

I. The Presence of the Past

Historians disagree about Dresden

A march has been held in Magdeburg to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the destruction of the city. Some 1,000 people attended, and they are described as “neo-Nazis” in the press. Speeches attacked “the allied Holocaust”. Some 1,500 people participated in a counter-demonstration and hundreds of police and security services (*Bundesgrenzschutz*) were sent to keep the two sides apart. The bombing of Magdeburg claimed thousands of victims, 41,000 houses, 224 inns, 15 churches, 23 schools and 24 warehouses were destroyed. 90 per cent of the city’s Baroque old centre lay in ruins by the end. The Magdeburg demonstration is probably supposed to be the curtain raiser for a series of such marches to commemorate the destruction of the other German cities, which occurred in January and February 1945. A big march is supposed to be held in Dresden on 13 February. The capital of Saxony was destroyed in attacks on 13 and 14 February 1945, during which 35,000 people were killed. The *Bild am Sonntag* published the views of the British historian, Frederick Taylor, whose book on the bombing of Dresden was recently published in German. Taylor justifies the attacks, saying that there were “good reasons to destroy Dresden.” By contrast, the German historian, Jörg Friedrich, whose book on the bombing campaign became a bestseller when it was published in 2002, says that “Dresden is the symbol of senseless, excessive force, destruction for destruction’s sake, with no military purpose.” Friedrich says the city was “nearly defenceless”.

There were considerable protests against the Magdeburg march: the cathedral bell rang every ten minutes in protest, and people formed a human chain. Preachers said that war would not have come to Germany if it had not gone out from Germany in the first place. Those who died in the Allied bombing raids were the victims of “German fascism”. Magdeburgers followed the neo-Nazi demonstration with brooms, symbolically sweeping the street clean of “the brown demon” in their wake. [*Die Welt*, 17th January 2005]

German President’s Israeli visit is controversial

Although it is by no means unprecedented, the forthcoming state visit by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Horst Köhler, to Israel, is

proving problematic. He has been invited to address the Knesset and the Minister of Health, Dabi Naveh, has already announced that he will boycott the speech. The occasion is the 40th anniversary of the opening of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany. In 2000 Köhler’s predecessor, Johannes Rau, also addressed the Knesset in Jerusalem. But Naveh has said that the German language should not be heard in the Israeli Parliament for as long as there are still survivors from the Holocaust. The Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, Hemi Doron, whose grandfather was killed by the Nazis, has also said that he does not want to attend. “My feet have never touched German soil and I never buy German products,” he said. “I cannot bear to hear the German language in the Parliament of the Jewish people.” In his 2000 speech, Rau had asked for forgiveness for what the Germans had done. On that occasion, the Speaker of the Knesset, Abraham Burg, had said how difficult it had been to agree to let Rau speak in German, and Rau made reference to this when he spoke. [*Die Welt*, 18th January 2005]

Front National fed up with Le Pen

The veteran president of the French National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen, has caused uproar in his own party by saying that the German occupation of France was “not particularly inhumane”. Le Pen is now under judicial investigation for this remark because it could fall under the terms of the Gayssot law which prohibits anyone from questioning crimes against humanity. Le Pen said that mistakes were inevitable in a country as big as France but that, “There is a lot to say about the massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane.” He was referring, no doubt, to the well-known revisionist theory that the Resistance had indeed hidden explosives in the village church where 642 civilians (including 245 women and 207 children) were burned to death on 10 June 1944. Le Pen said, “If the Germans had been carrying out massive executions all over the place, as people everywhere seem to believe, then there would have been no need for concentration camps for political deportees.” Le Pen also referred to a massacre, which had been ordered by a German officer who was “mad with sadness”, after an act of sabotage in the North of France, but which the Gestapo had prevented. “There are plenty of anecdotes like this,” he said,

presumably implying that the Gestapo was always running around trying to protect people. [Agence France Presse, 12th January 2005]

His remarks have caused considerable irritation within the ranks of the National Front itself. While there may be some people in the FN with Nazi sympathies, and there are certainly some Pétainists who believe that Marshal Pétain shielded France from the worst excesses of the Germans, there are also plenty of *résistants* and children of *résistants* in the FN, such as Marie-France Stirbois, who agree with neither view, and certainly plenty of ordinary patriots who do not see why anyone would want to play down the German occupation of their country. Whatever their political views, FN members agree that the timing was appalling and that the remarks are highly inappropriate. Most FN members want the party to wield power and not to be thrust into the outer margins of extremism. Le Pen blames the magazine *Rivarol* for not sending him the text of the interview for approval before it was published. The journalist at *Rivarol*, Jérôme Bourbon, has said that the remarks show that Le Pen, “with his revisionist theories”, is closer to Bruno Gollnisch than to his daughter Marine Le Pen. Marine Le Pen is being increasingly seen as her father’s most likely successor but it is strongly believed that she does not share his views on these matters. Everyone has noticed that Marine Le Pen, who is a member of the political bureau of the party, attended neither its first meeting this year nor the presentation of New Year’s wishes by her father to the press. This is being widely understood as a tacit criticism. Marine Le Pen is determined to “de-demonise” the National Front, and her father’s words will therefore be extremely unwelcome for her.

For his part, Le Pen has claimed that he is the victim of “persecution”. He has clearly been somewhat thrown by the virulence of the reactions against his interview. He used the occasion of his New Year wishes to the press to remind everyone that he was himself a *résistant* – “After the death of my father, I had a revolver, which was punishable by death. I lived through four years of occupation sharing the privations but also the hopes for liberation. 600,000 French people died in the 1939-1945 war. They have the right to be remembered faithfully by the generations for whose liberty they gave their lives. I have always considered the German army and police to have been enemy organisations: I judge them severely but while trying to be just and trying to avoid Manichaeism.” Le Pen went on to say that the whole thing was been exploited for political reasons, and that his words had been taken out of context. [Christiane Chombeau, *Le Monde*, 18th January 2005; Olivier Pognon, *Le Figaro*, 18th January 2005]

Lithuania haunted by Soviet past – and present

It has been revealed that both the Foreign Minister, Antanas Valionis, and the Head of National Security of Lithuania, Arvydas Pocius, were both KGB agents. Valionis is supposed to have joined the KGB as a “reservist” in 1981 with the rank of Captain. Pocius, the current head of the Lithuanian counter-espionage service, became an agent in 1989, just one year before the country became independent of the USSR. Valionis insouciantly confirmed that the revelations were true, but claimed that he had never collaborated “actively” with the KGB. He claimed that the security services and the foreign ministry had known about it all anyway since 1994. He said that he had sworn an oath of loyalty to the Lithuanian state and that he respected it. The head of the secret police, by contrast, denied all links to the KGB and said that he never knew he was on any kind of list. Both the President and the Prime Minister of Lithuania have called for calm over the issue. The revelations come less than a year after the previous President, Rolandas Paksas, was removed from office for alleged – but never proved – links with a Russian businessman. The suggestion was that the businessman was himself politically dodgy, but again this was never proved. The far greater accusation that these two ministers were actually KGB agents has not, however, threatened their careers for the time being. This is in spite of the fact that Lithuania passed a law in 1999 requiring everyone with KGB links to come clean in exchange for amnesty. Failure to declare collaboration was to be a bar to public service. Some people are accusing Russia of being the source of the revelations, on the basis that the Lithuanian Government was especially active in supporting the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and that it is also very pro-Chechen. [Laure Mandeville, *Le Figaro*, 18th January 2005] But the question then is: why would a KGB agent be in favour of the pro-Western opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko, or anti-Russian in the Caucasus? The answer was perhaps given in a *New York Times* article dated 17 January, which explained how the Ukrainian KGB had in fact been behind the Orange Revolution, not against it. [See “Back Channels: a Crackdown Averted” by C. J. Chivers, *New York Times*, 17th January 2005] Meanwhile, President Adamkus has still not said whether he will attend the celebrations in Moscow to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Many Balts consider that the defeat of Nazism was the beginning of their own occupation by Soviet forces – they would have preferred it if the Germans had won.

II. Other European News

EU shuts stable door after horse has bolted

EU Finance Ministers meeting in Brussels on Tuesday are trying to resurrect the Stability Pact which has been honoured only in the breach since it was signed in 1997. They have promised henceforth to encourage states to reduce their deficits in periods of growth, and to bring about greater financial and economic cooperation between EU countries. Their decision comes just months after their decision effectively to ignore the rules of the Stability Pact by refusing to open a deficit procedure against Germany and France. The idea now is that the Commission's powers to act pre-emptively against rising budget deficits will be strengthened – although no one seems clear just how. This “decision” by the Finance Ministers follows a proposal by the monetary commissar, Joaquín Almunia. He has said that in periods of growth countries should be obliged to provide the Commission with concrete proposals for reducing the debt. This is intended to reduce the danger of borrowing rising above 3 per cent of GDP in times of economic slowdown. The Commission accuses Germany, in particular, of not having done enough to build down its deficit in the last decade when there was some growth. The argument runs that this is the reason why it has broken the Stability Pact rules repeatedly since 2002. Despite the agreement, it remains unclear how the new preventive plan will be put into operation. The ministers have not yet agreed what exactly they mean by “times of growth”. “The devil lies in the detail,” commented one expert. Also controversial is the plan to be more lenient towards states which have lower overall national debt. The current rules put the limit at 60 per cent of GDP but some states have much higher national debt – Belgium and Italy for instance, whose figures are around twice this (106 per cent of GDP in the case of Italy). In order to give their new decisions credibility, the Finance Ministers agreed to pursue the deficit procedures against Greece and Hungary. [Jochen Hoenig, *Handelsblatt*, 19th January 2005]

The German Government has suggested a further loosening of the Pact's criteria – quite a difference from the mid-1990s when Germany was the one insisting that it be as tightly defined as possible. The suggestion has been greeted with considerable scepticism by the other member states. Schröder wants the Commission to agree to take various factors into consideration before launching a deficit procedure. These would include a weak economic situation, structural reforms the state might be introducing, and other special burdens like reunification or being a net contributor to the EU

budget. (Guess which country Mr. Schröder has in mind!) The sharpest criticisms of the German Chancellor's proposals came from German members of the European Parliament. The CSU MEP, Markus Ferber, said that Germany was blatantly trying to dismantle the Pact, and that Schröder was guilty of a breach of trust. Another, Alexander Radwan, expressed the fear that Germany would purchase agreement on this from its partners by agreeing to higher net contributions to the EU budget. In Germany itself, opposition MP, Peter Hintze, accused Schröder of wanting to write a blank cheque for inveterate debtors. He said that rising debt destroyed the basis of any state. He said that the German Government ought to bring Germany's finances under control instead of seeking ever more get-out clauses from the Pact. The FDP-Liberal spokesman on budgetary matters, Andreas Pinkwart, called the Chancellor “the gravedigger” of the Stability Pact. Government MPs returned the compliment and accused the opposition of being the gravedigger of growth and employment. [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18th January 2005]

In an interview, a professor of economics at the Free University of Berlin, Hendrik Enderlein, has lent credence to the view that the Germans never intended – and still do not intend – that the Stability Pact be applied to them. “The Pact was conceived for one single reason – to prevent the Italians from running deficits above 3 per cent,” said Enderlein. He says that Schröder is giving the impression that Germany is somehow different from other countries. [Arnaud Leparmentier, *Le Monde*, 19th January 2005]

Fini calls for ‘more flexibility’

The Italian Deputy Prime Minister, Gianfranco Fini, has said that Rome wants an agreement making the Stability Pact more flexible, and on the British budget rebate, by June. He rejected the notion that certain kinds of spending should be omitted from the debt calculation – such as on infrastructure, research, competitiveness, social security – because he said such a list would never end. But he did call for more flexibility in the way the Pact was applied. “The magic word is flexibility,” said Fini. [Interview with Henri de Bresson and Daniel Vernet, *Le Monde*, 20th January 2005]

Jobs for the boys

The former commissar for monetary affairs, Mario Monti, is to chair a new European centre for international economics whose creation was decided two years ago to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Franco-German Elysée Treaty. It has been called

BRUEGEL – Brussels European and Global Economic Laboratory – and it will open in March with a budget of 2 million euros a year, paid for by the member states who are associated with the idea (including the UK). The centre is to produce policy papers on things like “Europe in the age of globalisation” – in other words, just the kind of work which the Commission does anyway. [*Le Monde*, 19th January 2005]

How do you say ‘gobbledegook’ in Polish?

The ratification of the EU Constitution may be delayed or even derailed in Poland because of the poor quality of the Polish translation of it. The linguistic mistakes concern some very substantial issues: for instance, the Committee for Social Policy is said to make decisions by qualified majority when in fact it votes by unanimity. There are also mistakes between different versions concerning the number of votes Poland will have. Even pro-EU politicians are now saying that the ratification itself might be endangered. Bronislav Komorovski of the Civic Platform said, “The Sejm [Polish Parliament] cannot debate constitutional rules which contradict the original version, and on the most important points.” He said that not only his party but also the majority of the opposition parties would vote against the Constitution in its present form. In any case the ratification will now be delayed by several months until these problems are sorted out, but the delay means that the referendum on ratification cannot now be held on the same day as the presidential elections, as had been planned. The left-wing governing parties wanted the two to be held simultaneously, thinking that it would increase the chances of a left-wing candidate. They also wanted to be sure of a turnout of at least 50 per cent, because Polish law requires this for a vote to be valid. No one has yet accepted the blame for the mistakes, even though the faulty text has already been published in the Official Journal of the EU. Poland has now written to the Italian Government, which is the official guardian of the treaties, to ask for permission to alter the text of the document which has been deposited with it. [*Der Standard*, 19th January 2005]

Constitution “myths” to be rebutted

A group of pro-Constitution MEPs have set up a “rapid reaction force” designed to rebut any lies about the Constitution that make it into the public domain. The MEPs claim that the press (it is thought

this is most likely a jab at the British press) has been publishing scare stories on the implications of the Constitution once it is ratified. In order to refute inaccurate articles, the MEPs (including Labour’s Richard Corbett) intend to send out letters to newspapers or issue press releases. This is not the first time a “rebuttal” service has existed for the EU. On the europa.eu.int website there is already a section called “facts” which points out where misleading reports have been written up in the papers. Unfortunately, so many of them turn out to be true. [Honor Mahony, *euobserver.com*, 19th January 2005]

Protests start in Russia

During the ‘Orange Revolution’, an ally of Viktor Yushchenko, the gas oligarch Yulia Timoshenko, said, “As soon as our Orange Revolution is completed, we will transfer it to Russia.” [*Ukrainska Pravda*, 3rd December 2004] It seems that things have started already. A pension reform was introduced on 1 January and it means that pensions will be cut for 35 million pensioners, war veterans, police officers and soldiers. Thousands of people have immediately taken to the streets in protests which the BBC has already dubbed (with customary naff taste) “the babushka revolution”. The plan is to remove free health care, transport and other public services and to replace these with direct payments. Naturally people are against this change, especially since the financial compensation is very low (a few euros a month). For a week, the Kremlin said nothing about the demonstrations but then President Putin accused the Government of not having thought the reform through. The Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov, is said to have offered his resignation. Putin has proposed raising pensions and giving reduced prices for travel, but the protests have continued. Indeed, they may well continue since the prices of medicines and public services are supposed to start rising at the end of this month by up to 35 per cent. Students are expected to join the protests too, since their privileges are also being cut. Demonstrators in St. Petersburg have started wearing orange, in explicit reference to their Western-backed colleagues in Ukraine. The placards carried are very vehement – they describe Putin as a murderer of children and old people. “Independent” polling organisations are producing figures which talk up the level of discontent. In short, all the elements seem to be in place ... [*Der Standard*, 19th January 2005]