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Common Security and East-West Trade

The policy of détente pursued during the 1970's has to a large extent fallen short of its objectives. It was unable to limit the considerable armament efforts in both East and West and could not prevent the events in Afghanistan. In search of new paths towards an effective security policy the belief has been spreading in recent years that the safeguarding of one's own security can only take place if it is not effected at the expense of one's political and ideological adversary. The additional security must benefit both sides. The crux of the security philosophy of Helmut Schmidt, Egon Bahr and Olof Palme was and is that, in view of the nuclear arms race, the goal can only be Common Security. The search for a concept of Common Security means a search for ways of gradually overcoming the urgent problems between East and West.

The détente policy of the 1970's and East-West trade relations interacted in many ways. It therefore almost seems obligatory to conceptually apply the security philosophy of Common Security to East-West trade relations. Such considerations cannot be based on an ideal world marked by lasting political stability, but on the assumption that East-West trade relations are permanently subject not only to economic, but also to political/ideological, military/security-policy, technological and other influences. A glance at the USA shows how greatly these factors affect the realities of East-West trade policy: strongly restrictive forces are operating in questions of trade, certain groups advocate the application of a concept of refusal to trade with the East and inhibitions against politically instrumentalising East-West trade via embargoes, sanctions and credit restrictions are not particularly great. Common Security considerations cannot disregard the fact that this mood in the USA only recently found its expression in the form of new laws and regulations.

It is characteristic of Western policies on East-West trade to constantly check the political and military risks involved. The current policy of the Western industrialised countries – first and foremost the USA – with regard to trade with the East, which is very restrictive in terms of export structures, could lead to a situation in which a growing number of economically viable projects stand no chance of being carried out. This policy, however, jeopardises the development of East-West trade and hence an important field of peaceful East-West contact. In previous years Western European countries pursued a comparatively liberal East-West trade policy and demonstrated their unwillingness to simply tow the American line with regard to demands for export controls. Against this background, there has also been a growing trend in America during recent years towards a call for the tighter control of technology transfer to Western Europe.

In the final analysis, doesn't it run contrary to Western European economic and political interests to permit a further escalation of this restrictive policy? The geopolitical situation and common sense do not allow Western Europe to let its policy tend towards the total economic and technological isolation of the socialist countries. The only really reasonable political approach would seem to be for Western Europe, which conducts a quite stable exchange of

goods with the East, to take the initiative to turn East-West trade into an integral part of a concept which leads away from general confrontation between East and West, a concept which could some day develop out of the Common Security approach.

Common Security as a concept has not yet sufficiently matured to serve as a means of regulating the entire range of cooperation and coexistence activities between East and West. The field of economic relations may perhaps provide the best framework within which to test this concept. Experience has shown that the total or partial severance of trade ties is not a suitable instrument for the destruction, or at least painful damaging, of the economy of a political adversary. With a little common sense it should be possible, therefore, to elaborate rules of conduct for future East-West trade relations which are able to provide both sides with a guarantee that they stand to gain from an intensification of East-West trade without running the risk of being economically and/or politically harmed by its instrumentalisation. However, since Common Security is not divisible, i.e. not applicable in isolation to just a few areas of life, this concept can only be fully effective in the field of East-West trade if, in the medium term, it becomes the guiding political principle for the structuring of relations in their entirety. Or, to put it another way, as long as military thinking in this world is marked by the idea of one-upmanship via better or more arms the concept of Common Security can – even in economic relations – only be partly achieved. Until this situation changes the West will only promote trade relations up to the point where technology transferred to the Soviet Union cannot be directly used for military purposes.

However, even assuming that the search for safeguards against the military abuse of Western technologies will remain imperative for some time to come, Common Security could prove to be a useful idea for the promotion of East-West trade. It would comply with the principle that one's own security must always take into account the security of the other side. Any form of division of labour creates dependencies between partners. The desire to avoid dependence would mean accepting economic autarky as part of the bargain. Common Security could be regarded as a conceptual framework within which there is a guarantee that no side takes one-sided political or economic advantage of existing trade dependencies. Common Security would only be truly effective if the trading partners in East and West permanently try to strike a balance in the degree of dependence arising in the course of business transactions. Such a network of interdependence, able to prevent one-sided boycotts and blockades, would help to provide a lasting safeguard for the utilisation of economic advantages. The difficulties involved in establishing more balanced dependencies should not be ignored. Even assuming good will on the part of all concerned it will not be easy to find a workable yardstick for dependence, since dependence exists in greatly varying forms and areas, for example, not only with regard to the supply of gas, certain materials or modern production techniques, but also in the form of job security as a result of regular exports to an Eastern bloc country.

Reflections on the relationship between Common Security and East-West trade, however, must bear in mind that this concept cannot help promote new dimensions of East-West trade in the foreseeable future. The principle of Common Security cannot ignore the CoCom list and the much more far-reaching American measures associated with the SDI programme. Over the next few years an intensification of economic cooperation will hardly be possible in the so-called key industries, i.e. the high technology and thus sensitive fields in terms of security policy considerations will remain economic "no-go areas".

Our reflections have thus come full circle. East-West trade takes place in a world which is characterised by manifold forms of tension. In such a context it will not be that easy to create the considerable reserve of mutual trust between East and West needed as a basis for a workable Common Security concept. Until substantial progress has been made in the field of confidence-building measures and disarmament, therefore, and until the world has thus been made a safer place, the application of the concept of Common Security in trade relations will very soon come up against structural and quantitative limitations. In other words, political decisions must precede economic activities, not vice-versa!

Klaus Bolz