

**Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Geheime Dienste. Die politische Inlandsspionage der Organisation Gehlen 1946–1953, Berlin (Ch. Links) 2018, 816 S. (Veröffentlichungen der Unabhängigen Historikerkommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte des Bundesnachrichtendienstes 1945–1968, 10), ISBN 978-3-96289-023-0, EUR 60,00.**

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**Siegfried Beer, Graz**

Henke's first volume on Reinhard Gehlen's homeland espionage is a broad and impressive study of the predecessor organization of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) in the crucial early years of the Cold War. One is immediately struck by the thorough (e.g. over 2000 footnotes), almost pedantic, always critical, betimes aggressive research and language applied to an organizational fore-runner of a still existing service, albeit one with a long controversial history in West Germany and abroad during the Cold War and no less in unified Germany since 1990. The author's painstaking analysis of Gehlen's first years as auxiliary intelligence provider in the pay of the U. S. Army and later of the CIA up to the federal elections of 1953, must be understood as part of a still on-going collective research project which was initiated in 2011 by the then BND-leadership and has been supported since by German federal government funds.

For an Austrian intelligence historian this is an unimaginable project the likes of which, it is safe to speculate, will never happen in Austria. Official histories with access to secret archives of the three main British intelligence services MI5, MI6 and GCHQ (London's SIGINT operation) have in the last decade been written by individual historians, all of them published in 2009/2010<sup>1</sup>. The German approach, appointing a commission of four senior intelligence history specialists (known as the Unabhängige Historikerkommission, UHK) is unique and has already led to several, often lengthy publications of which Henke's volume is only the most recent.

The almost obsessive focus, both by object and author, is on interior intelligence gathering and counterespionage. And there is no beating about the bush in this book about the Gehlen Organization's (in short OG or Org) domestic spying. Henke gives the reader naked truth backed by almost minute documentation. The Org (chronologically also known as Bolero/Keystone Groups,

<sup>1</sup> Could the appearance of these official histories have prompted the BND to follow suit? Cf. Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm. The Authorized History of MI5*, London 2009; Keith Jeffery, *MI6. The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909–1949*, London 2010; and Richard J. Aldrich, *GCHQ. The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency*, London 2010.



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Operation Rusty, Zipper, and Odeum) and its chief, the former Wehrmacht officer in charge of FHO (Foreign Armies East, known also under the codenames »Dr. Schneider«, »Doktor«, »Professor«, and »Utility«), appear to have proven every critique and accusation ever heaped upon it. The author provides a detailed panorama of misuse, privacy invasion and illegality in the area of internal information gathering and analyzing, as well as of illicit surveillance and hidden manipulation of innumerable democratic institutions, groups and individuals, perceived by Gehlen as oppositional, dissenting and therefore inimical to German governments at federal and regional level, irrespective whether provisional or elected.

As a long-time defender of the need for state-run and democratically controlled intelligence organizations, the reviewer cringes at the documented abusive agenda, methodically applied by the Org to thwart legal and legitimate national forces and interests. Practically all accusations ever concretely levied against Gehlen and his team seem to have been justified, and from early on.

Strictly speaking it must be remembered and stressed that Gehlen was until the fall of 1953 exclusively (and partially even until 1956) in the pay of the Americans (at first of the Army G-2 and CIC, since 1949 of the CIA)<sup>2</sup> and thus in a way acting quasi on a semi-foreign territory for his financiers. Of course he always claimed to run a German organization, serving West German interests only or at least mainly. And even though he professed to counter Marxism, Communism, the Soviet state and satellite system and from 1949 to work mainly against the SED-State, the bulk of his intelligence efforts appear to have been directed against democratic parties, organizations and institutions as well as individuals in opposition to the conservative main stream at home, at first in Bavaria, soon in the Western zones and since 1949 in the Federal Republic.

Among these were not only the KPD, but foremost the leadership and organs of the SPD and of the trade unions, higher level civil servants, intellectuals and artists (like Eugen Kogon and Erich Kästner), media and even Konrad Adenauer's coalition partner, the FDP. Furthermore, Gehlen constantly exaggerated the communist threat from without and within. And while he was forced to please his American masters, at first the U. S. Army military intelligence establishment, from 1949 the CIA, personified in Col. James H. Critchfield, his controller until 1956, he proved skillful in evading their close scrutiny.

When by the end of 1949 the CIA leadership in Washington wanted to tighten its control and financing, not least because of serious doubts about the Org's performance and reliability, Gehlen started looking for support elsewhere by courting the newly elected Federal Government in Bonn. His main contact, soon supporter and supervisor was to be located in the chancellor's office: Adenauer's right-hand man and from 1953 state secretary, the NS-compromised Hans Globke, who by 1950 had not only



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<sup>2</sup> Yearly costs to the U. S. Army are estimated at half a million dollars, one and a half million to the CIA.

warmed up to Gehlen's illegal reporting on the opposition but started encouraging Gehlen's domestic intelligence work. This cooperation, according to Henke, was later intensified when in the build-up to the federal elections of fall 1953 Globke and Gehlen secretly met at least a dozen times. The author speaks of a power-political symbiosis between the two. In any case, Adenauer was quite well-informed about most of his political opponents.

Gehlen followed a master plan to build a German intelligence empire that included domestic security intelligence as well as foreign intelligence, a kind of unified German federal security service. This has been well known, at the latest since the spectacular opening of American files on account of the Nazi War Crimes Act of 1998 and its later amendments, which freed millions of documents on German (and Austrian) groups and individuals, among them on Reinhard Gehlen and his various cliques and team members<sup>3</sup>. Though the British already in 1950 foiled his ascendance to leadership of the state security service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz), in his march »from Pullach to Bonn«, Gehlen managed over the years to get rid of all interior intelligence competitors: Gerhard Graf von Schwerin, Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz and Otto John. Henke's trove of BND-files meticulously documents and complements these intelligence battles as well. Still, by 1953 it was far from certain that the Org under Gehlen's leadership would one day become the Federal Republic's one and only civilian and military foreign intelligence service.

It is easy to recognize Gehlen's human and professional deficits, partially mirrored in his organization: he was a mediocre intelligencer, he was an anti-liberal, democracy-sceptical, and alarmist nationalist-authoritarian; he was also a managerially and strategically-gifted opportunist. He certainly lied and deceived, vide his memoirs. And yet he became one of West Germany's state and nation builders after 1945. Henke proves to be a tough critic of Gehlen, but bases his judgment squarely on the historical record(s). He also demonstrates a remarkable level of scholarship, analysis and narration; and he promises even more of it for the short period of 1953 to 1956, and in even more length and detail. Finally, this also raises the question of readership and reception. Who will read these tomes? Only intelligence specialists? Very likely indeed, and with much enthusiasm<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The CIA History Office already in 1999/2006, but also the Interagency Working Group (IWG), created and financed by U. S. Congress, offered ample documentation of the American side in the evolution of Washington's intelligence policy towards postwar Germany. Cf. in particular: Kevin C. Ruffner (ed.), *Forging an Intelligence Partnership. CIA and the Origins of the BND, 1945–1949*, vol. 1, Washington DC 1999; and *ibid.*, 1949–1956, vol. 2, Washington DC 2006; and Timothy Naftali, *Reinhard Gehlen and the United States*, in: Richard Breitman et al., *U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis*, Washington DC 2004, p. 375–418.

<sup>4</sup> A viable, more popularly conceived treatment of the Gehlen era of German intelligence history would be the two-volume companion (essays and catalogue) to an excellent exhibition of 2016 in the Militärhistorisches Museum of the German Bundeswehr in Dresden: Magnus Pahl (ed.),



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