



Quelle: Hertie School gGmbH

In Memory of Henrik Enderlein

(A tribute by Jean Pisani-Ferry, 2. Juni 2021)

On April 20, Henrik Enderlein [tweeted](#) for the last time. His tweet was a reminder that in January 2020, at the Munich Security Conference, he had moderated a debate between Annalena Baerbock, now the Green Party's candidate for chancellor, and Armin Laschet, the CDU's candidate. Between these two personalities, who in all likelihood will form a coalition in a few months and one or the other of whom will lead Germany, the agreement, according to the tweet, is "remarkable."

In his introductory remarks, Enderlein set the stage for the debate. He identified three contrasts that structure the debate in Europe: the contrast between European and national approaches, between open and closed societies, and between liberal and illiberal democracy. It is tempting, he said, but too simplistic to summarize them as the single opposition between proponents of Europe, openness, and democracy and supporters of nation, retreat, and authoritarianism. And he invited the speakers to explain how to build a Europe that would protect.

So a German exchange developed on the podium, on a very French topic. This was characteristic of Henrik Enderlein's approach. Time and again, he relentlessly challenged one side of the Rhine on the basis of the other's thinking, never allowing a consensus based on prejudice or ignorance. His remarkable knowledge of the debates in both countries, as well as of their main actors, allowed him to fill this role vigilantly with significance. It was possible to discuss with him the French secularism controversies, and immediately afterwards the last judgment of the Federal Constitutional Court: in both cases he was aware of every detail of the respective problems.

The Franco-German debate too often takes the form of an agreed-upon exercise that leads to insubstantial compromises between actors who do not think the same way and basically do not understand each other. With Enderlein, the opposite was true: substance instead of show, commitment instead of mistrust, the search for actual agreement instead of protecting oneself from the other's positions. For example, a [report](#) he co-wrote, commissioned by two ministers, had to irritate both the German and the French side.

Between France and Germany, then, he was not simply a courier, shuttling back and forth so much that he lost his bearings. He wanted to understand and explain, but above all to convince. He never stopped fighting for his favorite topic, Europe.

Working with Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa in his early days at the European Central Bank, Henrik Enderlein had a sophisticated idea of what conditions had to be met for the common currency project to succeed. Like his mentor, he feared not so much the - largely imaginary - attacks on central bank independence, but rather a monetary construction without sufficient political integration. For this reason, he also argued strongly against a typically German assessment, according to which the main concern was to prevent budgetary irresponsibility. From the razor-sharp diagnosis of the "[Glienicke Group](#)" to the proposals of the "[7 + 7](#)," to name just two outstanding reports in which he participated, his work bears witness to this claim.

But was he, to use the title of his obituary in the Frankfurter Allgemeine, "The European"? His articles on emerging market bonds, published with his former student [Christoph Trebesch](#), of whom he was proud, are obviously not enough to balance a list of publications dominated by the European theme. But Enderlein was not a man of one cause, nor did he define himself as a European activist. If he devoted so much energy to Europe, it was undoubtedly because his intellectual maturity coincided with an acute crisis in the continent's unification project, and he knew that its failure would lead to a dramatic reduction in opportunities.

He was drawn to politics. He was close to the Social Democrats and tried to contribute to the renewal of the program of an aging party with whose leaders he was in close communication. More than once, they wanted him to join an SPD-led ministry. But it was not the right moment to make that leap and to trade his professional identity as an economist for a party stamp. He knew how cliquey German politics could be and preferred to go his own way for now.

In 2018, he had taken over the presidency of the Hertie School, a young public affairs school based in Berlin, which he had been involved in

developing from the start and which he wanted to transform into a university in the truest sense of the word. At the Hertie School in 2017, he organized the first [debate](#) between candidate Emmanuel Macron, Sigmar Gabriel and Jürgen Habermas. A cosmopolitan institution on the lookout for innovation, it is the image of a city that is increasingly investing in ideas because it knows that, if it is not an economic capital, it can claim to be an intellectual capital. When he had to step down in February 2021, Henrik Enderlein was in the midst of making it an inevitable institution, at the crossroads of research and debate.

Like so many others of his generation, he was without illusions. But not without dreams. In Munich, he had sketched out part of them: an alliance of Europe, of openness and democracy that he stubbornly believed possible. He was too perceptive not to see the contradictions in this project, but too determined simply to abandon it. At the same time, he strove to help the left reconcile realism and the pursuit of progress, and had devoted himself, when his illness gave him pause, to reading Robert Caro's monumental biography of Lyndon Johnson. Political skill and social progress: the combination appealed to him.

Henrik was all of these things. Above all, he was also a man full of vivacity, full of warmth, full of enthusiasm; he possessed a great talent for teaching; he had within him the power of friendship that disarmed prejudice and gave wings. Cohorts of students have had this experience. Many of his older friends also experienced exactly this with him, so that today they feel strangely abandoned by their younger comrade-in-arms.