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CONFERENCE ON THE GERMAN PROBLEM
IN THE CONTEXT OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS

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THE WEST AND THE GERMAN PROBLEM

Introductory remarks - an outline

by

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- 1) West or Western countries refers here to those countries of North America and Western Europe which :
 - a) maintained or reestablished after World War II political systems founded on liberal democracy and on a market economy; and
 - b) felt a necessity for common answers to the common challenges, external and internal, arising against their way of life.
- 2) At the end of World War II, a German problem existed in the West only for the three powers which controlled part of the German territories. The Germans themselves in that moment had no institutional possibility to express any political view, and the other Western countries were not in any condition to care about the German problem. The first decisions were therefore agreed upon and implemented by the three occupying powers. The G.F.R. is much more a product of common Western concerns than of national German concerns.
- 3) Largely as a consequence of the implementation of those decisions, the German problem became and remained a common concern of all the Western countries, included the West-Germans once they were endowed with the institutions which permitted the expression of their political will.
- 4) For a part of the political and intellectual forces of the G.F.R. the German problem is or should be the first priority problem for German politics, and any joint concern or action with the other Western countries should be subordinated to the paramount exigency of a national solution of the German problem.

However for the greater part of these forces the German problem should be and in fact was until now been conceived within the framework of, and subordinated to the common Western outlook.

- 5) The German problem as a merely national concern may be dealt with in several ways and receive several answers, but has only one formulation: how can the national reunification of the entire people into one political German community be achieved?
- 6) The German problem as a joint concern of the West may also be dealt in several ways and receive several answers, but has a very different formulation which consists of the three following interrelated questions:

- a) how to organize the domestic political life of Western Germany;
 - b) how to organize a permanent and friendly cooperation with the West-German people;
 - c) how to insert the West-German people into the context of East-West relations and tensions.
- 7) The common outlook of the West (if and when it exists) does not have an inherently antinational bias, but certainly has a tendency to downgrade the importance of merely national aims. If the national objectives of one of the states of the West may be made a part of common policy they are assumed without difficulty. If such aims cannot be included, they are not as a rule, openly rejected but strong tendencies operate in order to supersede them with other problems. It is evident that such tendencies may be successful only on the condition that the common purpose is real and momentous.

In any case contradictions may emerge between common and national interests; they may be solved not through historical, juridical or moral considerations, but in the course of political tensions and subsequent agreements in the Western system.

- 8) The answer given to the question of domestic political life has been the construction of liberal democracy and a prosperous economy in West-Germany and West Berlin. The implementation of these aims was a precondition for the creation of an atmosphere of reciprocal trust between West Germany and the rest of the West. The many real shortcomings which may be and have been denounced in this process show that success was not and indeed could not have been unqualified, but they also underline how great it was. The high degree of consensus, freely and frequently expressed by the West Germans about this political and economic reconstruction, and the very low degree of nationalistic restlessness in the political life of the G.F.R., are the most evident proofs of the success.
- 9) The Western countries were in the long run unable to continue to discriminate against Germany. Germany had to be accepted as a strong industrial country, and as a country with strong military necessities. At the same time Germany was feared by her Western neighbours, both as an economic and as a military power.

The way out of this dilemma was the gradual construction of European unity and the inclusion of the G.F.R. in the Atlantic Organization. Both systems are not merely Western answers to the friendly cooperation with West Germany, but they are also answers to this problem. They are both important factors of internal order in the European and Atlantic area. The European Community puts the German economy on equal footing with all the others, but it transforms it progressively into a part of a common supranational economic system. The Atlantic Organization, even with its lower degree of integration, gives West Germany military responsibilities, but deprives it of the practical possibility of independent military action.

The West Germans have accepted both commitments, with some initial misgivings, due to the feeling that both systems brought them astray from concentration on the question of reunification. Successively however the conviction grew that these commitments were new world ventures of fundamental importance.

Both ventures, European and Atlantic, are incomplete and their final success is far from being sure. In any event they have been the only positive contribution given to the question of how to establish friendly relations with West Germany and how to engage them willingly in constructive and permanent joint activities which might reduce the importance of their merely national aims.

- 10) The first stage of East-West relations was that of the Cold War, i.e. that of a very strong ideological and propagandistic antagonism on about almost all relevant questions. During this period both democrats and communists were convinced that the other regime had no inner solidity and that it was therefore useful to continue all possible accusations against it.

In this situation no one felt any strong reason to act cautiously either initially in destroying German unity or subsequently in demanding German reunification. In fact both rivals asked only that the other part of Germany be reabsorbed in their own sphere. The demand was first put forward by Stalin, then by the Western Allies. Only on the footsteps of the world powers it was adopted by Western and Eastern German parties and governments.

In this period the G.F.R. proclaimed her right to represent all Germans, and declared that national reunification was the supreme aim of her policy. All other Western countries agreed. Neither the G.F.R. nor her Western friends ever thought in terms of military conquest, since the Atlantic military system had only defensive capabilities. The reunification was not a real but only a declaratory policy.

- 11) When, some time after the death of Stalin, the search for detente began, the contradiction appeared evident between the balance of world power on the one hand, which froze in a permanent way the frontier between democratic and communist countries in Europe, and, on the other hand, claims for territories belonging to the other camp.

Khrushchev was the first to drop the Eastern version of reunification and to launch the more realistic doctrine of the permanent existence of two German States. The other communist governments, and in particular that of the G.D.R., adopted the same attitude without great difficulty.

In the West, where there is a much less centrally managed political life, the search for new guidelines has been and is much slower and more complex. However it was felt here too, that a minimum of correspondence had to be established between the words that were employed and the actions that were carried out, because from now on it would be necessary and useful to establish a minimum of mutual understanding between Western and Eastern countries.

- 12) The relaxation of the East-West tension, having caused a relaxation of the inner cohesion of both camps as well, gave West Germany greater freedom of initiative, in her foreign policy. But for a long time the Bonn government remained a prisoner of its own doctrine. Only the great "coalition", having called both great parties to governmental responsibility, was able to introduce new patterns into the foreign policy of Bonn.

During the Cold War, to say that the reunification had to be a precondition for any serious policy of detente, had no practical consequence, because in any event detente seemed impossible. The only consequence of repeating the same thing today would mean creating artificial obstacles to good commercial, and perhaps later political as well, relations between the G.F.R. and the Eastern countries. It was therefore declared that German reunification should remain the highest objective of any German government, but that it should no

longer be put forward as a precondition for the development of the détente. Reunification should on the contrary be the final step of détente itself.

There are many ambiguities in this policy. It may be conceived of as a way to isolate the G.D.R. in order to obtain in one way or another some sort of capitulation of East Germany. It may also be conceived of as a method of progressively educating public opinion in the G.F.R. towards accepting growing and more regular relations with the G.D.R.

To say that reunification will be the conclusion of a long period of détente, means in fact that reunification is only one of the possible conclusions of the détente.

- 13) No Western country, outside of the G.F.R., is particularly pleased by the prospect of the rebirth in Central Europe of a mighty state of 80 millions inhabitants. But no Western government is ready to come into conflict with the G.F.R. on this issue. Therefore they go on giving lip-service to their solidarity on the question of the reunification, while hoping that Bonn's diplomacy will reach some reasonable solution.

They have however an indirect way of exerting a strong influence on the G.F.R.. If they are able to maintain and develop the common European and Atlantic ventures, to provide them with new and larger goals, and to reinforce their supranational structure, the Western countries shall contribute to giving the relations between East and West Germany an increasingly cultural and human, rather than political, nature.

If, on the contrary, they fail in these ventures and relapse into the so-called "Europe of the States", or of the Fatherlands, then the G.F.R. shall be obliged to conceive her foreign policy more and more in terms of reconstruction of a national and sovereign Germany. And as the supranational alternatives in Eastern Europe are, as of now, non-existent, it would be very probable that at a certain moment the two Germanies will suddenly reach the melting point. At that moment the present world equilibrium would be destroyed in Europe, and many things which seem today practically inconceivable would become again possible.

- 14) Questions such as the Oder-Neisse-frontier, the status of Berlin, and the nuclear status of Germany, are not autonomous problems, but only aspects and/or derivations of the central problem concerning the degree of priority that the problem of German reunification occupies in the real foreign policy of the Western countries and of West Germany. This is why, although in themselves very important, they have not been examined in this outline of the German problem seen as an object of Western concern.

