The Structure of Power: The UNECE and East-West Electricity Connections, 1947–1975

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RESÜMEE

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Rolle der United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) aus der von Giddens' entwickelten Perspektive der Dualität von Struktur und Handlung. Häufig werden Internationale Organisationen (IOs) als Ausdruck der gesammelten Interessen ihrer nationalstaatlichen Mitglieder und damit letztlich als entscheidungsschwach dargestellt. Stattdessen argumentiert dieser Artikel, dass IOs durchaus über *agency* und eine eigene Agenda verfügen. Dies wird am Beispiel der UNECE deutlich, die ursprünglich als Steuerungsgremium für den europäischen Wiederaufbau konzipiert war. Am Beispiel von internen Aushandlungsprozessen zeigt der Artikel, dass die UNECE sowohl ein Resultat des Kalten Krieges als auch ein wirkmächtiger Akteur in diesem Konflikt war.

In the decades after the Second World War, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, 1947) played an instrumental role in (re-)structuring electricity networks in Europe. Whereas electrical integration occurred separately in the Western and Eastern blocks, the UNECE provided a forum to discuss possible connections between the two. This article claims that the UNECE structured East-West relations in the realm of international organizations.

The notion of structure is important, also from a more theoretical stance. Within the field of International Relations (IR) scholars are discussing the role and nature of International Organizations (IOs). While the agency of IOs is limited in realist and non-realist IR theories, new views incorporating structuration theory assume a more independent role for them. Instead of simply regarding IOs as agency-deprived and pawns of state preference, this article asks the question if, and to what extent, the UNECE held an independent place within the international system, and thus had its own set of values and agendas. Through the conceptual lens of Anthony Giddens's duality of structure, the

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UNECE is seen as an actor with agency *and* as a structural element within the international system.
This article proceeds as following. First, the place of IOs within IR theories is discussed, and the particular approach is explained. Subsequently, the UNECE and its activities are introduced, before going more in-depth with the case study on electricity connections between East and West. This section is based on primary research on the UNECE. The article ends with a conclusion which returns to the question of agency and structure, related to IOs.

1. Agency, Structure, and International Organization

Caroline Kennedy-Pipe has argued that International History and IR theory are waging a war over interpreting the Cold War, lasting for some forty years now. Historians, she claims, have a tendency to reduce 'the state' to 'the archives', thereby ignoring that "ideologies, ideas and how state are organized matter". Her conclusions are clear: International historians do not rely sufficiently upon insights from IR, while IR scholars make too little out of historical sources.[1] In other words, she suggests more forms of cross-fertilization between historical and theoretical approaches.
She certainly has a point. Still, her main emphasis remains on the role of states and gives little credit to the influence of IOs. She is not alone in that. Another example is the work of E. H. Carr, who does not treat IOs lightly in his classic *The Twenty Years' Crisis* – one of the foundational texts of realist IR. He characterizes the League of Nations as "utopian", and claims that IOs are not based on "absolute and universal principles", but merely "the unconscious reflexions of national policy based on a particular interpretation of national interest at a particular time".[2] Building on and criticizing the work of realists like Carr, Kenneth Waltz's neo-realism has taken over as the dominant paradigm in IR in recent decades.[3] Within this framework, state behavior can be understood as the outcome of inter-state relations, amidst an international system defined by anarchy. According to neo-realists, states and their interplay thus structure international relations. The only objects worthy of study are thus states, they argue.[4] These states are the organizing principle of the international state, which has an "enduring anarchic character".[5] The structure in the international realm is thus provided by nation-states, and determined by their interests and actions. To Waltz, actions of agents are affected by the structure of

1 C. Kennedy-Pipe, International History and International Relations Theory: A Dialogue Beyond the Cold War, in: International Affairs, 76 (2000) 4, pp. 741-754, 744-745, 741.
2 E. H. Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations, London 1939, p. 87.
3 See: K. Waltz, Theory of International Politics, Boston 1979.
4 J. Boli and G. M. Thomas, Introduction, in: idem (ed.), Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations Since 1875, Stanford 1999, p. 3.
5 K. Waltz, Theory, p. 66 (footnote 3).

the international system, but structure affects behavior within this system only indirectly through competition and socialization.[6]

What then to do with IOs? If they do not possess agency, how should we treat them then? Several scholars have proposed to turn to structuration theory, based on the work of Giddens and others. Making a first attempt, Alexander Wendt wrote that "a structurationist approach to the state system would see states in relational terms as generated or constituted by internal relations of individuation (sovereignty) and, perhaps, penetration (spheres of influence)".[7] This is precisely the kernel of Giddens's idea of the duality of structure, implying that structures are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that together form social systems. For Giddens, structures are 'enacted' by 'knowledgeable' human agents.[8]

Yet Giddens regards IOs solely as an instrument of nation-states. For example, he labeled the League of Nations "an expression of an acknowledged need for the reflexive monitoring of a world-wide system of states", and became a prominent hub in exchanging "global information sources upon which modern states depend". Giddens places a lot of emphasis on the sovereignty of nation-states, stemming from the Wilsonian principles, and which were consequently incorporated in the League of Nations and United Nations.[9] He also claims that 'international relations' are the basis upon which nation-states exist in the first place.[10]

Despite these theoretical reservations on IOs, the ascendency of these non-state actors cannot be denied. According to one estimate at least 238 IOs are active today, and make crucial decisions in world politics. Whereas IR scholars have discussed the nature and power of state *in extenso*, analyses of IOs have been rare.[11] Though in general IOs are presented as the reflection of state preferences, not everyone agrees. Akira Iriye forcefully argued that international organization constitute another world, "produced by forces that cut across national frontiers". Such forces create networks of mutual interest that go beyond nation-state preferences, and shape spaces where states try to solve problems by pooling their resources.[12] One could thus say that Iriye regards IOs as actors adding to the structure of the international system.

6 Ibid., p. 74.

7 A. E. Wendt, The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory, in: International Organization, 41 (1987) 3, pp. 335-370, 357.

8 W. H. Sewell, Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation, Chicago 2005, p. 127; T. Welskopp, Die Dualität von Struktur und Handeln: Anthony Giddens' Strukturierungstheorie als 'praxeologischer' Ansatz in der Geschichtswissenschaft, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft, Sonderheft 19 (2001), pp. 99-119, 103; T. Welskopp, Der Mensch und die Verhältnisse. „Handeln" und „Struktur" bei Max Weber und Anthony Giddens, in: T. Mergel and T. Welskopp (ed.), Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft, Munich 1997, pp. 39-70.

9 A. Giddens, The Nation-state and Violence: A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: Volume II, Cambridge 1996, pp. 258 and 281.

10 Ibid., pp. 263-264.

11 M. N. Barnett, Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics, Ithaca 2004, pp. 1-2.

12 A. Iriye, Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World, Berkeley 2002, pp. 6 and 9.

While this article follows Giddens's ideas on structuration theory, it does not continue along his thoughts about IOs. Surely IOs are often enabled and constrained by states, and function through interplay with other IOs. Still, they cannot be reduced to state preferences and inter-state bargaining only. They are neither passive nor neutral players. At least in part, IOs are also independent actors with their own agendas, often serving multiple aims.[13] Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore see IOs as independent "sites of authority", whose authority flows from two principles. First of all, and going back to Max Weber, IOs are bureaucratic institutions holding rational-legal authority. This kind of authority is rational because "it deploys socially recognized relevant knowledge to create rules that determine how goals will be pursued". For the UNECE, this stemmed from economists and engineers who sought to apply their knowledge to Europe as a whole. Bureaucracies like the UNECE thus represent modern cultural forms, embodying their own values and pursuing their own agendas, and their rationality has normative powers. According to Barnett and Finnemore, this is what makes people submit to their authority.[14]

Second of all, IOs legitimize their actions based on control over technical expertise and information. For example, the in-house knowledge of the World Bank makes it an oft-sought external consultant, while the vast statistical data collected by the UN serve as benchmarks for many. What makes these bureaucratic IOs particularly powerful is their habit to appear as 'neutral' and depoliticized. Yet behind this self-conviction often stands a set of cultural values.[15] They further derive power from classification, fixing of meaning and the diffusion of norms. For the latter, IOs often serve as 'conveyer belts' of technical expertise.[16] With regard to the former, from the 19th century onwards, IOs have been important catalysts of standard-setting. Loya and Boli identified standardization INGOs as "highly technical, strongly rationalized, and ubiquitously consequential". They also state that IR-theories cannot account for the rise and importance of this branch of IOs. In the end, they conclude, "technical rationality dominates over power" and reductionist views are inadequate.[17]

13 M. N. Barnett and M. Finnemore, The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations, in: International Organization, 53 (1999) 4, pp. 699-732, 705.

14 Ibid., pp. 705-706.

15 Ibid., pp. 705-708. One could recognise this most strongly in work of James Ferguson on the World Bank in Lesotho, see: J. Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development", Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho, Minneapolis 1994. In addition, Johan Schot and Vincent Lagendijk have identified a strategy of explicit 'depolitization' with international actors, though not entirely overlapping with IOs. See: J. Schot and V. Lagendijk, Technocratic Internationalism in the Interwar Years: Building Europe on Motorways and Electricity Networks, in: Journal of Modern European History, 6 (2008) 2, pp. 196-217.

16 M. N. Barnett and M. Finnemore, The Politics, p. 712 (footnote 13).

17 T. A. Loya and J. Boli, Standardization in the World Polity: Technical Rationality over Power, in: J. Boli and G. M. Thomas (ed.), Constructing World Culture, pp. 169-197, 169-171 and 191 (footnote 4).

2. The UNECE

This brings us to the UNECE. To a certain degree, one could explain the origins of the UNECE from a neo-realist perspective. Founded in 1947 because of economy- and efficiency-infused ideas, and the UNECE was supposed to take a leading role in reconstructing European countries from the scars of war. Suggestions for such a body stemmed from two sources. For one, the US State Department contemplated a European organization, charged with economic reconstruction. For another, shortly after the war, the Polish delegation to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) made a similar proposal for an institution to coordinate European reconstruction efforts.[18] This proposal enjoyed wide support. Thus far, the idea for a body like UNECE was on par with nation-state preferences.

In addition, the UNECE followed in the footsteps of already pre-existing organizations that provided stopgap aid and assistance in the service for post-war recovery. These included the Economic Coal Organization (ECO), the European Central Inland Transport Organization (ECITO), and the Emergency Economic Committee for Europe (EECE). These London-based temporary organizations tried to solve immediate needs, staffed by bureaucrats with intimate knowledge of energy and transportation issues.[19] These experiences convinced European governments of the need to step up their cooperative efforts to reconstruct a war-torn continent. The new European organization seemed a logical extension and thus absorbed the London E-organizations.

But one major change disqualifies explaining this IO in neo-realist terms only. Soon after its birth in 1947, relations between the Soviet Union and the United States took a turn for the worst. The UNECE initially hoped to coordinate the Marshall Plan, but this was eventually left to the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which was restricted to Western European countries.[20] Inaugurated "at the very last moment in the development of the Cold War", the UNECE hence became "virtually the only arena in which Eastern and Western Europe met to discuss European affairs".[21]

The Cold War, and the consequential East-West split, forced the UNECE to adjust its role and develop alternative agendas, in order to legitimize its existence and to underline its usefulness. This turned the UNECE into an independent actor, with its own distinct set of values and aims. As a consequence, the Geneva-based institution regularly deviated from the preferences of the bigger member-states, and the relationship with nation-states was often complicated.

18 W. W. Rostow, The Division of Europe after World War II: 1946, Austin 1981, pp. 3-5; V. Kostelecky, The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe: The Beginning of a History, Stockholm 1989, p. 16.

19 For an overview see Relief and Rehabilitation Organizations, in: International Organization, 1 (1947) 1, pp. 178-183.

20 The OEEC was preceded by the Paris-based Conference on European Economic Cooperation (CEEC). The OEEC itself was established in April 1948.

21 This was at least according to its first Secretary General, the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal. V. Kostelecky, The United, p. 37, note 78 (footnote 18). The second citation is from D. W. Urwin, The Community of Europe, London 1991, p. 14.

How did the UNECE operate as an organization? Structure-wise, the UNECE consists of a Commission, a Secretariat, and several Technical Committees. The latter Committees dealt with a wide variety of subjects, ranging from housing, food, and transport, to trade, steel, and energy. The Commission holds an annual and public plenary session, and oversees the work of the Technical Committees. The Secretariat, lastly, was composed of international civil servants who explicitly *not* represent any state. It was granted with the power to take initiatives, and to float proposals to amongst member-states.[22]

Cold War tensions made their mark on the UNECE's work, as distrust was mutual from the start. The United States were worried by the Soviet political obstruction of the ECE, but also suspiciously gazed upon Gunnar Myrdal – UNECE's Secretary General until 1957 –, who in the eyes of the US State Department gave too much leeway to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, too, looked with suspicion at the creation of an organization that treated Europe as an economic unit. According to the Soviets, too many agencies already struggled to perform similar tasks.[23] Of the three kinds of UNECE bodies, the Commission in particular fell prey to fierce East-West antagonisms, mostly evoked by the Soviets.[24] During the Cold War, the Technical Committees had most space to maneuver, like the Committee on Electric Power discussed below.

Especially due to the existence of the Secretariat, it is hard to reduce the UNECE to an IO reflecting the preferences of its member-states. When examining its Cold War-ridden history, it becomes obvious that the UNECE Secretariat regularly went against the grain of the consensus of the regional blocks and more powerful states. In effect, the UNECE can hardly be regarded as a body acting according to the wishes of states. Such a feat is not uncommon for IOs in general, but particularly stands out for the UNECE.[25] Although it wanted to work through member-states, its Secretariat could set the agenda, pre-consult about proposals, and could mitigate political tensions by postponing voting and focusing on the technical aspects.

The role of Gunnar Myrdal needs emphasis, as he was instrumental in shaping the set of cultural values of the organization. The Swedish Social Democrat and economist endeavored to make the UNECE an all-European organization which included the Soviet Union and its satellite states. He therefore insisted on having a Soviet deputy working with him. Myrdal argued that the Cold War stood in the way of economic progress for all countries involved. He saw UNECE's role broader than just economic, and thought the UNECE "represent[ed] an organized matrix for preserving and strengthening the links

22 M. Fagen, Gunnar Myrdal and the Shaping of the United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe, in: Coexistence, 27 (1988), pp. 427-435, 431.

23 D. Wightman, Economic Co-Operation in Europe: A Study of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, London 1956, p. 5.

24 Wightman makes a similar point, see: D. Wightman, East-West Cooperation and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, in: International Organization, 11 (1957) 1, pp. 1-12, 1.

25 M. N. Barnett and M. Finnemore, The Politics, p. 703 (footnote 13).

between countries on both sides of the divide, which must be preserved and strengthened if we want to build a sounder Europe and a peaceful world".[26]

Myrdal also succeeded in building up a top-notch group of economists and a capable Secretariat, allowing the UNECE to become an important actor in European economic norm-setting. Among the first to be employed in Geneva were Nicholas Kaldor, a Cambridge-trained economist and academic acquaintance of Myrdal, and Walt W. Rostow, who later gained a name for his developmental ideas and in his role as American presidential advisor.[27] Other pioneers included Tony Rollman, who would move on to become a principle figure in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and Albert Kervyn de Lettenhove, a Belgian economist who would later serve both the European Commission and the World Bank.[28]

This was in line with Myrdal's first aim; establishing the UNECE as a research group with a scientific take on European economic issues – something Myrdal would later label as "independent truth-seeking".[29] This implied conducting research along scientific lines and independent from any government's point of view. Problems were therefore always studied "as though Europe were but a single country, regardless of political frontiers", and from the perspective of "technical objectivity".[30] The research should also lead to practical and useful results that could inform policy, and was not just meant as *l'art pour l'art*.[31] This seemed to pay off immediately: while the OEEC had its own statisticians and rapporteurs, it was the UNECE's publication *The Economic Survey of Europe* that was used as the scientific basis for the Marshall Plan in 1948.[32]

The Secretariat's second aim was nurturing practical forms of cooperation. Proposals were only brought to a vote after informal discussions had resulted in a consensus. This empowered the Secretariat to postpone or even delay meetings.[33] Overall, the UNECE's working method tried to mitigate internal tensions and conflicts as much as possible. All European governments – UN member or not – and interested international organizations could join in deliberations.[34] The Commission and its subsidiary bodies refrained

26 G. Myrdal, Twenty Years of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, in: International Organization, 22 (1968) 3, pp. 617-628, 625 and 628.

27 The Secretariat held a rather autonomous role in hiring people. On Rostow, see: D. Milne, America's Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War, New York 2009.

28 S. Andersson, An International Network of Contacts in the Archives of Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, in: M. Grass, G. Litzell, and K. Misgeld (ed.), A World in the Basement: International Material in Archives and Collections, Stockholm 2002, pp. 86-92, 89.

29 G. Myrdal, The Research Work of the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe, in: Erik Lindahl (ed.), 25 Economic Essays in Honour of Erik Lindahl, Stockholm 1956, pp. 267-293, 270.

30 See for example Examination by the Economic Commission for Europe at its Sixth Session of the Report of the Committee on Electric Power, June 20, 1951, p. 5, Electric Power. Reports to ECE and to ECOSOC (jacket no. 1), GX 19/1/6 – 3306, Archive of the United Nations Organisation at Geneva (hereafter UNOG).

31 G. Myrdal, The Research, pp. 267-269 (footnote 29).

32 A. S. Milward, The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945–1951, Berkeley 1984 (footnote 67); G. Myrdal, The Research, p. 281 (footnote 29).

33 I thank Daniel Stinsky for pointing this out to me. Also see: G. Myrdal, Twenty Years, pp. 619-621 (footnote 26).

34 The United States were also a full member, as was the Soviet Union.

from majority voting, trying to avoid a split among the countries with different economic and political system.[35] Non-consensual proposals were withdrawn or postponed. The Technical Committees, on the whole, did not have official procedural discussions and kept only concise notes of meetings.

A third principle concerned the UNECE's position within the international system. The Secretariat would guide the preparations for meetings, but left the bulk of the work to the governmental experts themselves. It thus insisted on a clear division of labor. According to Myrdal, it was "a sign of a weak and inefficient international organization if too much of its activity becomes work of the Secretariat".[36] In addition, the UNECE carefully tried to avoid competition and duplication with other IOs such as the OEEC and the predecessors of the European Union, and coordinate activities with relevant IOs like the Danube Commission and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).[37]

These principles added up to the constructed self-image of an apolitical and economic technocratic organization. This did not mean that the UNECE's very existence and method of operation was not deeply political. In fact, its very style can be related to changes in the sphere of international politics. Myrdal wrote in 1956 that the UNECE was "not particularly naïve about the political facts in the world around us". He saw it as UNECE's task to initiate "an experiment in independent, disinterested research", which became a stable body over time.[38] Still, Myrdal acknowledged the political (read: Cold War) limits under which the UNECE had to operate, that actually gave meaning to its work.

The remainder of this paper will spotlight the activities of the UNECE in the field of electricity. It shows, firstly, how the UNECE operated as an autonomous agency, that, secondly, was part of the post-war international realm and able to serve as a platform for East-West interactions. Not only was the UNECE Secretariat an important actor in forging links across the Iron Curtain, it also provided a structural platform. It did not 'simply' conform itself to the wishes of individual states – the superpowers in particular. In that sense, the UNECE acted as the medium, as well as the outcome of a particular structure in international politics.

3. The UNECE and East-West electricity flows

A recurring tension with UNECE's work was the Cold War. This section will figure an electricity-related case, and took twenty-seven years to materialize. UNECE's facilitating role was hampered by Cold War-tensions for nearly as long. Besides showing how the Iron Curtain stood in the way of attempts to effectuate East-West cooperation, the

35 M. Fagen, Gunnar Myrdal, pp. 427-429 (footnote 22).

36 Opening Statement by the Executive Secretary to the Eleventh Session of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE Document E/ECE/242), 11th Session, April 5, 1959, pp. 5-6. Cited in Berthelot and Rayment, The ECE, p. 69.

37 M. Fagen, Gunnar Myrdal, pp. 433-434 (footnote 22).

38 G. Myrdal, The Research, p. 270 (footnote 29).

electricity case also underlines how the Geneva organization was able to position itself, often without the consent of (dominant) nation-states. At the same time, it reveals how the UNECE was an actor within an international arena cohabited by other IOs.

The electricity proposal at hand concerned the flow of electricity across the Iron Curtain, and was taken up by UNECE's Committee on Electric Energy in 1949.[39] Austria suffered electricity shortages as its power system was split; with most electricity production situated in the western Alps and the largest centers of consumption located in the eastern part. The latter region could receive electricity from Poland and Czechoslovakia. These two countries could build new thermal power plants, and export this to Austria. Austrian and Polish authorities had already come to an understanding. Poland would supply electricity to Austria during wintertime, and Austria, having a surplus of hydro-power during the summer, would return the favor during the summer. Czechoslovakia would profit along the way as a transit country, and could supply additional electricity.[40]

But this deal went beyond Austria alone. Before and during the Second World War the western part of Austria became strongly integrated into the German system. After the war German industry in Bavaria continued to be strongly dependent on Austrian electricity. Obtaining electricity from Poland thus relieved the stressed situation in Austria. This in turn would free up capacity to help out southern Germany. As the involved countries seemed to agree, the remaining bottleneck was building new power lines and power plants. In sum, four countries were part of this proposal – two on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Although the schemes appeared relatively easy from a technical point of view, matters were not as they seemed. The proposal itself turned out to be persistent as well as provocative. The obvious reason for this is the Cold War. The tensed relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union 'contaminated' East-West contacts in Europe, and subsequently significant tensions permeated political and economic relationships. Proposals to forge new connections – in this case electrical ones – met considerable resistance, particularly from the Western side of the Iron Curtain.

According to the UNECE, the most economic and efficient way to ease southern German needs was to get electricity from a Czechoslovak power plant, situated at approximately 30 km from the German border. If the price of the Czech supply would be favorable their offer would certainly be accepted, a UNECE report stated. Yet the project would also be "subject of course to the political and material difficulties which need not be recapitulated".[41] Still, generally speaking, most Secretariat-members were still convinced that economic cooperation between East and West would take place. For one, Secretariat members at this point believed cooperation would come about. In 1947, Rostow wrote

39 Interoffice memorandum from L.H. Black to J. Houston Angus, Supply of power to Bavaria, May 19, 1949, in: W.W. Rostow files, ECE: Electric power, Box 50, Archive of Accession of Retired Records (ARR) 1360, UNOG.

40 Draft minutes of the fifteenth meeting. EEC (47) 81, pp. 1, 4, 17, in: P. FO 371 / 62527 – 194, EECE: PUP, File No. 3395, 7. Economic, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom (hereafter: NA).

41 Document ME/25/50 Committee on Electric Power, January 11, 1950, GX19/6/1/4 – 3815, UNOG.

that "all the evidence seems to indicate that the Eastern countries are prepared to play ball in Geneva".[42]

But despite UNECE's optimism and attitude of 'technical objectivity', Cold War politics did play a role. In November 1950 Czechoslovakia stepped out of the project, claiming they needed the export power for their own economy and society.[43] UNECE now went for the second best option: supplying Germany with Polish electricity, generated with Silesian coal.[44] But Poland, too, stepped out of the project. Poland and Czechoslovakia would only return to the UNECE respectively in 1953 and 1954.[45] Two mainly political reasons can be identified for the plan's failure. One laid in the East: the 1948 Coup in Czechoslovakia brought the Communist Party to power, which appeared to be less interested in international trade, turning down an international deal on timber which was supported by both the UNECE and the World Bank.[46] One can suspect this, too, was a reason to drop out of the electricity plan. Under the new Communist regime, Czechoslovakia embarked on a path of industrialization, entailing the adoption of the Soviet modernization with a focus on energy-intensive heavy industry.[47] In other words, the coal resources were now needed domestically.

Another political cause laid in the West. Poland had problems acquiring the proper electrical equipment from Western European or American manufacturers. In January 1950, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson wrote that it appeared 'unsound' to encourage the Polish-Czechoslovak power export to Bavaria, due to the unreliable Eastern European political situation and problems involved in sending generating equipment from Western to Eastern Europe.[48] He pointed out the required equipment was on the embargo lists of the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM, 1949). COCOM was created by Western European allies and the United States, and had no official relation "to any US or European government agency, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the OEEC". [49] It aimed to prevent the transfer of potentially sensitive equipment to the East. Cold War-related tensions thus hampered UNECE's

42 Copy of Minute from Mr.Rostow to Mr.Angus dated December 16, 1947, on the subject of a European Power Board, in: Rostow Files, ECE; OEEC – Power, Box 50, ARR 1360, UNOG.

43 Document EP/23/add. 1, ECE Committee on Electric Power. Supplement to Possibilities for Electric Power exchanges between Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Poland, November 12, 1950, GX19/6/1/4 – 3815, UNOG.

44 It must be noted here that Oświęcim was the Polish equivalent for Auschwitz. Document EP/WP.2/4, ECE Committee on Electric Power – Thermal Working Party: Silesian study group, March 17, 1949, GX19/6/1/4 – 3815, UNOG.

45 D. Wightman, Economic, p. 157 (footnote 23).

46 The countries involved were Austria, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Poland, and Yugoslavia. E. S. Mason and R. E. Asher, The World Bank since Bretton Woods, Washington D.C. 1973, pp. 167-168.

47 P. G. Lewis, Central Europe Since 1945, London 1994, p. 105.

48 Telegram Washington (Acheson) to Paris, January 6, 1950, Folder: Industry – Power 19(c), Box 36, Special Representative in Europe, Office of the General Counsel. Subject files, 1948-53, Record Group RG 469, National Archives of the United States of America, College Park, MA (hereafter: NACP).

49 Quoted in J. McGlade, COCOM and the Containment of Western Trade and Relations, in: J. Eloranta and J. Ojala (ed.), East-West Trade and the Cold War, Jyväskylä 2005, (note 6), pp. 47-63, 49.

work. COCOM posed serious limits, and Soviet control and industrialization plans set different priorities. This did, however, not lead to a change of hearth within UNECE, as it would continue to mention East-West connections in plans and consultative talks.

Political circumstances changed in the 1950s, as the cooperative spirit of Central and Eastern European countries improved, especially after Stalin's death in 1953. Both East and West established vehicles for their regional economic interests. Regional economic development in the East was stimulated through the CMEA. Although CMEA was established in 1949, very few conferences were actually held until the 1950s.[50] In the West, economic cooperation took place in the OEEC and increasingly in the ECSC. Both bodies did not deal directly with East-West contacts. NATO, however, would. Both NATO and CMEA (co-)determined their participating in the UNECE.

In 1958 NATO countries started to coordinate their attitude towards the UNECE in order to make "its activities more favorable to Western aims".[51] NATO's Committee of Economic Advisers (ECONAD) regularly discussed UNECE's work that concerned the 'political interests' of the 'Atlantic Alliance'.[52] Crucially, NATO did not question the existence of the UNECE. It recognized the UNECE as the only existing all-European forum, which most Western European countries considered to be 'an important bridge' between East and West.[53] For several countries it was the only place to meet representatives from states with which they had no diplomatic relations. In addition, it presented a useful source of intelligence for the Atlantic Alliance. ECONAD saw the UNECE as a useful instrument, claimed that despite its limited results "it is felt that, if and when political tension decreases, ECE may eventually develop into an important link between the two systems".[54]

For Central and Eastern European countries the UNECE was seen as useful, at least to a certain extent. According to the CMEA, the UNECE worked primarily "along the interests of capitalistic countries and their industries".[55] Still the CMEA regarded the UNECE the most important body to help deal with the growing energy shortage in their

50 M. Kaser, COMECON: Integrated Problems of the Planned Economies, London 1965, pp. 42-43.

51 Document D/30 (revised), 'Conclusions agreed by the Committee of Economic Advisers', attached to document C-M(58)94, 'Co-ordination of attitude of NATO countries within the Economic Commission for Europe with a view to making its activities more favourable to Western aims', June 12, 1958, File AC/127: Committee of Economic Advisers, NATO Archives, Brussels (hereafter: NATO).

52 Ibid., p. 2.

53 Document WP/82, NATO countries' policy in the Economic Commission for Europe, March 12, 1962, p. 2, AC/127, NATO.

54 Ibid.

55 Vorschlag zur Vorbereitung des Arbeitsprogramms der Kommission für den Austausch von Elektroenergie zwischen den Teilnehmerländern des RgW und die komplexe Ausnutzung der Wasserkräfte der Donau auf Grund der Empfehlung der Beratung der Kommission, die in Moskau vom 19.-20. März 1956 stattfand, DE 1: Staatliche Plankommission (1949–1961 [1963]), Teil: Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 21753 Vorbereitung von Tagungen und Arbeitsberichte der Ständigen Kommission des RGW für den Austausch von Elektroenergie und die komplexe Ausnutzung der Wasserkräfte der Donau, Abschrift, Geheim, June 6, 1956, Bundesarchiv, Lichterfelde, Berlin (hereafter: BArch).

bloc and wanted to increase cooperation with UNECE's Committee on Electric Power.[56] Furthermore, the CMEA still considered electricity cooperation with Austria, hoping this could be a stepping stone towards further collaboration with the West.[57]

Energy problems were a recurring theme in the 1950s. A tight technological cooperation in the field of electricity came about in Western Europe in the early 1950s, leading to a more efficient use of resources and existing capacity. In these same years Central and Eastern European countries made serious progress towards their own high voltage electricity network. The German Democratic Republic (GDR), Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia were connected through 220 kV lines between 1957 and 1960. Western Ukraine followed in 1962, Romania and Bulgaria in 1963-64.[58] Towards the end of the 1950s, economic growth led to an increasing demand for energy. Yet production of Western Europe's primary resource – coal – was declining, and imports of foreign oil and coal increased. On average, the annual rise of electricity demand in Western Europe was estimated at seven per cent, implying a doubling of demand every ten years. At this point, representatives of the electricity industry of the West began to consider ways to expand the geographical scope of cooperation. In the early 1960s, some electricity producers concluded that "[a]ny new progress in interconnection will arise either from a reinforcement of the existing links or from the setting up of new submarine links, or the establishment of links with countries of eastern Europe".[59]

It thus comes as no surprise that the project remained an issue under study, despite Cold War tensions. Besides the Western electricity industry, several countries insisted that the UNECE re-examined the possibilities of reinforcing interconnections between Eastern and Western Europe.[60] Therefore the UNECE Secretariat re-assessed their original plan in 1963, and consulted Budapest, Warsaw, and Berlin to prepare a proposal. The UNECE concluded that "untapped hydro-power resources in Europe are dwindling", and, taking a technical perspective only, proposed several East-West exchanges in the form of draft proposal. These included an increase of exports from Yugoslavia to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and Austria – once again the proposal for electricity exports

56 Information des Sekretärs der Kommission für den Austausch von Elektroenergie und Ausnutzung der Wasserkräfte der Donau über seine Dienstreise zur 15. Tagung des Komitees für Elektroenergie der Europäischen Wirtschaftskommision vom 9.-17. Oktober 1957, p. 2, DE 1, 4101 Ständige Kommission für Elektroenergieaustausch zwischen den Ländern und für Ausnutzung der Wasserkräfte der Donau des RGW, BArch.

57 Verschlag zur Vorbereitung des Arbeitsprogramms der Kommission für den Austausch von Elektroenergie zwischen den Teilnehmerländern des RgW und die komplexe Ausnutzung der Wasserkräfte der Donau auf Grund der Empfelung der Beratung der Kommission, die in Moskau vom 19.-20.März 1956 stattfand, dated June 4, 1956, DE 1, 21753 Vorbereitung von Tagungen und Arbeitsberichte der Ständigen Kommission des RGW für den Austausch von Elektroenergie und die komplexe Ausnutzung der Wasserkräfte der Donau, BArch.

58 N. Savenko and M. A. Samkov, Объединенные Электроэнергетические Системы Стран-членов СЭВ, Moscow 1983, pp. 9-14.

59 F. Cahen and B. Favez, Control of Frequency and Power Exchanges Within the Framework of International Interconnections, UNIPEDE Congress of Scandinavia, Paris 1964, p. 23.

60 The initiative came from – no surprise – Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. Sevette to Zachmann, and Meller-Conrad and Batros, July 3, 1963, GX, file 19/6/1/15-32212, UNOG.

from Poland to Austria, and from Czechoslovakia and Poland to the FRG.[61] The latter required the reconnection of transmission lines between the GDR and FRG. With the Berlin Crisis fresh in mind, resulting in the construction of the Berlin Wall, this clearly was a sensitive issue.

Most Central and Eastern European countries responded favorable – the Soviet Union included. Yet nearly all Western European countries denounced the proposal. Their letters to Geneva were written in very similar language, hinting at a coordinated response.[62] This was indeed the case. The UNECE proposal was discussed within NATO's ECONAD in April 1964, where the FRG made a strong plea against the UNECE initiative. The FRG reminded that electricity collaboration in Western Europe was based upon mutual confidence between reliable partners. "The core of the problem", argued the FRG delegation, was the lack of a "basis of mutual confidence".[63] This convinced the other member-states, and thus explains their common stance vis-à-vis the UNECE's proposal. Once again, trust issues hampered East-West relations. NATO's task was not just to defend the West militarily, but also defended its economic interests. Electricity connections with the East could potentially jeopardize the Western systems, and would also (financially) benefit the East. This thus had to be avoided.

NATO's opposition did not kill the Austrian-Polish plan, only placed it on the backburner for a year. In November 1965 the UNECE Secretariat reported that several countries had 'renewed interest' in studying the electricity transfers across borders – particularly those East of the Iron Curtain. Poland again offered to build power stations financed by Western countries, and supply this electricity to their Western neighbors. This allowed Poland to exploit her coal resources and earn foreign currency by selling electricity.[64]

Prospects now seemed rosier. While still labeling these electricity transfers 'obnoxious' in 1966, Washington now supported the plan on the condition that any UNECE studies did not touch upon the 'inter-German problem'. In other words, electricity proposals linking East and West would be accepted, but should not involve connections between the FRG and GDR.[65] A similar change of heart occurred at Bonn, supporting East-West cooperation except for the German question.[66] NATO also changed its policies towards Central and Eastern European countries. ECONAD now studied economic measures that might "loosen the ties between the USSR and the various satellites". Energy coop-

61 Project de plan d'une étude relative aux possibilités de renforcement de l'interconnexion des réseaux de transmission d'énergie électrique en Europe, 1963, box 109, ARR 1360, UNOG.

62 George Tesoro to Velebit, October 8, 1964; J.F. de Liedekerke to Velebit, October 13, 1964; and T. Solesby to Velebit, July 29, 1964, GX, file 19/6/1/15-32212, UNOG.

63 Document R/132, annex, Text of the Statement on Exchanges of Electric Power between East and West, Made by the German Representative at the Meeting of 2nd April 1964, file AC/127, NATO.

64 Airgram from US Mission Geneva to Department of State, November 17, 1965, pp. 1-2, Folder: FSE 12 Electric Power 6/1/6, Box 939, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State, NACP.

65 Telegram Department of State to US Mission Geneva, Ibid.

66 H. Haftendorn, The Adaptation of the NATO Alliance to a Period of Détente: The 1967 Harmel Report, in: W. Loth (ed.), Crises and Compromises: The European Project 1963–1969, Baden-Baden 2001, pp. 285-322, 295.

eration between East and West, through the ECE, was one of the possible ways to reduce the region's dependence on the Soviet Union.[67] This was a policy line similar to the one taken towards Yugoslavia.[68]

This time around the UNECE avoided proposing interconnections between the FRG and GDR, and the other proposals clearly had wide-spread support from Central and Eastern Europe. The willingness of countries from this region can be linked to improving relations between UNECE and CMEA. In 1965 the UNECE Secretariat was invited for the first time to take part in some CMEA committees.[69] Contacts became more intensive over the next couple of years. In 1969 the Executive Committee of the CMEA labeled its cooperation with the UNECE Secretariat "particularly useful and intensive".[70]

UNECE's attempts to bridge Cold War divides now clear began to bear fruit. The CMEA saw Geneva as a full partner, and both Washington and NATO at least tolerated the UNECE's activities in this field. Myrdal's Secretariat had created an organizational structure that could act as a bridge between East and West. Now the international political situation, characterized by détente, provided the circumstances under which this bridge came in use. By 1965 Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland held informal talks, and convened in rooms and hallways of the *Palais des Nations* (UNECE's headquarters in Geneva) to discuss proposals whereby electricity would be transmitted to Austria.[71] Austria held a middle position between East and West, both geographically and politically. The 1955 State Treaty ordained Austria's political neutrality, and as a consequence Austria neither joined NATO nor the CMEA.[72] This gave Austria more leeway in establishing contacts with their Eastern neighbors. These discussions were eventually fruitful, as Austrian authorities announced a deal with Poland in 1974. A 25-year contract was signed; Austria loaned 3 billion Schillings to enable Poland to buy Austrian electrical equipment. The price of the electricity transmitted to Austria was partially fixed, and for 70 per cent determined by world market prices of solid and liquid fuels – radically different from the Polish price structure of fuels.[73] With this deal, the trilateral plan finally came into being. It proved to be the first of expanding number of East-West connections.[74]

67 Document D/150 (revised), NATO Countries' Trade Policies Towards the European Satellite Countries, March 31, 1964, file AC/127, NATO.

68 L. M. Lees, Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War, University Park 1997.

69 Cooperation with Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), paper dated February 8, 1966, ARR-14-1856, Folder: 00/08, UNOG. Also see Einschätzung der 21. Tagung der Ständigen Kommission Elektroenergie des RGW, December 12, 1965, DC-20 19589: Ständige Kommission für Elektroenergie beim RGW 19589 (Aktenzeichen 05232), BArch.

70 Letter Kostelecký to Stanovnik, April 29, 1968, Confidential, ARR-14-1856, Folder: 00/08, UNOG.

71 Telegram US Mission Geneva to Department of State, December 3, 1965, p. 4, Folder: FSE 12 Electric Power 6/1/65, Box 939, RG 59, NACP.

72 W. W. Williams, The Road to the Austrian State Treaty, in: Journal of Cold War Studies, 2 (2000) 2, pp. 97-107.

73 Meeting Comité Restreint, October 9, 1974, Archives of the Union for the Coordination and Transmission of Electricity, Brussels.

74 See: V. Lagendijk, Electrifying Europe: The Power of Europe in the Construction of Electricity Networks, Amsterdam 2008, chapter 6.

4. Conclusion

Although the UNECE could not perform its initially envisioned tasks, namely, guide European construction and administer the Marshall Plan, it was nevertheless able to establish its own organizational culture and values. The UNECE thus reinvented itself, carving out a niche for itself within the landscape of international organizations. Myrdal had a substantial hand in that, leaving a strong imprint on the organization which he established as a practical economic research institute, a meeting place for East and West, with little room for ideological and politics quarrels. In its studies, the UNECE approached economic problems from a Europe-wide and engineering perspective, thereby ignoring international borders and rupture lines. The UNECE Secretariat left much work to member-states and their experts, but kept considerable sway over the agenda and the process.

Its status as a 'neutral' technical and knowledgeable economic body gave it power and recognition. Therewith the UNECE Secretariat was to make ambitious plans for economic and infrastructural cooperation between East and West. That role was not easily accepted within the international community. But the UNECE was able to challenge the dichotomous international system – although with mixed success initially. Both East and West increasingly came to see certain advantages in the organization's existence. For the East, the UNECE offered openings to solving their growing energy problems, for which cooperation was seen as the way forward. More cautiously at first, the West came to see the UNECE as a potential bridge that might be instrumental once political tensions started to wither away.

The electricity case shows that UNECE could not simply work along the lines of technical objectivity only. The East-West divide could not be ignored, and the UNECE regularly had to respect the demands and objections of its member-states. The politically independent Secretariat analyzed the electricity situation in Europe as a whole, and proposed solutions to solve shortages. In the end, it had to comply with nations' wishes and the Cold War status quo. Stronger even, their style of decision-making which emphasized consensus actually empowered opposing member-states. The fact that this electricity project took so long to come about can clearly be attributed to the Cold War. In that sense, Loya and Boli's claim that "technical rationality dominates over power" does not hold. This is to say that the UNECE was independent but certainly not autonomous. Political tensions between East and West prevented financial flows across the Iron Curtain, and denied Poland and Czechoslovakia the necessary equipment to go ahead with the plan. Yet when the first electricity was transmitted from Poland to Austria via Czechoslovakia in the 1970s, the Cold War was far from over. How, then, was it possible that this electricity flowed from East to West?

For one, the fact that this project took so long can be related to the UNECE's agenda-setting capabilities. It made two extensive efforts in the 1940s and 1960s, to little avail. But it was able to continue to consult Eastern and Western governments on this very same proposal, and provided a structural forum between both sides of the Iron Curtain. How

was the UNECE seen by both East and West? Western countries in NATO saw the UNECE as a possible gateway to better contacts with the East, after if political relations had improved. NATO made clear that mutual trust was lacking in the early 1960s. CMEA files that already in 1956 Central and Eastern European countries wanted to cooperate on functional matters, such as in electricity with Austria. Yet their overall take on the organization was more critical. This changed halfway the 1960s, which opened up new perspectives for the plan.

In the field of East-West relations, UNECE still possessed agency and at least tried to break through the barriers set by the two superpowers. Not only did the UNECE persist with its controversial electricity proposal against the will of influential member states, it also took the wishes of smaller and more 'neutral' countries into account – like Austria and Yugoslavia. Over time, this strategy paid off, but political détente was necessary. While making continuing efforts it also changed East-West relations in a more structural way; it was – the only! – a space where both sides could meet, and discuss cooperation. Eventually the Austrian-Polish plan eventually came about without direct intervention from Geneva. Rather it seems the seeds for cooperation were sown in the UNECE, which persistently kept placing this on the agenda. This made the UNECE not only a 'conveyer belt' of technical expertise but also a clearing house for ideas and people, and a locus where trust could be build due to an independent Secretariat.