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A German in Moscow

Death is a master from Germany." So says an old Russian proverb. A mere 33 years ago it was proved cruelly true. Another Russian saying has it that the German "invented the monkey". And this proverb shows the Russians' admiration for the inventive genius and the punctuality and exactitude of the Germans. This esteem has survived through all the disasters, for the Russian gift of deft improvisation has a complementary counterpart in German perfectionism. That conflicting feelings are aroused whenever Germans and Russians wish to cooperate is not surprising; for however good their intentions, a genuine partnership has never developed between them — neither in 1922 when the two defeated enemies of World War I linked up for mutual political and economic assistance nor in 1939 when economic relations blossomed, and soon wilted, after the Hitler-Stalin pact.

But now, after World War II with its power-political upheavals, one may hope that the "inventor of the monkey" has overcome the "master of death" for good and that a basis of trust can be created. After Adenauer and Brandt, Schmidt was the third Federal Chancellor to make his way to Moscow. His visit marks the third phase of Bonn's eastern policy since 1955 when Adenauer established diplomatic relations with the USSR. During phase I, from 1955 till 1962, it was impossible to overcome the German partition. Phase II, from 1962 to 1969, was a time of second thoughts and tardy changes. Phase III opened under Brandt in 1969 with the involvement of a *modus vivendi*. It led to the Treaty of Moscow which opened the way to all the

other eastern treaties and especially to the Basic Treaty with the GDR and the Four-power Agreement on Berlin. Informal encounters at all levels have become a matter of routine. Follow-up treaties such as trade, aviation and cooperation agreements have been concluded, and the volume of German-Soviet trade has expanded year after year since the signing of the Moscow Treaty.

Shortly before the visit of Federal Chancellor Schmidt his Minister of Economic Affairs took a large staff to the Soviet Union. The German visitors opened their eyes wide when the Russians gave an outline of their projects at this fourth conference of the German-Soviet Economic Commission: foundry combines, nuclear power stations, immense pipeline and grid systems for natural gas, oil and electricity, and huge plants for the production and processing of raw materials. The Russians certainly mean what they say! Next year Brezhnev will face the 25th Party Congress at which not only the next five-year plan but for the first time a 15-year plan is to be adopted. By then he must be able to take the wind out of his critics' sails and give them proof of the success of his efforts for a *détente* by showing that he can draw especially on German, as well as American, cooperation and technologies for the planned huge projects.

Has the Schmidt-Genscher visit, viewed against this background, been a success? One must get things into proportion to answer this question. However vast the range of the plans may be, trade with the Soviet Union still has no high rating in the German

economy. Until now it has been limited by the size of USSR currency reserves and the extent of the German readiness to provide credit. This has however changed since the raw material crisis. Russian energy sources and raw materials are in demand and commanding rapidly rising prices, so much so that the balance of trade could be in equilibrium before 1974 is over. Krupp manager Mommsen, who advises Schmidt on economic matters, is certainly convinced that "an entirely new quality of trade" may develop from the West German business deals with the East although German industry has still misgivings about too great reliance on Russian raw materials. It is his view that business with the East designed with a view to the long term could help to outbalance economic recessions and downturns in employment.

Moreover, however interesting the natural gas deals, an electricity grid to include Berlin and the other agreements which have been concluded alongside the negotiations or will soon follow, Schmidt has scored a success which lies on quite a different plane: A new Chancellor and a new Foreign Minister have done something their predecessors always fought shy off. They have made it clear that it is not reasonable to expect constant confessions of guilt from one side and that willingness to engage in a *détente* endorsed by readiness to cooperate entitles to a mutuality of political contributions. Never before has it been made so unmistakably clear to the Russians that the Berlin problem blunts this will to cooperate.

Hubert Höping