

Press conference given by Walter Scheel (11 August 1970)

Caption: On 11 August 1970, West German Foreign Minister, Walter Scheel, replies to questions from the press relating to the signature, the following day in Moscow, of the Germano-Soviet Treaty.

Source: The Treaty of August 12, 1970 between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Bonn: Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 1970. 204 p. p. 174-183.

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Press conference given by Federal Foreign Minister Scheel in Bonn (11 August 1970)

Question:

You told the Cabinet that you believed the signature of this treaty would aid the talks on the future of Berlin. What reasons do you have for this assumption?

Federal Foreign Minister Scheel:

Berlin talks have been broken off until after the summer recess. They will then be resumed. There is no doubt that there is a connection between the policy of detente, which involves the whole of Europe, and one of the most important points, namely Berlin, where tension can become dangerous. Berlin is still capable of producing tensions. The Four Allies are all striving to limit these possibilities. The talks we have had, and the conclusion of the treaty, have influenced the continued progress of the Four Allies' negotiations, and it has been — I take it that everyone will be able to follow me — a positive influence.

Question:

What consequences on your talks could today's publication of the treaty text in the German Press have?

Federal Minister Scheel:

We shall be having no further talks on this treaty in Moscow, but we are flying to Moscow today to sign the treaty. The only thing one can say about these publications is that they no longer have any political effect, although they damage our prestige.

Question:

How did the Cabinet session assess the Opposition's letter ?

Federal Minister Scheel:

The Federal Government took note of the letter and heard the opinion of the Federal Chancellor. He will reply to this letter directly after returning from Moscow. As a preliminary judgment, I may say that the letter opens up the possibility of talks with the Opposition on these questions.

Question:

Did the Cabinet discuss the letter or only take note of it ?

Federal Minister Scheel:

The Cabinet took note of the letter and the Federal Chancellor gave the Cabinet his opinion on how he will deal with it, namely by replying to it after his return.

Question:

Did representatives of the Opposition see the texts which are published in DIE WELT and in BILD ?

Federal Minister Scheel:

Yes. Already the day before yesterday. But I wish to draw no conclusions from this; this I would like to stress unequivocally.

Question:

Why were copies not collected in as they were at the Cabinet session ?

Federal Minister Scheel:

It was necessary to leave individual members of the Parliamentary Parties a text for careful preparation of the talks on the subject matter arranged in the last few days. In any case, there remains only a short time until the signature.

Question:

A satisfactory solution of the Berlin question as we understand it, which we would make a precondition of ratification, surely presupposes the Four Points—access, etc.—you have frequently mentioned?

Federal Minister Scheel:

The Berlin negotiations are being conducted not by us but by the Allies. I have frequently named, both here and elsewhere, the points under discussion. These have not changed, so that we recognize precisely what can be termed a satisfactory solution. On this we need no further instructions from any side. We have also been talking this over for a long time with our Allies and are in full agreement with them.

Question:

In its letter, the CDU made the final endorsement of the treaty dependent not only on a satisfactory Berlin solution, but also on the relationship between the two states in Germany. Is this also your opinion ?

Federal Minister Scheel:

You know that the Federal Government has always seen a close connection between the negotiations with the Soviet Union and Poland and future negotiations with Czechoslovakia and talks with the German Democratic Republic. This connection still remains. We expressed it in one of the guiding principles which Herr Bahr agreed on in Moscow with Mr. Gromyko. This does not mean, however, that all these effort, treaties, agreements and pacts must be signed in one day or be debated in one day in the Bundestag. Here, I believe, one must maintain the flexibility that is necessary when one has undertaken to solve such an extensive political complex.

Question:

Does this mean that the Federal Government would present Parliament with a treaty with Moscow for its ratification, if by then there were still no recognisable progress in the relationship between Bonn and East Berlin?

Federal Minister Scheel:

That depends on the conditions existing at that time.

Question:

Has the Cabinet decided to invite Kosygin to Bonn or renewed the previous invitation ?

Federal Minister Scheel:

No decision was taken on this. It depends on the talks the Federal Chancellor has in Moscow.

Question:

You have spoken of the Soviets' economic motives for concluding the treaty. Could you say something more on what we will make of the situation?

Federal Minister Scheel:

I have said that the Soviet Union has certainly considered its own economic position as a motive. It knows that it can only narrow the gap behind the world's leading group if an increase is made possible in economic and industrial cooperation with the countries of the West. If one thinks of industrial cooperation, this means long-term planning. As I understand it, the Soviet Union does not want to base such long-term planning on an insecure political foundation. Its efforts are aimed at achieving secure political relations with its neighbours in Western Europe, among them the Federal Republic of Germany, which has here a particular importance, as it is situated in the centre of Europe, and because it is an industrially significant partner in the EEC. That is one of several motives. There are also others which cause the Soviet Union to seek improved cooperation with the Western countries.

Question:

Are economic negotiations foreseen in Moscow when the time is ripe?

Federal Minister Scheel:

The preamble to the treaty contains a section which points to future possibilities for cooperation. But so far, no concrete agreement has been reached on economic negotiations. These could, however, be arrived at in

the future.

Question:

Could you say something about the prospects for negotiations with Czechoslovakia and Hungary ?

Federal Minister Scheel:

I have frequently expressed my opinion here on the problem of negotiation with Czechoslovakia. I believe we should first let time take its course in order to distance ourselves to some extent from the Moscow treaty and to observe how it affects our relations with the remaining countries of the Warsaw Pact. I assume that we shall also come into contact with Czechoslovakia in the foreseeable future, for we have indicated in our talks with the Soviet Union that rulings formulated in a treaty with Czechoslovakia are also necessary. The course of the coming months will show when such talks can be opened.

Question:

How do you rate the chance of a European Security Conference after the Moscow talks?

Federal Minister Scheel:

The NATO countries issued a declaration in Rome which furthered plans for a European Security Conference (ESC). This declaration concerned the reduction of troops in Central Europe. In the meantime, there has been considerable diplomatic activity to begin preparations for a conference as soon as possible. I believe the conclusion of the treaty has had a positive influence on plans for such a conference, as the members of NATO have repeatedly affirmed the principle of such a conference in their consultations, but have with justification pointed out that progress must first be made in bilateral relations, in order to see whether a state of affairs has been reached in which there is hope for a successful conference. The treaty is one proof that improvement can be achieved. But the real test would be the favourable conclusion of negotiations on Berlin.

Question:

Has the wish been expressed to you in Moscow that the Federal Government should press for the calling of such a conference among its allies? If so, what was your reaction?

Federal Minister Scheel:

The Soviet Union has previously, but not at present, expressed the wish to promote such a conference to all members of NATO and other organizations. The talks conducted by Herr Bahr in Moscow also made mention of preparing for an ESC. During my stay, I talked with my conversation partner, Foreign Minister Gromyko, less about the date and more about the subject of such a conference during a comprehensive discussion, and also about other suggestions on the subject of the reduction of troops in Central Europe. But my conversation partner did not express any wish to me that we should press our allies for this conference. We are in diplomatic contact on this subject.

Question:

State-Secretary Bahr wrote in "The Bulletin" of August 10, 1970, that the Soviet Government will cease its internal propaganda against the Federal Republic in carrying out this treaty. What will happen if it does not cease this propaganda? Could this delay the process of ratification? What would happen if this propaganda ceased until ratification, and were then resumed immediately afterwards?

Federal Minister Scheel:

A treaty is only worth what one makes of it after its conclusion. Impressively formulated treaties which are afterwards not fulfilled or which cannot be fulfilled, are of no great value.

In this sense, one can probably not assess the historical significance of the treaty at present. One can only do this much later. We shall do what is expected of us to make of the treaty what it should be—an opportunity to improve relations not only between the Soviet Union and ourselves, and not only between the Federal Republic and the countries of the Warsaw Pact, but also an opportunity for improving relations on a broad front across the whole of Europe between Western and Eastern countries, and a treaty which should relieve

tensions with world-wide repercussions. What is afterwards made of the treaty text, only the future will show, and that will be the responsibility of future politicians in both countries.

Question:

What have you to say to the statement of Senator Mansfield that the treaty is a good thing because it will allow America to withdraw her troops?

Federal Minister Scheel:

Absolutely nothing happens in Europe without Senator Mansfield regarding it as basis for the withdrawal of troops.

Question:

About the European Security Conference. Did you indicate to your partners in the talks that the Federal Government considers progress can only be made in this respect if a minimal requirement of normalisation has previously been achieved between the two German states? And what was Gromyko's opinion on this point?

Federal Minister Scheel:

The Soviet Government is aware of this argument. I mentioned it again during our talks. A direct answer to this opinion is not to be expected and was not forthcoming. What is now happening is of course an attempt to hasten the remaining necessary agreements with the countries of the Warsaw Pact after the conclusion of the treaty with the Soviet Union. As a whole, this also belongs to a favourable preparation for a conference on questions of European security. Whether one begins at an earlier stage the diplomatic preparations for this conference depends not only on the Federal Republic and not only on the Soviet Union, but also on those European countries, and the United States and Canada, who, as future participants in such a conference, will have to express their own opinion on it. It is not yet known exactly when diplomatic preparation can realistically begin.

Question:

Did you gain the impression during your talks with Gromyko on the subject of the EEC that the Soviets expect you to act as a kind of pathfinder in contacts between COMECON and the EEC?

Federal Minister Scheel:

I did not gain the impression that the Soviet Union wished to make use of a pathfinder in its political and diplomatic initiatives in Western Europe. It was in another sense that I spoke to Mr. Gromyko about the EEC. I represented the situation to my conversation partner as it is, because I believe the Soviet Union must also face realities if it wants to conduct a European policy. The reality is that we are involved in a process of increasing integration in Western Europe, and that we shall have, in a few years, perhaps even by the end of next year, an economic community consisting of ten members.

Also that in ten years we shall have an economic union and possibly also a European currency, that the EEC will be not only a significant, but even the greatest factor in the world market and that we will have developed during the same period a high degree of political cooperation in Western Europe. That is the reality in which we now find ourselves. I drew Mr. Gromyko's attention to the fact that it would be useful for the Soviet Union and the members of the Warsaw Pact to adjust themselves to this development.

Question:

What did he say to this ?

Federal Minister Scheel:

He listened very closely to these explanations. We afterwards had an interesting talk on general questions of world economic policy, of European trade policy, and on questions concerning possible contacts between the EEC and COMECON.

Question:

Do I understand you correctly that you touched on the subject of the EEC?

Federal Minister Scheel:

I touched on the subject in a conversation which also dealt with many other subjects.

von Wechmar:

The Federal Cabinet has assigned the Federal Chancellor and the Federal Foreign Minister with the task of signing the treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in Moscow.