

July 3, 1973

**Notes on a conversation between the GDR and FRG
Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Otto Winzer and Walter
Scheel, on 3 July 1973**

Citation:

"Notes on a conversation between the GDR and FRG Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Otto Winzer and Walter Scheel, on 3 July 1973", July 3, 1973, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PA AA: MfAA C 376/78
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/110104>

Summary:

Notes on a conversation between the GDR and FRG foreign ministers on inter-German relations and the CSCE negotiations.

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

Helsinki, 3 July 1973[1] [2]

Notes on a conversation between the GDR's and the FRG's Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Otto Winzer and Walter Scheel,[3] on 3 July 1973

The conversation started at 18.10 and ended at 18.40. It took place at the suggestion of Mr. Scheel. The conversation took place in a room in Finlandia Hall.[4] The GDR was represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer and Dr. Bock, Head of Department in the MfAA, the FRG by the head of the policy planning staff in the Auswaertiges Amt, Dr. Brunner, and the Political Director[5] of the Auswaertiges Amt, Mr. van Well.[6]

After the journalist had left the room, Comrade Winzer opened the conversation by referring to Minister Scheel's having suggested the talk and asking Scheel about his motives for this.

Scheel explained that being here in Helsinki offered the opportunity to talk for the first time.[7] There would be more opportunities for such meetings in the future. He was thinking of the stay in New York in the context of the United Nations assembly.[8] Getting used to each other would be part of a process of normalisation. This process had started with the beginning of the development of our mutual relationship. The two [German] states would have to coexist in international affairs in the future. It was up to us now to make the best of it. This would also be in the interest of other states and it would have repercussions for the people at home. The huge numbers of journalists and photographers present had proven that recent developments were in accordance with people's needs and interests. At the Security Conference, for the first time, both German states were making their representations [in parallel]. Therefore, we should talk about how to manage this. Both states have diverging attitudes in a lot of matters. However, in matters of foreign policy this was less true than for those problems connected to the social systems. When we would face an international problem, it would be useful to have an exchange over it. Hence we would give the rest of the world and other states a shining example. We should put common things in the foreground and put matters where we are holding divergent attitudes in the background. Of course, this does not mean ignoring divergent attitudes, and this does not exclude disputes.

Minister Winzer said that in this respect there were deeply rooted divergent convictions which could not be denied. Obviously this would have effects on foreign policy and on attitudes towards international matters. But if we assume that relations of peaceful coexistence between states of different social systems are possible, then this was also true for the relationship between the GDR and the FRG. Without abandoning fundamental positions, we are prepared - where possible - to represent mutual positions. In this respect Minister Scheel argued that the FRG would not hesitate to speak of common interests. Comrade Winzer continued that both states would obviously be in Helsinki to contribute to the success of the conference. Maybe the FRG defines the success of the conference somewhat differently from the GDR. Nevertheless, both states should have an interest in not putting a strain on the conference by disagreements between our two states.

Minister Scheel stated that there were differences stemming from differing convictions. But it would be a genuine basic principle of the FRG's government to secure a sustainable peace. To this end one has to develop more cooperation between the states of East and West. This would certainly be a bold undertaking, but any cooperation needed to be organised first. Certainly there would be nuances in approaching cooperation. The East would rather emphasise collective aspects whereas the West was putting the main weight on the individual aspects. These points of view should not prevent us from doing what we considered to be necessary. Both sides had hesitated for long to take this step; what was now set in motion was a

positive development. [. . .]

Comrade Winzer continued stating that there were a lot of questions necessitating direct contact between the two Foreign Ministries. This would be in the interest of the role of both German states in international politics. Minister Scheel replied that this would not be excluded by the Basic Treaty.[9] It was for different reasons that a special construction had been found for the relations between the FRG and the GDR. [. . .]

Minister Scheel stated that the GDR's representation in Bonn would formally stay in contact with the Chancellor's office. But at the same time it would have contact with all state agencies possible. If it would be considered necessary, this would include communication with the Foreign Office.

Comrade Winzer explained that the more normal our relations became, the better our cooperation would develop. Within this meeting he would not want to elaborate on the FRG's reasons for this construction. This went so far as even to deny the CD number plates to the cars of the GDR's representatives.[10]

Minister Scheel replied that there are no special number plates for CD cars, but just a certain code of numbers. This would be a technical question. In his opinion it would be decisive that the GDR's representation in the FRG would have all rights emanating from international conventions. Concerning diplomatic protocol it made no difference if the GDR in such a technical question as a list of diplomats would be listed in a special category. But one by one those questions would certainly be settled.

To this, Comrade Winzer remarked that we would like these questions to be settled. We could not ignore that behind the "formal questions" - as you call them - there is the intention of a special inner-German relationship. And this we cannot accept.

Minister Scheel replied that currently an evolution would be taking place; when the foreign ministers of both states will meet again at the security conference in three years' time, the talks would not be about such questions. In reply, Minister Winzer explained that we should be honest about this. The inner-German special relationship was a concept aiming at liquidation of the GDR as a socialist state.

No one was talking about this any more, Scheel answered. What they wanted was not to abandon the goal of national unity. But they would strictly adhere to the principle of not intervening in the other German state's internal affairs. They did not intend any changes and they would not prepare for them either. Perhaps some day even the GDR would say that the idea of the unity of the nation is stronger than it assumes today. After all, the German nation had survived thousands of years while social systems had changed. We had a clear priority: Above all ranked peace, and the idea of the nation's unity had been pushed back behind this. If the policy of maintaining the nation's unity was not aggressive, pursuing it could not be evil.

Minister Winzer explained that we could not agree with this. We would not give up our well-known stance. It could not be the purpose of this short meeting to undertake an elaborate discussion over these matters. It would be crucial that we refrain from fighting each other about international issues. No doubt should remain that we [the GDR] represented the view of the socialist states like the FRG did that of NATO.

However, with regard to our international relations, we should do what other socialist and capitalist states also did in their mutual relationships, namely working from the principles of peaceful coexistence. These principles would not only include politics, they applied to various other areas as well. This included the whole scope of mutual relations and went beyond mere political declarations. The normalisation [of

relations] on the basis of peaceful coexistence ought to cover all areas, for example also the field of trade, and [Winzer continued] literally: "which you described as being a brace for inner-German relations". Minister Scheel noted that cooperation in the field of trade was a benefit one must not give up, it was especially in the GDR's interest.

Comrade Winzer declared that - as a matter of fact - it was the FRG that pursued this kind [of trade cooperation] actively due to the FRG's special interests. But this was also a question one could not talk about in detail during this short meeting. Lots of journalists were waiting in front of the door. Certainly they would ask about the issues the ministers had talked about. Minister Scheel replied one could tell them that the course of the conference was in the centre of our conversation. He had two minor questions, to which he expected some answers. But it was certainly not appropriate to pose them right away during this meeting. Maybe one could give this task to the members of the delegations. One question - for example - was about the permission for two television teams for shooting films in the GDR.

Comrade Winzer explained that this was certainly not a matter of principle necessitating consultations between the foreign ministers. The press department in his ministry was responsible for this question. He knew that many applications had been processed and had been approved. [. . .]

Endnotes

[1] Copyright: Project 'CSCE and the Transformation of Europe', University of Mannheim and the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center. All rights reserved. The "CSCE and the Transformation of Europe" Project is funded by the VolkswagenStiftung. If cited, quoted, translated, or reproduced, acknowledgement of any document's origin must be made as follows: "Oliver Bange/Stephan Kieninger (eds): "Negotiating one's own demise? The GDR's Foreign Ministry and the CSCE negotiations - Plans, preparations, tactics and presumptions," CWIHP e-Dossier Nr. 17, on behalf of the Project 'CSCE and the Transformation of Europe', University of Mannheim 2008 (<http://www.CSCE-1975.net>)".

[2] The memorandum of conversation was drafted by Siegfried Bock. For the West German account of this conversation, see Akten zur Auswaertigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1973, Doc. 215.

[3] Walter Scheel (Free Democratic Party, FDP) was the FRG's Foreign Minister from 1969 to 1974 in the coalition with the Social-Democrats headed by Chancellor Willy Brandt. Thereafter he served as President of the FRG from 1974 to 1979.

[4] Stage I of the CSCE, the meeting of Foreign Ministers, took place in Helsinki's Finlandia Hall from 3 to 7 July 1973.

[5] The Political Director is head of the 'Politische Abteilung' - the 'Political Department' - in the Auswaertiges Amt.

[6] Guenther van Well (1922-1993) headed the Political Department from 1973 to 1977. He then served as Undersecretary of State in the Auswaertiges Amt from 1977 to 1981.

[7] During Stage I of the CSCE, Scheel and Winzer indeed met for the first time. The negotiations about the inner-German Basic Treaty were held between the two German governments, Bonn's Chancellery and the GDR's Council of Ministers. This construction enabled the FRG to avoid recognising the GDR during the talks. The

Multilateral Preparatory Talks (MPT) for the CSCE were held at ambassador level.

[8] Both German states became UN members on 18 September 1973.

[9] The Basic Treaty between the FRG and the GDR was signed on 21 December 1972. See Ingo von Muench (ed.): *Dokumente des geteilten Deutschland*, vol. 2 (since 1968), Stuttgart 1974, pp. 301ff.

[10] The CD label is a special feature of cars possessed by the diplomatic corps.