

Address given by Willy Brandt on the Basic Treaty (Bonn, 15 February 1973)

Caption: On 15 February 1973, the German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, announces to the Bundestag the significance of the Basic Treaty signed on 21 December 1972 between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

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First debate on the Basic Treaty in the German Bundestag

Mr Speaker, ladies and gentlemen,

In my first statement to this House on 15 December last — in this, the seventh electoral term of the German Bundestag — I announced that the Federal Government would be signing the ‘Treaty on the Basis of Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic’ before Christmas. As you know, the Treaty was signed on 21 December 1972.

Referring to this Treaty in my government statement on 18 January this year, I said that we were determined to implement the Treaty with the GDR in a politically and legally consistent manner and to put meat on the bones of the Treaty to the benefit of the people of both States. At that time, I also pointed out that, in my view, we had a long and stony road ahead of us. Despite this, I said that I thought that we now had a better framework for the achievement of equilibrium in Europe — equilibrium between East and West. By this I meant the Treaties of Moscow and Warsaw, the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin, the associated agreements at German level, and the Basic Treaty or, as others choose to abbreviate it, the Treaty on the Basis of Relations with the GDR.

From the Government’s perspective therefore, ladies and gentlemen, this is how the Bills that we are considering today should be viewed. Mr Speaker, when I say ‘the Bills that we are considering today’, I mean both the one that you have just read out and the other one concerning our proposed accession to the United Nations. Both Bills — including, therefore, the one that concerns the Federal Republic of Germany’s signature of the United Nations Charter — written justifications have been distributed to which I may refer.

Perhaps I may just add this before we go any further. The foreign and intra-German policy issues that have taken up so much of our time over the past few years will no doubt continue to be bones of contention for some time to come. But they will not necessarily be resolved by the length of the debates or by the repetition of contributions to the discussion. The electorate has, at all events, made its views known. But we shall have to make our views known yet again, once these matters have been discussed in committee and before a final vote is taken here in the Bundestag.

Besides, unless I am very much mistaken, ladies and gentlemen, with all the differences of opinion one aspect has *not* been a matter of dispute. That is to say, that the individual stages and components of our East-West policy — or, as I like to say, our policy of actively ‘helping to secure peace’ — have to be seen in relation to each other.

Our relationship with the GDR may certainly not be viewed in isolation from our relations with the other members of the Warsaw Pact. I should like to make four points about bilateral matters.

First: the Treaty with the USSR, which the previous Bundestag approved, is already having absolutely positive repercussions. The Economic Commission talks that have been going on in Moscow have underlined the will of both States to develop bilateral cooperation on a realistic but consistent basis. Mr Friderichs, the Federal Minister of Economic Affairs, who yesterday also met with Mr Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, told me from the Soviet capital that he, the Minister, sees considerable opportunities for progress in the areas of exchange and cooperation. That was my first point.

The second is as follows. From the consultations that took place at senior official level early this month in Warsaw, capital of the People’s Republic of Poland, it is clear that the two governments are able to talk to each other objectively and with considerable openness, even on very difficult and complex matters. That is not perfect, but it is an improvement. This, ladies and gentlemen, gives us hope that progress may be made to our mutual benefit. From our point of view, family reunification is still a particularly important issue here.

Third: we have been listening carefully to statements from Prague about the relationship between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. It is, of course, a well-known fact that we distance ourselves both politically and morally from the policy — Hitler’s policy of aggression —

that led to the Munich Agreement. We are also prepared to consider the Munich Agreement void. We hope — and, in my opinion, with goodwill on both sides this should be possible — that a joint form of words may be found for such a declaration.

Fourth: It is well known — but I should like to emphasise the fact again here — that the Federal Government has, for some time, been interested in establishing diplomatic relations with Hungary and Bulgaria as well.

In the government statement of 18 January, I referred to the *multilateral* phase of East-West relations that has now been initiated.

Let me make three further remarks about this subject.

First: the Quadripartite Agreement which came into effect in early summer 1972 tangibly improved the situation in and around Berlin. While we do not wish to disregard or even make light of particular problems, in my opinion they should not spoil our view of the very much improved overall situation. The new problems will not be solved, for the most part, by routinely reviving earlier proposals and considerations again. The Federal Government would, at all events, like to help ensure that the Agreement on Berlin operates smoothly in every single respect.

Second: the positive view taken by the Federal Foreign Minister in the report which he published in late January on his talks in Paris covering, amongst other things, preparations for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (as you know, he cannot be here for this debate, but I am sure that he will be following it on television; and I am sure that we all wish him a speedy recovery) has, as a result of the preliminary negotiations that have continued in the interim, proved to be the correct view. Our delegation in Helsinki was and is taking an active and constructive part. We believe that the meeting of Foreign Ministers may take place in the summer.

Third: it is in the other efforts to achieve *détente* in Europe, that is to say, in the preliminary discussions that recently began in Vienna on issues involving the evenly balanced reduction of troops, that we have seen the major problems in this field from the outset (is anyone really surprised?!). We are in close contact with the parties concerned, especially the United States; we are determined to support these talks, and we hope that greater security and better cooperation may be achieved in Europe through future conferences.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wanted to draw your attention to these points because, in my opinion, the Treaty with the GDR must not be viewed in isolation. Naturally, there is a decidedly national dimension to this problem and, hence, to the Treaty that we are debating today. However, we are also concerned with that other dimension arising from the fact that both the superpowers and the countries of Europe have moved on from the Cold War.

Now we have to ask this question, ladies and gentlemen: was and is it possible to organise *détente* in Europe without the two German States making their contribution — irrespective of what they think of each other and what others think of them? In my opinion the answer is No.

We Germans — and this has been my firm conviction for years — would have come into conflict with a mainstream of international political events if they — if we — had wanted to set ourselves up as or on islands of ossified hostility in a Europe which, despite all the differences that still exist, is interested in cooperation.

Détente in Europe is not possible without the participation of the two German States. It is especially not possible without the active involvement of the Federal Republic of Germany, except at the cost of destroying our friendly relations with our partners and allies in the West.

This cannot be said plainly enough. Our policy, as also reflected in the Treaty of 21 December 1972, is in line with one of the fundamental decisions of the post-war period which the world powers have left

untouched. And that is to start from the legacy of the Second World War — Hitler's war and the war of the Third Reich — in terms of a new map of Europe. What that means, though, whether we like it or not, is that, at present, all the vital factors that affect us take as their starting point the division of Germany and the fact that lines of demarcation have become national frontiers.

In 1973 it is no doubt also possible to claim that in 1953 — or at any other time after 1945 — it would have been right and proper to give the German people the right to decide on unification and so to give them the opportunity to commit themselves as one people to the peace and welfare of Europe. I would not and could not oppose any such claim, because I myself have advocated this with genuine conviction. I do not conceal the fact, and I am not ashamed of it.

However, it is well known that, in politics, and especially in international politics, whether something is right or not or whether something becomes or remains right, is not decided on the basis of abstract categories. Actual events, the historical process, influence and alter political positions as well as opinions as to what is politically considered to be right. Today, the fact is that there is no shortcut to German unity. Furthermore, we as Germans can no longer break free from our considerable dependence on Europe — in fact, and this is what we are specifically talking about here, we probably no longer even wish to do so.

Ladies and gentlemen, the purpose of the Treaty before you today, as our partners know, is not to prevent a state of peace in Europe in which Germans as a whole could also freely decide how they want their life together to be organised. On the contrary, if possible, if at all possible, the purpose of the Treaty is to help prevent our nation from drifting further apart, from ceasing to have a life together. The purpose of the Treaty is to help make communication between the people of Germany easier and better. And its purpose is to make us sure in our own minds that the desire for unity and our sense of unity remain the basis for the continued existence of the nation.

Although what I have to say now may not be termed a common objective of the parties to the Treaty, we are convinced that the Treaty is intended to benefit, and will benefit, the people of Germany and peace in Europe. The Treaty has been negotiated between equals; it could not have come into being otherwise. And it has not helped either side to gain the upper hand. It could, of course, only ever be a compromise. If I did not think that it was a workable compromise, I would not be supporting the Treaty.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Treaty certainly does not enable us to duck the question of what is to become of the German nation. The text at least acknowledges its existence — that is to say, that both the question and the nation exist.

We and the GDR were unable to find a common reply. That should not come as a surprise and is no secret. To conclude, as I have read, that this 'seals' the division is, however, to disregard the real facts of the situation.

And, ladies and gentlemen, attention is not being diverted away from the depressing reality of a division that has now lasted more than 25 years when we ask two questions. First, in all its history, has the nation not spanned front lines that cut through Germany for far longer than it has lived within common borders? And, second, has this nation not, for centuries, lived with border crossings and fragments in the centre of this continent and yet remained a nation — or become one again?

Even here, in the Bundestag, many have lamented the fact that the Germans, or Germans, have no sense of their own history. They have praised the sense of history enjoyed by other peoples. All that I want to say about that today is this: in my view, learning lessons from our history means also recognising and being confident that a Basic Treaty with the GDR does *not* cut short the nation's history. On the contrary, and we are not fooling ourselves here, the Treaty gives the nation new, albeit limited, possibilities after the decades of naked hostility that have undoubtedly destroyed national fibre.

Besides, and this was referred to only yesterday afternoon in another connection, our road has led us into the European Community, which it is our will and that of our partners to see become the European Union before

the end of the decade. If that is not just hot air but a real opinion and intention, it does not help to bury your head in the sand. Instead, we should immediately add that the GDR, with its system of government, with its social system, is now firmly integrated and aligned with the other Eastern European states. And I am not displaying German arrogance when I also say that the other German State plays an important part both in CMEA — or Comecon as we usually call it in the West — and in the Warsaw Pact.

Ladies and gentlemen, what becomes of Germany, what becomes of the relationship between the German States, between the parts of the German people, depends to a large extent — and this is not the first time that I have said this here — on the future relationship between the different parts of Europe. That is why we Germans can only welcome it when bridges are built from one part of Europe to another, between States, perhaps even between alliances, in any event for the benefit of people and peace. That is also why my introductory remarks here today touched on the bilateral and multilateral aspects of the policy of *détente*.

Ladies and gentlemen, the relaxation of tension and active measures to secure peace come about at numerous levels, and these levels are mutually related, interconnected. In this network of talks, terms and treaties, the Treaty with the GDR, which starts from the specific state of affairs and takes it into account, is a major factor for which there was and is no replacement.

There were times when many feared that be a Third World War might break out because of Germany. The purpose of the Treaties of Moscow and Warsaw, of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin, of the supplementary German agreements and now of the Basic Treaty — the purpose of the entire body of agreements — is to prevent peace in Europe from ever again being jeopardised by Germany or ‘from German soil’.

But, ladies and gentlemen, I cannot possibly know — and which of you here would like to be certain! — what exactly will happen over the ‘German Questions’. I hope, however, that, in our replies to the ‘German Questions’ — and I deliberately use the plural here — at this time the world will be able to discern reason, goodwill and progress in the direction of Europe. Here in Germany, as we live alongside each other and in the togetherness that we want so much, peace will have to stand the test of time. Here it can still be disturbed; here it could, at worst, still be destroyed.

That is why, without pomposity but in all seriousness, we are taking the promise of refraining from ‘the threat or use of force’ absolutely literally, with no ifs or buts.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me take this opportunity again this morning to warn against indulging in pipe dreams. I said last month, and I have said it again today, that the road would be long and stony. When I said last month that we wanted to reach a situation where there was no more shooting, I did not mean, unfortunately, that such a situation could be created overnight.

On the other hand, when the forthcoming report on the development of relations with the GDR is available in a few weeks’ time, many of our people may then become aware, for the first time, of the number of areas in which a somewhat more positive development is beginning to be seen and how many individuals will benefit. And this is true — something that should not be overlooked — even though the Basic Treaty has not yet entered into force. It is, may I add, not at all convincing when some who direct particularly bitter criticism at the Treaty also complain that there is, as yet, no evidence of its anticipated effects.

I hope that those responsible in the other part of Germany, the GDR, acquire sufficient objectivity to enable them to refrain from small-mindedness and harassment. How, incidentally, could they otherwise hope to play the respected world role they have undertaken to play?

The postal talks with the GDR that were broken off for a few weeks are resuming in Bonn today. The system of agreements itself includes the exchange of letters on work possibilities for journalists, which has now come into force. The purpose of the talks recently begun between government representatives is to put some meat on the bones of the framework agreement.

The Federal Government has made all the preparations — and I emphasise the word ‘preparations’ — to ensure that correspondents from the GDR have the same work possibilities as are available to all journalists here. The GDR has started to respond to our journalists’ applications for accreditation in East Berlin. I am assuming that, after the somewhat tentative start on both sides —

(Jeers from the CDU/CSU.)

— Ladies and gentlemen, if I had to look back on the catalogue of failures in intra-German affairs that you do, I would, at the moment, keep quiet.

(Loud applause from the government parties. Shout from the CDU/CSU: ‘More democracy!’ More jeers from the CDU/CSU.)

— Now that you have had your gripe for a quarter of an hour, you should not be surprised at somebody actually telling you the truth.

We are laboriously working our way out of positions which we should all regret had become so negative.

That is why I say once again: I am assuming that, after the somewhat tentative start on both sides, legitimate journalistic expectations will be met.

Here in the Federal Republic we frequently come across the concern that our open society might suffer as a result of more exchange and contact with what is called the ‘East’; that our open society is not equal to what is called ideological competition with Communism. I say in all seriousness that this betrays a lack of self-confidence: a lack of self-confidence which, in my considered opinion, is not appropriate. I want to say here quite emphatically that our democracy, our political and social order, is strong enough to withstand the competition and also to cope with the criticism of extreme groups, for which, as we all know, the GDR is also a target.

It is absolutely vital that we continue our single-minded efforts to achieve a better social system under the rule of law and that we deepen and defend our liberal democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, our socio-political order and that of the GDR are naturally not compatible. They cannot be reduced to a common denominator. And yet — as (surprisingly) in the case of the United States and the Soviet Union, for example — we do have common interests, and there are possibilities for meeting, for exchange, for at least partial cooperation. To take advantage of these, each side must have the courage to expose itself to the other side’s influence. Anyone who does not have the confidence to do so would be wasting his time talking about the nation.

What we are primarily concerned with — and I have to stress this again and again here — are moves to secure peace on this side of the field, where a decision is still being made on the unity of the nation. I put 20 points before the Chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers in May 1970 when we met in Kassel, the last of which concerned United Nations membership for both States. The Bill concerning the Federal Republic of Germany’s accession is before this House today.

It was, essentially, not a normal state of affairs, in that we had been a member of the UN specialised agencies for many years, had made considerable financial contributions to them and had assisted with their work in many ways. Yet, at the same time, because of the unresolved situation in Germany, because of the irregular relationship between the two German States, we were unable to become a full member of the UN. The policy that we laid down in 1969 and that we have developed since then now gives us freedom to act in this area as well.

The Federal Republic of Germany will, in future, also be able to make its views known in the United Nations General Assembly when international political, economic or cultural problems are to be openly discussed there. The fact that our policy of equilibrium and reconciliation has met with lasting recognition in

the United Nations will make it easier for us to work with them. On the other hand, we must not evade competition with the GDR in this area either. There is no change in the responsibilities and duties which the Four Powers have assumed and confirmed in connection with this procedure.

Ladies and gentlemen, actively securing peace and achieving genuine equilibrium between conflicting interests are some of the most significant and, at the same time, most difficult tasks of our time. They have to be achieved by means of steadily increasing cooperation between all States or between as many States as possible. This requires a joint effort, not least with regard to the relationship between the rich and poor countries. Our efforts should not be absent from this task, which increasingly involves the use of United Nations' instruments.

From the Federal Government's point of view, and in its considered opinion, the Bills before the House for ratification are intended to underline the Federal Republic of Germany's will to help not only to secure peace in the short term but also to develop good-neighbour relations in the longer term both worldwide, in Europe, and with the other German State. To call this chapter of our work to maintain peace and of our diplomatic efforts *Ostpolitik* does not really do it justice, as I have already emphasised, since by their very nature, indeed in their origins, they are at the same time *Westpolitik*.

Ladies and gentlemen, our policy has not weakened the Alliance in which our security is enshrined. On the contrary, it has strengthened it, because our German interests converge with those of our allies. The conclusion of the Treaties of Moscow and Warsaw, the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin and the Basic Treaty have strengthened the consensus within the Alliance.

The European Community sees this policy as an encouragement. It has even led to an impetus for work on the European Union, that is to say, for testing out a Western European foreign policy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to let the two Bills before you today be discussed in committee so that the political decision that needs to be made may be made.