


# Interview with Egon Bahr: Willy Brandt and Charles de Gaulle's conception of Europe (Metz, 10 June 2006)

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[François Klein] How do you view General de Gaulle's policy on Europe at that time?

[Egon Bahr] On the one hand, Brandt admired de Gaulle. Not only for his historical role. Not only because of his key importance for Berlin. The Mayor of Berlin did not answer to the President of the Federal Republic but to the Queen of England, the US President and the French President. He therefore had responsibility for Brandt's city. But also because, in principle, Brandt shared the General's ideas on Europe, namely self-determination, i.e. emancipation from America while remaining loyal to the alliance, to the extent that he defended de Gaulle's position in America and tried to enlist support for it, adding 'Why just de Gaulle? Why can't this also be a German position?' So on the one hand, the two were very much in tune in their thoughts and reflections, sharing a vision of a Europe that could one day overcome its divisions. The General also thought in terms of Europe as a whole, even though he knew very well that, at the time, it was possible to talk only about Western Europe; Brandt was the same.

On the other hand, of course, Brandt failed to understand — to put it mildly — de Gaulle's position with regard to the United Kingdom, and he considered it a great success and was very happy when the situation was resolved in The Hague. It made no difference to him that he thought it possible that Pompidou might welcome the fact that, when the Germans embarked on their Ostpolitik, the British were on board. Because he thought 'They'll see that they have nothing to worry about. I have no ill intentions.'

I must add that, 10 years later, in 1980, Brandt began to wonder whether the General might not have been right. Whether the United Kingdom's keen interest in its special relationship with America might not mean, as he put it at the time, that Britain was not ready for Europe.