

'Is the Cold War over?', from Die Welt (23 July 1955)

Caption: On 23 July 1955, at the end of the Four-Power Conference held in Geneva, the German daily newspaper Die Welt comments on the new dialogue established between East and West and reports on the progress of the negotiations.

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. SCHULTE, Heinrich ; Herausgeber ZEHRER, Hans. 23.07.1955, n° 169; 10. Jg. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Ist der Kalte Krieg beendet?", auteur:Wirsing, Giselher , p. 3.

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After a five-day conference in Geneva:

Is the Cold War over?

All the problems remained unresolved; but the distrust that for many years dogged the major powers at every step has disappeared

From our special correspondent

Geneva, 22 July

There has been a change in the climate among the major powers. The geological formations on which the major powers are built remain, however. That is the outcome of the discussions held in Geneva.

The strongly-worded speeches and ill-tempered barrages of abuse that were still the norm at the Berlin Conference have given way to politeness and emphatic courtesy. By Friday, your chronicler of this conference did not have any incidents to report. No one failed to live up to their role. The method adopted for the Conference ruled this out. Points of view have been compared. Not one of the three major topics, Germany, security and disarmament, was discussed in passionate terms, however. The courtesy related to the procedure, not the substance.

Is it an exaggeration to say that the Cold War has come to an end with Geneva? All the problems remained unresolved. Geneva was certainly not a peace conference, merely the prelude to one. Only one thing has become clear: no one will declare war on account of the unresolved problems. The participants have looked each other straight in the eye; as a result, much of the distrust that has dogged the major powers at every step has disappeared.

They were all grandfathers

The main players were all grandfathers. It is reported here that they would have preferred to talk about their children and grandchildren. The marriage of Marshal Zhukov's daughter became symbolic of this gathering of elderly gentlemen who all have the years of turmoil behind them. The Russians too. The Russians in particular. It is perhaps reassuring for Eisenhower to make the acquaintance, in Bulganin and Zhukov, of mature officials, civil servants and military officials, who in many respects think as differently as do their American counterparts. The topic of the Communist International, which Eisenhower touched on on the first day, has not been the subject of further public discussion. The whole demeanour of the Russians should, however, prove that those times belong to the past: the Revolution is over; we have revived the Tsarist Empire; we have turned it upside down; but now we are continuing to build on a different plane in the place where Mother Russia was always at home.

The personal element was therefore the dominant feature of this Conference. Its limits were clearly recognisable wherever the naked interests of the major powers were at stake. Military policy issues, that is to say power issues, became increasingly prominent day by day. They were, however, for the most part formulated in negative terms. When four disarmament proposals, each more ambitious than the other, had been submitted by Thursday evening, this was clearly evident.

The Russians' aims

Eisenhower and Bulganin will leave Geneva convinced that war, particularly nuclear war, is no longer the way to conduct policy for the two superpowers. But the issues of areas of power and influence have not yet been resolved, nor has the balance between the powers yet been stabilised.

The Russians' aims have been made clear. They want the status quo maintained in Europe, meaning that, for the time being, they want a divided Germany and recognition of the satellite area as it is today. And they want the Americans to withdraw from Europe, which would be tantamount to the dissolution of NATO.

In accordance with a scale

In return, they are prepared to reduce their armed forces. This would, however, be done in accordance with a scale that would guarantee absolute military hegemony in Europe for Russia. They intend to water down the threat that this would continue to pose for Western Europe through non-aggression pacts and a security system.

It was this impression that prompted Eisenhower, on the fourth day of the Conference, to make the rather melodramatic proposal that the major powers should supply each other with a complete list of their military facilities and allow aerial photographs of their territories, revealing military secrets. The discussion consequently verged on the unrealistic on the Western side, too, as it had previously on the Eastern side in the proposals for the dissolution of NATO.

Currents

It was noticeable here in Geneva that American policy is shaped by widely differing currents, which occur with varying strength and overlap. Dulles considers the intransigence of the Russians to confirm his view that the 'new style' of Russian foreign policy is simply a matter of form. On the other hand, Ambassador Bohlen is said to feel that the power relationships in the Kremlin are still so unstable that Khrushchev is in urgent need of a success. Finally, a third current is represented in journalism by Walter Lippman, who in a notable polemical article argues against linking a European security pact to the issue of reunification and demands that 'the USA would have to conclude a security agreement with the Soviet Union before a Germany that has become militarily strong could come to a direct understanding with the Russians.'

Throughout the Geneva Conference, the German observers (the invisible conference guests) came under considerable crossfire. As soon as it became apparent that the Russians were standing firm on the German Question with their arms firmly folded, the problem arose as to whether the three Western Heads of Government could nevertheless accommodate the Russians in other areas. There was a distinct danger that, given the friendly basic mood at the Conference, the Germans might suddenly, with their pressing desire for reunification, appear to be ruffians disrupting the general agreement.

It is all quite remarkable. We sat in the Conference press building, talked among ourselves and tapped away at our typewriters. And yet it was shells that in part were being polished and prepared. A well-known neutralist on the Zurich newspaper *Tat* claimed that the buck had been passed on to Adenauer. *Le Monde* even came to the conclusion that Adenauer was nothing more than a Cold War politician.

These voices, of which there were several, latched onto a chance remark by Eisenhower, already mentioned, and gained further strength when Eden, in his disarmament proposal on Thursday evening, proposed mutual inspection of the troop strengths evidently based on the line of the Elbe as the line of demarcation existing at present between East and West.

One of those wars of nerves that have broken out after every major international conference began. While some newspapers in Europe were already celebrating the end of the Cold War and were generally suggesting that the peace festivities would be celebrated at the expense of Germany, the actual battle had shifted from the formal consultation room of the Heads of Government to the room in which the Foreign Ministers were gathered. The struggle there, however, was a tough one. This struggle will not reach a conclusion until the Communiqué is released on Saturday evening, just before Eisenhower departs.

Since Wednesday, Dulles, Pinay and Macmillan have been trying to make it clear to their old negotiating partner Molotov that, in practice, there is nothing at all that the West can do on the security issue if reunification is not made possible at the same time. The euphoric mood considered to be such a characteristic feature of this Conference — the mood of the 'Conference of Smiles' — did not penetrate the room where the Foreign Ministers were meeting. Tough talking took place in that room, as tough as it has always been when Molotov is on the other side of the table.

Tug-of-war

The Russians' intention was to refuse all involvement in the German Question at least until Adenauer had visited Moscow. And equally, in their own interests, the Western Powers had to refuse to allow Moscow to set itself up as the authority with sole responsibility for reunification. To avoid disturbing the friendly climate of this meeting in Geneva, the press secretaries of the Heads of Government did not mention at their evening conferences the tug-of-war between the Foreign Ministers behind the scenes. A true picture of this Conference in Geneva can be obtained, however, only if the details of this tough battle are known. At the time when these lines are being wired, this has not yet been decided. What is certain, however, is that the Western Powers are insistent on the German Question remaining the main topic at the forthcoming of Foreign Ministers Conference, otherwise no progress can be made on security.

As has been said here in Geneva by the Russians, there is much to indicate that the men from Moscow have in mind a status for Germany roughly equivalent to that of Finland: formal independence, no Communist regime and no formal ties to the Eastern bloc or the Western bloc. The West will never agree to a solution of this kind. This can be emphatically stated even before this Conference in Geneva ends.

If agreement is reached by Saturday on further negotiations on the German Question (and we do not think that the Russians will allow the Conference to founder on this point at the eleventh hour), consent has been obtained for negotiations on reunification to be resumed before the end of this year.

This is where the limits are

We now have quite a clear picture of what awaits Adenauer in Moscow: an attempt will be made to make recognition of the status quo palatable to the Federal Chancellor when he is there. Even Geneva has not been able to break the vicious circle in which the fate of the Germans is enmeshed. Here lie the limits of such meetings, based so heavily on the mood of the time. Germany's situation has nevertheless not worsened as a result of the Conference. The Cold War enforced the status quo of a divided Germany. Détente also preserves this status quo for the time being. It leaves the hope that the peoples will, however, finally want more than a friendly cocktail party for Heads of Government. And 'more' is only possible if the most important focus of tension in Europe is removed.

Giselher Wirsing