

**September 8, 1987**

**Memorandum of a conversation by the Honorary  
Chairman of the SPD, Brandt, with the General  
Secretary of the CC of the SED and Chairman of the  
State Council of the GDR, Honecker, in Bonn, 8  
September 1987**

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Translated by Dwight E. Langston.

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**Summary:**

Memorandum for Brandt and Honecker on discussions for reducing chemical and nuclear weapons in Europe, relations between social democrats and communists and how they influence greater European nations.

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Original Scan

No. 19

**Memorandum of a conversation by the Honorary Chairman of the SPD,  
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*English translation: Dwight E. Langston*

At the beginning of the discussion W[illy] Brandt said that E[rich] Honecker's visit to the FRG had historical significance.<sup>3</sup> No one could ever brush that aside. The road to this point has been a hurdle race. ["You are better than we at hurdle races.[" E. Honecker stated, he agreed that a lot of breath was needed for a long distance run.<sup>4</sup> W. Brandt remarked that he already had the feeling at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich that the general public in the Federal Republic had fewer and fewer reservations about better relations with the GDR.

Referring to his discussions with Weizsäcker and Kohl,<sup>5</sup> E. Honecker said that a shared responsibility to secure peace had stood at the centre. Agreement had prevailed that the Pershing 1As must not become an obstacle to an accord between the USSR and the USA.<sup>6</sup> That would also ease the discussions between Shultz and Shevardnadze due to take place the following week.<sup>7</sup> In this context, E. Honecker provided information on a discussion with A[rmund] Hammer in Berlin.<sup>8</sup>

Erich Honecker said that he, in the name of the leadership of the SED, would like to personally express his heart-felt gratitude to Willy Brandt for his considerable contribution to détente in Europe and to the normalisation of relations between the two German states. The value of the joint document by the Fundamental Values Commissions of the SPD and of the Academy for Social Sciences was greatly appreciated in the CC of the SED.<sup>9</sup> The joint proposals for a zone free of chemical weapons and a corridor free of nuclear weapons were of considerable importance.<sup>10</sup>

Deeply moved, Willy Brandt expressed his gratitude for the cordial words directed to him personally concerning his, as he put it, “ice breaker function.” He shared the viewpoint that the editorial policy of the Joint Documents between SPD and SED was correct<sup>11</sup>, above all the fundamental idea that the existing differences must not be an obstacle to the creation of an enduring system for peace.<sup>12</sup> Making reference to the discussion which he had conducted with J[ános] Kádár, he posed the question whether one would still have to observe the 1918 dividing line between Social Democrats and Communists.<sup>13</sup> He asked that they consider whether, even between Social Democrats and Communists, commonalities above and beyond the issue of peace could be found which ought to be emphasised.<sup>14</sup> Similar thoughts were expressed by M[ikhail] Gorbachev.<sup>15</sup> Another issue is the necessity for an agreement between our parties on how we can interest our respective neighbours more strongly in our initiatives for a zone free of chemical weapons and a corridor free of nuclear weapons.

That means, Willy Brandt said, what does the one do and what does the other do vis-à-vis its community? For the SPD, the French were the major problem, all political persuasions, in fact. He had visited Mitterrand in late July [1987].<sup>16</sup> F[rançois] Mitterrand is very unrealistic. Thus, it is necessary to discuss steps to be taken in common which can have an influence on France.<sup>17</sup> E. Honecker replied that that was correct. He had an invitation from Mitterrand, does not know at present, however, just how he should comport himself in light of the upcoming presidential elections. W. Brandt expressed the view that it is presently unclear whether Mitterrand is going to run for office again. If he does, he would win the election. One can assume that the CPF would support him in the second balloting. Mitterrand’s wife, however, is advising against a candidacy, since a further seven-year term of office at his advanced age would be too much of a burden.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion took place on the evening of 8 September 1987 in the Bristol Hotel in Bonn following a banquet which Honecker had given.

<sup>2</sup> Template copy is the written record by the GDR which was also published in: *Potthoff* 1995, p. 636 f. A “Memo on the Discussion between Willy Brandt and Erich Honecker on 8/9/1987 in Bonn,” prepared by Brandt’s associate Klaus Lindenberg on 10 September 1987, is found in: AdsD, Dep. Bahr, 1/EBAA000959. Passages from this memo by Lindenberg, which render the template copy more precise or supplement it, are quoted in the following note.

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<sup>3</sup> Honecker visited the Federal Republic from 7–11 September 1987. Cf. *Winkler* 2000, Bd. 2, p. 454–459.

<sup>4</sup> Lindenberg noted in addition the statement by Honecker that the GDR had already won twenty gold medals in 1972 (Note 2).

<sup>5</sup> The discussion with Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker had taken place on the previous day. Honecker had met with Federal Chancellor Kohl on 7/8 September 1987 in Bonn for a total of four discussions. Cf. *Pothoff* 1995, p. 576–606.

<sup>6</sup> The agreement at the Soviet-American INF negotiations, which had seemed imminent since 22 July 1987, provided for an internationally valid double “zero solution”: the removal of all land-based nuclear medium-range systems of longer (1,000–5,500 km) and shorter ranges (500–1,000 km). Belonging to the second category were American Pershing 1A missiles, 72 of which, though not supplied with atomic warheads, were in the possession of the *Bundeswehr*. Although formally these had not been objects of the negotiations, the Soviet Union insisted on including them in the comprehensive agreement. After initial resistance, Federal Chancellor Kohl had, on 26 August 1987, expressed the Federal Republic’s willingness to completely dismantle the German Pershing 1As after ratification of the INF Treaty. Cf. *Schöllgen* 1996, p. 404.

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the USA and the Soviet Union on 15–17 September 1987 in Washington, at which they concluded a fundamental agreement for an accord on medium-range missiles, cf. EA 42 (1987) 20, p. D 576 f. At this point in the discussion, Lindenberg made additional note of Brandt’s question as to whether in Honecker’s opinion the accord would actually come about, which his interlocutor affirmed (Note 2).

<sup>8</sup> There is nothing in Lindenberg’s record about this meeting of Honecker’s with the American businessman Hammer (Note 2). Instead, at this point the following portion of the Honecker-Brandt discussion is recorded:

„EH German unity is not a decisive issue now; it is not a subject-matter for today.

WB Even Gorbachev has said, who can already know what will be in a hundred years ...

EH He now sees new pre-conditions after some things had tensed up. F[ederal]C[hancellor] Kohl had told him that he had encountered some criticism in his faction.

WB But no one will be able to stop that any more.“

<sup>9</sup> The joint paper by the SPD and SED with the title “The Conflict of Ideologies and Mutual Security” had been published on 27 August 1987. It is printed in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 32 (1987) 10, p. 1365–1371. Cf. Also Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. on that in particular No. 20, Note 48 and No. 35, Note 7. Concerning party relations between SPD and SED, Lindenberg at this point recorded in addition (Note 2) the following sentence by Honecker: “He was very happy about this development.”

<sup>11</sup> Note 9. In Brandt’s reply Lindenberg (Note 2) recorded additionally: “The document could perhaps have been somewhat slimmer [...]”

<sup>12</sup> In Lindenberg (Note 2) is recorded as well: “whatever remains must not endanger peace.”

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<sup>13</sup> Brandt is referring to a confidential discussion which he conducted during his visit to Hungary on 21–30 March 1978 with the head of the Hungarian communists. During that, Kádár had asked: “Do we really always have to fight the battles of 1914 and 1917 again?” *Brandt* 1994, p. 467. Unfortunately, no memos about this discussion could be located. In the summary reports which were prepared on the occasion of further visits by Willy Brandt in Budapest on 11–13 November 1981 as well as 26–29 June 1985, this question is not mentioned. See Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian State Archives), Department V, File portfolio of the Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, M-KS-228.f.11/4401. and 11/4429.ö.e. But at the subsequent discussion with Kádár, which had taken place on 27 June 1985 in Budapest, the SPD Chairman had apparently revisited the earlier discussion. Karsten D. Voigt, who had been there along with the then International Secretary of the HSWP (Hungarian Socialist Workers Party), Gyula Horn, confirmed in a letter to Heinrich August Winkler on 17 August 2001: “At that time, Willy Brandt actually addressed the eventual possibility of overcoming political divisions in the workers’ movement. I remember that quite precisely because, at that time, I was astonished that he went so far in a discussion with Kádár.” Cf. on this also *Voigt, Karsten D.: Dialog zwischen SPD und kommunistischen Parteien*, in: *Bentele, Karlheinz/Faerber-Husemann, Renate/Scharpf, Fritz W./Steinbrück, Peer (Hrsg.): Metamorphosen. Annäherungen an einen vielseitigen Freund. Horst Ehmke zum Achtzigsten*, Bonn 2007, p. 275–284 (p. 281).

<sup>14</sup> Concerning this passage of the Brandt-Honecker discussions, Lindenberg recorded the following (Note 2):

“WB [...] “on the other hand – Kádár had once made such a remark to him – you might ask the question, if you must always remain in 1918 – or whatever date one chooses. You could ask yourself where you were more in agreement today than 50 years ago. But this must indeed be left to others.

EH He perceived this as a very good thought. Perhaps we should not simply leave it to others: ‘We must still help things along.’ In ‘our’ circles that had already been discussed, and he knew that this made a difference to Gorbachev. And after all: the detailed report on the SED-SPD document in Pravda and TASS was really significant.”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. to this No. 43.

<sup>16</sup> The meeting had not taken place in late July, but rather on 24 June 1987 in Paris. See the memo of 30 June 1987 by Klaus Lindenberg for Hans-Jochen Vogel, Betr.: Gespräch von Willy Brandt mit François Mitterrand in Paris am 24.06.1987, in: AdsD, WBA, A 13, 346.

<sup>17</sup> Lindenberg summarized Brandt’s position on this matter as follows (Note 2): “For us the French continued to be a major problem. They remained sceptical about anything undertaken by Germans. Even his most recent discussions in June with Mitterrand had confirmed this impression. It might make sense to let duly appointed representatives conduct discussions as to how both sides could have a reassuring effect on France.”

<sup>18</sup> Mitterrand did not announce his candidacy until the following Spring and was re-elected President of France on 8 May 1988.