

## Statement by Willy Brandt (Erfurt, 19 March 1970)

**Source:** United States-Department of State. Documents on Germany 1944-1985. Washington: Department of State, [s.d.]. 1421 p. (Department of State Publication 9446). p. 1075-1080.

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**Last updated:** 02/07/2015

## Statement by Chancellor Brandt, Stressing the Need to Recognize the Existence of a German Nation, Made at the First Meeting Between the East and West German Heads of Government, Erfurt, East Germany, March 19, 1970

Mr. Chairman of the Council of Ministers, gentlemen:

Nobody will be surprised if my views on many things differ from those put forward here from the point of view of the GDR Government. We do not want to play down anything. However, nothing would be gained were we both to produce statements of account about the 20 or 25 years behind us. Rather, the situation necessitates that we seek areas where the interests of both sides allow progress to be made for peace and for the people.

[...]

My staff and I have come here without the illusion that our points of view can be reconciled by friendly persuasion or by the mere fact that we meet. We see the differences of principle and we soberly put them on record. Nevertheless, I believe that neither of us should abandon the attempt to learn the views of the other in such a manner as to correctly assess them in his own policy. We must proceed from the situation as it is. It is obvious that relations between East and West cannot essentially improve if relations in the heart of Europe remain disturbed. This means that the two governments must make an honest attempt to find a way which must be taken and can be taken to the benefit of our two states, to the benefit of the German people, to the benefit of security on our continent.

In this context, I hope that I will find the GDR Government ready to look forward so that we may not become the prisoners of a dark past.

It is undeniable that between the inhabitants of our two states relations of a special kind exist such as do not exist between inhabitants of other states, even if they be on friendly terms or interdependent. Thus there are common features which do not exist between other states. The arguments between us are different from those between alien nations. They concern the unity of the nations.

There are other common features. The Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR are members of pact systems which, strongly armed, face each other on German territory. They contribute to the fact that in Europe a balance of forces exists which over the past years has prevented war and which today provides relative security. But real peace and security in the long run can only be found in a European peace order under which both the confrontation of blocs and the antagonism of the two states in Germany is ended.

The Federal Government regards peace as the greatest treasure. We are surely agreed that no war must again emanate from German soil.

The two German states have neither the right nor the possibility of pursuing the aims set out in their constitutions either by force or the threat of force. A democratic, peace-loving, united Germany can never be established by war or civil war.

This aim is, as far as words are concerned, common to both German states; however, according to their contents, your ideas and ours are very far apart. We stand by the free and social state based on the rule of law as set out in the basic law of the Federal Republic. But why should we argue here about a subject which only history can answer! However, we must not make it impossible for historic developments to fill in the abyss today separating the states of Europe. We must not make it impossible for the German people to decide in free self-determination how they want to live together. There is another point which is important to our two governments about which nothing must remain.

In face of the four-power agreements on Germany since 1944, agreements between our two states can neither affect nor replace the existing rights of the four powers. This applies equally to our agreements with the three powers and those of the GDR with the Soviet Union.

It applies in fact to bilateral or multilateral treaties entered into by us. However, these agreements need not and should not prevent us from reducing the barriers between us.

If I draw attention to the four-power agreements and to our arrangements with the three powers, I do so not least on account of Berlin. I must ask you to take this statement very seriously. We do not want to alter the status of Berlin as long as the German problem is not solved. I mean, one cannot, on the one hand, demand the recognition of realities and, on the other, demand a one-sided change in the existing situation.

The fact that West Berlin is not being administered by the Federal Republic has not prevented the three powers from charging the Federal Government with certain tasks, for instance the representing of West Berlin regarding external relations or the taking care of the economic viability of the territory of Berlin. In fact, in economic, financial, legal, and cultural respects, there is no distinction between West Berlin and the Federal Republic. To this extent, Berlin is fully part of us. Neither the three Western powers, nor the Federal Republic, nor the Berliners directly involved would agree with alteration of the status of Berlin, as fixed by the four powers, which would lead to a change in these links.

It is up to the four powers to decide how they want to exercise their supreme power in Berlin. If an understanding was reached between them about an improvement in the present position, the Federal Government would welcome this.

In any event, I do not want to leave any doubt on this, because my government's efforts for normalization and easing tension in Central Europe are inseparably linked with easing tension and normalizing the situation in and about Berlin.

[...]

Mr. Chairman, in my letter of 22 January 1970 I informed you about my ideas concerning the matter and subject of the negotiations to be conducted between our governments. Permit me again to confirm the principles by which the Federal Government is guided and which I conveyed to you in my letter:

1. Both states have an obligation to preserve the unity of the German nation. They are not foreign countries to each other.
2. Otherwise, the generally recognized principles of interstate rules must apply, particularly the exclusion of any discrimination, respect for territorial integrity, the obligation to solve all disputes peacefully, and respect for mutual frontiers.
3. Included in this is also the obligation not to seek to forcibly alter the social structure of the treaty partner.
4. The two governments should strive for neighborly cooperation, particularly regulation of specialized-technical cooperation, which could be made easier through government agreements.
5. The existing rights and responsibilities of the four powers in regard to Germany as a whole and Berlin must be respected.
6. The efforts of the four powers to arrive at agreements on an improvement of the situation in and about Berlin should be supported.

[...]

The draft submitted by the State Council Chairman contains a point which deals with the position of our two states in international organizations. For my part, I have already said the government intends to seek a greater measure of cooperation in the United Nations and other international organizations. I have also said that our attitude and that of our friends vis-à-vis the international relations of the GDR does not in the least depend on the attitude of the GDR Government itself.

I suggest that, in the further course of our meetings and in accordance with the progress of our talks, we also raise this question. Progress in this direction would serve to make the ability of our compatriots, the efficiency of our economy and our science useful more than hitherto to peace, to development, and to the struggle against hunger in many parts of the world.

In order to be able to give effective help in this sense we should also seek a balanced reduction of armed forces and armament in East and West. We Germans should set an example in the efforts for disarmament and armament control and we should muster the strength to enter into a constructive competition while maintaining full loyalty toward our alliances.

All efforts for promoting peaceful relations in the world are credible and convincing only if we create peace among us and for our citizens. Formal documents alone are not enough to normalize relations. People here and there must profit from the normalization. Here is a wide field which I would like to chart only in outline. Details must be left to future meetings and certainly also to thorough deliberations on another level.

I am thinking above all the first and foremost of human distress, which we should alleviate as far as it is in our power. To cite two examples: Where children have not yet been united with their parents we should find ways of bringing them together. Where fiancés on this side and the other side of the border are waiting for one another, we should enable them to marry.

I note with satisfaction that the downward trend in trade could be halted. We should ask our competent bodies not to be satisfied with the more positive figures of the last year and a half. We should also seek a substantially greater exchange in the economic and technical fields.

This also applies to other spheres. As regards road traffic, we should concert the building of trunk roads with the plans of our countries in a meaningful way and bring about the opening of more border crossing points and other facilities of communications. It seems desirable to speed up railway traffic, to create a uniform freight law, with tariffs valid on both sides, and to improve technical contacts between the railway administrations. Improvements are also possible in the field of inland shipping. In the interest of improved contacts of individuals and firms with their partners in the other part of Germany, we should make arrangements to increase telephone, telegram, and teleprinter communications, also to make better use of other telecommunications facilities and to overcome the difficulties in the balancing of accounts. Finally, I am thinking of numerous practical and administrative problems which have arisen from the marking of the borderline and where local problems have to be solved.

It would certainly be progress if, between the two states in Germany, and in Berlin in any case, we could reach such a measure of visiting opportunities, cultural exchange, sports encounters as already exist, for example, between the Federal Republic of Germany and various states of East Europe.

This, however, would only be a modest beginning. Only, we must at least make a beginning if we are serious about a normalization and if treaties are not to remain empty shells. In addition, I say in all frankness: In my view a genuine normalization must help to overcome intra-German border barricades and walls. It is these which symbolize the deplorable speciality of our situation. This will presumably not be changed in a day. It must remain the goal and purpose of our efforts, however, to achieve progress leading to greater mobility and giving greater scope to human rights. We, on any account, will continue to represent our views on this matter.

Mr. Chairman!

I would like to raise, in the course of our talks today and at future occasions a number of important individual issues, which you have discussed here in the statement on the stand of the GDR Government; at the same time, I have to ask you to carefully examine what I have said.

There is one thing, however, that I must be allowed to mention on this occasion: Even if I do not contradict your individual points, you will certainly understand that to a large measure I do not share your assessment of various aspects of domestic political development in the Federal Republic of Germany, the assessment of individual political groupings and personalities, and the analysis you have made of the development of the Federal Republic of Germany and the evolution of the two states in Germany.

[...]

At two points you have put the concrete question as to whether I am ready to negotiate. I said: We are ready to examine whether the time has come — and I hope it has come — to negotiate, and I now deliberately, add, about everything one or the other side has brought to the negotiating table or will, in the course of our talks, bring along to it.

I am proceeding from the premise that our relations must be based on nondiscrimination and equality. Neither of us can act for the other, neither can represent the other part of Germany abroad. This is the result of a development which we — whatever the feelings — acknowledge.

The two states in Germany must work toward the idea of a particularly close relationship, even if it would be progress to establish relations at all. I shall, in this respect, keep to the points of orientation which I listed on 14 January in my speech to the lower house.

No one must try to subject the other to overweening influence. I have not come here to demand the liquidation of any ties of the GDR or of any social order. Neither am I inclined to accept corresponding demands on the Federal Republic of Germany.

I have mentioned the constitutions of our two states which contain the long-term concept of a unified Germany. This also applies to the agreements which the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR as well have concluded. Our treaty with the three Western powers, just as your friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, includes political unity as a possibility. There are even a number of phrases used by both sides which speak in this context of an aim. It must be quite obvious that nothing in the treaties nor in the intentions and aims related to this long-term concept of self-determination will change.

For this reason alone I am convinced that the term “internationally valid recognition” as well as the term “noninterference in internal affairs” does not cover the real issues of the establishment of equal relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR. In fact, each of the two states will have to take the same commitments, to respect anything laid down by the two governments by the authority exercised in their own territory. As part of this, defamatory attacks against the Federal Republic of Germany and its leading personages would have to be discontinued. This, too, is part of the nondiscrimination between our states. The principles of nondiscrimination and equality must not interfere with our aim to one day help the real sovereign, the German people, come into its own.

Mr. Chairman, it emerges from your arguments and my statement that at best we stand at the beginning of a long and arduous road. But something else could emerge, too — that, in spite of everything that happened and everything that separates us, we are prepared to take this road. We cannot ignore what separates us, but we should move those points to the forefront on which agreement could be possible.

The fact that we made prepared statements today is understandable, in view of the unusual circumstances which have brought the heads of governments of two states in Germany together for the first time. We should, however, give our exchange of views that more intimate character which, according to experience, is in the interest of the cause and avoids the appearance that we only want to talk out of the window. I would welcome it if we could adopt this method even this afternoon. We would, moreover, adapt ourselves in this

case to the style of exchange of views prevailing between the Soviet Union and the Polish People's Republic and the Federal Government.