

## 'Brandt falls to his knees in the ghetto' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (8 December 1970)

**Caption:** On 8 December 1970, the day after the signing in Warsaw of the Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and Poland, the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung comments on Willy Brandt's genuflection before the monument erected in memory of those who perished in the city's Jewish ghetto.

**Source:** Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. 08.12.1970, Nr. 284. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Brandt kniet im Getto nieder", auteur:Henkel, Walter , p. 4.

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## Brandt falls to his knees in the ghetto

### Walter Henkel reports on the events in Warsaw

Willy Brandt retains his composure even when laying wreaths. He comes across as self-confident — a man with the inestimable advantage of a powerful physique that inspires confidence at an ordinary human level. It takes a great deal to throw him off balance. At monuments of this kind, which are usually referred to in books as memorials, he remains apparently frosty, unemotional and grudging. At 9.30 a.m. yesterday (Monday), he had laid a wreath of white carnations at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw with full military honours. Then the cavalcade carrying Mr Brandt and his Foreign Minister, Walter Scheel, drove into the former ghetto, to the Monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto. The ghetto had been established by the German occupying forces between 1940 and 1943 and, in 1943, witnessed an uprising, mainly of the Jewish population, during which half a million Jews were killed. Here, the Federal Chancellor laid his wreath of white carnations embellished with two ribbons in the black, red and gold of the German flag. And, suddenly, Willy Brandt fell to his knees in front of this monument and bowed his head low. He must have felt a deep sense of shame, and there was not a German person present who did not experience similar feelings. The scene made a deep impression. The Federal Chancellor paused for 20 or 30 seconds, while the 300 to 400 Poles who witnessed the scene looked on expectantly. Some Jews were also present.

Mr Brandt looks older, Mr Scheel looks older. Nobody can refrain from describing the scene in detail. All the men are pale: Carlo Schmid, Achenbach, Ahlers, von Wechmar, Duckwitz, Klaus von Bismarck. State Secretary Egon Bahr and the industrialist, Berthold Beitz, did not join the silent procession from the road to the monument. The young Germans that Mr Brandt had brought with him were also obviously moved.

At exactly 12 noon, the distinguished politicians entered the Hall of the former Radziwill Palace, now the seat of the Polish Council of Ministers, to sign the Treaty. Mr Brandt was flanked by Party Secretary Władysław Gomułka and Polish Premier Józef Cyrankiewicz. A crystal chandelier of red and gold hung from the centre of the Hall's ceiling. The atmosphere was reminiscent of the era of the grand, elegant aristocracy who had built such palaces in the 17th and 18th centuries. The very brief notes jotted down by the several hundred journalists herded closely together in the audience had to convey the details of an historic ceremony. Mr Cyrankiewicz took his seat at the table on the left, his Foreign Minister, Stefan Jedrychowski, beside him, while Mr Brandt and Mr Scheel took their seats on the right. Mr Gomułka stood behind them. The Treaties were exchanged: one in a black leather folder, the other in a red one.

### Plain speaking

The Federal Chancellor is a grave man given to plain speaking. No witty remarks were forthcoming from Mr Scheel, not even for the German journalists. The Poles and Germans displayed neither obvious satisfaction at what had been achieved nor smugness. Mr Brandt knew the right line to take, even where an entreaty would have seemed reasonable.

The cameras tried to capture the faces of the two German statesmen. Mr Brandt was flushed, while Mr Scheel looked wan. The whole ceremony lasted only eight minutes. Then everyone left the Hall and went off for a lunch given in the Federal Chancellor's honour by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers at the seat of the Council. The Poles were standing there, too. We were unexpectedly given the chance to look into these men's faces, too. Mr Gomułka stood there, bald-headed and bespectacled; he had been imprisoned for a long time as an anti-Stalinist. Mr Cyrankiewicz stood there, also with a shaven head but resembling a baroque prince. It is difficult to describe him exactly. I had been told a couple of hours beforehand by my Polish journalist colleague, with a wink, that Mr Cyrankiewicz loves fast cars, good food and women. Next, the Foreign Minister, Stefan Jedrychowski, small of stature, an old political instructor (*Politruk*), former Head of the State Planning Committee. Another three dozen people were standing there, huddled closely together, behind the table on which the Treaty was signed. All manner of camera lenses were trying to capture them on film. Even the dazzling light of the camera floods did not hold up proceedings. Everything was over in a few minutes.

Anyone who was trying to follow events on the Warsaw airfield on Monday evening could not, at first, believe

that the weather there would have changed. It was misty, cold and damp, even at 4 p.m. Central European Time, almost two hours before the Federal Chancellor's arrival. And it was pitch-black. We could make out only some of what was going on. Detective Chief Inspector Fritsch, Head of the Bonn Security Group, simply said that relations with the Polish security services were very friendly and that everything was going perfectly. He did not say that, while they were still in Bonn, several death threats had been made against the Federal Chancellor and the Foreign Minister. Nor did he know that Professor Klaus Mehnert, who, in his capacity as a journalist, had voiced support for the signing of the Treaty and who was also flying to Warsaw, carried in his pocket two almost identically worded letters from two different places in Germany threatening that he would hang alongside Mr Brandt and Mr Scheel.

The first aircraft, carrying Walter Scheel, was expected. But, on the airfield, they failed to create the right setting quickly enough. The diffuse evening light, the figures of the Polish detectives and officials, the several hundred journalists and photographers, the onlookers curious to see history in the making and being gently shooed back behind railings: there were only faint signs of a spectacular state visit. The journalists, of whom there were 151 from the Federal Republic alone, seemed to be able to keep the purpose of the visit constantly in mind. Their black suits were conspicuous, even there at the airfield.

Twelve policemen on red motorcycles and 14 numbered and many more unnumbered black Chaika limousines were waiting in readiness in the darkness at the edge of the airfield. The West German Ambassador, Egon Emmel, his Embassy Counsellor, Arnold Gans, and his advisers, Pieck, Schneider and Glatzel, had already taken up their positions an hour before their Minister arrived. In between jokes and wisecracks, snippets of conversation and disrespectful remarks, the journalists tried to bring some semblance of order to their musings.

The West German Foreign Minister's aircraft taxis in before 5 p.m. The nose section of the Lufthansa plane bears the name 'Kempton'. Walter Scheel alights first, Duckwitz, the former State Secretary, second; then third — and, initially, no one knows what to say — there appears, unshaven in the aircraft doorway, the Editor-in-Chief of the political magazine *Stern* (meaning 'Star'), who has so often tried to explain political issues in words that the nation will understand. He must feel a real 'star' at this moment. Only after the magazine has made its appearance do we catch sight of Mr Achenbach, a Member of the West German Parliament, and the writers Günter Grass and Siegfried Lenz — one hailing from Gdańsk, the other from East Prussia.

An hour later, the Federal Chancellor's twin-jet aircraft arrives. There is still no sign of a change in the weather. Three red and white Polish flags and three black, red and gold German flags hang limply on their poles. Are there 200 or 500 people out there in the dark, hoping to witness what is happening? The positive aspect to all this is that, at all events, all one can do is wait. A 94-strong guard of honour and 49 bandmen have emerged from the darkness. The Federal Chancellor alights from the aircraft first. Walter Scheel, who has waited at the airport, awaits the Federal Chancellor alongside the bald, dapper Polish Premier, Józef Cyrankiewicz. They shake hands. Darkness has more or less literally descended over the whole scene. Only a couple of bright searchlights struggle to pierce the gloom. Hundreds of camera lenses try to focus on the faces of Mr Brandt, Mr Scheel and Mr Cyrankiewicz. State Secretaries Ahlers and Bahr are visible, as are Government Spokesman von Wechmar, Berthold Beitz, the West German Radio Director-General, Klaus von Bismarck, and Jochen Frowein, a Professor at the Ruhr University in Bochum. The others must be the young people from the youth organisations.

The German national anthem is solemnly played, 'Unity and justice and freedom'. Then comes the Polish national anthem, 'Poland is not yet lost'. Commands are given, arms presented, the officers with swords drawn, the soldiers' eyes follow the Federal Chancellor. You have to hand it to Mr Brandt: he does this rather well. He bows his head before the Polish flag. Then the soldiers parade in goosestep before him and Cyrankiewicz. The music is the 'Warszawianka', composed in 1807 and lending the proceedings a hint of tradition with the words, 'Today is a day of blood and glory'. The march is rather lively, and a Pole standing nearby remarks that it stems from a time when Poland and Russia were still enemies. They immediately let the subject drop. The Polish eagle is displayed on the officers' caps.

There is not a great mass of people, yet a crowd of people can certainly be seen in the surrounding darkness.

No one applauds. But one of the official Polish representatives asks Mr Duckwitz, the negotiator, whether the Federal Chancellor would have any objection to the schools in Poland being closed for the day on Monday. Brandt is not good at extravagant gestures. He simply sent the message, 'Close the schools? Better not.'

### **Text drafted by professional writers**

Just before midnight, Mr Ahlers, the Government Spokesman, arrives at the Hotel Europejski for a 'briefing', as it is now known in press-conference journalism. He clearly does not think of Mr Brandt and Mr Scheel as allies, since he remarks that the Federal Chancellor is always right and the Deputy Federal Chancellor is also almost always right. On the other hand, he sees the Federal Chancellor and contemporary German literature as allies, since he comments that some of our famous poets would be revising the text of Mr Brandt's television speech.

The dinner given by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers provided exquisite fare: poularde on toast, tripe soup with noodles, carp *à la polonaise*, roast hare in cream, vodka, 1964 Chablis, Beaujolais and Heidsieck champagne. We have the impression that the dinner had also really drained the Government Spokesman. On one side of Mr Brandt sat Mr Gomułka, and on the other side sat Zenon Kliszko, Secretary of the Central Committee. Opposite, next to Mr Cyrankiewicz, sat Mr Scheel and Mr Bahr, West German Ambassador Egon Emmel, two Polish Deputy Foreign Ministers, the Head of the Polish trade mission in Cologne and a fairly large number of interpreters. According to Government Spokesman Ahlers, the issue of diplomatic relations had been resolved; they would follow once the Treaty came into force. Those present had also remarked that they had a sense of belonging to a common European cultural environment, he said. The Berlin problem had not been mentioned, but the Treaty of Moscow could not come into effect without a satisfactory solution to the Berlin situation, he said. The conversation at the table had been primarily between Mr Brandt and Mr Gomułka.