

## European unification and the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany (1966–1974)

**Source:** CVCE. Robin Allers.

**Copyright:** (c) CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

**URL:**

[http://www.cvce.eu/obj/european\\_unification\\_and\\_the\\_foreign\\_policy\\_of\\_the\\_federal\\_republic\\_of\\_germany\\_1966\\_1974-en-a7c8686d-05cc-4484-9fb4-ac8106d98757.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/european_unification_and_the_foreign_policy_of_the_federal_republic_of_germany_1966_1974-en-a7c8686d-05cc-4484-9fb4-ac8106d98757.html)



**Last updated:** 08/08/2016

## European unification and the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany (1966–1974)

As Mayor of West Berlin, Willy Brandt had matured into one of the Federal Republic of Germany's most prominent politicians in the foreign affairs arena. His experience and prestige in international relations grew further when he went on to become Foreign Minister in the Grand Coalition (1966–69). And as Federal Chancellor from 1969 with the Social–Liberal Coalition, he was clearly the driving force behind German foreign policy.

In the years of government responsibility, Brandt brought new initiatives, in the field of Ostpolitik in particular. The successful process of reconciliation with the country's Western neighbours as part of the process of European and transatlantic cooperation, which had begun in the early 1950s, was now to be followed by an easing of relations with the neighbours in the East. For this to happen, it was necessary, as Brandt put it, 'to work from the existing realities'. For the Federal Republic, this meant recognising the existence of the GDR and the definitive loss of the German Eastern Territories.

At the same time, Brandt was committed to the interests and fundamental principles of German foreign policy and policy towards the West, as they had evolved since 1945. In Brandt's understanding of the defence of Germany's national interests, furthering the economic and political unification of Europe was no less important than active cultivation and maintenance of the Atlantic Alliance and a policy of détente with Central and Eastern Europe. Westpolitik and Ostpolitik were part and parcel of an overall design, that of resolving the German question and establishing a pan-European peaceful order.

### European unification as an element of the new Ostpolitik

The first steps in what would later become known as the 'new Ostpolitik' were taken in the aftermath of the 1958 Berlin crisis and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Having realised that the Western powers were unwilling to run the risk of a war for the unity of Berlin, the city's Mayor and his colleagues — above all Egon Bahr — opted for a 'policy of small steps' directed at facilitating contact between the two parts of Berlin. This approach was given a Federal dimension in July 1963 when Brandt and Bahr, addressing the Evangelical Academy in Tutzing, spoke of 'Change through rapprochement'. These initial steps were, however, too bold for the CDU-led governments under Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard. The Federal Republic's claim to sole representation ruled out, until the mid-1960s, recognition of the 'Zone Regime' in East Germany and, hence, any kind of official contact with the GDR. The Erhard Government did, admittedly, seek to expand economic relations with Germany's Central and Eastern European neighbours, but it was not until the advent of the Grand Coalition that a government was prepared to risk a cautious revision of the Hallstein Doctrine, under which the prohibition of official recognition of the GDR had, since 1955, been extended to all other states. Constrained as they were by domestic political resistance and hindered by mistrust on the part of the Eastern Bloc countries, the Grand Coalition's initiatives towards détente remained timid indeed. And when Soviet troops marched into Czechoslovakia in August 1968, they suffered a setback. The Brezhnev Doctrine announced in November 1968, in which the Soviet Union reminded the Warsaw Pact countries of their limited sovereignty, also brought it home to the Bonn Government that a transformation of East–West relations could be achieved only by reaching an understanding with Moscow and resolving the German question.

The planning unit in the Foreign Ministry, led by Egon Bahr, had in the meantime drawn up a comprehensive set of ideas on the subject, ideas which the SPD/FDP Social–Liberal coalition under Brandt and his Foreign Minister, Walter Scheel, put into practice after 1969. Negotiations were set in motion with the GDR, the Soviet Union and Germany's Eastern European neighbours, Poland and Czechoslovakia, while the Allied Control Powers were pressed to settle the issue of Berlin's status. Through symbolic gestures, Brandt sought to underline his government's willingness to engage in reconciliation and recognise post-war frontiers. When, in December 1970, he knelt down at the monument to murdered Jews in Warsaw, during his visit there for the signing of the German–Polish Treaty, Brandt wished to make it clear that the Federal Republic was conscious of its historical responsibility. This signal was also directed at Germany's Western partners and at the country's own general public, who were reacting with mixed feelings to the first steps in the new Ostpolitik.

The European partners and the USA welcomed the Federal Government's resolve to abandon the rigid observance of the Hallstein Doctrine and its willingness to recognise the realities of the post-war period. Both Washington and Paris had, though for differing reasons, initiated moves towards détente in the preceding years. Against this background, the strict German policy on reunification had increasingly come to be viewed by partners and allies as a burdensome obstacle.

The fact that the Federal Government was now taking its fate into its own hands was, however, also the subject of some mistrust, in which fear of a possible German–Soviet understanding played no small part. To counter any such impression, Brandt and his team went to considerable lengths to emphasise that the Ostpolitik initiatives were anchored in the Western Alliance and to keep partners and allies informed through official and informal channels. Any concern on the part of Germany's Western European and transatlantic partners that it might wish to go it alone must be dispelled. A second 'Rapallo', an understanding reached independently by Germany with the Soviet Union, as in the inter-war period, was no longer an option with a Social Democrat-led government. The sceptical government in Paris in particular must be persuaded that a settlement of Germany's relations with its Eastern neighbours would be of decisive importance for the future of Europe. Political unification of the continent would be possible only on the basis of frontiers recognised by all parties. Nothing could be more important than 'the establishment of a secure peace', Brandt emphasised in a TV address given to mark the signing of the Warsaw Treaty on 8 December 1970. 'Freedom is not possible without European solidarity.'

A stable anchorage in the West was also an important element in the battle for domestic political acceptance of the Ostpolitik. Time and again the Brandt Government found itself having to deny Opposition accusations that its political endeavours in the East were causing it to neglect the legacy of Konrad Adenauer. While the Federal Government's successes in the European political arena — completion of the Common Market, launching of accession negotiations and initiatives leading towards political unification — were certainly acknowledged, they were not regarded as offering a sufficient safeguard. At times it rather seemed that Brandt was more popular abroad than at home. This impression became stronger still when Brandt was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 21 October 1971. An honour which outside Germany was acclaimed as a well-deserved tribute to a man of peace and promoter of détente was in part criticised inside the Federal Republic as interference in a disputed political issue. The parliamentary clash over the Eastern Treaties led in 1972 to a motion of no confidence tabled by the Opposition against the Social–Liberal Coalition, governing with a razor-thin majority, and the Chancellor; they only just survived it. The elections in autumn 1972, which followed a campaign made to measure for Brandt, brought the SPD its greatest triumph to date. The Eastern Treaties — the Moscow Treaty with the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Treaty with Poland (both signed in December 1970), the Basic Treaty with the GDR (signed in December 1972) and the Four Power Agreement on Berlin (signed in 1971) — met with wide approval abroad and went on to be ratified in the Bundestag with the requisite majorities.

### **Relations between the European Communities and the United States**

As early as 1944, in a text written in exile entitled 'Efter segern' (After victory), Willy Brandt affirmed: 'American withdrawal from Europe is out of the question.' Close ties with the United States and the aim of a European Union, as he would argue later, were not mutually exclusive; rather, they together formed 'a fundamental of German policy'. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1971, he emphasised that the United States and Europe could not be divided: 'They need one another as self-assured partners enjoying equal rights.' With regard to the superpower's economic difficulties and its involvement in the Vietnam War, Brandt cautioned that in difficult times more than any other, Europe must stand by the USA.

The encounter with American President John F. Kennedy, whom Brandt as Mayor of Berlin met on a number of occasions in the USA and who visited the city in 1963, made a particularly powerful impact on the rising détente politician. Brandt saw in Kennedy's strategy for peace, which for the first time combined a willingness to talk with the Eastern Bloc and a commitment to security, an approach which opened up perspectives for détente policy in Germany. He likewise supported Kennedy's Grand Design, his concept of Europe and America as partners having equal rights and bearing equal obligations. And while Brandt was aware that the

relationship would remain unbalanced and that in the final analysis the USA had no interest in sharing the lead role in the Western Alliance with the Europeans, he nevertheless recognised the symbolic importance of Kennedy's initiative for the Western Alliance. This was another reason why, in 1963, he strove to secure the addition to the Franco-German Friendship Treaty, negotiated by Adenauer and de Gaulle, of a declaration by the Federal Republic of its attachment to the transatlantic relationship.

It was as Foreign Minister and Chancellor that Brandt experienced the tougher side of the close ties between Bonn and Washington. As its consolidation progressed, the European Community was increasingly becoming an economic competitor for the United States. And at the same time the 'Gaullist' challenge to America's role as leader did nothing to simplify the Federal Republic's role as mediator. It was, however, precisely this role as 'honest broker' between France and the United States which Brandt chose to assume and develop with considerable energy from the very start of his period of office as Foreign Minister. Together with the Chancellor, Kurt Georg Kiesinger (CDU), he strove to restore the balance in the Federal Republic's relations with the USA on the one hand and France on the other, a balance which in the eyes of many observers had been lost while Ludwig Erhard was in power.

In the second half of the 1960s, the Vietnam War cast a shadow over transatlantic relations; this led to increased American pressure on the Allies, on the one hand, and greater public pressure on the Western governments, on the other. While the Johnson Administration was satisfied with economic and material support from the Federal Government, Germany's left-leaning youth in particular held it against Brandt not to have clearly distanced himself from America's war in the Far East. As he later observed in a spirit of self-criticism, Brandt's loyalty to the USA laid him open to attack as uncritical.

As Chancellor, Brandt's dealings on the US side were with Richard Nixon, sworn in as President in January 1969, and his influential National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger. During this period, the bilateral relationship was marked above all by the Federal Republic's initiatives on Ostpolitik and policy on Germany. The moves in this area by the Brandt-Scheel Government were founded on a recognition that Germans must ultimately take the initiative themselves if a solution was to be found to the German question. The timid Ostpolitik initiatives taken by the Grand Coalition had nonetheless already made it clear that, if it was to pursue its Ostpolitik and policy on Germany, the Federal Republic must take account of the Soviet Union and must have the support of the USA. While the initiatives taken by the Brandt-Scheel Government after 1969 were essentially consistent with the efforts being made by the Western partners to further détente, the fact was that Bonn's independent political action aroused mistrust in Washington and Paris (and to a lesser extent in London) and represented a challenge to the USA's claim to leadership in relations with the Eastern Bloc.

The German-American relationship in the Nixon-Kissinger era was placed under particular strain by the growing unrest in the capital markets from the late 1960s onwards, which led in August 1971 to unilateral measures by the US President, including suspension of the convertibility of the dollar into gold and introduction of a 10 % import tax. In an attempt to smooth relations with the USA, Brandt managed at the October 1972 EC Summit in Paris to secure the inclusion in the Final Communiqué of a reference to the central role played by the Atlantic Community. But the stance adopted by Kissinger and Nixon, to the effect that world political affairs were a matter for the USA, with the European nations focusing on regional issues, did nothing to improve the transatlantic relationship. Kissinger's address of 23 April 1973, in which he proclaimed the 'Year of Europe' and went on under this banner to outline the allocation of tasks in the Western Alliance, was felt by Brandt — and by most of the Continent's politicians — to be presumptuous and wrong.

The transatlantic relationship was taken into a further crisis in autumn 1973 by the Yom Kippur War between Israel and the Arab states. One of Brandt's final foreign policy initiatives as Chancellor was a further attempt to overcome this crisis of confidence in the Atlantic Alliance. In the run-up to the EC Summit in Copenhagen in December 1973, he strove for a common line on the relationship with the USA, suggesting there should be an 'organic connection' in which the emphasis would be on economic issues. Brandt had an important ally in Edward Heath, the UK Prime Minister, who had been at the helm in London since June 1970. Heath, under whose leadership his country's EC accession negotiations had been successfully concluded in 1972, was moving away from the concept of the 'special relationship' with the USA and attempting to bring the UK

closer to Europe. Brandt, for his part, stood by the German foreign policy concept of a balanced relationship with Europe on the one hand and the USA on the other.

The Copenhagen Summit did indeed produce a declaration which, while invoking the 'European identity', also gave prominence to the close ties with the United States. Constructive dialogue and cooperation were to be further developed 'on the basis of equality of rights and in a spirit of friendship'. As regards NATO, the 15 Member States went on to sign, in Ottawa, the Transatlantic Declaration, emphasising common aims; this was in June 1974, a good month after Brandt's resignation as Chancellor. But as Brandt had to concede when looking back, neither declaration left 'a powerful mark'.

### **European unification as a contribution to peace and détente — from the concept of a pan-European peaceful order to the CSCE process**

Both the Federal Republic's integration with the West and his Government's Ostpolitik initiatives were, in Brandt's view, merely steps on the way to a pan-European peaceful order.

For Brandt, there were two sides to the efforts being made in this direction. On the one hand, there were steps to promote détente between East and West without putting safety and stability at risk in the process. Here the demands were on the Atlantic Alliance, and the Federal Government contributed actively to the formulation of the 1967 Harmel Report, in which NATO for the first time combined security and détente in a two-pillar doctrine. Brandt also backed the 'Reykjavik Signal', an Alliance proposal to the Eastern Bloc to proceed with Multibalanced Force Reductions (MBFR), on the ground that 'a lasting European peaceful order presupposes a balanced security system'. At the same time, according to Brandt, there must be greater emphasis on the European components of the Atlantic Alliance and the security concept must be strengthened by incorporating elements of economic and technological cooperation. Brandt was for example prepared to envisage, in line with a recommendation by the Action Committee for the United States of Europe (the Monnet Committee), a committee for cooperation between the European Communities and COMECON. Far-reaching initiatives were needed, ones which would in the final instance mean the dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact and their eventual replacement by something new.

Brandt also used the concept of a European peaceful order as an argument to persuade Euro-sceptical candidates for EC accession that the European unification process was about far more than just economic prosperity. The Federal Republic's Ost- and Westpolitik formed, as he explained to the Norwegian Parliament (*Storting*) in April 1970, an overall concept having two goals, European unification on the one hand and achievement of a pan-European peaceful order on the other. Enlargement of the Community to include countries with a stable experience of democracy and good contacts with Eastern Europe played an important role in this concept. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech on 10 December 1971 and in the first address by a German Head of Government to the United Nations General Assembly which he gave in September 1973, Brandt again emphasised the special responsibility borne by the European Communities for the peaceful development of Germany and for the resolution of the East–West conflict.

Both short- and long-term initiatives in pursuit of détente in Europe called for a multilateral framework encompassing not only the two superpowers but also the Western European partners and their Eastern European neighbours. It seemed to Brandt that a security conference, as had been proposed in 1969 by the Warsaw Pact states in their 'Budapest Appeal', would offer a suitable way forward. Finland having agreed to host such a conference in its capital, there followed difficult, protracted consultations which ultimately led, in March 1973, to the opening of negotiations in Helsinki. It was precisely because the two superpowers were involved in the Helsinki process that the planned conference represented a challenge for political cooperation within the only recently enlarged European Community. But when it came down to it, negotiation of a common position among the 'Nine' and in particular Franco-German cooperation in the run-up to the conference went substantially more smoothly than was, for example, the case on Middle-East policy.

### **The European Community and the challenges arising from the monetary and energy crises**

The recurring tensions in the international monetary system had a considerable impact on German foreign and

European policy in the Brandt era. In the autumn of 1968, a dollar weakened by the USA's worldwide commitments brought Europe's currencies under pressure for the first time. The Federal Republic withstood pressure from both France and the United States to revalue the Deutschmark and, in pursuing an independent line on monetary policy, put its economic strength to the test. This flexing of economic muscle evoked unhappy memories in the partner countries and, for the then Foreign Minister Willy Brandt, it was thus particularly important in this situation to demonstrate European solidarity. But as there was no longer any getting round the dominating role of the German economy and the Deutschmark, and as a chronically weak dollar was fuelling further crises, Brandt became increasingly interested in subsequent years in binding rules on European and international monetary solidarity. In his view, it was for the Community to take the initiative in stabilising the international monetary system and here the Franco-German axis would have a key role to play.

In a speech given on 15 August, President Nixon announced a sharp shift in US economic and monetary policy which presented the European partners with serious problems. The President of France, Georges Pompidou, speaking at a press conference on 25 September 1971, outlined various lines of action, which attracted substantial support from Brandt. In early December, Brandt and Pompidou conferred on a package of measures to overcome the currency crisis; these included devaluation of the dollar, revaluation of the Deutschmark and maintenance of the French franc exchange rate. The Franco-German measures were accepted as a European compromise during discussions between Pompidou and Nixon which took place in the Azores on 13 December 1971; the compromise was then submitted on 18 December to a conference of the 10 most industrialised nations (the 'Club of Ten') in Washington. Under the 'Smithsonian Agreement' which emerged from the conference, a devaluation of the dollar was approved and new monetary parities were set. Yet while these measures brought the acute phase of the world monetary crisis to an end, the structural problem — the weakness of the dollar which, as lead currency, continued to determine exchange rates within the Common Market — persisted.

A major factor in the deepening of the world economic and monetary crisis in the following years was the 1973 oil crisis. In the aftermath of the Arab–Israeli October War (the Yom Kippur War), the states belonging to the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) decided to restrict their oil exports to the Western nations for as long as the latter maintained pro-Israeli policies. The Arab oil-producing countries placed an embargo on oil supplies to the United States and the Netherlands on 19 October. This crisis presented the European partners with a severe challenge, one which they had great difficulty in tackling successfully. While France confirmed its close relations with the Arab states, the Federal Republic and other European partners declared their strict neutrality in the Middle-East conflict. No European country could, however, escape the economic consequences of the crisis. On 15 December 1973, as part of their Final Communiqué at the end of the Copenhagen Summit, the 'Nine' formulated a position statement in which they expressed their concern at the energy crisis and announced a series of measures. It did not, in contrast, prove possible to arrive at a common stance vis-à-vis the parties to the conflict and the USA. There was no prospect in this climate of achieving the objective — proposed by Brandt in December 1969 and accepted by the Community in 1970 in the form of a phased plan (the Werner Plan) — of moving in stages from monetary cooperation within the Community to economic and monetary union. Faced with a deepening economic crisis and the resulting struggle for markets and resources, most governments, including the German Federal Government, opted for national defensive strategies. And although the need to improve coordination and decision-making mechanisms seemed more urgent than ever, once again the European enterprise could attract no more than lip service.