

## Willy Brandt, My Life in Politics

**Caption:** In his memoirs, the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Willy Brandt, describes the first steps of the Ostpolitik and recalls the reactions of Western countries to this opening of relations with the Eastern bloc as part of West German foreign policy.

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[...]

Many years before I became Chancellor I had to ask myself: what can your state do, what can the Federal Republic of Germany do, to make peace more secure? What can it do, what can you do, to overcome the consequences of the Second World War, reduce tension, and surmount the antagonisms that will no doubt continue to be felt, in order to construct a system of security and co-operation in Europe? A peace policy had to mean more than talking about peace, and it still does. It must entail more than applauding or criticizing others. In the Federal Republic of Germany, above all, it had to mean action and not just verbiage. We had to avoid getting bogged down in generalizations, and had to try to be equal to our country's specific role.

In other words: we should not expect others to find the answers we had to find for ourselves. We had to start out not from any imaginary situation, but from the real one as it had developed a quarter of a century after the war. We had to overcome a widespread propensity to self-delusion, and avoid confusing quasi-legalistic formulae with reality. Then and only then could we be capable of action on the international stage.

I was not happy about the concept of *Ostpolitik* as it was first ascribed to me and then identified with me. But how can you capture a term which has acquired a life of its own and been swiftly adopted into foreign languages? Why did I dislike the label? Because I was afraid it suggested that I regarded foreign policy as a chest from which you might pull out now one drawer, now another. Together with my colleagues, and not least my Foreign Minister and Deputy Chancellor, I assumed that we needed two things at the same time, and co-ordinated with each other: reliable partnership with the West, and the understanding with the East that was laboriously taking shape and must then be extended. I was aware that our national interests simply would not allow us to oscillate between West and East.

Reduced to basics, this meant that our efforts in *Ostpolitik* must be attuned to our Western partners and rooted in the political structure of the Atlantic Alliance. Even more simply: our *Ostpolitik* had to begin in the West. But developments since the Western treaties of 1955 meant that relations as normal and productive as possible were also called for with the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries. Normalizing those relations was necessary for the Federal Republic to be able to protect its own interests in European co-operation on anything like an equal footing. We were therefore determined to do what we could to encourage peace on a basis of the utmost possible security - 'in awareness of our special responsibility in Europe and to the best of our ability, which we do not, however, overestimate'.

[...]

It has sometimes been suggested, not always kindly, that my policies may have been motivated by doubts about the intentions of the United States. They were not. However, it is true that I took an evaluation of the interests and special problems of the United States into consideration, and assumed that American commitment to Europe would be reduced rather than increased over the years. But I stated with the utmost clarity that our close ties with the United States excluded any doubt about the binding nature of the duties they had undertaken towards Europe, the Federal Republic and West Berlin. Our common interest required neither additional assurances nor repeated declarations. They supported a more independent German policy in a more active partnership.

And what about keeping the Western powers informed? What about consulting them, in so far as their rights in connection with 'Germany as a whole' were affected? It is true that we wanted to represent ourselves - that goes for the East as well - and to that extent we wanted to be 'more equal' than before. We did observe the principle of regularly furnishing accurate information. However, Henry Kissinger was correct in saying that Brandt had not asked for permission, but for American cooperation in a political course whose direction was already determined.

You do not need to have read Kissinger's memoirs to know that there was ill-concealed suspicion in the

Western capitals - as far as I could see, it was least felt in London; in Paris, there were marked swings between friendly understanding and wild speculation; the Washington attitude was quite simple -Nixon's security adviser told my eminent colleague Paul Frank in 1970 that any détente with the Soviet Union would be America's doing.

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