

Address given by Paul-Henri Spaak on the status of Berlin (Washington, 21 November 1961)

Caption: On 21 November 1961, during an address given to the National Press Club in Washington, the Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak draws attention to the issue of settling the status of Berlin.

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Last updated: 03/07/2015

Address given to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., by Mr. Paul-Henri Spaak, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium (12 November 1961)

Mr. Chairman,

Members and Guests of the National Press Club,

I want to thank you for having invited me to your luncheon. Since this is not the first time I have been your guest, I already know how courteous you are, and am aware of the importance of your Association.

Speaking English, I am compelled to read a text which I have prepared. This obligation to write offers me the advantage of being very precise and perhaps clearer.

We are faced with several major problems: East-West relations, the extension of the Common Market through the application for membership of the United Kingdom, and the problem of the Congo.

I shall attempt to define some of my positions on these three problems, holding for further clarification, in reply to your questions, those points which may appear somewhat obscure to you.

East-West Relations — The Berlin Problem

I would like to begin with a double statement of principles which will allow you to understand the spirit in which I approach the difficulties involved.

1. It is my opinion that no country has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to modify unilaterally the international *status quo*. That is why I, along with so many others, reacted very strongly when in November 1958 the Soviet Union posed in rather brutal terms the question of Germany and that of Berlin — in such brutal terms that we were convinced that we were faced with an actual ultimatum. At that time, we believed in good faith, that it was necessary to resolve this dispute before March 1959. Either we were mistaken or the Russians modified their original position.

2. If it is true that no one can take the law into his own hands, it seems to me equally true that no one does not have the right to refuse to negotiate once a problem arises. One cannot indefinitely fall back on the *status quo*. To refuse with obstinacy to negotiate is to create an international situation which, logically, can only be resolved by an explosion.

We should, then, start from the fact that the question of Germany and the question of Berlin have been raised, and that we must try to resolve them through negotiations.

3. Allow me to make another general observation. In certain circles, there is some tendency to confuse negotiation with submission to the will and wishes of the opponent. This is excessive. Each negotiation is not necessarily a Munich. What is debatable about Munich is not that negotiations took place, it is what was accepted as the outcome of those negotiations.

I assert in the most absolute terms that negotiation is not a proof of weakness. One can also negotiate when, being sure of the rightness of his cause, he has decided to defend this cause and bring about its victory in a reasonable manner.

Concerning the German question, and the question of Berlin, I believe, then, that we must negotiate. I believe that the bases for negotiation exist, although this does not mean that negotiation will necessarily succeed.

4. It is common sense to state that one does not know if negotiation will succeed until after undertaking and pursuing such negotiation.

It is quite evident, also, that negotiation cannot begin unless we know exactly what we wish to accomplish. This means that when we are part of an alliance such as the Atlantic alliance, negotiation cannot begin until preliminary agreement is reached with allies and partners on both the goals to be attained, and the procedure to be followed.

It would not be unveiling a great secret to state that this first stage has not yet been reached in the Western camp, that divergent views exist both as to the advisability of negotiation and the objectives to be sought.

5. As for me, I believe there is a preliminary question to settle. Must we have broad negotiation on both the problem of Berlin and the problem of Germany or must we, on the contrary, discuss only the Berlin problem? The very manner in which I have asked this question will give you a good guess regarding my answer. I believe that we must limit ourselves to discussion of the Berlin problem where it seems to me that a solution can be found, and that we must forego settling the more general problem of Germany.

6. Why?

On the German problem, the thesis of the Western world and the thesis of the communist world are so far apart that a compromise cannot possibly be perceived.

The Russians demand the signing of a treaty with the two Germanys, the West wants the reunification of Germany on the basis of self-determination. I must emphasize that this Western position is reasonable. It is difficult to see why, since the principle of self-determination is granted today to all the peoples of the world, only the Germans should be deprived. That our thesis is well-founded is one thing, however, and the possibility of making it triumph is another.

7. One cannot entertain illusions; the Russians will never accept in the present state of things, the Western position.

I think, then, that we must take into account these divergences. We should maintain our position, continue to affirm the right of Germany to reunify by self-determination. As a consequence, we are prevented from signing a peace treaty with East Germany.

De jure recognition of East Germany is tantamount to renunciation of the possibility of reunifying Germany. It is impossible to understand how — and why — you would begin to reunify a country by dividing it.

8. This option being taken, we must approach the question of Berlin; and, there, we know well what we want.

What we want is to guarantee the freedom of two and one-half million Berliners who have declared themselves in the clearest, most concrete, and most solemn way to be foes of communism.

What must be done to guarantee the freedom of these Berliners?

The people of Berlin must, of course, be allowed to choose their institutions freely; there must be, and this is essential, a maintenance of complete freedom of communications between Berlin and the Western world; definite guarantees must be given so that these first two points become a reality; and, last, the possibility of economic life in Berlin must be ensured.

9. With a view to achieving these objectives, on which Western agreement should be easily reached, the procedure has to be settled.

One interesting idea recently published in the press consists of reaching without delay an agreement between the Russians and the Western Big Three, and the insertion of this agreement as a clause in the treaty that the Soviet Union would sign with East Germany. In my opinion, if the problem of Germany and of Berlin could be ended without having conceded on the question of reunification through self-determination, and, if we

could obtain for Berlin a statute that really guarantees its political and economic freedom, I do not see why we could not feel satisfied. A serious crisis would have been overcome and the essential objectives to which we are devoted would be safeguarded.

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