



ARTICLE

Kultur and Its Ambiguities: West German Intellectuals and the Société Européenne de Culture in the Early 1950s

Fabio Guidali 

Dipartimento di Studi storici, Università degli Studi di Milano, Via Festa del Perdono 7, 20122 Milano, Italy
fabio.guidali@unimi.it

This article provides a perspective on the relations between Jaspers, Sternberger and Paeschke, and the SEC, an intellectual organisation which advocated the autonomy of culture from politics and the idea of common cultural ground with Eastern Europe. While West German intellectuals could endorse the principles of the association, they were reluctant to cooperate with foreign colleagues to bridge the division of Europe. This article supposes that their failure to collaborate with the SEC was due to the existence of a limited space for independent political initiatives, but also to their actual approval of the Cold War status, which had brought them back into the international community, and to the persistence of a traditional interpretation of ‘culture’, regardless of whether they accepted or refused this. Thus, the Cold War situation is not the only explanation of why the SEC failed to have success in West Germany in that phase.

Introduction

The intellectual association *Société européenne de culture* (European Society of Culture; SEC), officially established in Venice in 1950, and its ‘politics of culture’ are deployed in this article as a way of both understanding West German intellectuals’ ambivalent engagement with European colleagues in the early Cold War and contributing to the debate on such a famously crucial theme such as German collective identity. According to an authoritative tradition that flourished in the Romantic period, *Kultur* (culture), *Bildung* (cultivation of the self) and *Geist* (spirit) were considered to be major constituents of the national character and therefore separated from day-to-day politics.¹ This outlook was still very much alive after the Second World War. In West Germany the reintroduction of democratic structures and proceedings, the economic recovery, and unprecedented Western integration from the political and military points of view combined with the restoration and reconceptualisation of pre-Nazi cultural traditions – as shown by Jeffrey Herf and Andreas Agocs² – and a complex relationship with this same past cultural identity, as especially A. Dirk Moses, Friedrich Kießling and Sean A. Forner have argued.³ Culture was considered to be a haven that had allowed the inner emigrants (those who had not fled the

¹ Georg Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur. Glanz und Elend eines deutschen Deutungsmusters* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1994); Raymond Geuss, ‘Kultur, Bildung, Geist’, in Raymond Geuss, *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29–50. For an outline of German intellectual history, see Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals Between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

² Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Andreas Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). On personal continuities, see also Norbert Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

³ A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Friedrich Kießling, *Die undeutschen Deutschen. Eine ideengeschichtliche Archäologie der alten Bundesrepublik 1945–1972*

country during the Nazi oppression but had not politically compromised themselves)⁴ to resist the regime, relying on *Innerlichkeit*, the distinctive German word for inwardness. This feature has been described as the ability to distance oneself from the exterior world and find an inner free space for reflection,⁵ but, after the war, it also played the leading role in a narrative that implied indifference to politics and a lack of resistance to authoritarian and anti-liberal institutional forms.⁶

This relation between politics and culture in post-war West Germany should be taken into consideration in the light of both the process of European integration and the cultural Cold War. On the one hand, scholarly literature investigating the idea of Europe over the long term, notably work by Vanessa Conze and Christian Bailey,⁷ stresses that, among the cultural traditions revitalised after the war, the concept of *Abendland* was widely circulated up until the mid-1950s. This could be translated as ‘the Occident’ and indicated a supranational European community rooted in Catholic culture, subsidiarity and medieval-style universalism, with overtones of both anti-Bolshevism and anti-Americanism.⁸ Intellectuals who supported the *Abendland* ideal envisaged a unity of Western and Eastern European peoples, too, and were opposed to European integration that would neglect the countries placed under Soviet influence after the Second World War.⁹

On the other hand, the whole of the European continent, and German territories in particular, was the battleground in a struggle for souls, a struggle in which intellectuals played a pivotal role. Indeed, several international associations of intellectuals were established during the post-war years, which, depending on who pulled the strings, were either tools of soft power to impose some conformity on independence-striving intellectuals, or aimed at helping thinkers and the *literati* to achieve a sufficient critical mass to prevent political interference.¹⁰

An example of the former was the most prominent Cold War intellectual organisation, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which secretly received considerable funding from the CIA and aimed at bringing together non-communist leftist, social democratic and liberal intellectuals to fight communism and transfer the principles of so-called consensus liberalism to Europe, based on values of individual liberties and the tradition of philosophic pragmatism.¹¹ In West Germany the CCF had the additional task of overcoming both nationalist tendencies and the tradition of the

(Paderborn: Schönningh, 2012); Sean A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics After 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 18–148.

⁴ Jost Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times: Nazi Fascism, Inner Emigration and Exile* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); John Klapper, *Nonconformist Writing in Nazi Germany: The Literature of Inner Emigration* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015).

⁵ See Nicholas Stargardt, ‘The Troubled Patriot: German Innerlichkeit in World War II’, *German History*, 28, 3 (2010), 326–42.

⁶ Sean A. Forner, ‘Reconsidering the “Unpolitical German”: Democratic Renewal and the Politics of Culture in Occupied Germany’, *German History*, 32, 1 (2014), 56–9.

⁷ Vanessa Conze, *Das Europa der Deutschen. Ideen von Europa in Deutschland zwischen Reichstradition und Westorientierung (1920–1970)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005); Christian Bailey, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow: German Visions of Europe, 1926–1950* (New York: Berghahn, 2013).

⁸ Axel Schildt, *Zwischen Abendland und Amerika. Studien zur westdeutschen Ideenlandschaft der 50er Jahre* (München: Oldenbourg, 1999); Dagmar Pöpping, *Abendland. Christliche Akademiker und die Utopie der Antimoderne 1900–1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 2002); Vanessa Conze, *Das Europa der Deutschen*; Vanessa Conze, ‘Facing the Future Backwards. “Abendland” as an Anti-liberal Idea of Europe in Germany between the First World War and the 1960s’, in Dieter Gosewinkel, ed., *Anti-liberal Europe. A Neglected Story of Europeanization* (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 72–89.

⁹ As a general reference, see Ariane Brill, *Abgrenzung und Hoffnung: ‘Europa’ in der deutschen, britischen und amerikanischen Presse 1945–1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014).

¹⁰ Fabio Guidali, *Scrivere con il mondo in testa. Intellettuali europei tra cultura e potere (1898–1956)* (Milan-Udine: Mimesis, 2016), 183–206.

¹¹ Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999); Volker R. Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe. Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture. The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and Postwar American Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2002). See also Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte A. Lerg, eds., *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War. The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

disengaged intellectual for the purposes of mobilising scholars and artists in the anti-communist campaign.¹²

Relying in its initial phase on aid from the Venice Biennale, the SEC was an example of the latter form of association. Its founder and leader was the Italian philosopher Umberto Campagnolo (1904–76), a former anti-Fascist émigré to Switzerland and a European federalist¹³ who, at this time in which intellectuals were exhorted to become aware of their alleged responsibilities in defending universal values, argued for a defence of cultural autonomy from direct party militancy.¹⁴ According to Campagnolo, being politically committed did not mean taking sides, but doing one's own job as a writer, artist or scientist, while defending the work from external influence. Campagnolo called this position '*politique de la culture*' (politics of culture), which he saw as a political act aiming at preserving culture's conditions of development, in opposition to state-driven cultural politics ('*politique culturelle*').

This '*politique de la culture*' could only be fruitful through the collaboration of scholars from different political and philosophical backgrounds. Campagnolo therefore wanted the SEC to foster dialogue between Western and Eastern European intellectuals, which he deemed possible by virtue of the common cultural roots of Christianity, humanism and a philosophical mindset. From 1952, SEC's members included prominent Italian and French communists and later even Soviet writers like Ilya Ehrenburg, which made the association unique, considering the Cold War and the general anti-communist feeling in Western Europe. Campagnolo did not sympathise with communism himself; his personal ties were to his fellow countrymen like Giovanni Ponti and Stanislao Ceschi, who were involved in the politically moderate Christian Democracy Party, but these leanings never resulted in an explicitly political stance.

The SEC is a convenient setting from which to analyse the reactions of West German intellectuals engaging with foreign colleagues – what compromises they were prepared to make to develop relations, how they responded to cultural and political stimuli from outside their own country and, more generally, what function they attributed to culture. In a context of culture as a realm in which the Cold War could be either won or lost, this article investigates the reasons that very few German intellectuals joined the association in the early 1950s, despite the involvement of distinguished personalities such as the philosopher Karl Jaspers, the political thinker Dolf Sternberger and the essayist Hans Paeschke, while the number of mostly French and Italian members steadily increased to over 900 affiliates.

In many ways, the SEC, which is underrepresented in scholarship although it is still active today,¹⁵ seemed to fulfil requirements needed for its activity to be appreciated by a large number of West German intellectuals. Firstly, it maintained the autonomy of culture from any external pressure. Secondly, it fostered the idea of European integration which had common ground with the *abendländisch* interpretation (that is concerning the *Abendland*), refusing Bloc politics by emphasising the original unity of the West and the East of the continent. Lastly, it represented a way for former inner emigrants to reconnect with the European cultural elite after long isolation during the years of the Nazi regime and the war. Yet, on the contrary, West German intellectuals' relationship to the SEC gives an insight into their difficult path towards rejoining European intellectual society after the war, against a background of questions of trust and dependability that were central in post-war Germany.¹⁶ This article concludes that West Germans were circumspect at best about supporting the SEC, as a result of either the traditional conception of culture – whether they approved of it or not – or their political opinions and, especially, the fear that the association's position on bridging

¹² Michael Hochgeschwender, *Freiheit in der Offensive? Der Kongress für kulturelle Freiheit und die Deutschen* (München: Oldenbourg, 1998).

¹³ Lorella Cedroni and Pietro Polito, eds., *Saggi su Umberto Campagnolo* (Rome: Aracne, 2000).

¹⁴ Umberto Campagnolo, *Petit dictionnaire pour une politique de la culture* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1969).

¹⁵ The only monograph dedicated to the SEC so far is Nancy Jachec's *Europe's Intellectuals and the Cold War. The European Society of Culture, Post-War Politics and International Relations* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

¹⁶ Reinhild Kreis, 'Arbeit am Beziehungsstatus. Vertrauen und Misstrauen in den außenpolitischen Beziehungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland', in Reinhild Kreis, ed., *Diplomatie mit Gefühl. Vertrauen, Misstrauen und die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 7–16.

Western and Eastern Europe through a dialogue that included communists would result in an endangerment of the current situation, which had provided them space to resume free intellectual activity after the years of Nazism.

West Germans and the Emergent SEC

Campagnolo's first step in establishing the SEC was the creation of an extensive promotional committee, whose early members came either from his surroundings in Italy and Switzerland or were leading representatives of European culture he contacted directly. Yet he had no German contacts, except for the philosopher Karl Jaspers, a controversial personality for having raised the question of German collective guilt and for daring to disapprove of the Goethe cult as 'a kind of escapist mythmaking'.¹⁷ Jaspers had emigrated to Basel, where Campagnolo met him during a European trip made between February and March 1949 in order to expand his network of acquaintances. Although Jaspers agreed to join the SEC's promotional committee,¹⁸ probably both as a matter of prestige and from a desire to work transnationally, the association could not count him as an ordinary West German representative.

Things changed when Hans Paeschke became a member in June 1949.¹⁹ Paeschke, editor of the highbrow periodical *Merkur*²⁰ and regular of the annual *Rencontres internationales de Genève*, where he had met Campagnolo, approved of the *abendländisch* movement and displayed an 'idealistic vision of a politically engaged but independent European civil society'.²¹ In many ways his positions were in tune with Campagnolo's, because they both believed in the unity of European civilisation, contested the division of the continent into two opposing fields and challenged the functionalist and intergovernmental approach to the European integration process, though they proposed different solutions (bottom-up federalism by Campagnolo, aristocratic elitism by Paeschke).

From 1949 Paeschke was willing to provide the SEC with some German names: his co-editor Joachim Moras, Dolf Sternberger, the Catholic journalists Walter Dirks and Franz Joseph Schöningh, the Catholic theologian Joseph Bernhart, the luminary in the field of medicine Viktor von Weizsäcker, the philosophers Leopold Ziegler (a conservative) and Max Bense. These individuals became members of the promotional committee and then automatically members of the SEC after its official foundation in May–June 1950, while others, whose names were on Paeschke's lists of candidates, such as the Catholic thinker Alois Dempf and the poets Bertolt Brecht and Peter Huchel, who lived in East Germany, joined the association at a later time.²² It is evident that Paeschke had indicated predominantly humanist educated intellectuals who had experienced inner emigration (except for Brecht). However, in his suggestions of personalities from the East German zone, he also demonstrated that he considered the German cultural panorama to be still intrinsically united, as did supporters of the *Abendland* idea.

During this first phase, however, the SEC did not generate much interest in West Germany. Paeschke had submitted a list of names of German figures and, though Campagnolo had tried to involve them all, half of them did not agree to join the SEC – for example, the European federalist Eugen Kogon, the SPD politician Carlo Schmid, the poet Hans Egon Holthusen and the Germanist

¹⁷ Mark W. Clark, *Beyond Catastrophe. German intellectuals and Cultural Renewal After World War II, 1945–1955* (Oxford: Lexington, 2006), 74.

¹⁸ Letter, Jaspers to Campagnolo, 15 Mar. 1949, Archives of the Société européenne de culture (thereafter ASEC), Venice (now transferred to the Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence-Fiesole), file Jaspers.

¹⁹ Letter, Paeschke to Campagnolo, 14 Jun. 1949, ASEC, file Paeschke.

²⁰ Hans Manfred Bock, 'Die Fortgesetzte Modernisierung des Konservatismus. Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken 1947 bis 1957', in Michel Grunewald and Hans Manfred Bock, eds., *Le discours européen dans les revues allemandes/Der Europadiskurs in den deutschen Zeitschriften (1945–1955)* (Bern: Lang, 2001), 149–85; Friedrich Kießling, 'Fruchtbare Zerrissenheit. Der Merkur in der frühen Bundesrepublik', *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte*, 8, 1 (2014), 87–100.

²¹ Bailey, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, 59.

²² Letters, Paeschke to Campagnolo, 22 Aug., 17 Sep., 15 Dec. 1949 and Campagnolo to Paeschke, 6 Oct. 1949, ASEC, file Paeschke.

Christian Ernst Lewalter. Even those who did join the association seemed to have little interest in it, as was the case with Thomas Mann, who published some pieces of writing in the SEC's periodical *Comprendre*,²³ but did not actively participate in the organisation's activities, probably also on grounds of age.²⁴ The journalist Hans Eberhard Friedrich, who worked for the American daily newspaper *Die Neue Zeitung*, was initially involved in the SEC, though loosely.

In October 1949, Moras wrote Campagnolo a letter that provided a clue to such a lack of enthusiasm. In Moras's opinion, the SEC seemed politically dubious to many West German colleagues; Campagnolo's wish to involve communists and intellectuals from behind the so-called Iron Curtain placed question marks over his political project. Moras added that Germans could, generally, hardly intervene in philosophical debates conducted in French,²⁵ which was the SEC's official language as an international society. Whether or not the latter remark was true, it is undeniable that the SEC struggled to gather West Germans from its early days.

Venice versus Berlin

There are moments when the tempo of history seems to quicken, and this certainly applies to June 1950, the time when the confrontation between the Western and Eastern Blocs was institutionalised also at a cultural level.²⁶ The SEC was established as an association devoted to dialogue, and later that month (just after the Korean War had broken out) the widely publicised founding conference of the CCF was held in the Western sector of Berlin.

Campagnolo had invited the members of the promotional committee to Venice to participate in the SEC's founding general meeting. However, almost all Germans declined the invitation, citing strict visa regulations or work commitments. The philosopher even received an unsympathetic letter from Jaspers, who acknowledged that he could not yet identify the distinguishing features of the association.²⁷ Jaspers's uncertainty seemed to have arisen suddenly after he had welcomed Campagnolo to Basel a year before, but it is undeniable that the international situation had been rapidly changing in the months in between, and Jaspers had already been asked to give his patronage to the anti-communist Berlin congress. As far as the SEC was concerned, Jaspers reserved his right to judge the association. Therefore, at the Venice meeting, German participation was limited to Paeschke, the eminent physician Theodor Brugsch from East Berlin and Dolf Sternberger. Brugsch was appointed the SEC's vice-president but never played an important role in the association; his appointment was simply one of the many indications the association gave regarding its intention to maintain links between Western and Eastern Europe.

Sternberger²⁸ was the only West German who took the floor during the Venice meeting. In his brief speech, he highlighted that culture can become universal only if founded on solidarity, friendship and the free exchange of ideas, echoing his approach to dialogue as an ethics of communication he had already expressed in his works.²⁹ However, Campagnolo gave Sternberger rather cursory treatment, asking him to concentrate on the assembly's practical tasks, such as outlining a statute, without

²³ Thomas Mann, 'Mon Temps', *Comprendre*, 3 (1951), 68–81; 'L'artiste et la société', *Comprendre*, 7–8 (1953), 143–6; 'Éloge de l'éphémère', *Comprendre*, 7–8 (1953), 147; 'Retour d'Amérique', *Comprendre*, 9 (1953), 94–5.

²⁴ He nevertheless approved of Campagnolo's endeavour. See Elisabetta Mazzetti, *Thomas Mann, dialoghi italiani. Sintonia spirituale e comune cultura europea nei carteggi (1920–1955)* (Rome: Artemide, 2016), 147–217.

²⁵ Letter, Moras to Campagnolo, 27 Oct. 1949, ASEC, file Moras.

²⁶ See mainly Andrew J. Falk, *Upstaging the Cold War. American Dissent and Cultural Diplomacy, 1940–1960* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010); Kathleen Starck, ed., *Between Fear and Freedom. Cultural Representations of the Cold War* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010); Judith Devlin and Christoph Hendrik Müller, eds., *War of Words. Culture and the Mass Media in the Making of the Cold War in Europe* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013).

²⁷ Letter, Jaspers to Campagnolo, 22 May 1950, ASEC, file Jaspers.

²⁸ Claudia Kinkela, *Die Rehabilitierung des Bürgerlichen im Werk Dolf Sternbergers* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001).

²⁹ See Dolf Sternberger, 'Erinnerung an die Zwanziger Jahre in Heidelberg', in Dolf Sternberger, *Schriften*, vol. VIII, *Gang zwischen Meistern* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1987), 17–32.

drifting on to general philosophical issues, because they were trying to define the association's membership. Campagnolo made the case for the neologism '*hommes de culture*' (men of culture), which the assembly later accepted, to focus on the fact that what was important was the attitude of those looking for solutions to the social problems of culture who knew that culture itself, rather than their professions, had the propensity to create moral values. Sternberger, for his part, had proposed '*des hommes de lettres, des hommes d'art, des hommes de musique*', as he wished to identify the candidates more clearly and avoid direct mention of the word 'culture'.³⁰

This disagreement did not seem to have hurt Sternberger's feelings: once back home, he wrote Campagnolo a positive letter regarding the SEC's efforts, more than a formal thank-you note, in which he stated that the time in Venice had been of high significance for him and he hoped the SEC would be a growing strong force.³¹ Indeed, Sternberger would have agreed with Campagnolo in condemning intellectuals taking apolitical positions and the political hetero-direction of culture, which were two main pillars of the debate in Venice. However, he had before him the tradition of the German *Kultur* and its connotation – though he did not endorse it – while the Italian philosopher did not. This is the reason that continuous references to culture during the assembly and the concentration on practical questions concerning the association had bothered Sternberger. Only a few days after writing to Campagnolo he openly condemned the SEC's founding meeting at the Berlin congress; in Sternberger's opinion, the Venice meeting had seen culture as merely a matter of organisation. He compared this with what had occurred under the Nazi regime and was allegedly still occurring in West Germany. Referring to the expression '*homme de culture*', he stated that he could not tolerate culture being considered a profession,³² as the Nazis had done, using the word '*Kulturschaffende*' (creators of culture). As Paeschke noted in private in the wake of Moras's observation, without any specific reference to Sternberger, some French expressions were lost in translation for the German public,³³ to whom the term 'culture' sounded both like a familiar identity feature and a reminder of the Nazi instrumentalisation of the arts. Sternberger's case seemed to confirm this. The cause of the quarrel, therefore, had been more of a historic and conceptual misunderstanding than a variance over the sense of the SEC's project.

However, the fact that there is no proof that Campagnolo ever learned in detail about this strong disapproval of the SEC's vocabulary expressed in Berlin was an indication of Sternberger's ambiguous attitude: congratulatory in private but intellectually hostile in public. Paeschke's attitude also needs careful consideration. The editor of *Merkur* attended both the Venice meeting and the Berlin congress, as did Sternberger, appreciating the CCF for its anti-communism, but not for the idea of Europe it proposed. Indeed, siding with Western and pro-American integration, the CCF would be a contributing factor in breaking the *Abendland* unity. After the congress, Paeschke wrote to Campagnolo that the Berlin meeting had exacerbated the situation by making it much harder to foster dialogue between intellectuals. In his opinion, from that moment on it was essential to keep a low profile, because simple private communication between Eastern and Western European intellectuals would not be questioned.³⁴ Since Paeschke was the only active SEC representative in West Germany, Campagnolo had to adapt to his viewpoint as far as German-speaking members were concerned. The fact that, in the existing documentation, Paeschke did not mention Sternberger's Berlin speech to Campagnolo could have a variety of explanations. He could have forgotten it, or deemed it unimportant, or consciously avoided mentioning it out of a desire not to insist on divergence. Either way, this was an early sign that the Italian philosopher was inadvertently depending on information from someone who would prove to be reticent towards him, which would lead to increased inconvenience.

³⁰ 'Débats de l'assemblée constitutive de la Société européenne de culture Venise 28 mai–1 Juin 1950', *Comprendre*, 2 (1950), 39–40.

³¹ Letter, Sternberger to Campagnolo, 19 Jun. 1950, Bestand Sternberger im Deutschen Literaturarchiv Marbach (thereafter DLA), A:Sternberger/Gesellschaften, HS.1989.0010.09532.

³² Dolf Sternberger, 'Von der Zweideutigkeit der Kultur', *Der Monat*, 2, 22–3 (1950), 375–9.

³³ Letter, Paeschke to Campagnolo, probably 1 Jun. 1950, ASEC, file Paeschke.

³⁴ Letter, Paeschke to Campagnolo, 10 Jul. 1950, ASEC, file Paeschke.

Hanging by a Thread

Paeschke was not the only member sensing the difficulties for the SEC in West Germany. For instance, the journalist Friedrich, referring to the Korean War, confirmed that the political and military situation forced him not to publish a positive article about the association.³⁵ He implied that West German *litterati* and scholars had to politically censor or at least monitor their work, and that the SEC, which kept open a line of communication between the Blocs in the intellectual sphere, would be ostracised in the country. After the summer of 1950, it was therefore evident that the SEC had to struggle for attention in West Germany, as demonstrated by the fact that the newly-elected executive committee included only three Germans (Paeschke, Friedrich and the emigrant poet Fritz von Unruh) out of a total of around 50 members.

In the months following its official foundation, Campagnolo decided that the SEC should take a stand on the cultural situation, drafting a manifesto to confirm the moral validity of all honest '*hommes de culture*', including communists, and the possibility of collaborating with them on a strictly cultural level. In his view, the SEC could not manoeuvre itself out of a dialogue with communists at a spiritual level, and his orientation was certainly influenced by his position as an expert on the French-speaking intellectual environment and as an Italian. Indeed, in his country, communists were the main opposition force and had been able to both carve out a leading role in the memory culture of the resistance movement against Fascism and Nazism and to relate to the national cultural tradition.³⁶ Paeschke seemed aware of this, at least as far as the different roles played by communism in Italian and West German culture were concerned. In a letter to Campagnolo, he pointed out that the cultural base of communism had disappeared from Germany in the inter-war period, and now only sidekicks of the Soviets were active in West Germany.³⁷

Therefore, Paeschke was hugely critical of the manifesto, which was an indirect political view, maintaining that the text sounded like a statement against the CCF and remarking that West German intellectuals were very sensitive about announcements of this nature, considering the division of their country. Pivoting on Schönigh and Sternberger's opinions (of which no confirmation has, however, been found in his archive), Paeschke considered that he could not guarantee further West German collaboration until the manifesto was definitively edited.³⁸ Furthermore, he declared, in one of his infrequent essays in *Merkur*, that the SEC had exposed itself to misunderstanding by making the manifesto public.³⁹ He also admitted disapproval of the SEC's 'politics of culture', because it entailed being open to dialogue with communist intellectuals without a guarantee of reciprocity. In questioning the possibility of considering communist intellectuals sincere men of culture, Paeschke was questioning the sense of Campagnolo's undertaking itself.⁴⁰

Jaspers's reaction to the declaration was even more vigorous. The philosopher initially condemned the drafting of a manifesto as not among intellectuals' tasks, but finally admitted that he was afraid of being politically manipulated.⁴¹ When the SEC's assembly approved the final version of the document,⁴² which insisted on cultural autonomy without any regard for the West German members' objections, Jaspers resigned. Moreover, his close disciple, the Swiss philosopher Jeanne Hersch, launched an attack on the association in the internationally influential French daily newspaper

³⁵ Letter, Friedrich to Viana (Campagnolo's secretary), 9 Aug. 1950, ASEC, file Friedrich H.E.

³⁶ Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e Pci. 1944–1958* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1979); Albertina Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali. La politica culturale dei comunisti italiani (1944–1964)* (Rome: Carocci, 2014).

³⁷ Letter, Paeschke to Campagnolo, 22 Aug. 1951, ASEC, file Paeschke.

³⁸ Letters, Paeschke to Campagnolo, 16 Dec. 1950 and 7 Feb. 1951; Letter, Campagnolo to Paeschke, 28 Dec. 1950, ASEC, file Paeschke.

³⁹ Hans Paeschke, 'Der Geist des Auslandes im Spiegel seiner Zeitschriften (III)', *Merkur*, 5, 42 (1951), 769.

⁴⁰ See Paeschke to Campagnolo, 22 Aug. and 8 Oct. 1951; Campagnolo to Paeschke, 28 Sept. 1951, ASEC, file Paeschke.

⁴¹ Letters, Jaspers to Campagnolo, 22 Jan. and 9 Feb. 1951; Letters, Campagnolo to Jaspers, 2 and 12 Feb. 1951, ASEC, file Jaspers.

⁴² 'Débats de la première Assemblée générale ordinaire de la Société européenne de culture, Venise 8–11 novembre 1951', *Comprendre*, 5–6 (1952), 78–9.

Le Monde, stating that the SEC was turning a blind eye to restrictions on freedom in Eastern Europe and that the fear of a new war should not lead to dialogue at all costs.⁴³ The CCF also raised severe criticism.⁴⁴ Jaspers, who was CCF's honorary president, also claimed that a SEC member, whose name he did not reveal, had asserted that one could not be a member of both the SEC and the CCF. This was clearly an attempt to find an easy way out, as Jaspers refused Campagnolo's proposal to set up a roundtable in order to bridge the political differences.⁴⁵ Consequently, Campagnolo inferred that the CCF did not want to clear up the matter⁴⁶ and preferred to stir up a propaganda war.

The wish not to be politically exposed was the official motivation behind Jaspers's resignation; however, this was only partially true, given that he was already exposed as a result of his role in the CCF. As he explained to Paeschke in a letter explicitly labelled as confidential, in his opinion SEC's accommodationist policy, which allegedly echoed an anti-anticommunist position widespread outside West Germany, worked to the Soviets' advantage by undermining the efforts of the anti-communist resistance, although Jaspers admitted that he had no evidence of Soviet influence on the association.⁴⁷ Paeschke's answer was as intriguing as Jaspers's letter – which, incidentally, the editor had promised to destroy, although he obviously did not keep his word. Paeschke wrote that he had learned of Sternberger's and Schöningh's intention to leave the SEC and acknowledged that he shared Jaspers's criticism. Nonetheless, he wanted a discussion with Campagnolo, hoping for clarification.⁴⁸ In the end, Paeschke continued to cooperate with the association, probably because he approved of its efforts to create dialogue with the Eastern European peoples, even though he did not appreciate the political consequences of Campagnolo's project involving relations with communist intellectuals.

Sternberger, Paeschke and Jaspers focused attention on different motifs in the problematic dialogue between West German intellectuals and Campagnolo: the acknowledgement of a distinctive German mindset as regarded 'culture'; the lack of a cultural impact from communism; anti-communism at a political level and West Germany's position internationally. However, they had in common an absence of clarity and a distrustful attitude; they seemed, on the one hand, to be the passive subjects of political and cultural developments decided by authorities inside or outside the country,⁴⁹ on the other, to exploit this same position as an excuse to avoid a profound and straightforward dialogue with Campagnolo.

The project of creating a local West German section of the SEC, as in Paris and Rome, was a good example of the latter point. Undoubtedly, there were budgetary hurdles⁵⁰ and coordination difficulties stemming from a decentralised cultural life and state control; authorities kept associations at a local level, fearing manipulation by foreign forces. Paeschke acknowledged this in a report he presented to a meeting of the SEC's executive committee in 1952,⁵¹ but also added, in confidential messages to Campagnolo, that domestic policy continued to hamper the project and warned him not to be deceived by the lack of help from state authorities. Paeschke maintained that his fellow citizens felt captive: every position of the SEC would force them to express a political opinion, which was not acceptable for them. The so-called 'politics of culture' promoted by Campagnolo was a political approach, even if it had nothing to do with parties or movements,⁵² and referring to it was becoming increasingly problematic in West Germany. Despite this warning, Campagnolo planned a meeting in

⁴³ Jeanne Hersch, 'Réflexions sur le message de la Société européenne de culture', *Le Monde*, 16 Jan. 1952.

⁴⁴ Nancy Jachec, 'The Adresse aux intellectuels de l'Europe et du monde (1952) and its Aftermath: Some Comparative Perspectives on the Intelligentsia's Response to the Partitioning of Europe', in Heiko Feldner, Claire Gorrara and Kevin Passmore, eds., *The Lost Decade? The 1950s in European History, Politics, Society and Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2011), 91–2.

⁴⁵ Letters, Jaspers to Campagnolo, 29 Feb. 1952; Campagnolo to Jaspers, 5 Mar. 1952, ASEC, file Jaspers.

⁴⁶ Letter, Campagnolo to Babel, 4 Mar. 1952, ASEC, file Babel.

⁴⁷ Letter, Jaspers to Paeschke, 12 Jul. 1952, DLA, D:Mercur, HS.NZ80.0003.

⁴⁸ Letter, Paeschke to Jaspers, 17 Jul. 1952, DLA, D:Mercur, HS.NZ80.0003.

⁴⁹ Hochgeschwender, *Freiheit in der Offensive?*, 157.

⁵⁰ Letters, Campagnolo to Paeschke, 18 Jul. and 4 Aug. 1950; Paeschke to Campagnolo, 14 Oct. 1950, ASEC, file Paeschke.

⁵¹ 'Extraits des procès-verbaux des séances du Conseil exécutif tenues à Paris en la salle des Commissions de la Direction générale des arts et des lettres du 5 au 7 janvier 1952', *Comprendre*, 5–6 (1952), 105–6.

⁵² Letters, Campagnolo to Paeschke, 24 Jan. 1952; Paeschke to Campagnolo, 28 Feb. and 12 May 1952, ASEC, file Paeschke.

Munich for July 1952, but was forced to cancel two weeks beforehand because too many West German members would be absent. The point is that Campagnolo never knew that it was the editor of *Merkur* who had put the breaks on, as one can infer from a letter from Sternberger, who openly states that he should apologise to Campagnolo for not attending *following Paeschke's instructions*.⁵³ The West German SEC members were evidently not being completely honest with Campagnolo, so the Italian philosopher never learned about the boycott. Still, it appears paradoxical that Paeschke continued to blame Campagnolo for not visiting West Germany.⁵⁴

In the light of this tug of war, Sternberger resigned from the association at the beginning of 1953 under the pretext of bad health following a car accident and a heavy workload.⁵⁵ It is plausible that his resignation was not merely a means of avoiding some tasks, considering that he was also active in the German commission at UNESCO; he evidently did not intend to be linked to an organisation with which he could not eagerly collaborate⁵⁶ and whose mission he probably did not fully understand.

The SEC's executive committee discussed the German problem again in June 1954. On that occasion, Paeschke reiterated the difficulty of translating some of the SEC's basic concepts into German and the fact that, in the context of West Germany, intellectuals were obliged to separate politics from culture, meaning that any cultural relationships could work only on a private level.⁵⁷ Of course, Paeschke's explanation was a cosmetic exercise, because he had contributed to provoking the failure of a *private* meeting of West German members in 1952, when state authorities had not been involved.

It is worth remarking that the SEC was not the only organisation that had serious problems taking root in West Germany, as the development of the CCF shows. Indeed, in spite of the considerable finance coming from the United States and political support at high levels, for instance from Carlo Schmid, the CCF's West German local section closed in 1953. Internal quarrels, the decentralisation of national cultural life and a lack of influence over the central bureau of the organisation, whose headquarters were in Paris, contributed to that failure.⁵⁸ Moreover, the CCF was introducing philosophical ideas that many Germans still saw as foreign to *Kultur* – with some success. Therefore, the early 1950s appear to be the nadir of international intellectual associations in West Germany, either because of the complex political situation, which inspired fear of political manipulation, or from a desire not to transform culture into a mere political asset.

The Thaw

After Stalin's death in 1953 and with Khrushchev's rise to power, a period of so-called peaceful coexistence began. The mid-1950s represented a crucial turning point in the West Germany too, given growing pluralism and politicisation of intellectuals, which conflicted with the traditional refusal of direct political involvement. A new generation was emerging: young writers and scholars did not feel obliged to maintain the same distance from politics as their older colleagues who had been educated under the Weimar Republic or before; intellectuals were increasingly identified as legitimate players in the political arena, fighting authoritarianism and striving to enforce liberal democracy. The period could genuinely be regarded as the beginning of a 'second foundation of the Federal Republic',⁵⁹ paving the way for active political participation on the part of West German intellectuals like Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll, Jürgen Habermas, Alexander Mitscherlich and many more, a

⁵³ Letter, Sternberger to Paeschke, 23 Jun. 1952, DLA, A:Sternberger/Gesellschaften, HS.1989.0010.09540.

⁵⁴ Letter, Paeschke to Campagnolo, 19 Mar. 1953, ASEC, file Paeschke.

⁵⁵ Letter, Sternberger to Campagnolo, 24 Feb. 1953, DLA, A:Sternberger/Gesellschaften, HS.1989.0010.09532.

⁵⁶ Letter, Sternberger to Campagnolo, 9 Mar. 1953, DLA, A:Sternberger/Gesellschaften, HS.1989.0010.09532.

⁵⁷ 'Réunion du Conseil exécutif avril 1954 (Florence)', *Comprendre*, 12 (1954), 16–17.

⁵⁸ Hochgeschwender, *Freiheit in der Offensive?*, 402–3.

⁵⁹ Franz-Werner Kersting, Jürgen Reulecke and Hans-Ulrich Thamer, eds., *Die zweite Gründung der Bundesrepublik. Generationswechsel und intellektuelle Wortergreifungen 1955–1975* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010).

convergence of leftist intellectuals around the Social Democratic Party (SPD),⁶⁰ and a push also from conservative intellectuals for the liberalisation and politicisation of culture.⁶¹

Consequently, the SEC aroused more interest in West Germany over the following years, although signs of change in the relationship between the association and German-speaking intellectuals came initially from the East Germans. The big names of East German culture such as Bertolt Brecht, Stephan Hermlin, Anna Seghers and Arnold Zweig joined the SEC through the mediation of Gabriele Mucchi, the Italian communist painter, and Theodor Brugsch, without any contact with West German colleagues.⁶² It is interesting to note that the SEC's executive committee, which vetted nominations, accepted all these new members before Campagnolo could verify whether they were actual candidacies or just proposals made without consulting the candidates, as he openly admitted in a letter to Mucchi.⁶³ This showed that the Italian philosopher was so eager to bring Eastern European members into the SEC, without whom the association would have lost its meaning, that he was willing to bend the procedures.

Change was less rapid as far as West Germany was concerned, yet Friedrich declared that he felt free to offer his collaboration after the suspension of the American newspaper *Die Neue Zeitung*,⁶⁴ and presented a list of several candidates. Many of the individuals he indicated were conservatives – like the Evangelical theologian Otto Dibelius, who had declared himself an anti-Semite years before, and the mathematician and former NSDAP member Pascual Jordan – or had been celebrated by the Nazi regime, like the composer Werner Egk, or compromised with it, as with the composer Carl Orff and the journalist Karl Silex. Friedrich's selection is not surprising, given the continuities in Adenauer's Germany, but it is telling that the SEC's executive committee accepted those candidacies without objection, while only a couple of years before there had been controversy over the membership of French historian Daniel-Rops, because of his alleged collaboration during the Nazi occupation.⁶⁵ Campagnolo's insufficient knowledge of the German milieu, and that of his closest confidants, was therefore blatant, unlike his understanding of the French environment. Other candidates suggested by Friedrich were rejected out of fears of protest by 'pure intellectuals', for instance, Gustav Stein, a CDU member and deputy chief executive officer of the Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (the Federation of German Industries), and Daimler-Benz general director Fritz Könecke.⁶⁶ Campagnolo was afraid that the SEC's autonomy might be in danger if representatives of such powerful institutions joined the association, but that resolution obviously irritated Friedrich.⁶⁷

Despite the new members, West Germans were still a tiny minority in the SEC. Campagnolo certainly lacked a sufficient number of correspondents from the country, making it difficult to easily discern candidates, but West German intellectuals themselves were either incapable of, or prevented from, integrating into a non-intergovernmental European organisation and contributing to the

⁶⁰ Müller, *Another Country*; Dominik Geppert and Jens Hacke, *Streit um den Staat. Intellektuelle Debatten in der Bundesrepublik 1960–1980* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); Michael Hochgeschwender, ed., *Epoche im Widerspruch: Ideelle und kulturelle Umbrüche der Adenauerzeit* (Bonn: Bouvier, 2011); Thomas Kroll and Tilman Reitz, eds., *Intellektuelle in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013). See also Frank Biess, 'Thinking After Hitler: The New Intellectual History of the Federal Republic of Germany', *History and Theory*, 51, 2 (2012), 221–5. For an earlier study, see Wilfried van der Will, 'From the 1940s to the 1990s. The Critical Intelligentsia's Changing Role in the Political Culture of the Federal Republic', *Debatte*, 5, 1 (1997), 25–48.

⁶¹ Jens Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit. Die liberalkonservative Begründung der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

⁶² Fabio Guidali, *Il secolo lungo di Gabriele Mucchi. Una biografia intellettuale e politica* (Milan: Unicopli, 2012), 257–8.

⁶³ Letter, Campagnolo to Mucchi, 25 Jul. 1955, Materiali & corrispondenza SEC, Mucchi Archive, Centro Apice, University of Milan.

⁶⁴ Letter, Friedrich to Campagnolo, 10 Nov. 1953, ASEC, file Friedrich H.E.

⁶⁵ Letter, Mayoux to Campagnolo, 31 Oct. 1951, ASEC, file Mayoux.

⁶⁶ 'Conseil exécutif. Session du mois de juillet 1955', *Comprendre*, 15 (1956), 231; Letter, Friedrich to Campagnolo, 10 Jun. 1955, ASEC, file Friedrich H.E.

⁶⁷ Letters, Campagnolo to Friedrich, 17 Jan. and 11 Jul. 1955; Friedrich to Campagnolo, 21 Jul. 1955, ASEC, file Friedrich H.E.

development of the debate on politics and culture. Indeed, no German intellectual took part in the momentous *Rencontre Est-Ouest*, a gathering of Soviet, Eastern and Western European figures held in Venice between 25 and 31 March 1956 under the aegis of the SEC.⁶⁸ Although Paeschke acknowledged the importance of the *Rencontre*,⁶⁹ West German intellectuals were merely observers and still had little influence in the association.

Paeschke was upset once more over the SEC's political position following the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. The association decided not to create a breach with communist intellectuals, even though they might support the military intervention of Warsaw Pact troops, while Paeschke clearly wanted the SEC to take a moral stand against the Soviets.⁷⁰ Following this argument, Paeschke did not resign, but he drastically reduced his collaboration with the association, so that neither he nor other eminent intellectuals made the SEC an important feature in West German cultural life during the 1950s. Nevertheless, in 1958, when he could finally make a trip to West Germany,⁷¹ Campagnolo wrote to Dempf that their conversation had clarified for him the situation in the country for the first time. Dempf, who had been a member of the SEC for about three years, replied that their meeting had given him the chance to understand the association's mission.⁷² There was no doubt that, before that point, the collaboration between West German intellectuals and the SEC had been largely ineffective.

Conclusion

The SEC is an interesting case study for analysing how West German intellectuals built a new network of relations with their European colleagues in the middle of the Cold War, and more generally for delving into the tensions between the politicisation and autonomy of culture – an Ariadne's thread throughout the twentieth century. It is not surprising that intellectuals from different backgrounds, like the conservative Paeschke, the democrat Sternberger and the liberal Jaspers, at first lent an attentive ear to the 'politics of culture', given the central question of *Kultur* in narratives about the German past and present. Indeed, Campagnolo's principle involved a consideration of culture as a political, but not ideological or party, issue – paradoxically something both supporters of traditional *Innerlichkeit* and their opponents could agree on – and had some points of contact with the concept of *Abendland*, which attracted Paeschke. On a practical level, however, there are no signs of West German involvement in the association's activities nor in the debates conducted mainly by French and Italian members on the political responsibility of intellectuals, on cultural strategies for overcoming the Cold War, or on decolonisation.⁷³ While there is no doubt that Campagnolo lacked an understanding of the peculiarities of the German mindset on culture and politics, the low level of collaboration was mainly due to the nuanced positions of West German intellectuals. Indeed, it was the result of both anti-communism and the Allied and state control of all intellectual activity, which made it inadvisable and imprudent to approve of the dialogue with foreign Western communist and Soviet colleagues that the SEC had embarked on, and of cultural differences, since the SEC's basic French concepts could not be translated into German without touching on highly divisive questions. For this reason, the pressure of the Cold War is a necessary but insufficient condition for understanding the complex relation between the SEC and West German intellectuals, since the Bloc logic of confrontation was juxtaposed with a conception of culture that, willingly or unwillingly, was still present in West Germany and could not be underestimated. This is why those organisations that tended to

⁶⁸ Nancy Jachec, 'The Société Européenne de Culture's Dialogue Est-Ouest 1956: Confronting the "European Problem"', *History of European Ideas*, 34, 4 (2008), 558–69.

⁶⁹ Letter, Paeschke to Campagnolo, 12 Apr. 1956, ASEC, file Paeschke.

⁷⁰ Letters, Paeschke to Campagnolo, 17 and 28 Nov. 1956, ASEC, file Paeschke.

⁷¹ See 'Conseil exécutif. Session du mois d'avril 1958, à Venise', *Comprendre*, 19 (1958), 336.

⁷² Letters, Campagnolo to Dempf, 18 Jan. 1958; Dempf to Campagnolo, 22 Jan. 1958, ASEC, file Dempf.

⁷³ Fabio Guidali, 'Rediscovering the European Identity Approach: Umberto Campagnolo and the Periodical *Comprendre* in the 1950s', *Zeitgeschichte*, 43, 6 (2016), 365–78.

enforce the taking of sides – either politically, as in the case of the CCF, or in defence of the autonomy of culture, as with the SEC – had a hard time in West Germany in the early 1950s. Even though an apolitical posture and neutrality were generally judged negatively, they remained an ideal point of reference to escape the burning – and sometimes harassing – demand to adopt a formal political position. This was a paradox that made the intellectuals' stance quite uncomfortable. In this sense, stability for West German intellectuals was provided by a highly unstable position as men of culture torn between conflicting requests.

However, this does not explain why Paeschke, Sternberger and Jaspers used a series of what appear to be subterfuges in their relationship with Campagnolo, a foreigner uninvolved in their national problems. It seems reasonable to suppose that West German intellectuals, who could compare themselves with politically engaged colleagues mainly from France and Italy thanks to the SEC, wanted to avoid a frank exchange of values and political ideas. The core of the matter was that the prevailing political situation had allowed them to become assimilated again into the international community, for better or worse. The balance, based on anti-communism and international tension, had allowed West German intellectuals to rebuild a solid cultural environment, and the SEC, with its desire to overcome the Bloc duality, could endanger international power relationships. The need for stability prevailed, a shared goal among thinkers of very different political persuasions, as Jan-Werner Müller has defined the search for a 'post-post liberal order'.⁷⁴ At the same time, the European integration founded on intergovernmental agreements and developing from a cultural point of view under the auspices of the pro-American CCF was certainly not the kind of Europe that *Abendländer* Paeschke or the democrat Sternberger preferred. Therefore, the SEC represented a different approach to the European question, and that caused uncertainty for some time about whether to break with it or keep open the channels of communication with Campagnolo. Ambiguities and deceptions appear to have been the outcome of this tension.

⁷⁴ Jan-Werner Müller, 'A Post-Post Liberal Order: How Western Europe Emerged from its Thirty-Years Crisis', in Lars K. Bruun, Karl Christian Lammers and Gert Sørensen, eds., *European Self-Reflection between Politics and Religion. The Crisis of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 199.