



A Deutsch for Our Time

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Three years ago, a conference was convened in Prague to celebrate a centenary of a great political scientist. For the Charles University, one of organisers of the conference, it was a rare and welcome opportunity to recognise its illustrious alumnus. That great political scientist celebrated in the historical halls of Carolinum was none other than Karl W. Deutsch.¹

Karl Deutsch (1912-1992) was born in Prague in a family with German and Jewish roots that were then a seemingly inseparable part of the great city's cultural fabric. His father owned an optical store at the Wenceslas Square, the beating heart of Prague's business district, and young Karl, though he would later graduate from Charles University with a *juris doctor* degree (1938), developed a penchant for measuring things in his childhood that would later become a trademark of his scientific method once he fled the political storm that was about to befall his homeland, becoming one of the titans of American science of politics and international relations.

The *Deutsch Security Square*, a research centre which is now being founded by the Charles University, commemorates and honours Karl Deutsch and his distinguished career. Its ambition is to be more than a memorial, however. The centre takes as its core mission to promote Deutsch's intellectual heritage in the research of security and politics; and drawing on this heritage, to produce academic knowledge of various aspects of security that is theoretically and practically relevant. In this short essay, I outline how we understand this intellectual heritage, and how we intend to draw inspiration from it. In other words, how we understand the "Deutsch for our time".

The first source of inspiration that we wish to draw is the **liberal research of security** exemplified, and to a great extent also stimulated, by Karl Deutsch's explorations of the nature of political and security communities.² That tradition of theorising security has lost nothing of its currency today in the ever more complex world, as reflected in the burgeoning literature on security governance or security *assemblages*. We take seriously the challenge to the realist paradigm of security; a challenge that defines this tradition which seeks to zoom in out and out of the "leviathan" of the modern state while stressing the importance of norms, ideas and discourses, as well as the social practice of (in)security. It is the focus on the latter, with a critical edge, that situates us at the intersection of international relations and international political sociology that thinks

beyond state institutions and even elites' knowledges and practices. This is not to doctrinally ignore the nation state and the continuing importance of sovereignty in global politics, however hybridised it may have become; but rather about striving for an open mind capable of thinking about security communities and their boundaries that do not necessarily coincide with borders of nation states.

The *square* in the Centre's name refers, metaphorically, to *agora* as a space where ideas are floated, traded and shared; and where those who enter can join in a dialogue. It also reflects the definition of our **research interests**. These include, first, strategic agenda. The issue of nuclear weapons and their proliferation was of major concern of Karl Deutsch; a concern that we share from our own, mainly critical liberal positions. Our second research interest is in the areas explored by critical security studies, which we conceive of as a range of diverse perspectives bound together by reflexivity, interrogation of contexts for the production of knowledge – particularly when this knowledge presents itself as something natural and normal, nonpolitical and nonideological, objective and certain – and normative commitment to challenge the power structure of the *status quo*. The third area of our interest is conflict resolution and transformation. The perspective we assume in this area spans from more conventional liberal to critical which takes into account heterogeneous components of the crisis management *assemblage* present in the “crisis field”. The last “corner” of our square is occupied by the issue of small states' security. Our interest in small states is premised on the conviction that comparative study of these states' security strategies ought to receive more academic attention, including that which can benefit from Karl Deutsch's work on security communities in which they may be integrated. The study of those security communities as frameworks where small states' security policies are enacted should feature processes of both integration *and* disintegration of security communities, the latter being rather rare in the field.

From the **methodological** perspective, the inspiration we take from Karl Deutsch lies less in his emphasis on the possibility, and even desirability of measuring social phenomena and modelling social reality to further the progress of the scientific method; and more in his advancement of the ethic of research that is empirically rigorous, transparent in methodological choices, collective and transdisciplinary. We strive for academic excellence based on those criteria without prejudice in terms of method. What matters to us is research that is theoretically sound, innovative and empirically thorough.

Karl Deutsch is remembered by his students not only as a great scholar, but also a great educator. We, as researchers but also lecturers, look up to the ideal that he embodied of a knowledgeable, passionate and kind teacher. Moreover, we seek to **speak to broader interested audiences** and mediate to them the outcomes of our research, and to shape the public debate on current security issues, combining Deutsch's ideal of educator with the imperative of critical theory of a socially engaged scholar that is not far, in fact, from Karl Deutsch's belief in the emancipatory power of knowledge.³ Not much has changed since he told the conference of his colleagues in the early 1970s that “the overwhelming fact of our time is change” which we must face, understand and sometimes initiate in our thoughts; and meet, respond to, and sometimes initiate in our actions.⁴

It is both honour and commitment to be at the founding of Deutsch Security Square. I hope the centre will prosper at the Faculty of Social Sciences, which itself originated in the early 1990s from the belief that the restored democracy in Czechoslovakia would benefit from interdisciplinary social science; and that it will promote collective research of security in the best tradition of scholarship of Karl Deutsch – seeking, in his own words, “more knowledge for greater competence and more compassion.”⁵

1 Some of the proceedings of the conference were subsequently published in a special issue of the *International Politics* journal edited by Jan Ruzicka, one of the members of Deutsch Security Square's advisory board.

2 See, above all, Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community at the International level* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954); and Karl W. Deutsch et

al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). For an ambitious attempt to resurrect research on security communities, see Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds.), *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For my own take at a constructive critique of the use of the concept of security community in theory, see Ondrej Ditrych, "Security Community: A Future for a Troubled Concept," *International Relations*, Vol. 28 (2014), No. 3, pp. 350-366.

- 3 Jan Ruzicka, "A Transformative Scientist: Karl Deutsch and the Discipline of International Relations," *International Relations*, Vol. 28 (2014), No. 3, pp. 277-286.
- 4 Karl W. Deutsch, "On Political Theory and Political Action," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 65 (1971), No. 1, p. 11.
- 5 Quoted in Andrei Markovits, 'Historical Experience and the Culture of Knowledge: Karl W. Deutsch from Prague to America' (translation of a lecture at the Simon Dubnow Institut für Jüdische Geschichte und Kultur, University of Leipzig, 2004).