

Statement by the Secretary of State, Michael Kohl (21 December 1972)

Caption: On 21 December 1972, East German Secretary of State, Michael Kohl, welcomes the signature, on that day in East Berlin, of the bilateral 'Fundamental' Treaty as a significant step in the strengthening of relations between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

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Statement by State Secretary Kohl on the Signing of the Treaty on the Basis of Relations Between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, Berlin, December 21, 1972

Herr Bahr, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The signing of the Treaty on the Basis of Relations between the GDR and the FRG is in keeping with the peace policy which the German Democratic Republic has always pursued. I would recall that the First Secretary of the SED Central Committee, Erich Honecker, whilst on an official visit to the People's Republic of Bulgaria last April, proposed the establishment of normal relations between the GDR and the FRG and the conclusion of the necessary agreements. With the present Treaty, therefore, a general basis in line with international law has been established for normal good-neighbourly relations between the two States. With this Treaty the GDR and the FRG recognize without reservation each other's sovereignty and independence, as well as the inviolability of the border existing between them.

The Treaty will benefit not only the two German States but all who desire peace and détente. It will be an important element of the system of complementary treaties designed to safeguard peace, which include, above all, the treaties between the USSR and the Polish People's Republic on the one hand and the FRG on the other. This Treaty is in keeping with the objectives of the Eighth SED Party Conference and the co-ordinated policy of the socialist States to guarantee peaceful co-existence between States with different social systems on our continent.

One prerequisite to the Treaty was the realization that relations between the GDR and the FRG could only be developed as between sovereign and mutually independent States, which is the usual and favourable practice all over the world and is consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

The Treaty and its related documents make allowance for the sovereign rights and legitimate interests of both States. That is a good thing, for such balance augurs well for its continuity.

Even the initialling of the Treaty on the Basis of Relations was received all over the world as an event of considerable importance for détente. This applies equally to the letters on the accession of the GDR and the FRG to the United Nations which were signed and exchanged on 8 November of this year, parallel to the initialling of the Treaty. The boycott of the GDR in international organizations had done damage not least to the organizations themselves and their aim of universality. It is therefore no coincidence and is almost of symbolic significance that the unanimous admission of the GDR to UNESCO a few weeks ago was acclaimed by all delegations.

The admission of the GDR and the FRG to the United Nations is even more in the interest of its Member States and the world organization itself. The GDR has always advocated membership of the United Nations. It welcomes the FRG's decision to initiate with the ratification procedure the necessary steps to achieve membership of the United Nations as soon as possible.

As has been repeatedly emphasized by party and government leaders in the GDR, the German Democratic Republic would like to see the Basic Treaty enter into force soon. It is prepared to speed up the ratification process if the FRG will do the same.

The entry into force of the Treaty will establish the basis for normal relations of peaceful co-existence between the GDR and the FRG. There is a variety of fields in which the GDR and the FRG can, and should, develop business-like relations for their mutual benefit and advantage in spite of their different social systems. Such possibilities are mentioned in Article 7 of the Treaty and in the Supplementary Protocol. As a rule, negotiations will commence after the entry into force of the Treaty. In some cases they will start sooner. For instance, negotiations between the GDR and FRG on a posts and telecommunications agreement have meanwhile begun. After the signing of the Treaty, the Border Commission of the two States will be constituted whose task is to mark the border existing between the GDR and the FRG and help to regulate other problems connected with the course of the border.

Before signing the Treaty, Herr Bahr and I signed and exchanged letters relating to Article 9 of the Treaty and concerning the opening of four additional road-crossing points at the time of the entry into force of the Treaty. In a further letter I have also notified Herr Bahr of the steps the GDR will take to facilitate border-crossing travel and visitor traffic, and of some other measures which the GDR will undertake after the entry into force of the Treaty. Herr Bahr has acknowledged the receipt of that letter.

On the occasion of the signing of the Treaty, I wish to refer to our agreement that the extension to Berlin (West) of agreements and arrangements envisaged in the Supplementary Protocol to Article 7 may be agreed in each case in accordance with the Quadripartite Agreement of 3 September 1971.

The permanent mission of the Federal Republic of Germany in the German Democratic Republic will represent the interests of Berlin (West) in accordance with the Quadripartite Agreements of 3 September 1971.

Arrangements between the German Democratic Republic and the Senate remain unaffected.

I also refer to the fact that the two Governments have agreed to consult each other in the process of the normalization of relations between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany on questions of mutual interest, in particular on those which are of importance for the safeguarding of peace in Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Treaty and its related documents are intended to establish the basis for a new relationship between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. They can guarantee that the two States, irrespective of their different social systems, may in future live together in peace as good neighbours. We do not pretend that this road will be an easy one. But the Treaty can become a turning-point for the better. It has been signed at a time of growing European détente. The Treaty itself serves the cause of détente. May it prove to be an element in the construction of European peace.