

Statement by Andrei Gromyko on the Soviet proposals regarding Berlin (Geneva, 30 May 1959)

Caption: On 30 May 1959, at a conference in Geneva attended by the Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers, the Soviet representative, Andrei Gromyko, outlines the advantages of the conversion of Berlin into a free, demilitarised city.

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In the course of our exchange of opinions with regard to a peace treaty with Germany the Soviet delegation has already had an opportunity of putting forward certain considerations on the Berlin question as well. It now becomes essential to explain in more detail why the Soviet Government attaches such great importance to this question and what is the essence of our proposals with regard to West Berlin. This is all the more necessary since the Soviet Union's proposals have caused, in Western countries, a good deal of comment which distorts the sense of these proposals. In the interests of calm and businesslike discussion of the Berlin question at our Meeting it would be an advantage if we could free ourselves from these unnecessary accretions and take a sober look at the state of affairs in Berlin.

We all know that fourteen years ago the eyes of mankind, which had watched the historic military victory of the anti-Hitler coalition, were turned hopefully towards Berlin, where the great Powers which had brought about the capitulation of Hitler's Germany were unanimously making decisions that were important for the fate of the world. And now, by an irony for which there are few precedents in history, Berlin has been turned into one of the most dangerous sectors of the "cold war". It must surely be an alarming warning to us, that in the post-war years there have more than once been conflicts in Berlin which have been fraught with grave danger for the cause of peace.

We are told that the occupation régime in West Berlin has been in existence for a long time, so why should it not remain in force in the future? As can be judged from the statements made by official representatives of the Western Powers, this position entirely suits these Powers. But this is a way of posing the problem which is in no way justified.

In actual fact, if we look at the period when the Allied agreements on Berlin were worked out and remember the situation at that time, it must be admitted that probably the only thing that has not changed during the decade and a half which has gone by is the occupation régime in West Berlin. But all around, throughout Germany, changes have occurred which have altered the very basis on which the Four-Power agreements on Berlin rested. The western part of the city has now become, in the State, political and economic respects, an island on the territory of the German Democratic Republic, while all around, for ten years now, a new German State, the German Democratic Republic, has been growing and flourishing.

The realities of life have long since overtaken and passed the occupation régime in Germany and have wiped out the division of the country into occupation zones; the Allied Control Machinery for Germany, in which one of the links was the quadripartite status of Berlin, has long ago disappeared into the past.

As the historic capital of Germany, Berlin was chosen as the residence of the Control Council, which is recalled today only by an empty building in the American Sector, with the flagstuffs of the four Powers. In a word, life in Germany has gone its own way, while West Berlin remains the preserve of the occupation régime.

Who will be so bold as to question that however wise the statesmen who determined the fate of Berlin back in the years of war may have been, however sensible for the circumstances of the time the decisions worked out then may have seemed, these divisions cannot operate indefinitely? Nor, as we all know, were they ever intended to operate indefinitely.

When we speak about the Berlin question, we mean primarily the ending of the occupation régime in West Berlin, and the point is not merely to abolish the foreign military commands in Berlin and to take down signs put up fourteen years ago with such inscriptions as "You are now entering the American Sector of Berlin". It is necessary to get rid of the essentially abnormal situation in which West Berlin, as a result of the artificial support of the occupation régime, is being used by the NATO Powers, including the Federal Republic of Germany, and by certain extremist groups in Western Germany, for the purpose of carrying on subversive activity and hostile propaganda against the U.S.S.R., the German Democratic Republic and other socialist countries.

It would be superfluous to enumerate the dozens of bodies belonging to foreign intelligence and subversive organizations which are located in West Berlin. I think that these facts are sufficiently well known to all of us here.

No, there is probably no other place in the whole world where the intelligence services of certain States would feel so cosily at home. Agents of these organizations are operating against the German Democratic Republic, are carrying out sabotage and arson, are putting machinery in the factories out of commission, destroying livestock in agricultural co-operatives and so forth. These facts are sufficiently widely known from official documents published by the Government of the German Democratic Republic.

And what are we to say about the activity of RIAS, the broadcasting station which was set up as long ago as 1946 in West Berlin? The dissemination of lying rumours, slanders, incitements to sabotage and disorders — this is the weapon which this notorious broadcasting station is using day by day.

If, then, one remembers all these facts — and this is by no means the complete list — it becomes clear that the continuation of the occupation of West Berlin is appropriate and necessary for the purpose of using this town as a “cold war” outpost pushed far forward against the German Democratic Republic and the other socialist countries. It is no accident that West Berlin is called, in the language of those who support the cold war, a “frontier town” and the “cheapest hydrogen bomb.”

The Soviet Union has constantly raised with the Western Powers the question of abolishing the espionage and sabotage centres and the subversive organizations in West Berlin, but the proverb applies — “no one is so deaf as he who does not wish to hear”. Moreover, it seems that some people are even expecting the Soviet Union to help maintain in West Berlin arrangements which are being used against her interests to the prejudice of the interests and security of her allies and to the detriment of the cause of peace in Europe. Surely this is absurd! Can there be any doubt that if any of the Western Powers were in the Soviet Union’s place they too would probably be demanding an end to so abnormal a situation?

A tense, nervous atmosphere in Berlin has already been created because, within the walls of this city, American, British, French, Soviet and German military units belonging to the forces of opposing military alliances are serving, wearing uniform and coming into direct contact with one another. Under such conditions, there is the constant fear that some purely local incident might end up as a serious conflict.

The dangerous situation in Berlin is further complicated by the fact that three occupation Powers, having put their troops in the centre of the German Democratic Republic, think it possible to ignore that State, its Government and its laws. Under these conditions even insignificant incidents, the consequences of which could be dealt with through ordinary negotiations, are turned into problems of international significance and become the subject of sharp political polemics, accompanied by provocative actions against the German Democratic Republic. It is not very difficult to understand that such a situation is not only in itself intolerable but is also exerting an extremely unhealthy and febrile influence on the whole European situation.

There is a further side to the question which we cannot lose sight of. If the high principles of the United Nations are to be followed not just in words but in deeds, then in considering the situation in West Berlin we cannot but set ourselves the task of restoring in full the rights of the Germans in this part of the city; and this cannot be achieved without ending the occupation régime. So far these principles have been patently forgotten when West Berlin has been discussed.

The military authorities of the United States of America, Britain and France are maintaining unlimited authority in West Berlin, which permits them to control the social, political, economic and cultural life of that part of the city. The three Allied Commanders can, according to an official statement of 5 May 1955, alter the laws of the West Berlin authorities “in the event of their not corresponding to Allied legislation or other measures of the Allied authorities, or to the rights of the Allied authorities.”

In the Western sectors there are all kinds of occupation bodies, from commandants to various “information services” who have the last word in deciding the development of West Berlin. Is it not time to admit that this interference in the internal affairs of the Germans is wrong, and to renounce it? In the opinion of the Soviet Government it is high time.

In Berlin then, we are dealing with a very complicated entanglement, not only of the political but also of the military interests of several Powers. This circumstance must, in our view, still further underline the danger of the existing situation in West Berlin. Surely it is clear that if peace were to be violated in West Berlin the armed forces of the Soviet Union and the armed forces of the Western Powers could scarcely be expected to stand aside from the conflict.

Such, in broad outline, is the position in West Berlin which gives us every reason for regarding West Berlin as a place where a fuse, as it were, is perpetually smouldering under a powder magazine. Such is the situation which has induced the Soviet Government to declare its determination to end the occupation régime in West Berlin and to raise this question at the present Meeting.

Can a solution be found for the Berlin question which would serve to strengthen peace in Europe and which would be acceptable to all the parties concerned? It is our deep conviction that such a solution is perfectly possible, and the Soviet Government hopes that our conference will find a basis for settling the Berlin question in a way which will serve the cause of peace.

From the very outset we must proceed from a recognition of the necessity for united effort on the part of those taking part in the Meeting in order to bring the situation in Berlin into line with the circumstances which have been created in Germany and with the requirements of securing peace and the security of the European peoples. The task of our Meeting with regard to the Berlin question is determined by the same consideration — that a new agreement which meets this purpose should now be substituted for the quadripartite agreements on Berlin which were drawn up back in the days of the war. However, as soon as a readiness for this appears, there is no question but that such an agreement will be worked out.

We have already had an opportunity here to acquaint ourselves with the joint proposal of the three Powers on Berlin, set out in their general Plan for a settlement of certain international problems as well as in the speeches made by Mr. Herter and Mr. Couve de Murville. There is no need now for me to dwell in detail on the attitude of the Soviet delegation towards the three-Power proposals, since I have already done this.

But I must repeat once more that the Western Powers’ proposals with regard to Berlin are unacceptable from beginning to end. They cannot form a subject for discussion.

How can the Soviet Union, which long ago finished with the occupation régime in the territory of the former Soviet occupation zone and recognized the sovereignty of both German States, be expected to be able to agree to the maintenance of an occupation régime in Berlin in any form whatsoever? But surely this is precisely what is suggested by the three Powers, whose Plan has the aim of perpetuating the occupation of West Berlin and extending it to East Berlin, which they propose to detach from the German Democratic Republic.

It can hardly be counted as a success for our efforts if the three Powers first regard the Western sector of Berlin as a kind of spoils of war, as some kind of trophy which they intend to hold on to, fourteen years after the end of the war.

In our opinion it is quite possible to settle the Berlin question on an agreed basis without having recourse to an artificial prolongation of the occupation of Berlin.

All the participants in the Meeting are familiar with the Soviet Government’s specific proposals on the Berlin question. The proposals were repeatedly expounded in detail in statements by Mr. N. S. Khrushchev, the Head of the Soviet Government, and in notes addressed by the Soviet Government to the Governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and France and also of the German Democratic Republic and the

Federal Republic of Germany. We have on several occasions explained their contents here at Geneva too, and during our joint flight from the United States to Geneva. I should like briefly to deal again with the substance of these proposals, which, as we think, indicate the most suitable method of settling the Berlin question.

The Soviet Government is deeply convinced that in the present circumstances the conversion of West Berlin into a demilitarized Free City would be the most suitable basis for settling the Berlin question. Such a settlement of the question is suggested by the facts themselves, inasmuch as, more than any other method, it takes into account the position of West Berlin as an enclave in the German Democratic Republic with a political and social order different from that existing in the Republic.

If West Berlin is given the status of a demilitarized Free City, it will be possible to create a solid and orderly basis for the life of 2.2 million West Berliners, who have been placed in the paradoxical position of a State within a State as a result of post-war developments. After all, West Berlin is in reality a separate political formation in the territory of Germany, which has definite political, economic, cultural and other ties with various States. But as a result of the continued occupation, this city now enjoys no firm guarantees of its rights. With the removal of the occupation régime and the creation of a Free City, West Berlin will obtain a reliable, legal status and generally recognized rights to independent development, its population will sleep tranquilly and be confident of its future.

The Free City would undertake not to participate in any associations or agreements of a military or politico-military character. At the same time, any activities hostile to other States would be prohibited. Such a provision will preclude the possibility of West Berlin being used in the military interests of any States or blocs of States and will place its development on a peaceful basis.

There are people who consider that since West Berlin's geographical position cannot be changed, the only means of safeguarding the interests of the Western Powers is the presence of military garrisons of the United States, the United Kingdom and France at Berlin. But if we are to rely on arms and on a policy of strength alone in international affairs, no place whatever remains for co-operation between States in the interests of reducing tension and creating genuine peace-time conditions.

The Soviet Government does not, of course, share such views, since it is quite obvious that the presence of foreign armies in any territory not only provides no guarantees of stability in the international situation, but, on the contrary, is one of the chief sources of friction and mistrust between States.

The Soviet Government proceeds from the assumption that such guarantees for the free and independent existence of a Free City of West Berlin and for its unimpeded communications with the countries of both the West and the East can and must be worked out, as would dispel any doubts regarding the intentions of the parties to an agreement on the new status of West Berlin and would safeguard the firm and durable status of West Berlin as an independent political unit.

In the Soviet Government's view, the four Powers should solemnly undertake not to interfere themselves, and not to permit the interference of other States, in the domestic affairs of the Free City and to guarantee its free communications with the outside world. If this is found to be appropriate, the provisions guaranteeing the status of the Free City could in our view be set forth in a special document to be signed by the Four Powers. Such clearly defined obligations would undoubtedly provide a more reliable guarantee for the security and free existence of the population of West Berlin than the presence of occupation forces interfering in all questions regarding the city's domestic situation and exerting pressure on all aspects of the West Berlin people's life.

The Soviet delegation is prepared to exchange views also on the forms in which the United Nations might be enlisted for the purpose of underwriting the guarantees for the independent existence of a Free City of West Berlin.

The Government of the German Democratic Republic has already officially stated that it is prepared for its

part to guarantee the status of the Free City and its free communications with the outside world.

The Soviet Government's concern is that after agreement has been reached on the status of the Free City for West Berlin, this status should be strictly and fully respected by all States and also by the West Berlin city government.

The question arises who is to watch that the status of the Free City is respected? A special body will obviously have to be established for this purpose. In our view, a permanent Commission consisting of the representatives of the four Powers and of the German Democratic Republic could be such a body. We do not mean, however, that this Commission should be a kind of higher authority for the Free City. It should not have any administrative or executive functions. It would be solely competent to verify that all parties concerned strictly and absolutely respect the status of the Free City and that its independence is safeguarded. The Commission might submit periodic reports on the results of its observation to the governments of the countries which have signed the agreement on the status of the Free City and also to the United Nations Security Council.

The development of West Berlin as a demilitarized Free City will permit the creation of a stable and balanced economy. It is common knowledge that the industrial development of West Berlin has considerably fallen behind that of the other parts of Germany at the present time. Thus, while in the German Democratic Republic and in the Federal Republic of Germany industrial production has more than doubled in comparison with 1936 and while the industrial production index of East Berlin is 189 compared with that period, the industrial production index for West Berlin in 1958 was merely 119. Moreover, such important branches of West Berlin's economy as mechanical engineering, precision engineering, the optical and metal working industries, and the transport equipment and printing and publishing industries did not even reach pre-war levels in 1958.

Countries interested in having economic ties with West Berlin would be able to develop trade with the Free City on a sound commercial basis.

The Soviet Government desires to ensure that the economic position of the West Berlin population will not only not deteriorate but be strengthened in every way through the creation of a Free City, and we are convinced that the real prerequisites for this exist. With this in mind, the Soviet Union has already announced, as you are aware, that it is prepared to place orders with the industries of the Free City of West Berlin and also to supply it with foodstuffs and raw materials required for industry on a commercial basis. It is relevant to point out that at the present time a considerable part of the Soviet Union's purchases in West Berlin already goes to absorb the output of branches of industry which experience difficulty in marketing their products.

We do not of course by any means aspire to a monopoly of trade with the Free City of West Berlin, and if other Powers also expressed the wish to expand their trade relations with the Free City, we should only welcome such a development. Such competition would only contribute to making the Free City of West Berlin more viable and more prosperous.

In submitting its proposal for the creation of a Free City of West Berlin, the Soviet Government is guided by the consideration that this settlement is the most feasible compared with any other possible settlement of this question. Why? Because the liquidation of the occupation régime in West Berlin would in this case not harm the interests or affect the prestige of any of the Governments concerned, nor would it give unilateral advantages to either side. This, if you like, is the reasonable compromise which might be accepted, in our opinion, by all the parties concerned without any detriment either to their prestige or to their security.

As you are aware, we have also made some other proposals for the liquidation of the occupation régime in West Berlin. They are well known, and there is no need to deal with them in any detail now, particularly as we have already discussed them. In the interests of reaching a mutually acceptable agreement, we are of course prepared, in the examination of this question, to consider any proposals which may serve to achieve this purpose.

I have already pointed out that after the Soviet Government submitted its proposal for the liquidation of the abnormal situation in Berlin and the conversion of West Berlin into a Free City, certain groups in the West made a number of statements intended to distort the Soviet proposals and to mislead the people of West Berlin and public opinion in other countries. Such statements include the assertion that the Soviet Union allegedly desires to seize West Berlin and incorporate it into the German Democratic Republic.

The Soviet Government is also credited with the intention of blockading the city, upsetting the way of life which has been established there, etc.

All such allegations are of course completely alien to the Soviet Union's true intentions and aims.

The Soviet Union does not seek to obtain any unilateral advantages or privileges from a settlement of the abnormal situation in Berlin and it does not pursue any aims other than the removal of a source of tension in the centre of Germany and of Europe. Anyone who takes the trouble to study the substance of the Soviet proposals for the settlement of the Berlin question will satisfy himself that is precisely how the matter stands.

If we are to speak frankly, the Soviet Government considers the creation of a Free City far from being an ideal solution of the West Berlin question. The most equitable approach to this question would be, of course, the extension to West Berlin of the full sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic. I think that the German Democratic Republic, whose capital the division of the city continues to mutilate, could, with the fullest justification demand such a solution of the question.

However, the implementation by the German Democratic Republic of its sovereignty over West Berlin would lead to an unhealthy breakdown of the economic and political structure that has been set up in West Berlin, which, as is well known, is not what the German Democratic Republic desires. The Soviet Government has taken all this into consideration in submitting, in agreement with the Government of the German Democratic Republic, a proposal for the creation of a Free City.

I mention this because in the Western Press and in the statements made by certain political leaders the situation is represented in such a way as to make it appear that by agreeing to the creation of a Free City the Governments of the United States of America, the United Kingdom and France would be making a great concession to the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. In reality, however, if it is possible to talk of any concession in connection with declaring West Berlin a Free City, it should be about the concession on the part of the German Democratic Republic. The most important factor, however, is that a normalization of the situation in Berlin would serve, above all, the general cause of consolidating the peace and security of the peoples in Europe.

The opponents of the settlement of the West Berlin question, in striving to discredit the idea of the creation of a Free City, assert that it would lead to the further division of Germany since, they allege, the Free City of Berlin would become a "third State" on the territory of Germany. Such assertions are being made above all in the Federal Republic of Germany. There has also been talk on these lines in some of the statements made at this conference. It is not difficult, however, to show the utter groundlessness and, more than that, the deliberate flimsiness of such arguments.

It is, of course clear to all of us that the creation of a Free City is a temporary solution designed for the period before the unification of Germany and the formation of a single German State. At the same time it must be admitted that such a step would make an undoubted contribution toward the unification of Germany. Indeed, the normalization of the situation in Berlin would have a positive effect also on the situation in Germany as a whole, it would help to improve the relations between the two German States.

We would not witness, for instance, such manifestations of hostility toward the German Democratic Republic on the part of certain circles in the Federal Republic of Germany as occur almost every time official visitors from Western Germany — statesmen of the Federal Republic of Germany — take advantage

of their stay in West Berlin to make statements harshly attacking the German Democratic Republic, denigrating the system prevailing there and trying to rouse the inhabitants of West Berlin against the German Democratic Republic. Let us imagine for a moment statesmen of the German Democratic Republic starting to use some city in Western Germany as a tribune for making statements against the internal system and Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. I think that the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany would not show such a tolerant attitude as is now shown by the German Democratic Republic.

The formation of a Free City of West Berlin would help remove the many disagreements that have accumulated in the mutual relationships of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, and this would contribute towards bringing them closer together, while the practical business of the Free City's political, economic, and other relations with the German Democratic Republic would help to accumulate positive experience for the extension of such relations between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany.

In our opinion, the best way of all to resolve the Berlin question would be within the framework of a peace treaty with Germany in the event of agreement being reached on such a treaty. As a result of a peaceful settlement, any occupation rights and privileges of the Powers that vanquished Germany would, naturally, lapse and the conditions would be created for the peaceful development not only of Berlin but of the whole of Germany. Of course, so long as two German States exist, for Berlin, even after the signing of a peace treaty, it is impossible to imagine a solution other than that of declaring it a Free City until Germany is unified.

The Soviet Government's proposal for the solution of the Berlin question has met with a sympathetic response both on the part of official circles and of public opinion in many countries. It is no exaggeration to say that today people throughout the world have become profoundly conscious of the abnormality and danger of the present situation in West Berlin and are convinced that the Berlin question must be resolved, as required by the interests of consolidating peace and relaxing international tension.

The Western countries are no exception in this regard. It is well known that influential political parties, authoritative political and social leaders and numerous organs of the Press in these countries are expressing serious concern in connexion with the dangerous rôle which West Berlin is playing as a result of the continued foreign occupation of that city and its utilization as a breeding ground of international tension. The importance of a solution to this question was also stressed in the joint communiqué on the results of the talks between the British Prime Minister, Mr. Macmillan, and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R., Mr. N. S. Khrushchev, in Moscow.

All this gives grounds for hope that the participants in our conference will treat this question with due understanding and recognize the need for taking immediate steps to normalize the situation in West Berlin and that as a result we shall succeed in reaching an agreement which will be in keeping with the task of strengthening peace in Europe, while taking into due consideration the rights and interests both of the German Democratic Republic and of the inhabitants of West Berlin. The achievement of such an agreement would at the same time help to remove one of the causes that are preventing the relations between the great Powers from being properly adjusted.

Such are the comments we wished to make especially regarding the Berlin question, taking into consideration the fact that all the participants in our Meeting have recognized the importance and the acuteness of this question.