

‘Concerning Germany’s “Ostpolitik”’ from L’Europe en Formation from L’Europe en Formation (May 1971)

Caption: In its May 1971 issue, the federalist journal L’Europe en Formation identifies both the positive effects of and the threats posed by the Ostpolitik pursued by the German Chancellor, Willy Brandt.

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Concerning Germany's 'Ostpolitik'

by Ferdinand Kinsky

The political debate that has been raging in Germany for the past year, on the subject of the 'Ostpolitik', has not always been amicable and has, on occasion, been quite violent. 'Rapallo', 'Germany sold out to the East', the 'FRG will soon be a People's Democracy', 'High Treason', are some of the slogans bandied about by opponents of the policies of Chancellor Willy Brandt, to which the pro-government lobby reply by claiming his policy to be 'realistic', 'peace-loving' and 'European'.

A more tempered analysis, devoid of wild slogans, would have to decide whether the Ostpolitik represents an alternative to a European policy or whether, on the contrary, it may be considered as a constructive part of it. To find a satisfactory answer to this fundamental question, let us attempt to compare the positive and negative aspects of this Ostpolitik.

1. The positive aspects

The Brandt Government can claim credit for:

— A gesture of reconciliation with the peoples of Eastern Europe, the significance of which must not be underestimated. Mr Brandt's genuflection in the Warsaw ghetto, strongly criticised by his opponents in Germany, produced a generally favourable reaction, even positive admiration from the majority of world opinion. The Ostpolitik has thus filled the void left by Chancellor Adenauer who had himself undertaken a policy of reconciliation with the West.

— The recognition of the *status quo* and of the current frontiers removes any suspicion of revenge and nationalism which had previously been fuelled by the Federal Republic's declarations in favour of reunification.

— Without doubt, Willy Brandt has increased his own and his country's prestige on the world stage. *Time* Magazine chose him as '1970's Man of the Year', *Le Monde*, *L'Express* and *Le Nouvel Observateur* talk of the 'Europe of Mr Brandt'. Since the demise of Konrad Adenauer, Germany seems once again to be led by a 'statesman' of international stature.

— Contrary to the 1950s, when the SPD's Kurt Schumacher saw neutrality as the alternative to Chancellor Adenauer's policy of European integration and the Atlantic Alliance, the Brandt Government has frequently stressed that the Ostpolitik is not an alternative to NATO or to the unification of Western Europe. The meetings and discussions pursued by the Bonn Government with its Western partners, the apparently firm attitude of Mr Brandt at the Hague Summit in December 1969 and that of his Minister, Karl Schiller, on the subject of the 'Werner Plan', seem to confirm the sincerity of his declarations: the present Federal Government is no less 'European' than the two preceding ones.

2. The dangers

Let us now spell out the pitfalls and the dangers that the Ostpolitik represents for Germany and Europe.

— Chancellor Brandt put the Federal Republic in some danger when he declared that the ratification of the Treaties of Moscow and Warsaw was dependent on Soviet concessions on Berlin. Using the traditional carrot-and-stick philosophy, the Soviets have already declared that they attach only secondary importance to ratification, since, firstly, the signing of the Treaties is at all events binding and, secondly, they are threatening Germany by accusing it of insincerity. It seems unlikely that the Soviets would deprive themselves of such an advantageous position by making concessions on Berlin. They are in a position to be able to point out for a long time that the Germans have finally recognised the facts but that they are still pursuing an ambiguous, Cold War policy. If Willy Brandt had really wanted to gain ground on the Berlin issue, he should have linked the issue to the signing of the Treaties and not to their ratification. On this point, the arguments of the Chancellor's opponents, that the Bonn Government had reacted too swiftly and

ignored the basic rules of diplomacy, seem valid.

— Even if the Federal Government stresses that its Ostpolitik does not call into question the idea of Western European integration, the Soviets think otherwise. Several spokesmen for the Kremlin have indicated that the paragraph in the Treaty of Moscow that defines the current frontiers would not permit the creation of a federal Europe, inside which frontiers would lose their meaning. It is true that Walter Scheel, the German Foreign Minister, does not agree, but this interpretation constitutes a legal weapon for the Soviet Union against European integration.

— While it is true that the Bonn Government cannot be accused of nationalism, having had to make a series of concessions, we must not ignore the danger of the Federal Republic becoming used to pursuing a policy of national self-interest, forgetting its European commitments.

— This outcome is all the more worrying, since the opening up of the markets of Eastern Europe is undoubtedly a great temptation for a large section of German trade and industry.

In favour of a European ‘Ostpolitik’

This last danger, however, is often greatly exaggerated. The events of the last few months prove that the German economy cannot easily change direction. Trade between the USSR and the FRG represents only 2 % of Federal Germany’s foreign trade. A sizeable increase in volume comes up against a series of problems: most of the industrial production of the Socialist countries is not of sufficient quality to compete on the German market, which is, at all events, largely saturated with the raw materials that might be supplied by Eastern Europe. Added to this is the dogmatic attitude of the USSR to trade balances: the Soviet Union buys products only if it can, in turn, sell products of an equivalent value. Of course West Germany might invest in the East, but, there again, a visit made recently by an influential group of German industrialists showed its limitations: Soviet managers could not and would not give the guarantees demanded by the Germans.

Let us stress, finally, that the Ostpolitik must face the same realities that put paid to General de Gaulle’s illusions: the Soviet Union would not for one moment allow a small Western European nation state to challenge its leadership in the East. Consequently, the Ostpolitik undoubtedly represents a small step towards ‘détente’, but it will not lead either to the reunification of Germany or the dissolution of the political blocs and ‘pan-European’ unification. In the absence of a truly European Ostpolitik, Germany’s policy is, of course, logical and understandable. But the real problems remain. The success or failure of Germany’s Ostpolitik depends on whether the rest of Europe adopts the policy. It goes without saying that a European foreign policy cannot possibly emerge from the consultations provided for in the ‘Davignon Report’. Without a European political authority, the security conference proposed by the USSR can have only one of two results: a setback for or an increase in Soviet influence in Europe.

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