

# West Germany takes a patient view of the world

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Malcolm Rutherford, Bonn Correspondent, reviews German foreign policy

TODAY'S ELECTION of Herr Willy Brandt as the new West German Chancellor ought in many ways to mark the end of an era—the era of Konrad Adenauer, and at least in one important respect it does. For the first time the Christian Democrats, the party which he led for so long and so victoriously, are in opposition in the Federal Parliament. Dr. Adenauer's influence, however, went beyond his own party and the Government which succeeds the Christian Democrats to-day has freely accepted the old man's cardinal principle. West Germany's place in the world is to be tied as firmly as possible to the Western Alliance.

Because of this, there will be no fireworks, no sudden about turns in German foreign policy. Foreign policy indeed may turn out to play a relatively minor part in the Government's early programme. This may seem surprising when it is remembered that for the last three years Herr Brandt has been Foreign Minister and the Vice-Chancellor, and now Foreign Minister, Herr Walter Scheel, has made his name by advocating greater efforts for East-West rapprochement.

## "Progress by small steps"

Yet it is precisely because of his experience in office that Herr Brandt knows so well the limitations, and already the warnings have gone out against great expectations. The new Chancellor has indicated that he wants to go down as a domestic reformer, no doubt because he has appreciated the difficulties of achieving anything very dramatic abroad.

Anyone dealing with German foreign policy comes up at once against three basic situations.

The country would like to improve relations with East Germany and with Eastern Europe in general. Progress to this end, however, depends on the Russians.

The country would like to speed up political and economic integration in Western Europe. Progress here, however, depends on the French.

The country is sworn not to seek to become a nuclear power and has no intention of trying to do so. It therefore depends for its protection on the nuclear power of the U.S. and it is a constant anxiety that this protection should remain.

In none of these situations is there much room for a German initiative. There appears even less room when it is recalled that it is enshrined in this generation of German political leaders that they should never seek to throw their weight about abroad. The policy has developed, therefore—to use Herr



BRANDT: Knows the difficulties.



SCHEEL: Advocate of rapprochement.

Brandt's phrase—of trying to make "progress by small steps," because big steps are recognised to be impossible. This small-step policy is in fact approved by all three parties because there is simply nothing to put in its place.

How painfully slow progress can be is shown by reference to the so-called *ostpolitik*, by which is meant the attempt to improve relations with Eastern Europe. The new *ostpolitik* dates from the early 1960s, long before the Grand Coalition was formed. In all that time West Germany has established diplomatic relations with Rumania and re-established them with Yugoslavia, both of them countries which have a degree of independence from Moscow. The other Socialist countries remain hostile.

True, especially recently there has been a growth in trade and economic contacts, but the overall amount remains small. In the same period the Russians have occupied Czechoslovakia and Herr Ulbricht has strengthened his hold over East Germany. The Russians are even now seeking a European security conference to give their domination of Eastern Europe legal form.

In other words, the policy of small steps has not led very far. It runs up against the fundamental obstacle that the Russians have not been prepared to make—and perhaps cannot make—concessions of substance. The same holds for the Four Power talks which may now take place on Berlin. The Russians have suggested that it may be possible to make progress on guaranteeing the western access routes to the city, whereas the routes are supposed to be guaranteed anyway. To have the Russians put this

formally may be an advance, but nothing has been said at all by the Russians about increasing the freedom of the East Germans, let alone of removing the Berlin Wall.

## Talks with East Germany

In a week or two's time the two German Governments will resume their talks on improving communications, begun in the last days of the Grand Coalition. No doubt it is a good thing that the talks are taking place, but the sort of things that are being discussed—such as the easing of shipping movement between the two Germanies—are hardly earth-shaking. The East Germans are holding out for full diplomatic recognition, though recently there have been hints that they would be prepared to accept this by stages.

Perhaps in time their persistence will be rewarded and they will get it—Herr Scheel fought his election campaign on a platform of wanting relations to be "normalised." Perhaps they should. But diplomatic relations are not necessarily good relations, and it is hard to see Herr Ulbricht making any material concessions as part of the price, or even contemplating that he should.

Following the Budapest declaration of the Warsaw Pact powers last spring, there have been new signs that Eastern Europe is interested in increasing its trade with the West, and West Germany is more than ready to respond. But the catch remains small. West Germany's total trade with the Communist world (excluding East Germany)

is only 5 per cent of its trade overall—about the same as its trade with Switzerland alone.

Nor is there much left of the belief that by encouraging East-West trade Eastern Europe somehow becomes more liberal. Current Soviet policy in fact suggests the opposite: the Russians are allowing economic reforms in Comecon in an attempt to buy off demands for political reform. The faint stirrings of a softer approach from Poland with reference to recognition have yet to be tested. Herr Brandt will no doubt test them to the fullest of his ability, but he will do so without expectations of great or immediate success.

Just as in Eastern Europe the German Government is faced with the intransigence of the Russians, so in Western Europe it is faced with the intransigence of the French. It is, of course, a relationship quite different in kind, but rightly or wrongly the French do not share the German view of the desirability of European integration, and there is very little the Germans can do about it.

It is sometimes said in London that the Germans should somehow put pressure on Paris, notably over the British application to the Common Market. The suggestion makes Germans bristle—Herr Brandt as much as Herr Kiesinger. In the three years that Herr Brandt was Foreign Minister, there was no place which rejected it more strongly than his own Foreign Office. And the reason is simple enough: you do not risk throwing away some of the good things that have been achieved—such as Franco-German reconciliation—for the sake of

some political alternative. If progress is to be made in widening the Common Market, it will have to be done in short steps, and the slow process of mutual bargaining. Herr Brandt has repeatedly and recently stressed the notion that the key lies in Bonn.

## Weakness of NATO

The difficulty with the French further than the Common Market and spreads to the most sensitive area of all, defence. One of the worst things to have happened to West Germany in the past few years was the French withdrawal from the organisation of the Atlantic Alliance. It forced the Germans to depend even more closely on the U.S. If the withdrawal had been followed by a movement towards something like a European Defence Community it would have been easier to take, but it wasn't. It required the shock of Czechoslovakia for the NATO allies to decide that perhaps the Alliance had been allowed to run down too far. Now, only 14 months later, the talk about further troop withdrawals from Europe has begun again.

Now, especially it seems that even the American commitment is weakening, at least in so far as it is expressed in keeping large numbers of American forces in Europe. The German anxiety if American withdrawals start could hardly be under-estimated, yet somehow they have to accept the argument that the burden for the Americans has been excessive. West Germany spends, proportionately, almost a third of the Americans on defence, and almost half the British. At some time this will have to be changed: the question is how, without leading to a further increase in East-West tension.

Yet the question will have to be faced, and if the American hints about withdrawals continue, sooner rather than later. It is a reasonable bet that questions of defence will come to take more of the new Government's time than any other aspect of foreign policy. The Germans do not like taking initiatives in such matters, and there are those among their allies who would not like it if they did. But in fact they need not act alone.

The germ of a new defence policy is there in the ideas already pressed by Mr. Healey, the British Defence Minister, and already broadly accepted by the Germans. Put simply, it is that the European contribution to defence should increase while the American contribution declines. Mr. Healey puts it in terms of establishing a "more European identity" within the alliance. Herr Helmut Schmidt, the new German Defence Minister, has accepted the terms.

There is no need to go much further at first—Mr. Healey indeed even echoes the word "European concern," and certainly nuclear questions could be decided later. The important thing is to start before it is too late. Quite apart from the imperative defence needs the move would have the advantage for both Britain and Germany that it would shift the European debate away from the price of buffer on to completely different ground.

It is not without interest either that the shift would take place at a time when the Independent French defence programme is running into difficulties and there are signs that the French are looking rather more kindly at the idea of defence co-operation.

## Security placed first

The obstacle is, as always, that up to now NATO has broadly worked: neither West Germany nor any other NATO country has yet been attacked despite relatively low defence budgets. In these circumstances it is hard to get people to accept the need for change. There are also the counter-attractions of the idea of the European Security Council and accepting the Russians' assurances that all they want to do is to confirm the European status quo.

In fact, the situation in Western Europe has changed: the commitment to NATO is lessening, and doing so at a time when, with the emergence of the Brezhnev doctrine of the right of interference in the affairs of other Socialist states, the Soviet Union is presenting itself as more belligerent than ever. One man who has no illusions about this is Helmut Schmidt. In a recent article he wrote:

"Brezhnev is well on the road to a foreign policy that will be remade in Stalin's image, in which the whole of Europe will be under the direct influence of the Soviets... the necessity remains to offer the Soviet urge to expand no gap or opening, both before and after the Brezhnev doctrine, this is the key strategic task of the Western Alliance. For the extent of the success of Moscow's potential expansionism depends, now as before, on the question of concrete power relationships and correct or incorrect estimating of them in both East and West."

Just before the German elections Herr Schmidt made a controversial visit to Moscow to talk to the Russian leaders (though he did not in fact see Mr. Brezhnev). In other words, he is willing to try the policy of advancing by small steps, at any time. The moral of the quotation, however, is *ostpolitik* is all very well, but it will never be allowed to interfere with security. The partnership between Herr Schmidt and Mr. Healey should be a good one.