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Switzerland

Political report¹ of the Swiss Ambassador in Bonn, Alfred Hohl²

TOO EARLY?

Confidential

Bonn, 10 April 1990

A state secretary of the Federal Foreign Office excitedly remarked to the signatory that Bonn had been confronted with the task of reunification 20 years too early, pure and simple. “We are not yet integrated into Europe fully enough and the chances of German-national upsurges remain much too real.”

Meanwhile, in Europe, the perpetuum mobile of 19th / 20th century national problems, connected to the dissolution of empires, amongst other things, is keeping busy the Balkan states most of all, whose borders were arbitrarily drawn, back in the day, right through ethnic territories and thus from the start ensured considerable controversy. The same goes for the dissolution of the Soviet empire built by the Czars and their epigones that intended, for instance, to bring together Europe and Asia, Christianity and Islam in the grip of its party-bureaucratic manner of rule. Is Europe now about to face a general rise of those who came up short e.g. in Versailles, Potsdam, and Yalta?

In Hessen, nationally inspired unknowns are thought to have recently painted the slogan “Ami go home” on a wall, and the press there discussed governor Wallmann’s³ alleged plans to house one’s own lodgers and migrants in living quarters becoming vacant with the Americans’ withdrawal. In my opinion, however, this is for now only rumour-mongering by the media that is not to be taken seriously.

We have already reported elsewhere, however, that the Germans’ basic mentality, a kind of penitent’s attitude combined with the readiness to help the weak and disenfranchised, has at least partially changed. The thinking here is once again German first, although most of my interlocutors attest to the chancellor’s⁴ reliability in term of European politics. Kohl possibly means to ultimately become not only the chancellor of reunification but also Europe’s deus ex machina. As the French have so far reserved this role for themselves, things will get interesting. Delors⁵ surely has as little interest as Mitterrand⁶ in letting Kohl pave the way

1 *Political report No. 24 and Telegram No. 97 (incoming, translated from German): Swiss Federal Archives CH-BAR#E2010-02A#1996/400#19* (A.21.31).*

2 *Alfred Hohl (1930–2004), dodis.ch/P16080, Swiss Ambassador in Bonn 1.9.1987–16.11.1991.*

3 *Walter Wallmann (1932–2013), dodis.ch/P56923, Minister President of Hesse 1987–1991.*

4 *Helmut Kohl (1930–2017), dodis.ch/P31852, Chancellor of the FRG 1.10.1982–27.10.1998.*

5 *Jacques Delors (*1925), French politician, dodis.ch/P47396, President of the European Commission 7.1.1985–24.1.1995.*

6 *François Mitterrand (1916–1996), dodis.ch/P13775, President of France 21.5.1981–17.5.1995.*

183 for European success. But the chancellor's ambitions are apparently growing increasingly more global: a German-German monetary union, reunification, united Germany participating in Europe, a European monetary union, the relinquishing of national prerogatives of political sovereignty to a European executive and its parliamentary substructure.

A daring transformation from the German "Michel" to Euro-citizen. At times, it almost seems this way.

One may thus honestly wonder why the above-cited state secretary of the Federal Foreign Affairs Office thinks that the reunification barged in 20 years too early. Are there really still national territorial ambitions here as in the times of the Prussian kings, of Bismarck⁷, or of Hitler⁸? As far as Kohl is concerned: no. With him, one rather feels a true willingness to let Germany come to bloom as a part of Europe. This is genuine and reminiscent of Walter Hallstein⁹ – with the one nuance that the chancellor reasons more sentimentally. When he speaks of the German-French handshake over the graves of Verdun, he does so with a tearful voice. Compared to this attitude, the advocates of federations of Expellees, including Schönhuber's¹⁰ camarilla, remain a rather ephemeral Don Quixotism.

Generally speaking, nationalism these days appears to have become the religion of the poor. It rages in Kosovo, Romania, or Bulgaria – soon perhaps also in Albania. Here, German saturation in the context of the materialism fuelled by Erhard's¹¹ "Wirtschaftswunder" seems to have mostly eradicated the infamous appetite for "Lebensraum". One rather pursues ideas of qualitative growth.

Kohl may ultimately disappoint many ambitions and hopes: for instance, the still existing feelings of entitlement regarding lost territories in the East, or GDR hopes for prosperity through an automatic bonanza, French aspirations to push for European integration according to concepts created in Paris, etc.

Whether reunification, then, is coming around 20 years too early is hard to tell. Such fears are based on the assumption that, preferably, the FRG would have been irrevocably and strongly rooted in Europa for now. But revolutions elude all timing. And no one can say whether a process of Europeanization controlled by French computers and coupled with a postponed reunification would have produced more suitable results.

In fact, why does no one make use of Kohl's almost clumsily lovable openness to Europe? Why does everyone suspect the ponderous giant from the Palatinate of deviant Germanic Machiavellianism? Why, by contrast, the premium for Oskar¹² the tin drummer from the Saarland?

7 Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), dodis.ch/P3822, Chancellor of the German Empire 1871–1890.

8 Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), dodis.ch/P535, Führer of the German Third Reich 1933–1945.

9 Walter Hallstein (1901–1982), dodis.ch/P2869, Civil servant in the FRG Foreign Office who had the "Hallstein Doctrine" that meant that the FRG would regard it as an unfriendly act if third countries were to recognize the FRG, named after him and President of the Commission of the European Economic Community 1958–1967.

10 Franz Schönhuber (1923–2005), dodis.ch/P54840, journalist and politician of the FRG, founder and later chairman of The Republicans.

11 Ludwig Erhard (1897–1977), dodis.ch/P2893, Chancellor of the FRG 1963–1966.

12 Oskar Lafontaine (*1943), dodis.ch/P54839, Minister President of Saarland 1985–1989 and SPD candidate for Chancellor in the German federal elections of 1990.

184 Europe has often seen dishonest politics. But in my opinion, Bonn is not currently a target of legitimate suspicions in this regard. Perhaps the reunification came too early for the keepers of the grail of European distrust, but so far, the chancellor seems to be coping just fine with the enormous problems he is facing.