GERMAN WRITERS ON EUROPE
BEFORE AND AFTER 1989

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I
Although many contemporary European writers are involved in the dis-
cussion of the changes that swept the Continent since 1989, the con-
tribution of German writers to the discourse on Europe has been rather
paltry: Almost all intellectual energy that German writers invest in polit-
ical essays is spent on matters of national concern. The discussion revolves
everless around Stasi documents, the sensitive relationship between East
and West Germans, the opportunities that may have been overlooked
when the two states were reunited, or the question of the “great” liter-
ary unification work that has yet to be written.

Before 1989, the situation was different. During the 1980s, a new
Europe discourse was alive and well among West German writers. They
were reacting to two European phenomena: First, they reacted to the
increased economic integration in anticipation of the targets “1992” and
“Maastricht,” set by the European Union in Brussels, and second, they
reacted to the essayistic offensives of Central European intellectuals such
as Kundera of Czechoslovakia, Szczypiorski of Poland, and Konrad of
Hungary. The Central European authors wished to contribute to their
countries’ efforts of liberating themselves from the political domination
of the Soviet Union. These two directions in the West German Europe
discourse of the 1980, crossed and merged, a fact that became particularly
evident in 1988 during the writers’ congress on Europe in Berlin. The
authors Hans Christoph Buch, Anna Jonas, Hans Joachim Schädlich,
and Peter Schneider had adopted an idea of György Konrd’s by organizing
the congress under Konrad’s motto “A dream of Europe.” Their intention
was to provide moral support to the Central European writers in their
attempt to return to Europe, that is, to free their countries from Moscow’s
domination. Buch and Schneider had invited a number of dissidents from
the GDR to participate. However, not a single one attended the congress.
The intellectuals from the German Democratic Republic generally stayed
away from anti-Soviet campaigns. In comparison to Erich Honecker’s dic-
tatorial style, Michail Gorbachov’s Soviet Union seemed a model of reform.
The diverging attitudes toward Brussels rose to the surface during this congress of 1988. Central European writers such as Konrad renewed their demand that Western Europe should increase its economic and political integration and that in the long run the Central European countries should become part of this united Europe. West German writers, however, aggressively distanced themselves from the European Community. Writers from Austria and Switzerland (e.g., Barbara Frischmuth and Peter Bichsel) articulated their concerns as well, concerns that were summarized by Susan Sontag in her differentiation between Europe and “Euro-Land.” For her, Euro-Land represented Brussels and the European Union (EU), the result, in her opinion, of the equation Europe minus culture. Although the congress had been conceived with Konrad’s motto in mind, there was little evidence of his dream of Europe.

In the 1980s, the basic tenor of the writers’ essays on Europe was one of repulsion of Brussels’s European policies. From the multitude of examples, I would like to expand on three: Carl Amery, F. C. Delius, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Each of these writers took a different stand in his criticism of Brussels: Amery pleaded for a Europe that would take the regions into account; F. C. Delius saw the European Union as an institution of neocolonialism, bent on exploiting the Third World; and Hans Magnus Enzensberger perceived Brussels as the destroyer of cultural diversity and a throwback to the politics of pre-democratic times. Carl Amery stated that Europe could only function as a union of the historically established regions, not as a conglomerate of sovereign nations. Brussels should be replaced by a “senate of European regions” which would be entrusted with evolving a “European constitution.” In his satire, Delius reports about a retired former official of the European Union’s Commission. This bureaucrat sends a memorandum to one of the departments of his former employer. Under the pretense of wanting to do something against hunger in the world, this missive campaigns ruthlessly for the exploitation of the Third World, not even shying away from propagating genocide. Nowhere else but in Delius’s memorandum has the European Union been depicted so strongly as a mere machine of neocolonialism.

Compared with Delius’s satire, Enzensberger’s criticism of Brussels is a model of objectivity. He is concerned with the preservation of cultural diversity and the assurance that democracy will continue to exist in the Europe of the future. Enzensberger expressed his fear of the elimination of historic cultural differences in the regions and countries of the Continent through internationalizing, technisizing, and computerizing