

October 14, 1970

**Valtin-Brandt Discussion of Radio Free Europe and
Radio Liberty**

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Summary:

CIA official Fred Valtin provides a detailed report on his discussion of RFE and RL with German Chancellor Willy Brandt.

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REPORT FROM MR. VALTIN

1. The 14 October meeting with Chancellor Brandt lasted almost two hours (twice what was originally allotted on Brandt's calendar). Minister Ehmke was present but said practically nothing. The atmosphere ^{was} entirely cordial throughout.

2. Valtin opened the meeting with a fairly lengthy statement on the Radios, largely along the lines of the two background briefs prepared by Headquarters this summer. He described their evolution over the past ten years into highly sophisticated instruments for influencing developments in the entire Soviet Bloc. He emphasized the highly responsible role of the American (as compared with emigre) management in running the organizations as a whole and in controlling both the content and tone of the broadcasts. In response to Brandt's query, he described the manner in which the U. S. Government (Agency and State Department) relate to the Radios on program and other policy subjects. He stressed the significant role both Radios have been playing in support of FRG objectives vis-a-vis the USSR and Bloc countries. He explained the unique nature of these two Radios in terms of their identification with the target audiences, asserting (with Brandt agreeing) that none of the other American or German communication media could conceivably come close to serving as substitutes for them. He described the effectiveness of the Radios in some detail, and then wound up this part of the presentation by expressing the strongly held U. S. Government view that the Radios constitute uniquely effective instruments, that they cannot be replaced once terminated, and that they do not represent an anomaly in the 1970's or, for that matter, in an era of detente and, to the contrary, they are even more essential in the more complex ideological struggle in such an era.

3. Brandt stated that he had read the material Valtin had left with Ehmke in August and that he agreed with it and with what we had just said. He said that he does not question the effectiveness of the Radios (comment: at no point in the conversation did Brandt raise any questions about content or tone of broadcasts themselves) nor the U. S. Government view concerning the continued validity of

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BOX 13 FOL 63

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instrumentalities like RFE and RL. He expressed the hope that there was no misunderstanding in Washington regarding his position on the need to continue the ideological struggle with Communism, particularly in an era of "negotiation rather than confrontation," and he pointed to his own public statements along this line in recent months, such as at the SPD convention earlier this year. He said that he had also made this clear to Brezhnev by telling him right after the signing of the treaty that the treaty concerned inter-governmental relations only and that it had nothing to do with ideology, on which fundamental divergencies will continue to exist and about which there could be no mixing-up (to which Brezhnev replied: "The last thing we want is ideological fraternization."). Thus, said Brandt, it is neither his nor his Government's desire to terminate the Radios.

4. Valtin said that what Bahr had told him in Ehmke's presence in June, i. e., "The Radios must go," would -- if the FRG persisted in this view -- mean the liquidation of the Radios. He told Brandt that the position taken by Ehmke/Bahr in June had created a potentially very serious situation. The matter had been considered as a problem of inter-agency interest (i. e., not just by CIA) and that the conclusion had been reached that the FRG position, as enunciated by Ehmke/Bahr, could not be accepted since relocation appeared impossible and, even if technically feasible, would affect the nature of the operations so radically as to make their continuation almost certainly not worthwhile. He advised Brandt that the President had personally considered the problem, that the President feels strongly that the Radios must be preserved, and that the President is seriously concerned about the situation. Thus, and while the U. S. Government had deliberately chosen to continue the talks on this subject in the informal channel, there should be no misunderstanding concerning the seriousness with which the U. S. Government viewed the problem at the highest level.

5. Valtin advised Brandt that this had been the reason for the urgency with which we had sought a meeting with him in August. Brandt apologized for his inability to meet with Valtin at that time

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and said that Ehmke/Bahr had told him of their meeting with Valtin in August and, in his words, he had "got the message." He said that nevertheless it was always best to hear things directly as had just happened. He expressed his appreciation for the U. S. Government's willingness to handle the talks on this subject in the informal channel, and his hope that the practice could be continued. After saying that this should not be interpreted as a threat, Valtin told Brandt that that would depend on what could be worked out in the informal channel.

6. Valtin then asked Brandt to explain his position on the Radios. After repeating his positive view of their role and effectiveness, Brandt said that, nevertheless, they do present a problem. He expressed hope (and mild doubt) that the U. S. Government understands that "after all, what we are attempting to do in the way of establishing more normal relations with the USSR and the Bloc countries is no more, and far behind, what other free Western countries achieved long ago." In that context, Brandt said, the Radios are and will probably continue to be a problem in the sense that they provide a convenient peg for the Bloc on which to hang their carping about the Federal Republic's alleged cold warish and revanchist attitude. Valtin pointed to the, if anything, stepped up Soviet and Bloc propaganda campaign against the free West, particularly via the Radio medium and including their numerous black and ostensibly non-governmental broadcast stations. Brandt acknowledged this point but said that, since logic is not what governs Bloc positions, RFE/RL nevertheless represent an irritant in the context of the FRG's efforts at normalizing its relationship with the USSR and Bloc regimes on a government-to-government basis. In this respect, and against the background of Germany having been the aggressor -- and loser -- in World War II, the FRG is in a less advantageous position to stonewall Soviet Bloc complaints than the U. S. and other Western countries who were allies and defenders of the USSR and East European countries -- and winners -- in that war. Brandt went on to say that it is unlikely that either the USSR or the Bloc countries, all of whom have their own rationale for desiring more normal relations with the FRG, will make such an issue of the

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Radios as to cause a breakdown in negotiations for that reason alone, and that the FRG will be able to deal with actual or anticipated Bloc pressures on the Radios (and the Soviets had never said anything about RL to Bahr or others involved in the negotiations and the signing of the USSR/Federal Republic treaty, nor since then). Brandt said that the FRG is obviously not in a position to bargain with the USSR or Bloc countries on the Radios and that this was the reason that all concerned in German officialdom (in Germany and at appropriate posts outside of Germany) had been told that it is FRG policy that the Radios are not negotiable and that any demarches on this question are to be rejected on that basis. (comment: This confirms what Pommerening told Valtin in August.) Brandt said that the recent official announcement concerning the Radios was similarly motivated; it was designed to calm down harmful speculation on the Radio's status in Germany but also, and more importantly, to indicate to the Bloc that the FRG position was firm. Brandt said that while this was their posture vis-a-vis the German public and the Bloc, and while this would continue to be their position, the Radios nevertheless do constitute a problem for the FRG, and that the FRG thus feels compelled to discuss them with the U.S. Government.

7. The sovereignty aspect does not appear to weigh heavily with Brandt. He did say that the operation of foreign owned and controlled propaganda media of this nature and magnitude on German soil constitutes an anomaly so many years after the end of the occupation, but he went on to say that he, personally, does not attach as much importance to this aspect of the problem as some of his advisers.

8. Coming back to what he views as the problem, and after stating that he accepts as a fact the U.S. Government position that relocation of the Radios in their entirety is tantamount to termination and thus out of the question, Brandt wondered whether some compromise formula might be worked out. As it was, Brandt said, the Federal Republic seemed to carry the entire political burden of the Radios, and he asked whether some degree of (in his words) burden sharing is feasible. He said it would make things considerably easier if one or more other NATO countries assumed

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part of the burden. Valtin pointed out that RFE's primary short wave facility is located in Portugal (and while not a NATO country, that Spain was the location for RL's primary short wave installation). This apparently was not known to Brandt, but he dismissed it as not particularly meaningful in this context, saying that he had been thinking instead of Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, Italy and France -- admitting at the same time that some of these do not appear to be realistic choices.

9. Valtin asked what he meant by burden sharing. He said he had in mind the possible relocation of the transmitters. Valtin asked whether he agreed with the position taken by Ehmke/Bahr in August that the relocation of the transmitters has more importance than the programming/research Headquarters in Munich. Brandt said he does agree, and that it was the actual emission of propaganda broadcasts from German soil that constitutes the problem, in terms of the activity as such and as compounded by the fact that it is precisely that portion of the Radios which is carried out under German license, i. e., a matter about which the FRG presumably has a choice and on which the FRG is thus more vulnerable. He said that the programming/editorial/research Headquarters are not so licensed, need not be licensed, and -- while much larger and admittedly of a somewhat different nature -- are in essence like any other journalistic or media activity whose freedom to exist and function is guaranteed under the German constitution. Thus, Brandt said, the FRG will have no problem in rejecting Bloc pressures, if such develop on Munich Headquarters of the Radios.

10. Valtin told Brandt that there is considerable apprehension in Washington that a relocation of the transmitters, even if feasible and agreed to, might turn out to be only half of the salami, and that a year or so later the U. S. Government might be faced with a FRG request also to move the Munich Headquarters of the Radios. Brandt was unequivocal in stating that as long as he has anything to say about it no such request would be made.

11. Brandt asked whether the U. S. Government has undertaken a feasibility study on transmitter relocation. Valtin advised him that such a study is in process but nowhere near being finished.

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Valtin further told him that nevertheless certain facts were beginning to emerge quite clearly and that all of them made the chances of relocation appear slim: (a) relocation is technically feasible but the choice of possible locations is extremely limited; (b) RFE and RL short wave transmitters in Germany could be replaced with new ones in Portugal and Spain, respectively, but (apart from the difficulty in terms of site acquisition) there is no guaranty that the two Governments would agree to such a request, particularly against a background of unfortunate publicity on the status of the Radios in Germany being in question; (c) RFE's medium wave, which is most important in terms of target audience listening habits, could only be relocated in Greece or West Berlin -- and Brandt agreed that neither location is at all attractive politically, albeit for different reasons; (d) the cost of relocation is conservatively estimated at \$15 million and could go much higher as the financial aspects of the study are refined -- Brandt winced; and (e) the lead time on equipment is a minimum of two years which means that, even if a decision to relocate were made today, the transmitters in Germany would be needed through 1972 and thus through the critical period of the Olympic Games in the summer of that year. Brandt, and even more so Ehmke, appeared dismayed at these findings but said nothing on them specifically.

12. Brandt then said that, if relocation turns out not to be feasible, perhaps some other solution could be found to make it easier for the FRG to defend the continued existence of the Radios on German soil. Emphasizing that he had not thought through its feasibility or implications, he wondered whether a contractual U.S. Government/Federal Republic of Germany arrangement on the Radios might be feasible, since the FRG would find it easy to deal with Bloc complaints on that basis. Valtin said we do not know but offhand think that this is not likely. (Comment: In subsequent talks with Ehmke, we came to a joint conclusion that this proposal is not possible without changing the legal basis and character of the Radios and that, even if that were thought acceptable, it would radically change the Radios' image and is thus not a desirable solution.)

13. Brandt said that, if relocation of all the transmitters is not feasible, it would already be helpful if only a portion of both

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Radio's transmitters or the transmitters of one of the Radios were moved from Germany (he did not specify which Radio, nor did Valtin have the impression that he had either specifically in mind). Valtin did not react to this proposal other than to assure him that it would be included in the report.

14. Brandt said that, apart from Bloc pressures on the FRG which in the final analysis could probably be handled, what really worried him was the domestic pressure that will inevitably come into being once the Bloc begins its anticipated campaign of threatening that it will not participate in the Olympics as long as the Radios are operating in Germany. Brandt agreed with Valtin's analysis as to why such a ploy is no more than a bluff, but he feels that intensive domestic pressures would develop anyway (from the highly influential sports/athletics lobby and every other non-governmental organization, including political and business interests) since these groups could be depended upon to fall for the bluff. If so, the Radios would become a political football in Germany, and Brandt expressed himself as most apprehensive about the FRG's ability to cope with such a situation. Valtin expressed the view that the virulence of public reaction to a Bloc ploy on the Olympics is related to how the FRG itself handles the bluff. Brandt agreed in principle but said that there are situations wherein public opinion is dominant no matter what the Government does, and in his opinion the Olympics are an issue in Germany on which emotions are likely to be so intense as to make it most difficult, if not impossible, for the Government (whether it is his or another) to contain them. Brandt said that, of course, no one could be sure but that he wants the U. S. Government to be aware of his estimate of what may well happen.

15. Valtin spoke in some detail about the image problem that the FRG would create for itself if the Radios were forced out of Germany, both in the Bloc and with official and non-official circles in the U. S. Brandt said he is not unaware of these considerations.

16. After reiterating the seriousness with which the U. S. Government views the situation and after reemphasizing the

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President's personal involvement and position on the problem, Valtin asked Brandt what he could report to Washington. Brandt said that he did not repeat not want the problem of the Radios, serious as it is, to become a matter of controversy between the FRG and the U.S. Government. He hoped that some mutually agreeable formula could be found for lessening the political burden on the FRG. However, if that should turn out not to be possible technically or politically, things will remain as they are. Brandt then made a most earnest plea that possible alternatives, such as already discussed or as might yet occur to the U.S. Government, would in fact be examined by the U.S. Government in good faith.

17. Valtin thanked Brandt for this decision and for the time he had given him. It was agreed that another meeting with Ehmke (and, if appropriate with Brandt) should take place once the U.S. Government has finished its analysis of possible alternative solutions.

18. Comment: It is significant that Brandt reached his decision, as described in paragraph 16 above, with full awareness of the gloomy picture on the feasibility of relocating the transmitters facilities, as told to him per paragraph 11 above.

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