

THE CENTRAL AMERICAN DILEMMA: WEST GERMAN PERCEPTIONS AND OPTIONS

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Although current problems in Central America are usually seen as a major problem for United States policy makers, it is often forgotten that many other nations are also involved in the region. As H. Jürgen Hess outlines in this article, the European Economic Community is the second largest trade partner for many of the Central American countries. In the case of West Germany these historically strong economic ties, often in opposition to United States policy, are complicated by equally strong present-day security ties with the United States. The West German government must strengthen NATO and at the same time respond effectively to strong domestic opposition to United States policy in Central America. Mr. Hess surveys the historical relationship between West Germany and Central America and the current policies of the four West German political parties represented in Parliament toward the region. He argues that policy options are limited, given overwhelming U.S. influence in the region. But though West German attitudes toward NATO and Central America seem to conflict, the author concludes that opposition to United States military involvement in Central America springs from a conviction that the deployment of United States forces in the region would only weaken NATO and increase German domestic opposition to West German ties with the United States.

I

In the late 1970s, Central America¹ moved into the focus of international attention as a result of political turmoil in the region. Although the process of social ferment and chronic political instability had been going on for decades, it took the successful revolution of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas in 1979 and the continuing guerrilla wars in El Salvador and Guatemala to elicit broad international awareness of the problems in the area.

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1. For the purposes of this paper the term "Central America" refers to the five countries on the isthmus: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

Central America is often perceived to be the "backyard" of the United States. The location of the Central American republics increases their strategic and political significance to the United States far beyond their economic importance. European influence in the region might have been considerable in historical and cultural terms, but commercial relations are the major ties remaining between the two areas today. Although most European governments might not always agree with United States policies toward the region, they are usually inclined to give the Americans the "benefit of the doubt" when looking at the United States' way of dealing with Central America. The West Germans,² especially under the current conservative-liberal coalition government, have been following a course of close policy alignment with the Reagan administration. Yet not even the government of Helmut Kohl has been able to support the U.S. policy in all its aspects.

Germany has had a long and colorful history of relations with the five republics of Central America. Immigration and trade have dominated this relationship. For almost all of these countries, Germany was at one time the most important trade partner.

Today West German relations with Central America are affected by a multitude of interrelated issues. First of all, West German relations with an area relatively far away from Germany, yet so close to the United States, are strongly influenced by the relations between the Federal Republic and the United States government. By the same token, German policies toward Central America also have a profound impact on German-American relations, particularly when opinions over the treatment of the Central American issues differ.

A second important factor is West Germany's overall policy toward the Third World and especially toward Latin America. Although in the past the Third World has not been an area of primary attention for the German government, there seems to be a growing awareness of the present and future importance of North-South issues.

A third component of this complex picture is the coordination of policy within the framework of the European Community, both economically and politically. It has become quite clear that with regard to a political response to the Central American crisis, the Europeans have not always been able to speak with one voice. Economically, Central America is not of major importance to the countries of the European Community. From the Central American perspective, however, the European Community, as Central America's second largest trading partner, is of para-

2. Throughout the text the terms "Germany" and "Germans" will be used to denote "West Germany," the Federal Republic of Germany and its citizens, unless indicated otherwise.

mount importance. This is especially true in times of disagreement and conflict with the United States, when the countries of Central America are interested in reducing their economic and political dependence on the United States. The members of the European Community have recognized their responsibility in this respect and have already begun to pay more attention to the problems of the region.

A fourth area of German policy toward Central America and its current crisis is the East-West relationship. This area is linked to the first issue — German-American relations — and has strong ideological components which lead to different interpretations of the causes of political instability in Central America. These distinct explanations of the roots of the social situation in Central America have not only caused disagreement between German and American policy makers but also have stimulated a lively debate within the political elites and the general publics of the two countries.

In addition to these four areas which affect the relationships between Central American countries and the Federal Republic of Germany, there are several other significant aspects which deserve mention. Germany's relations with Latin America in general and specifically with Central America are different from its relations with other areas of the Third World. Germany's ties to the countries of this region are diverse and by no means limited to the governmental level. Historical, religious, and cultural ties have created a special relationship on a transnational basis. Political parties and their foundations, labor unions, and church organizations have been very active in developing and sustaining relations between Central and South America and Germany.

II

In order to understand the current relationship between Germany and the Central American republics it is necessary to take a brief look at the historical development of German ties with the region. Although Germany's actions in Central America cannot be viewed against the background of a colonial past in the Western hemisphere, one ought not forget that Germany has a long tradition of relations with the various Central American republics and has to some extent influenced and shaped their development.

Trade and investment have always played an important role in Germany's relations with the whole of Latin America. In turn, these commercial interests have largely determined German foreign policy toward the countries of South and Central America. Even before the Latin American states had gained independence from Spain, German merchants

from the Hanseatic cities tried to break Spain's trade monopoly. Consequently, the Hanseatic cities were among the first to recognize the sovereignty and independence of the new Latin American states. Despite English and French competition, German trading firms were able to achieve strong economic positions in many of the Central and South American states by the middle of the nineteenth century.³ Trade was followed by political engagement to safeguard the fruits of commerce. Germany did not hesitate to flex its military muscles when interests in the area seemed to be endangered, as demonstrated by the German blockade of Nicaragua in 1875 and the 1902 blockade and bombardment of Venezuelan ports.

Yet Germany's strongest influence on the development of Central America seems to have been through the influx of German immigrants. Germany's imperialist expansion beyond the European area in the late nineteenth century thus affected the tiny republics of Central America by introducing a foreign elite into their native societies. Throughout the century, there had been a steady flow of German immigrants to Latin America. The Germans who came to this part of the new world were described as "patient, methodical tropical pioneers" who had come to the Americas on their own "with the intention of digging in, marrying into some native family, . . . and really growing up with the country."⁴

With the immigration, German religious and scientific influence also spread throughout the region. For example, Moravians from Germany came to the Nicaraguan Mosquito Coast to work among the native population in 1849.⁵ In the field of scientific exploration the only publications available for many years on Central American volcanology, meteorology, ethnology, and general geography were published in German.⁶

Later in the century, Germans acquired a major share in Nicaraguan coffee production. Together with Frenchmen and North Americans, the Germans produced more coffee than the Nicaraguan producers.⁷ In Guatemala, the German influence grew with German immigration, and soon most of the country's coffee industry was in German hands.

As the twentieth century began, a three-way struggle for economic control of Central America commenced. Great Britain's former hegemony

3. Albrecht von Gleich, *Germany and Latin America* (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 1968), p. 3.

4. Arthur Ruhl, *The Central Americans* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 251.

5. Franklin D. Parker, *The Central American Republics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 254.

6. See *Ibid.*, p. 133 (discussing the work of Karl Theodor Sapper (1866-1945)).

7. Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., *Central America: A Nation Divided* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 157.

was challenged by two latecomers in the imperialist race: the United States and Germany. Although the North Americans could profit from the obvious advantage of geographical proximity, German individual initiatives in the coffee industry, the growth of German shipping and manufacturing, and an aggressive diplomacy made the Germans powerful competitors.⁸ From the American perspective, military and economic interests in the area were closely related. For many years Great Britain had been the potential enemy and competitor, but after 1900 Germany took over the British position and became the major threat to America's strategic interests and economic profits in the region.⁹

The period between the turn of the century and the beginning of the First World War were the years during which Germany was to reach its strongest position. In 1913, 53 percent of Guatemala's exports went to Germany, compared to only 27 percent to the United States. Although Germany's economic preponderance was most pronounced in Guatemala, Germany also attracted a considerable amount of the exports from the other Central American republics. On the eve of World War I, 27 percent of Central America's exports went to Germany, as compared to 38 percent to the United States and only 17 percent to Great Britain.¹⁰ By 1913 coffee had become Central America's most important export, and most of it went to Germany. In 1913 alone 654.6 million pounds of coffee were shipped to Germany from the four countries, compared to 405 million to Great Britain, 372.4 million to the United States, and 262.6 to France.¹¹

World War I brought about a radical change in the trade patterns of Central America. Exports to Europe dropped drastically because of the European conflict. The Central Americans had to look for other markets, and the United States seemed to be willing to exploit the situation to increase its influence in the region. After World War I European economic power had declined and German and British influence no longer posed a major threat to American interests in Central America.¹² By 1929 only El Salvador still considered Germany its leading market. The United States had become the primary purchaser of Central American exports from all the other countries.¹³

Despite the decline in trade relations, German influence continued to play a role in the region, especially in Guatemala. Since 1900 the German

8. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

9. Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), p. 15.

10. Dana G. Munro, *The Five Republics of Central America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), p. 274.

11. Woodward, *Central America: A Nation Divided*, pp. 158, 160.

12. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, p. 79.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

community in Guatemala had quietly accumulated wealth by operating large coffee plantations. By the 1930s, Germans or persons of German descent controlled about two-thirds of the country's entire coffee industry.¹⁴ Besides owning several of the largest banks, German interests were deeply entrenched in the leading retail stores. Guatemala was the only Central American country with a German school. Intermarrying with the Guatemalan elite had brought social and political status to the German immigrants. Yet the large German population also made Guatemala a special target for Nazi agents in the late 1930s.¹⁵ This, of course, caused concern in Washington and pressure was applied on the Central American republics to conform to American policies with regard to Europe. When war between the United States and Germany finally broke out, the Central American nations swiftly declared war on Germany.¹⁶ The Guatemalan government used this circumstance in 1942 to take over a railway operated by a German firm, and in 1944 and 1945 it expropriated the coffee holdings of German citizens. These holdings were reorganized as *Fincas Nacionales*. Managed by the government, they provided about one-third of the nation's coffee production.¹⁷ Other Central American countries exploited the occasion in similar ways. Germans who did not become nationals of their host countries soon found their properties expropriated. Thus the Second World War temporarily ended all contacts between Germany and Central America.

After the war, economic ties between Germany and Latin America were quickly reestablished. Economic relations were resumed even before the founding of the Federal Republic. Although the traditional German export market in Latin America had been severely harmed by the war, South and Central American exports started to flow rapidly to the Federal Republic in the postwar years. In 1950, the Federal Republic imported goods worth only \$2.4 million from Central America, yet four years later Central American exports to Germany had grown to \$53.2 million and after another four years this amount had doubled.¹⁸ By the late 1950s, the Federal Republic had regained its position as Central America's second largest trading partner. In the period from 1955 to 1958, 20 percent of Nicaragua's exports went to the Federal Republic.¹⁹ On the average, between 1956 and 1959, Germany bought 25 percent of Costa Rica's exports, 30 percent of El Salvador's, and 14 percent of Guatemala's.

14. Parker, *The Central American Republics*, p. 91.

15. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, p. 77.

16. von Gleich, *Germany and Latin America*, pp. 19-21.

17. Parker, *The Central American Republics*, pp. 116, 122.

18. von Gleich, *Germany and Latin America*, p. 43.

19. Parker, *The Central American Republics*, p. 240.

Only in Honduras were exports to the Federal Republic (6 percent) in third place behind the United States (66 percent) and El Salvador (8 percent).²⁰ During the same period, goods from Germany accounted for about 9 percent of the Central American countries' imports.

After 1951, when the Federal Republic had attained full sovereignty in foreign affairs, diplomatic relations with the Central American countries were resumed. Yet in view of the Federal Republic's significance as their second largest trading partner, its official representation in the region has been described as inadequate. The fact that South and Central America did not play any particular role in German foreign policy in the postwar era is seen in the remarkably small number of Latin American experts in Bonn.²¹

During the period from the founding years of the Federal Republic through the first CDU/CSU administrations, the official policy toward Latin America, as well as toward the rest of the Third World, was aimed at preventing the recognition of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).²² The following goals and tasks constituted German policy toward the developing nations of the Third World in the late 1960s:

1. Acceptance by the Third World of the Federal Republic's claim to be the only legitimate representative of the German people;

2. Defeat of GDR efforts to achieve political or diplomatic recognition in countries with which the Federal Republic maintains friendly relations;

3. Presentation of a clear picture to the Third World of the Federal Republic, its political orientation and its unequivocal rejection of the policies of the Third Reich;

4. Establishment of a new cultural policy differing from the National Socialist cultural policy toward groups of German ethnic origin abroad;

5. Establishment of commercial relations while keeping in mind both the interest of trading partners among the Third World countries and the economic integration of Europe; and

6. Recognition of the economic and social problems of the developing countries, and energetic assistance for their solution.²³

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 284, 166, 117, 205.

21. von Gleich, *Germany and Latin America*, p. 27.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Although no special effort was made toward the implementation of these basic goals, the Federal Republic's policy was generally successful. In 1963, relations were broken off with Cuba because it had established relations with the GDR.²⁴ Yet up until 1969, when Willy Brandt became Chancellor, no other Latin American country had recognized the GDR or established diplomatic relations with East Berlin.²⁵ On the contrary, Latin American representatives in the United Nations repeatedly had pressed for a solution of the "German question" along the lines advocated by the government of the Federal Republic.²⁶ With the general change of German foreign policy, the implementation of *Ostpolitik* and the abandonment of the Hallstein Doctrine, the "German question" lost importance in relations with Latin America. In 1971 the Chilean popular-front government recognized the GDR, a policy which was followed by many other Latin American countries without causing problems with the government in Bonn.²⁷

III

In 1970 Foreign Minister Walter Scheel articulated general objectives for a Latin America policy, which were so general that they also could have applied to any other area of the developing world.²⁸ Only in the late 1970s did South and Central America move out of the area of German political neglect and the German government start the search for a coherent policy toward this region. Visits by then Federal President Walter Scheel to Costa Rica and Mexico in 1977 and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to Brazil, Peru, and the Dominican Republic in April 1979 marked the beginning of a growing awareness in Bonn of the area's problems.²⁹ An article by then Foreign Undersecretary Peter Hermes, published in *Europa-Archiv* in the summer of 1979, signaled that the German government was finally interested in taking a position with regard to Latin America.

At the time Hermes' article appeared in Germany, an event took place in Central America that was to have profound effects on future German relations with that region. On July 19, 1979, the people of Nicaragua

24. Manfred Mols, "The Latin America Connection," in *West German Foreign Policy: Dilemmas and Directions*, ed. Peter H. Merkl (Chicago: The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1982), p. 100.

25. von Gleich, *Germany and Latin America*, p. 37.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Mols, "The Latin America Connection," p. 100.

28. Manfred Mols, "Eine Neuformulierung der deutschen Lateinamerikapolitik," in *Lateinamerika*, ed. Hans-Georg Wehling (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), p.221.

29. Peter Hermes, "Aspekte und Perspektiven der deutschen Lateinamerika-Politik," *Europa-Archiv* 14 (1979):421, 427.

under the leadership of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) overthrew the Somoza dynasty which had ruled the country for decades. The initial reaction of the German coalition government to the Nicaraguan revolution was very positive. Like most Western governments, the Federal Republic was eager to help the country, devastated by civil war, with generous aid. According to the Sandinistas' own program, they were willing to "accept economic and technical aid from any country," but only when this did not "involve political compromise."³⁰ By the end of 1980, the Nicaraguan government had received assistance on this premise from not only the United States, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany, but also from the Democratic Republic of Germany, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Libya.³¹

Since January 1981, when President Reagan moved into the White House, the American position on Central America has shifted radically. The American policy of tacit support of the revolutionary process in Nicaragua, or at least the benevolent wait-and-see attitude advocated by President Carter, was replaced by a more hard-line approach under Reagan. The apparent ultimate aim was to oust the Sandinista government and reverse the revolutionary process in the name of United States security interests.

To the dismay of the Reagan administration, the European governments did not follow the Americans in this policy change. The Social Democratic government in Bonn continued to support the revolutionary process in Central America. A number of activities of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, closely related to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), as well as public statements of Willy Brandt in his capacity as chairman of the Socialist International, and comments by Horst Ehmke, the deputy parliamentary leader of the SPD in the Bundestag, all aroused distrust and even anger in Washington.³² Besides giving material aid to the Nicaraguan government, West Germany also supported the *Frente Democrático Revolucionario* (FDR) in El Salvador. The Germans were not alone in helping the FDR and the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN). By the spring of 1981, the Mexican and the French governments had both recognized the FDR/FMLN as a representative political force in El Salvador and proposed a negotiated solution to the conflict in El Salvador which took into account the interests of the

30. The Sandinista National Liberation Front, "The Historical Program of the FSLN," in Peter Rosset and Jon Vandermeer, *The Nicaragua Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 1983), p. 145.

31. Jan Knippus Black, "Government and Politics," in *Nicaragua: a Country Study*, James D. Rudolph, ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982) p. 182.

32. Mols, "The Latin American Connection," p. 102.

revolutionary groups.³³ The German government, concerned about the human rights situation in El Salvador, eventually recalled its ambassador from San Salvador and cancelled all aid to the country. This action brought American "displeasure to a head."³⁴ The SPD's support for the Sandinistas in Managua and the revolutionaries in El Salvador provoked American resentment to such an extent that Reagan finally sent Under-Secretary Enders to Europe "to tell them to stop interfering in Central American affairs."³⁵

When the conservative-liberal coalition under Chancellor Helmut Kohl came to power in October 1982 proclaiming a *Wende* (turning point), German policy toward Central America entered a new phase. In his declaration of the goals and policies of the new government on May 4, 1983, Kohl stated:

We will especially foster our historically close ties with Latin America. The Federal Government supports all efforts to overcome the causes of crises in Central America through economic and social reforms based on a truly democratic pluralism.³⁶

In the spring of 1983, new attention was focused on the situation in Central America when German physician Albrecht Pflaum was assassinated in Nicaragua by U.S.-financed anti-Sandinista guerrillas. This event led to a debate in the Bundestag about the Federal Republic's policy toward the region. During the debate and in its aftermath a re-orientation of German policy toward Central America became obvious. The news magazine *Der Spiegel* proclaimed: "The Federal government is fearful of criticizing U.S. intervention in Central America. The *Wende* is beginning"³⁷

However, the German government did not speak with one voice. A conflict emerged between the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation under the leadership of Jürgen Warnke, and the German Foreign Ministry, controlled by the Free Democratic Party (FDP) under party leader Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Warnke, willing to accommodate American desires, advocated the elimination of German aid to Nicaragua and a withdrawal of all German development specialists and aides. Genscher, stressing that German foreign policy should properly be made in his

33. Heinrich-W. Krumwiede, "Die Zentralamerikanische Krise als Problem westlicher Aussenpolitik," in *Die Internationale Politik*, eds. Wolfgang Wagner et al. (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1984), p. 269.

34. Mols, "The Latin American Connection," p. 102.

35. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, p. 284.

36. Helmut Kohl, *Programm der Erneuerung: Freiheit, Mitmenschlichkeit, Verantwortung*, Regierungserklärung, 4 May 1983, (Bonn: CDU-Bundesgeschäftsstelle), p. 29.

37. "Unsere Freunde," *Der Spiegel*, 9 May 1983, p. 19.

ministry, opposed any cancellation of aid to the Nicaraguan government.³⁸ This controversy illuminated a conflict between the liberal partner in the government and the most conservative element, the Christian Social Union (CSU).

As the change in the German position over the following weeks and months showed, the FDP and Genscher were losing ground, at least on the Central America question. A German ambassador to El Salvador was appointed, and plans for the resumption of aid to the government of El Salvador were advanced.³⁹ On the other hand, the aid promised to the Sandinistas was cut from DM 40 million⁴⁰ to DM 15 million⁴¹ and was finally frozen.⁴²

Throughout 1984 and the early months of 1985, several debates in the Bundestag on the crisis in Central America showed that the German government was slowly but steadily moving closer to the American position, as the more conservative elements within the government were gaining ground. At the same time, the German government has still stressed that all actors in the region must obey the principles of self-determination, national independence, non-intervention, independent development, respect for human rights and the peaceful solution of conflicts.⁴³ The opposition parties while pointing to the United States as a possible violator of these standards, have at least supported the same values.

Although Germany's policy has been closely related to the Reagan administration's strategy, one major difference between the official German and American positions remains: unlike the Americans, the German government stresses that the conflicts in the area can be solved only by peaceful means and that the principles of non-interference and territorial integrity must be observed. Hence, differences of opinion are most pronounced on the question of support for the contras in Nicaragua.⁴⁴ Overt American military involvement in Central America is especially feared by the current German government, not because of empathy with the Central American nations but because of Germany's own security

38. See *ibid.*

39. Die Bundesregierung, "Lage in Mittelamerika," *Drucksache 10/22*, Deutscher Bundestag, 25 January 1984.

40. Horst Schreiter-Schwarzenfeld, "Nicaragua und der hindernisreiche Weg deutscher Interessen," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 4 May 1983.

41. "Uneinigkeit in Bonn," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 May 1983.

42. Heinz Dieterich, "Ante el servilismo democratacristiano alemán," *Uno Mas Uno* (Mexico, D.F.), 26 September 1984.

43. "Reply of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany to a formal interpellation of the SPD Parliamentary Group," 25 January 1984, mimeo., p. 3.

44. *Ibid.*

interests. The late Alois Mertes, former Minister of State in the Foreign Office of the German government, articulated this fear:

Were Central America to distract the United States psychologically, politically or militarily from the focal point of the Soviet threat and of Western security — namely Europe — the consequences for the cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance would be incalculable.⁴⁵

Thus, according to the Mertes, the “Europeans . . . must do everything possible” to prevent the United States from facing the choice between “losing credibility as the leading Western power” and “resorting to a military intervention.”⁴⁶

The latest European efforts to contribute toward a peaceful solution of the Central American crisis must be judged in light of such European security considerations. Security concerns, for example, explain and justify Genscher's latest attempt to advocate a European policy toward Central America that is independent of the United States. The European Community (EC) members had already declared in their Stuttgart-Declaration of July 1983 that the problems of Central America could not be solved by military means; only a political solution could bring lasting peace.⁴⁷ The next step was taken by Genscher in the fall of 1984, when he took the initiative for a conference of foreign ministers of the Central American republics with the Contadora Group and the ten member states of the European Community (as well as its then candidate members, Spain and Portugal). The conference, which took place on September 28-29, 1984, in San José, Costa Rica, “was a preliminary high point in Europe's efforts to contribute actively to regional conflict management and in guaranteeing of peace in Central America.”⁴⁸ Genscher commented on the purpose of the San José conference: “We confront the danger that Central America is becoming the arena of a heightened East-West antagonism.”⁴⁹ This seems to be the essence of German interest in the region.

The EC effort is supposed to strengthen the economies of the Central American republics and thus decrease the causes of social unrest. The means to this end are to be found in a cooperation agreement between the EC and the Central American nations. Furthermore, an increase in

45. Alois Mertes, “Europe's Role in Central America: A West German Christian Democratic View,” in *Third World Instability: Central America as a European-American Issue*, ed. Andrew J. Pierre (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., 1985), p. 130.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Robert Held, “Die Deutschen, die Europäer und Zentralamerika,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 7 March 1985.

48. Mertes, “Europe's Role in Central America,” p. 122.

49. Held, “Die Deutschen, die Europäer und Zentralamerika.”

economic aid to the region is planned. Political dialogue and future economic, scientific, and technical cooperation between the two regions constitute the centerpiece of this joint European venture. The European aid, which amounted to \$50 million in 1985, supplemented by aid given by the United States through President Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI). One notable difference between the CBI and the European initiative, however, lies in the European inclusion of Nicaragua. Last fall a follow-up conference was held in Luxembourg. At this meeting a five-year accord was signed, under which the Foreign Ministers of the EC member states, the Central American republics, and the Contadora group decided to grant each other most favored nation status, to co-operate in technological, agricultural, industrial, and other fields and to promote European investment in Central America. More significantly, it was agreed to institutionalize the political dialogue by holding ministerial meetings on an annual basis.⁵⁰

IV

Relations between Germany and Central America do not only occur on the governmental level. Political parties and their closely affiliated foundations, churches, and other private organizations also play an important role in the relationship.

All the major political parties in the Federal Republic have traditional ties to Latin America. For many years, they have been very active in Central America through their foundations. The foundations try to find local partners, particularly among like-minded political parties, trade unions, and cooperatives. They also carry out projects financed by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation. The aim of German parties and foundations in the region is to strengthen the center of the political spectrum in order to overcome the extreme political polarization present in most Central American countries.⁵¹ The global associations of the various political parties follow similar goals in the region.

Despite the major differences of opinion among the parties represented in the Bundestag regarding the best German approach to the Central America crisis, all the parties stress their support for the Contadora process and emphatically endorse the European San José initiative.

As the major power in the coalition government, the CDU/CSU naturally shares the government's analysis of the crisis in Central America: it considers "outdated and no longer practicable economic and social

50. "Central America and the E.C. set new dialogue," *Europe*, January-February 1986, p. 54.

51. Mertens, "Europe's Role in Central America," p. 132.

structures" as the causes of the present conflicts in the region.⁵² Yet the CDU/CSU sees the problems of the region also in light of East-West issues. According to a CDU spokesman, the Soviet Union is trying to drag Central America into the global East-West struggle by using the conflicts in the region as instruments against the United States.⁵³

In its evaluation of the specific issues, the CDU/CSU thus seems to be the German party closest to the views of the Reagan administration. Like the United States, the CDU/CSU condemns the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua for not following its self-proclaimed principles of pluralism, a mixed economy, and non-alignment. The system created by the Sandinistas since 1979 is viewed as an unacceptable solution for the problems of Central America.⁵⁴ The elections of November 1984, for example, were denounced as a mere attempt to increase the power of the Sandinistas, a development which, according to the CDU's development expert Karl Lamers, made a peaceful solution of the conflict more and more unlikely.⁵⁵

In El Salvador the CDU/CSU has always backed fellow Christian Democrat José Napoleon Duarte. The CDU/CSU believes that Duarte is leading his country back to stability and peace. The German Christian Democrats hardly miss an occasion to pronounce their satisfaction with Duarte's performance, which they view as a model for the whole region.⁵⁶

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) continues to perceive the crisis in Central America as it did when it led the government. The SPD advocates reform, but also declares that violence is sometimes unavoidable to overcome outdated and repressive structures, as in the case of Nicaragua. Nevertheless, the SPD stresses that a return to the political process must be achieved as quickly as possible.

With regard to El Salvador, the SPD stresses that a lasting solution to the conflict can be achieved only through serious negotiation involving all important political groups. In this respect, the SPD welcomes the beginnings of a dialogue between the FDR/FMLN and the government.⁵⁷ The SPD still supports Guillermo Ungo, chairman of the Social Demo-

52. "Reply of the Government," 25 January 1984, p. 1.

53. CDU/CSU Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag, *PresseDienst*, 13 March 1984.

54. CDU-Bundesgeschäftsstelle, "Bundesfachausschuss Aussenpolitik der CDU," *CDU Pressemitteilung*, 3 May 1984, p. 3.

55. Karl Lamers, "Keine Legitimation für die Sandinisten," *Deutschland-Union-Dienst*, 6 November 1984, p. 6.

56. See Winfried Pinger, "Rückkehr aus Zentralamerika," *CDU/CSU Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag (PresseDienst)*, 24 August 1984, p. 4.

57. Deutscher Bundestag, "Änderungsantrag der Fraktion der SPD, Lage in Mittelamerika," *Drucksache 10/2732*, 16 January 1985, p. 5.

cratic MNR, who has joined the FDR. On the other hand, the SPD has become more cautious in its criticism of Duarte.

The SPD's support for the Sandinistas was reaffirmed when Willy Brandt, in his capacity as chairman of the Socialist International, took part in a pro-Sandinista rally on the eve of the 1984 Nicaraguan elections. At this rally, Brandt compared the American policy toward Nicaragua with the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan.⁵⁸ The SPD believes that neither the "gunboat diplomacy" of the United States, nor a cessation of development aid will solve the problems of the area. On the contrary, the SPD emphasizes that Nicaragua should receive generous aid from the German government at a time when the country is beset from abroad. Otherwise, the SPD maintains, Nicaragua's democratic development process will be endangered. In this respect, the SPD considers the Nicaraguan elections of November 4, 1984 a success: "The elections . . . demonstrate a meaningful step toward democratization in a country which until now has known no democratic structures."⁵⁹ Thus confident about Nicaragua's capacity for reform, the SPD views the United States as a contributor to the instability in the region: "It would be catastrophic," one SPD parliamentarian warned, "if the plant of democracy were to be destroyed by American military boots."⁶⁰ Thus the SPD advocates an immediate suspension of all overt and covert military intervention by the United States and has called upon the EC to conclude a cooperation agreement with Central America to counteract the "ominous influence" of the United States in the region.⁶¹

Like the SPD, the Free Democrats believe that the causes of the crises in Central America are the outcome of a long historical process and are not related to the ideological confrontation between East and West. The FDP is unwilling to follow a policy of the "big stick" and emphasizes that German policy must be intelligent and understanding.⁶² The FDP recognizes that there can be no solution to the conflict without the support of the United States, because of that country's legitimate security interests in the region. Nevertheless, the FDP is also critical of American policy. As Helmut Schäfer, foreign policy spokesman of the FDP parliamentary group, has stated, "It is unwise to attempt to bring about political solutions with a crowbar or mallet."⁶³

58. Held, "Die Deutschen, die Europäer und Zentralamerika."

59. Deutscher Bundestag, *Drucksache 10/2732*, p. 4.

60. Uwe Holz, quoted in *Informationsfunk der Bundesregierung*, 18 January 1985.

61. Deutscher Bundestag, *Drucksache 10/2732*, p. 5.

62. Helmut Schäfer, "Schäfer zur Lage in Mittelamerika," *Freie Demokratische Korrespondenz (fdk) — Tagesdienst*, 17 January 1985.

63. Helmut Schäfer, "Schäfer zu Mittelamerika," *fdk — Tagesdienst*, 4 October 1984.

The FDP believes that Duarte is following the right course in El Salvador. Although the FDP has criticized El Salvador's elections, the party tends to support the CDU/CSU's optimistic attitude toward the democratization process. The FDP strongly supports the national dialogue between the FDR/FMLN and the Duarte government and calls on the CDU and the SPD to use their respective partners in the country to bring about a successful continuation of the talks.

Although the FDP is highly critical of the developments in Nicaragua, there seems to be a consensus within the party that aid to Nicaragua should not be completely eliminated. According to Jürgen Möllemann, one should not perceive the problems in the region in simplistic black or white terms.⁶⁴ Helmut Schäfer too believes that some members of the current government (meaning above all Jürgen Warnke, Minister for Economic Cooperation), must rid themselves of ideological blinders and look at the situation in a more differentiating manner.

Germany's youngest party, the Greens (*die Grünen*), also blames economic and social misery for the crisis in the region. Correspondingly, the Greens state that the current situation is caused by economic underdevelopment. They believe, however, that the social and ruling structures of the region make reform impossible. According to the Greens, only an alteration of the economic structures can solve the problems of Central America. The Greens emphasize that the necessary reforms are impossible as long as the United States is interested in preserving the *status quo*. Consequentially, the Greens believe that the United States is turning the region into an area of confrontation between East and West:

The imperial designs of the USA for unlimited hegemony, and the alleged danger of a communist "conquest" of the Central American isthmus and of the Caribbean, means that from the American point of view Central America is becoming the arena for East-West antagonism.⁶⁵

The Greens call on the Federal government to promote changes in U.S. policy and to condemn all kinds of American military intervention or activity in the region. The Greens advocate continued German aid to Nicaragua, yet demand a halt to all bilateral cooperation with El Salvador. They urge that aid should reach the needy groups of El Salvador's population primarily through non-governmental organizations. As to Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala, the Greens urge that development

64. Informationsfunk der Bundesregierung, "Bundesrepublik Deutschland/Mittelamerika," 1 February 1985.

65. Deutscher Bundestag, "Änderungsantrag der Fraktion Die Grünen," *Drucksache 10/2739*, 16 January 1985, p. 2.

aid projects should be reexamined in light of their effectiveness at political and social emancipation of the poor.⁶⁶

Although politics play a major role in relations between Germany and Central America, no examination of the area's problems is complete without attention to the role of religion in the region.

The churches, especially the Protestant Church and the lower clergy of the Catholic Church, perceive the revolutionary movements in Central America as an attempt by the people to free themselves from dependence and underdevelopment.⁶⁷ The Catholic Church is split on this issue. While the hierarchy is opposed to revolutionary change and supports the process of peaceful reform, groups within the lower clergy believe that the cooperation with the Sandinistas constitutes a unique opportunity for the Church to help the poor in a meaningful and effective way and to "achieve genuine and vivacious Christianity."⁶⁸

Despite the split within the Catholic Church, the Church is perceived by the European governments as a possible mediator between the antagonistic groups. In El Salvador, the Church's active support made possible the talks at La Palma between Duarte and the guerrillas. In Nicaragua, Archbishop Obando y Bravo, although strongly opposed to the Sandinistas, has declared his willingness to accept the role of mediator between the Sandinistas and the contras.⁶⁹ Even Pope John Paul II has offered to mediate.

The German Catholic Church is active in Central America through "Adveniat," an organization dedicated to the solidarity of the German Catholic Church and the Church in Latin America. Adveniat views its mission as two-fold: to promote understanding of the problems and conflicts of the region in Germany and to support initiatives that will remove the causes for the conflicts. The group actively disseminates information, organizes seminars and workshops, hosts visitors from Central America, and offers financial and moral support for the clergy in the region.

Apart from the Church, there are a host of other non-governmental organizations which are also active participants in German-Central American relations. Most prominent among these are the "German Development Service," "*terre des hommes*," and, on the trade union side, the "Union for Education and Science." These organizations generally voice their concern about what they believe to be an overly close alignment between German and American policy positions. Directly involved in development

66. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

67. Letter received from Klaus Rödler, Institut für Iberoamerika-Kunde, 25 April 1985.

68. Adveniat, *Bericht über Zentralamerika* (Essen: Bischöfliche Aktion Adveniat, 1982), p. 59.

69. Informationsfunk der Bundesregierung, "Reise STM Mertens," 11 March 1985.

work in Central America, most of these organizations stress that the position of the German government is based on false premises and an ideological interpretation of available information.

V

To judge Germany's overall policy toward Central America one must take into account the Federal Republic's general foreign policy priorities. The overriding concern of German foreign policy for almost four decades has been the guarantee of its external security through membership in NATO and through close ties with the United States. The second most important issue has been the country's integration into the European Community. Other goals of German foreign policy have included reconciliation with wartime enemies, ensuring free access to Berlin, maintaining the demand for future German reunification, and continuing to search for a *modus vivendi* with East Germany.⁷⁰

The role of Latin America and the Third World in general has thus not occupied a high priority in the minds of German foreign policymakers. Although many Third World countries are important to Germany as suppliers of much-needed raw materials, their economic importance in the overall trade relations of the Federal Republic is negligible. Politically the German role in the southern part of the Western hemisphere has been limited by the predominance of the United States. The Federal Republic cannot, and does not want to, compete with the United States in this region. Nevertheless, the German government is also aware that many Latin American countries view the European Community, and especially Germany, as partners which will allow them to diversify their foreign relations and limit their dependence on the United States.

Germany's perceived role in Central America has been minor throughout the second part of the twentieth century. Although Germany has been the second largest trade partner for many of the Central American republics, only recently has political interest in the region been stimulated by the intensification of political turmoil and the spread of violence throughout Central America. Because of the region's new importance to the North-South and the East-West conflicts, the German government has found itself searching for a position on the problems of the region. On one hand, the credibility of Western values with regard to the developing world is at stake. On the other hand, American policy toward the region places the Europeans in a difficult situation. The credibility of their political solidarity with their ally on the other side of the Atlantic could easily be damaged.

70. Mols, "Eine Neuformulierung der deutschen Lateinamerikapolitik," p. 222.

The change of government in Bonn in October 1982 had a profound influence on the German policy choices in this area. The SPD-led government had shown much more willingness to disagree with the United States on issues such as Central America. The Social Democrats were determined to follow an independent policy course toward the Third World, a policy which was increasing Germany's credibility and image among the developing nations. The post-*Wende* government, in contrast, has placed more emphasis on Germany's primary foreign policy goal: external security guaranteed through NATO and through close ties with the United States. Thus even conflicts like those in Central America tend to be perceived first and foremost in light of the East-West conflict. A thorough evaluation of the real situation in Central America has become secondary to perceived German security interests as they relate to American involvement in the region.

The German government believes that an escalation of the American involvement must be avoided at all costs. Military involvement would weaken NATO by diverting military strength and resources to an area which, from the European point of view, is relatively unimportant in the real struggle between East and West. "A second Vietnam" is also feared because of its impact on the internal political climate in Germany. The recent debate surrounding missile deployment has already weakened German popular support for the Alliance. The growth of the peace movement, the Greens, neutralist groups within the SPD, and anti-Americanism among segments of the younger generation are symptoms of a relationship that has become more fragile over the years. Direct American military involvement in Central America would undoubtedly lead to an increase in anti-Americanism and to doubts about the stability of the Alliance. Such issues would, in turn, generate a highly emotional and divisive debate.

Thus it is very much in the interest of the federal government to prevent an escalation of American involvement in Central America. Germany's policy options to preempt such a solution are limited. Primarily, the German government could use its influence in Washington to bring about the adoption of a more conciliatory approach toward the region. Secondly, it could expand its efforts to further economic development and social justice through bilateral and multilateral aid programs. Whatever approach the government chooses, non-governmental groups, churches, political parties, foundations, and development organizations will continue to play a significant role, especially in the implementation of the second element of Germany's policy options toward Central America.

