

Annemarie Franke, Thinking about Europe, acting in German-Polish cooperation. Origins of the Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe

The Lower Silesian village of Krzyżowa was called Kreisau until 1945. It was here, on the estate of Helmuth and Freya von Moltke, that the anti-Nazi opposition group known as the Kreisau Circle used to meet during World War II. Count Helmuth James von Moltke and seven of his friends belonging to the group were sentenced to death by a Nazi court and murdered. When the war ended, the German inhabitants of Krzyżowa had to leave their houses and farms. To take their place, new settlers were brought equally forcibly to the village that was unfamiliar to them. In socialist Poland, the von Moltke family estate was taken over by the State Agricultural Farm. As a result of the traumatic experience of war and of German occupation, as well as flight and expulsion during the war and after its end, contacts between Poles and Germans froze for several decades. Silence fell. On both sides, very few individuals, although some very early on, dared to attempt dialogue, to restore broken ties, and to seek partners. Their efforts cannot be overestimated. They were pioneers of Polish-German reconciliation. I would like to present the work done by the friends from the Krzyżowa Circle in the post-war years for the sake of closer relations with Poland, looking at the former Kreisau, today's Krzyżowa.

The oppositionist group held its secret meetings from 1942 to 1943 in Kreisau in the so-called House on the Hill, discussing the rebirth of Germany based on new principles, after the fall of the Nazi dictatorship. One of the results of these deliberations was a draft European Constitution. However, independently of all this, the most important documents of the Kreisau Circle all reiterate the belief that the future peaceful order in Europe could not be based on strong nation states; moreover, in order to achieve it, states would have to relinquish their sovereignty. Equally important in the group's ideology was their willingness to accept unconditional responsibility for the war and for the crimes of Nazi Germany. A key document in this context is the one that includes reflections on punishment for an offence against the law, which reads like an intellectual anticipation of the later trials of people accused of perpetrating Nazi crimes and crimes against humanity¹.

Those who survived tried in various forms and institutions to fulfil the testament of the opposition and resistance members. From the 1950s onwards, the Evangelical Church in West Berlin supported pastoral care and civic education among workers employed in industry and

¹ See *Dossier: Kreisauer Kreis. Dokumente aus dem Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, ed. R. Bleistein, Frankfurt am Main 1987, pp. 302–310.

crafts. Pastor Harald Poelchau, responsible for this new direction of the Church's social activities, founded the Evangelical Chaplaincy for Vocational Schools in 1957 together with the young pastor Franz von Hammerstein. In this manner, the two theologians, shaped by their experience of resistance against Nazism, wanted to accompany young working-class people in the process of personality formation and to awaken in them an awareness of current social and political issues. Harald Poelchau (1903–1972) had served as a chaplain at the Berlin-Tegel prison from 1933 to 1945. He looked after hundreds of political prisoners who were persecuted and sentenced to death. They included Helmuth James von Moltke and his friends from the Kreisau Circle. Franz von Hammerstein (1921–2011) was the son of Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, Reichswehr general and Chief of the Army High Command, who refused to cooperate with Hitler after 1933. Franz, the youngest son of seven siblings, was persecuted as part of a collective responsibility for the actions of his brothers, who had actively participated in the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944.

Both pastors, who saw it as their mission to foster a critical view of politics and a sense of responsibility among the younger generation, wanted young people to draw conclusions for the future from the Nazi dictatorship. The meeting house referred to as *Haus Kreisau*, established in the 1960s in south Berlin, became their place of work. Where did the name come from?

“The name is intended primarily to emphasise the community aspect of the explorations, the shared views and the joint actions of a very diverse group of people (the Kreisau Circle) . The various domains of human responsibility – whether social, political, or Christian – in their case do not disperse but form a uniform whole.”²

The name was therefore supposed to announce the group's programme: opposition and resistance against lawlessness and tyranny, standing up for humanity and tolerance, as well as an orientation towards a united, peaceful Europe.

In May 1970, in relation to the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the end of World War II, Franz von Hammerstein sent a brochure to the Foreign Office in Bonn, informing them about Haus Kreisau having been recently established in Berlin. He added an appeal, asking the Ministry to consider whether the palace and farm in Krzyżowa would perhaps be a

² The quote can be found in the “About us” tab on the Haus Kreisau website, see http://hauskreisau.de/ueber_uns/#_geschichte (accessed: 21 February 2019).

suitable location for a meeting house for German-Polish understanding³. At that time (1968–1975), he was General Secretary of the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (Aktion Sühnezeichen), which he had established together with Lothar Kreyszig back in 1958, even before the division of Berlin⁴. In May 1970, West Germany did not yet have any diplomatic relations with the Polish People’s Republic, but the new government led by Chancellor Willy Brandt heralded changes, and the initiative of Franz von Hammerstein and his friends should be seen in this context.

The brochure, drafted in 1968, presents Haus Kreisau in Berlin and explains why it was given this name. It was edited jointly by Franz von Hammerstein, Freya von Moltke, and Harald Poelchau. It showcases the institution and its programme offering, but above all it introduces the members of the Kreisau Circle who “gave meaning” to Haus Kreisau’s name⁵. The fourth page of the brochure features a photograph of the signpost “Krzyżowa 3 [km]”, taken during someone’s visit to Poland. The authors briefly describe the Kreisau Circle, and towards the end draw attention to Helmuth James von Moltke’s attitude towards Poland:

“After all that had happened in Poland since 1939, the Kreisau Circle clearly understood that the Germans had a lot to fix there. Moltke repeatedly talked to people about ‘making amends’ to Poles. From this particular point of view, the German border was not that important to him.”⁶

From the political point of view, it was very bold at that time to make such a statement about the border in conjunction with a photograph of the Polish name “Krzyżowa”, as West Germany did not recognise the Oder and the Lusatian Neisse as Poland’s western border, and consequently did not consider the loss of the German eastern borderlands as final. For this reason, the Foreign Office responded to von Hammerstein’s letter with much restraint. Secretary of State Duckwitz explained that the palace in Krzyżowa was “not at the Federal

³ Correspondence between Hammerstein and Duckwitz of 14 and 21 May 1970, Krzyżowa Foundation archive, A. Cordes collection.

⁴ After the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the organisation split into Aktion Sühnezeichen West and Aktion Sühnezeichen DDR. On the history of this organisation, see: G. Kammerer, *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste – Aber man kann es einfach tun*, Göttingen 2008.

⁵ Foreword to the brochure *Kreisau. Haus der Berufsschul- und Industriejugend Berlin-Kladow*, dated 20 February 1968 (Krzyżowa Foundation archive).

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5. For the Polish translation, see: A. Franke, *Wspólna droga, wspólny duch. Fundacja „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia europejskiego 1989-1998 [A common way, a common spirit. Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe 1989–1998]*, Poznań 2017, p. 140.

Republic's disposal", and that consequently the initiative would have to come from the Polish side⁷.

The enquiry addressed to the Foreign Office was not left unanswered, but had no diplomatic effect for the time being. Nevertheless, Franz von Hammerstein, active in various spheres of public activity, continued to follow the developments related to Krzyżowa both as the general secretary of the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (West) and later as director of the Evangelical Academy in West Berlin (1978–1986). While pursuing these roles, he constantly looked after creating and strengthening the relations with Poland, and inspired discussion on this topic in West Berlin and in West Germany in general.

His request filed with the Foreign Office in 1970 proves that long before 1989, various individuals and groups had been interested in the former estate of the von Moltke family and the meeting place of the Kreisau Circle. I discussed their efforts and correlations in my doctoral dissertation, where I wrote about an "invisible network", whose nodal points can be located both in specific institutions and in formal and informal groups⁸. The various actors prepared the future meeting place at Krzyżowa intellectually in various ways, addressing in their research and opinion journalism work different aspects of Nazi crimes, the history of World War II, the deep social and political roots of 20th-century totalitarianism, the division of Europe and Germany, and Polish-German relations. They shared their thoughts in places specially created for unhindered dialogue, or ones creating the right conditions for such dialogue to be possible. These included editorial offices of periodicals, educational centres, church premises, private flats and houses, universities, as well as scientific conferences and seminars. The village of Krzyżowa as such, belonged to the "invisible network" before 1989 only insofar as it constituted a point of reference or motivation for many to engage in Polish-German dialogue. Most people, however, who used to focus in their contacts with Poland on specific places that included Krakow and Warsaw in particular, did not discover Krzyżowa until 1989.

Interest in Krzyżowa as a political/historical topos goes beyond Polish-German relations and extends also to scholars from the Netherlands, the UK and the USA. The

⁷ The then Secretary of State Georg F. Duckwitz had formerly worked as Director of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, and resigned in 1961 in protest against the Hallstein Doctrine. Willy Brandt reinstated him to the Foreign Office in relation to the SPD-FDP government's new eastern policy. G.F. Duckwitz is commemorated in: H. Kirchhoff, *Zum Gedenken an Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz 1904-1973*, available for download at <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/130930-duckwitz/257754> (accessed: 02 March 2019).

⁸ This is presented in detail in the Introduction and in Chapter 1 of my doctoral dissertation: *Powstaje niewidzialna sieć współpracy. Miejsca pamięci o Kręgu z Krzyżowej i idea międzynarodowego domu spotkań przed 1989 r.* [An invisible network of cooperation is emerging. Sites of memory of the Kreisau Circle and the idea for an international meeting house before 1989] in: A. Franke, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–31 and 35–198.

connection with the USA is different and relies on an individual only indirectly related to the history of the Kreisau Circle: Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888–1973), who taught law at the University of Wrocław before emigrating from Germany in 1933 and became a spiritual father of sorts to Helmuth James von Moltke and several later members of the Kreisau Circle. His writings and political ideas united many people on both sides of the Atlantic in a community of ideas. Freya von Moltke (1911–2010), widow of Helmut James von Moltke, lived with Rosenstock-Huessy in Vermont, USA, since the 1960s, thus becoming an important link in the nexus of various relations associated with Krzyżowa.

All these individuals and milieus were united by the belief that a concrete response to the catastrophe of the Second World War would involve building friendly relations between societies and states, and that this was the task both of the citizens and of the governments. In the case of Polish-German relations, the citizens would actually often be ahead of the governments' moves and dare to take the first step.

But how convincing could it be for the Polish partners in the 1970s when a German opposition group was recalled that had adopted the programme outlined above, a group whose meeting place used to be located in former eastern territories of Germany, now in western Poland? Was Krzyżowa, with its heritage, the right place to bring the idea of understanding between young Poles and Germans to life? Which themes had priority in the Polish-German dialogue?

Wanda Czaplińska and Kazimierz Czapliński, together with their sons Michał and Krzysztof only become involved in the project of creating a youth meeting house in Krzyżowa later, after 1989. Since the 1960s, they had played an important role in Wrocław in the relations with both the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace in East Germany and with West German Catholic initiatives, such as the Pax Christi group in Dortmund, or the Bensberg Circle. Krzyżowa, located 60 km from Wrocław, and the history of the Kreisau Circle were unknown to them. They later recalled that someone from Germany had told them the story. In 1971, Kazimierz Czapliński marked the place on a map of Lower Silesia with a note: “Krzyżowa near Świdnica (German: Kreisau), Moltke’s former seat (Kreisauer Kreis – see the publication about Bonhoeffer in «Znak»)”. He found the note unexpectedly when his son Michał mentioned the idea of buying the palace at Krzyżowa at home, and took the map in his hand⁹.

⁹ *Ku nowej Europie, czyli jak powstawała Fundacja „Krzyżowa” dla Porozumienia Europejskiego [Towards a new Europe: how the Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe was established]*, ed. K. Tyszkowska, Wrocław 1997, p. 25.

A frequent guest at their house was the Catholic social pedagogue Günter Särchen, who created a network of contacts between the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace and Poland. He attended the Action's summer camps, during which work was carried out for instance to clean up former concentration camps, build churches, and restore the Jewish cemetery in Wrocław. The theme of the Kreisau Circle oppositionists somehow did not come up during the meetings with Polish partners. The famous bicycle pilgrimage of the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace from East Germany in the summer of 1965 led to Oświęcim and Auschwitz via Lower Silesia and places such as Groß Rosen (Rogoźnica) – a former concentration camp – and the monastery in Krzeszów, but did not include the memorial site recalling the circle of oppositionists concentrated around Count von Moltke in Krzyżowa.

The Action also brought Ludwig Mehlhorn to Poland; at that time, he was a student, while later he became a civil rights activist in East Germany, and from the 1970s onwards, he remained in close contact with the Polish democratic opposition. This is how he described his attitude towards Krzyżowa before 1989 years later:

“I had intensive contacts with friends in Poland, and I knew that Krzyżowa was in Poland, but – although I was interested in the resistance – I had never connected the two aspects. They existed separately in my consciousness. I knew, of course, that Kreisau had ended up in the Polish territory, but the history of the former eastern territories of Germany and of Lower Silesian villages did not interest me at all at the time.”¹⁰

Only in 1989 did Mehlhorn's Polish friends spur him to discover Krzyżowa in Lower Silesia on the map. In the following years, he committed himself to the project of an international youth meeting house and, above all, to the concept of a Memorial Site to Resistance and Opposition in the 20th Century.

Also, the participants of various initiatives for German-Polish reconciliation from West Germany, namely Pax Christi, the Bensberg Circle, Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk, Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (West) and others, used to refer not so much to places and prominent figures of the German opposition, but rather to places of German guilt and crimes in occupied Poland. The aim was to settle accounts with the history of their perpetrators and to seek the possibilities of making amends, as well as to explore the prospects for reconciliation and for restoring neighbourly relations with Poland. In this dialogue, going on

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 29f.

since the 1960s between Germany and Poland, the theme of the German opposition, including more specifically of the Kreisau Circle, did not play any special role. In the opinion of the Polish United Workers' Party and of the Polish state, the memory of German resistance and civil dissent was politically and ideologically undesirable, while the general public and independent milieus were largely unaware of it, with few exceptions. After many years of effort, the first meeting house for Polish and German youth was finally built in the mid-1980s, on the initiative of the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (West), supported by the Polish and West German governments, in Oświęcim, in the direct vicinity of the Auschwitz concentration camp – incidentally, also thanks to the efforts of Franz von Hammerstein, very intensive in the initial phase.

How did Krzyżowa and the memory of the Kreisau Circle manage to gain a stronger presence in the public opinion in West Germany, East Germany and the Polish People's Republic in the second half of the 1980s? Already before 1989, the governments of West Germany and of the Polish People's Republic, as well as, in several documented cases, East German state bodies, had developed an interest in Krzyżowa. The West German-Polish relations at the time of the Kohl-Genscher government in 1982–1989 have been described as progressing from stagnation to understanding. The elections to the Sejm and Senate held on 4 June 1989 and the success of the Solidarity Citizens' Committee put an end to the communist parties' monocracy in the Eastern Bloc. In September 1989, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-communist Prime Minister of Poland since the end of the Second World War, was entrusted with the mission to form a new government. At the end of the day, it was precisely the change of government in Poland that brought the Krzyżowa theme out of its long slumber in 1989, until it eventually became a symbol of Polish-German reconciliation. In November 1989, Chancellor Helmut Kohl came to Poland for several days for a long-planned official visit. One of the points on his agenda was a meeting with the German minority on St Anne's Mountain in Upper Silesia, in relation to Mass celebrated in German there. Thanks to the diplomatic skill of the Polish government, the Mass and the meeting were moved to Krzyżowa almost at the last minute. The embrace between Helmut Kohl and Tadeusz Mazowiecki exchanging the sign of peace during Mass was understood at that point as a political symbol of reconciliation between the two nations, represented by the heads of their respective governments.

The idea to create a meeting house and memorial site in Krzyżowa stands out because in 1989 not only was there a declaration of political will at government level, but at the same time an international civic initiative was born to save the palace complex in Krzyżowa and to

transform it into a centre for European dialogue. The individuals and milieus presented above that had previously developed an interest in the German Kreisau and the Polish Krzyżowa were now given voice, and discovered a network of mutual connections. Around 30 people met for the first time on 2–4 June 1989 at a conference in Wrocław, invited by the local Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK) and by the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace from East Germany. The Poles attending the meeting included members and supporters of the KIK, as well as scholars and students researching German resistance and opposition against Nazism. The German attendees included guests from East Germany, West Germany and West Berlin – all of whom had already had contact with Poland in different ways, either through the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (West and Ost), through the partner relations of the Dortmund and Wrocław parishes, and in the case of East Germany also through the Anna Morawska Seminar, or had some connections with the Kreisau Circle or Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. This latter milieu was represented by several participants from the Netherlands and the USA. The conference in Wrocław, which happened to coincide with the first partially free elections in Poland, became a *kairos* – a watershed moment – for the subsequent decision to establish the Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe¹¹. At the end of the meeting, the participants signed an appeal addressed to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They called upon the government to take into account their initiative’s plans in the Polish-German negotiations:

“We welcome with satisfaction the inclusion of Krzyżowa, Wałbrzych Province, as a subject in the talks between the Polish and German governments. The participants of the conference considered the following possibilities: 1. establishing an international meeting centre for the young generation in Krzyżowa, and 2. establishing a museum of European resistance movements against Nazi Germany. Without wishing to anticipate in this way the outcomes of the negotiations in course between the two governments concerning the matter, we would like to ask that you give this matter your attention.”¹²

¹¹ See A. Franke, *Krzyżowa powtórnie odkryta. Jakie plany wobec Krzyżowej mieli Polacy i Niemcy w latach 1989-90?* [*Krzyżowa rediscovered. What were Poles and Germans planning for Krzyżowa in the years 1989-90?*] [in:] *Krzyżowa jako miejsce dialogu polsko-niemieckiego. Szanse na europejską narrację* [*Krzyżowa as a place of Polish-German dialogue. Opportunities for a European narrative*], ed. W. Czachur, A. Franke, Krzyżowa 2013, pp. 24–29.

¹² Krzyżowa Foundation Archive, FK B II-14 Memoranda 1989. Signatories of the letter: prof. Karol Jonca, Ryszard Pollak, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Piotr Karasek, Janusz Witt, prof. Ger van Roon (NL), W. Ph. Leenman (NL), prof. Andreas Möckel (West Germany), Frances B. Huessy (USA), Günter Särchen (East Germany), prof. Wolfgang Ulmann (Berlin-East Germany), Jochen Köhler (Berlin-West Germany), Mark Huessy (USA). Not all conference participants signed.

The project participants from Poland had already known their West and East German partners before, and they had discussed the issues of guilt and entanglement during the Nazi period with them, while the German participants knew the history of World War II and of the German occupation, as well as knew about the extent of the crimes committed against Poles. The discussions also concerned the shifting of borders after the Second World War, expulsions, the loss of the eastern borderlands – in Poland’s case to the Soviet Union – and the experience of oppression from two totalitarian regimes. Thanks to these contacts and conversations, the vision of “reconciliation” would no longer apply merely to those Poles and Germans who had committed themselves for the sake of Krzyżowa in 1989. After 1989, Krzyżowa became a laboratory for this international community, where they could start to think about a common Europe and to create it under new political condition, after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the removal of the communist regimes from power in Central and Eastern Europe.

The founders of the Krzyżowa Foundation were ahead of their time with this vision. The broad masses of Poles and Germans had a lot of catching up to do in their mutual relations in terms of knowledge and emotions. Since that time, the Krzyżowa Memorial Site and the International Youth Meeting Centre established in the 1990s have become a space for getting to know each other better. The extensive range of activities in the programme of the Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe have made it possible to engage in dialogue about European matters in this place connected with Polish-German history. Credit should be given for this to the pioneers of Polish-German reconciliation.