Central and Eastern Europe (Freie Universität/FU Berlin and Europa-Universität Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder) and representatives from two independent scientific

institutions (Informationszentrum Sozialwissenschaften und Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin) took part in the panel discussion.

*Prof. Dr. Klaus Segbers*, chairman of the Institute Council of the Institute for Eastern Europe at the FU Berlin (OEI), presented the three focal points of his Institute which is the only university institute in Germany for Eastern European researches and studies:

- Education: the focus is on the present-day oriented multi-disciplined graduate course “East European Studies.”
- Research: focal points are the transformation processes in the countries of Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe.
- Consulting service to the economy, the media and politics: as to the counseling of politics, he annotated that the consulting competences of the OEI are first of all used by federal agencies and not so much by the Berlin Senate.

*Prof. Dr. Gesine Schwan*, President of the Europa-Universität Viadrina in Frankfurt/Oder, spoke about her experiences gained in many years at universities in Berlin and now Brandenburg. Taking the Viadrina and the OEI as examples, she illustrated that such an intense and “concentrated competence for Central and Eastern Europe” cannot be found anywhere else but in this region. However, the national radiation of the specific competence “has not yet come to its own.” She emphasized the necessity of specific transnational co-operation to overcome the striking prejudices that prevail towards Poland (“psychological fear from the EU enlargement”). For her, competence for Central and Eastern Europe also includes the competence to speak the language of the relevant partner country.

The head of the GESIS Branch Office *Ulrike Becker*, introduced her institution and suggested that Berlin shall make better use of the existent “East-West network social sciences.” She underlined that there were about 130 institutions in Berlin, which have relations with Central and Eastern Europe in the one or other form. From her experience Eastern European research in Berlin is by far more intense than in other parts of Germany, but hitherto it has not been uncovered how much expertise is in stock.

*Dr. Biegger* presented the Wissenschaftskolleg (WK) zu Berlin as a “temporary guest house” for approximately 40 researchers at a time. Prerequisite for the efficiency of the fellows’ advanced studies was a kind of “cloister atmosphere.” Therefore, it is intended that the work of the WK fellows remains unnoticed in many cases. But it would be important to mention that since the foundation of the Wissenschaftskolleg approximately 900 to 1,000 former fellows are active in one-of-a-kind Berlin-relevant network. About 100 scientists from countries in Central and Eastern Europe are part of this network.

### (3) Policy panel

The discussion forum was attended by two high-ranking representatives of the Berlin Senate and the Brandenburg State Government as well as by two representatives of institutions of scientific policy counseling.

In his written welcome address, the Governing Mayor *Klaus Wowereit* emphasized, “... There is no doubt that Berlin’s competence for Central and Eastern Europe is immense. Many consider Berlin the “Gate to the East.”

The Commissioner for Europe of the Land Berlin and Appointee of the Land Berlin to the Federal Government, *Under-Secretary of State Monika Helbig*, underlined the great importance the present Senate attaches to Berlin's role in the relationship with countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Under her direction, a working commission on Central and Eastern Europe was set up with the primary aim to create a possibly area-wide databank of all East-West actors in Berlin. She admitted that the creation of a databank alone is no politics, but this stocktaking could form the quantitative basis of politics. Setting up focal points for co-operation with Central and Eastern European countries would be the next on Berlin's agenda. Here, she particularly mentioned Poland, the Czech Republic and the Baltic countries.

For known reasons, a specific financial support on the part of the Senate could not be expected. But the Senate would be prepared to give assistance in removing obstacles.

As to the division of labor with the Governing Mayor's Coordinator for Central and Eastern Europe, *Dr.-Ing. Wolfram O. Martinsen*, the Under-Secretary of State said that his specific responsibility would be the coordination of the economy's activities in Berlin.

*Ministerial Secretary Dr. Jochen Bethkenhagen*, head of the unit "International Affairs and European Affairs" with the Brandenburg Ministry for Justice and European Affairs, also touched on the necessity of reducing mental barriers as a precondition for a closer co-operation with countries in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, he stressed the importance to improve cross-border infrastructures. He specified the Brandenburg Future Agency, *Zukunftsagentur Brandenburg (ZAB)*, the consultation programs of the Brandenburg Chamber of Industry and Commerce and, as a concrete successful example, the Guben EURO TECH as instruments for implementing economy-related activities.

For him, the creation of the European Commission-aided "Euro regions" is a particular chance.

*Dr. Heinz Timmermann* from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)*, underlined the announcement effect of the move to Berlin of both federal-related scientific institutions for policy counseling – the SWP in Ebenhausen and the former Federal Institute for Eastern and International Studies in Cologne – for strengthening the East-West competence that exists in Berlin. At the same time, he said that people have to consider that the work of the SWP, financed from the budget of the Federal Chancellor's Office, must be necessarily restricted to direct counseling of the Government.

*Alexander Rahr*, head and program director of the Körber Office Russia/CIS at the Research Institute of the German Council on Foreign Relations (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik – DGAP*), diagnosed "a meanwhile fewer interest in information about the East," on the one hand. On the other hand, he stated that, compared with his former DGAP experiences in Bonn, there is a "hard competition" in Berlin in the field of information about Central and Eastern Europe due to innumerable information and discussion meetings organized by Berlin-based banks; journals and other media; institutions of various kinds, including party-bound political foundations; embassies, etc. In this sense, Berlin had become more "American", i.e., the

competition for interesting speakers was of another intensity than in the years before.

### Concluding remarks

It is the merit of the organizer to have undertaken the attempt to pick out as a topic Berlin's East-West competence talked about for a decade. In addition, it is deserving to have gathered in a room a circle of people, which obviously has not only reduced the average age of participants compared to similar discussion forums but has also attracted interested persons of highly different professional provenience.

However, the question must be posed: have new conclusions been attained or discussed?

"If science is good then more science is better," or "if East-West competence is good then more East-West competence is even better." Certainly, such a statement would be too trivial.

Obviously, the organizers have deliberately abstained from taking a numerical stock of Berlin's East-West competence in the three areas under discussion right from the beginning. Instead, they have shed light on the situation in Berlin as it was a decade ago, it is today and they discussed what will be the prospects for Berlin after the EU enlargement in the coming decade.

In their entirety, the thirteen, partly instructive individual presentations have by no means given an overall picture of the complex situation.

Though, compared to other regions in Germany, Berlin's East-West competence is diffuse, but, without doubt, in its aggregation it is higher than anywhere else (the "monstrance of Berlin's East-West competence"). But that was already known before the conference. The question on how it shall be strategically and – to use a buzzword – "synergetically" implemented was not highlighted, not even rudimentary:

1. Shall Berlin's competence headstart concerning the "Central and Eastern European market know how" lead to bigger shares in the market and thus to more jobs? At the moment, the contrary is the case. Compared with many other federal states, including the export-weak East Germany, Berlin's share in German export to Central and Eastern Europe is in decline altogether, despite occasional "two-digit" growth rates.
2. Compared with other German science centers, shall Berlin's Central and Eastern European competence in the field of science lead to a more intensive networking (e.g., by partnerships between universities, joint participation in bilateral or EU projects, by deliberate mobility sponsorships of professors, research staff and students)? Deliberate or unintentional, the absence of representatives from the fields of natural sciences and engineering technology, which are particular important for the creation of the planned "European space research," in the discussion about the scientific East-West competence of Berlin as a location factor cannot be understood ("Berlin. Global City of Knowledge").
3. The question raised in the program, whether a new environment would bring about a new policy, was not answered. For the Berlin Senate, the

conclusion of partnership contracts with the capitals of major EU accession countries, for instance, would offer a quite different quality of activity. A visible signal for the demanded new Berlin policy on Central and Eastern Europe, for example, could be a recognizable preparedness on the part of the Senate to implement the proposition of the Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski for a initiative to create a “River Oder Community for Science and Technology” for which he explicitly encouraged an involvement of Berlin’s research potentials. Last but not least, *ceterum censeo*: To quote the former longtime president and now honorary president of the Association Eastern and Central Europe (OMV), Prof. Dr. Manfred Busche, “Resolutions, announcements, discussion forums, initiatives – and afterwards for the most part only individual actions and withering expectations ... Berlin – even twelve years after the reunification of Germany – lacks an integrated ‘East-West strategy’ of politics, science and economy.”

If the “Berlin Initiative Competence for Central and Eastern Europe” wants to make its verve sustainable, the innovative composition of its supporters could provide a stage, which Berlin’s Central and Eastern European actors from the economy, science and politics should use in order to present the long-awaited concept of an integrated Central and Eastern European strategy for Berlin – hopefully in the not so far future.