

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

Evolution Instead of Revolution



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ILLUSTRATION 7: Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (right) and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher during a Bundestag session in March 1975.

Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, B 145 Bild-00114645,
Photographer: Ludwig Wegmann.

The Federal Republic of Germany has always regarded the renunciation of the use or threat of use of force as the basis of its policy. This also applies to changes of frontiers. Frontiers are inviolable; but one must be able to change them by peaceful means and by agreement. It remains our aim to work for a state of peace in Europe in which the German nation will regain its unity through free self-determination.

– Chancellor Schmidt’s speech in Helsinki, August 1975¹

The Federal Government approves the results of the conference, continuing the policy of the Federal Republic to safeguard peace. This policy obliges us to promote détente. This policy obliges us to use the opportunity of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe steadfastly and without illusions for the people in divided Germany, for the people in divided Europe and for safeguarding peace on the continent.

– Foreign Minister Genscher to the *Bundestag*, July 1975²

This book has charted the prehistory of the CSCE from the viewpoint of the Federal Republic. As outlined in the introduction, the main aim has been to analyse the role of the FRG in the intra-Western preparations of the conference, with the final chapter focusing on the practical implementation of these preparations in the conference. At the same time, an attempt has been made to participate in and contribute to broader scholarly discussions on the history of détente, of the CSCE and of West German foreign policy. This conclusion first summarises each of the preceding chapters, and then moves on to discuss wider implications of the key findings of this book for existing and future scholarship.

Chapter 2, covering the years 1966–69, focused above all on the domestic controversies in Bonn. In the Grand Coalition, foreign policy issues were increasingly contentious. All the parties represented in the *Bundestag* – the coalition partners CDU/CSU and SPD as well as the opposition FDP – talked about a ‘European peace order’ as a long-term goal, guiding the way forward from the impasse resulting from the anachronistic Hallstein Doctrine. As it turned out, the SPD and FDP definitions of such a peace order were converging, whereas the CDU/CSU, in particular after the Prague invasion in 1968, found less and less common ground with the Social Democrats. Well before the federal election of September 1969, then, the writing was on the wall for a Social-Liberal Coalition.

This became apparent also in the CSCE context. In the spring of 1969, after the Warsaw Pact issued its so-called Budapest Appeal for a conference, Foreign Minister Brandt began to take a more forthcoming view of the CSCE, whereas Chancellor Kiesinger maintained his sceptical attitude. Although these internal disagreements prevented the formulation of a coherent government line, the Grand Coalition years were significant for the

formation of the West German CSCE policy. Its essential characteristics were developed in Brandt's *Auswärtiges Amt*. Egon Bahr was particularly active in arguing for the use of the CSCE as leverage, linking West German participation in the conference with preceding progress in bilateral *Ostpolitik*. On the other hand, Brandt himself showed interest in the agenda of the conference, possibly enabling gradual steps towards a European peace order.

These blueprints were to a large extent implemented immediately in the first year of the new Brandt Government, which was dominated by the negotiation of the Moscow and Warsaw Treaties. Regarding the CSCE, the 'linkage' approach prevailed in 1969–70. As Chapter 3 argued, the plans to link bilateral *Ostpolitik* with CSCE preparations materialised in the Bahr–Gromyko talks in Moscow in the spring of 1970. The strong West German commitment to support preparations for a CSCE contributed in part to the historic West German-Soviet agreement. Applied through Moscow, the linkage also seemed to have an impact on the GDR. At the same time, however, the Moscow Treaty of August 1970 was a clear watershed for this policy. The bilateral bargaining chip which could only be used once had now been spent.

Meanwhile, first studies preparing the ground for a Western CSCE position were launched in NATO. By mid-1970, these ideas for a conference agenda began to take shape, consisting of principles governing relations between states, freer movement and increased East–West cooperation, as well as military elements of security. For the FRG, the last topic was of particular importance, and the majority of West German efforts was spent on trying to ensure the inclusion of MBFR on the CSCE agenda. This focus on MBFR overshadowed other elements, but there were also first signs of a particular West German interest in freer movement as early as in the autumn of 1969. Nonetheless, the *Auswärtiges Amt* was somewhat slow in genuinely discovering the potential of working through multilateral fora in the Western CSCE preparations.

This transition to multilateralism in the years 1970–71 was the central theme of Chapter 4. In terms of the linkage, multilateralisation was a necessary reaction to the changed situation after the Moscow Treaty. Abandoning the idea of a link between an inner-German treaty and the CSCE, the FRG decided to turn its attention to the Berlin Agreement as an essential but only precondition for the conference. There was a discernible French influence in the arrival at this position. However, as the conclusion of the first stage of the Berlin negotiations approached in 1971 and France attempted to pave the way for a CSCE even before the final agreement, the FRG did not waver. For Bonn, the full Berlin precondition was not negotiable, and due to West German steadfastness that was also maintained as a NATO position.

From autumn 1970 onwards, there was new momentum in the multilateral CSCE preparations within the West. NATO stepped up its own efforts to outline an agenda for the CSCE. In this framework, the West German approach was at first predominantly defensive. The hard-fought bilateral achievements of the Moscow and Warsaw treaties had to be safeguarded in the multilateral setting, in particular regarding the potentially problematic repercussions of an agreement on borders. More generally, it was vital for the FRG to keep its *Deutschlandpolitik* options open. As before, elements of military security continued to top the West German wish list in the CSCE preparations conducted in NATO. But gradually, the FRG started to develop an interest in the cooperation aspects of the conference. This change coincided with the emergence of a completely new framework, European Political Cooperation, in the autumn of 1970. After initial hesitation, the FRG began to make full use of the EPC, alongside NATO, in its increasingly effective multilateral CSCE policy within the West. This was a result of a new level of activity in Bonn in the spring of 1971, as the *Auswärtiges Amt* finally began to get its act together. Now the FRG developed its step-by-step approach, arguing for the need to avoid unnecessary controversies at the beginning of East–West contacts.

As the opening of these East–West contacts drew near, the original ‘linkage’ plans began to turn against their authors. Chapter 5 argued that in 1971–72 the approaching multilateral preparatory talks of the CSCE increased pressure on the FRG to conclude the inner-German negotiations in time. The Brandt Government tied its hands conclusively in September 1971, when it decided that the Berlin Agreement was to remain the only precondition for the CSCE. An active linkage with the inner-German treaty was no longer an option. By December 1971 this was also locked in as a joint NATO position. In the summer of 1972, when the date for the MPT in Helsinki was already fixed for late November, the FRG opted to pursue a Basic Treaty with the GDR before that. In a remarkable reversal of Bahr’s initial plan, he was now himself under pressure to conclude the inner-German negotiations by a set deadline.

However, in the period covered in Chapter 5, the ‘linkage’ approach had already been completely outweighed by the conference agenda in West German deliberations. In the year leading to the Dipoli talks, the CSCE policy of the FRG turned into a multi-faceted interplay of defensive and offensive efforts in Western multilateralism. *Deutschlandpolitik* became the common denominator for these endeavours. Whereas the defence of the achievements of *Ostpolitik* was necessary in particular to keep the German question open, the emphasis on a gradual process approach, avoiding excessive polemics, was designed to alleviate the consequences

of division and to achieve small steps in the inner-German relationship. Freer movement was a case in point.

In 1971–72, the CSCE policy of the FRG was increasingly Europeanised, as the EPC proved to be a more effective forum than NATO. By late 1971, the FRG discovered an opening for a West German lead in both Western frameworks. This opportunity was seized vigorously, with an unprecedented burst of West German initiatives. In November 1971 the FRG was the first to suggest human rights as one of the principles governing relations between states, and in February 1972 the West Germans introduced the concept of peaceful change. By early 1972 the CSCE preparations in the West were dominated by West German working papers for virtually all possible agenda items. When the Federal Government approved the West German guidelines for the CSCE in May 1972, the FRG had clearly assumed the leading position within the West. Naturally, not all of the West German goals were achieved, but this lead was further consolidated in the subsequent attempts to arrive at joint Western negotiating positions for the MPT.

Finally, Chapter 6 showed how the FRG could enjoy the fruits of its extensive preparatory work with relative ease and distance during the actual conference, as far as the bulk of the CSCE topics were concerned. The Western agenda had to a large extent already been set before the start of the MPT in Dipoli, with an active West German influence. During the conference itself the FRG delegation no longer stood out due to an extraordinary amount of national contributions or registered texts submitted to the committees. Rather than being a signal of passivity or detachment, however, this only underscores the effectiveness of the European method from the West German perspective. When the coordination of the Nine worked smoothly, and as long as West German ideas were sufficiently represented through common EPC positions, this suited the FRG perfectly.

It was only when fundamental national interests were endangered that the more assertive face of West German CSCE policy was revealed. Issues with direct relevance for *Deutschlandpolitik* were simply too important to be left for European coordination alone. In these matters the political leadership in Bonn became directly involved in the search for the most effective means to defend West German interests. Also here, alliances and resolutions were primarily sought in the EPC and NATO frameworks. But if those were not adequate, the FRG did not hesitate to turn bilaterally to the US for assistance, as was the case with peaceful change. In the defence of *Ostpolitik* and *Deutschlandpolitik*, form followed function.

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Over the course of these chapters, this book has produced a range of new findings which are significant beyond the scope of this particular topic. The first important contribution to scholarship is simply the breadth of the body of evidence used in the research. Building on recently released documents from more than fifteen archives in eight countries, the book has been able to take an exceptionally thorough look at the multilateral European détente in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The complex interplay between NATO, EPC and the Bonn Group has not been studied in this detail before. In doing so, this book has underscored the importance of looking beyond the bipolar surface of Cold War and détente. It has also helped to highlight the interconnectedness of European integration and European détente. Nonetheless, this study has only been a first step. Further research is urgently needed to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the intra-Western dynamics of the Cold War.

Turning to the particular case at hand, the most obvious argument carrying the story in the book is that regardless of the original plans, West German CSCE policy soon shifted away from the approach emphasising instrumentalisation, linkages and short-term tactical considerations. Instead, the substance of the CSCE as part of a long-term strategy, based on the concept of a European peace order, overtook the earlier deliberations. This book has argued that the link between these two approaches was *Deutschlandpolitik*. As soon as the prospects of improving the inner-German situation within the CSCE rather than outside it were realised, the FRG, which had been the main obstacle to the CSCE, became its main proponent in the West. As soon as *Deutschlandpolitik* interests were involved, the political leadership in Bonn was vigilant.

The evolution from 'linkage' goals towards agenda concerns also highlighted the parallel nature of *Ostpolitik* and the CSCE, which is a further novel contribution of this book. As pointed out in the introduction, one of the few blind spots in existing scholarship on West German foreign policy has been the early interaction between bilateral and multilateral policies. This book has argued that instead of being just the multilateral coronation for Brandt's bilateral achievements, the CSCE accompanied *Ostpolitik* throughout the period covered here. Admittedly, as has been pointed out in Chapter 3, the West Germans were also at first slow to identify all the opportunities inherent in the conference. But once the bureaucratic machinery in Bonn began to move, the CSCE turned out to be an ideal framework for pushing the limits of the sovereignty of the Federal Republic.

Regarding the West German role in the West, this book has pointed out that at first, unwillingness to offend its major allies continued to limit the FRG's actions. The West Germans were constantly alert to their position vis-à-vis the Three Powers. Of these three, the relationship with the UK

was fairly unproblematic – in spite of the often stinging internal remarks by FCO officials about their West German colleagues, the official line in London was to follow the West German lead in the CSCE. But in a latter-day version of the Gaullism-Atlanticism dilemma, the Federal Republic often found itself in a difficult spot between the US and France. As has been shown in the preceding chapters, at the best of times this led to helpful West German mediation within the Alliance, at the worst of times to hesitation and incoherence in the West German line. Only in the case of peaceful change did the FRG choose a direct bilateral channel with the US.

With the ascendancy of the EPC, the inherent tension between Paris and Washington became even more apparent in the EPC–NATO relationship. In the beginning, the FRG was the most loyal of European NATO members, opposing any tasks for the EPC that overlapped with the topics already discussed in NATO, even seeing itself as the US's advocate in the EPC. Over time, however, the FRG began to pursue its own interests more assertively and take the lead in the making of Western CSCE policy. Accordingly, the FRG was also prepared to risk disagreements with the major Allies in matters it considered important, such as the Berlin precondition in the case of France, and the freer movement approach in the case of the US.

The rapid West German learning process in the uses of multilateralism has been a central theme in this book. Depending on the issues involved, the FRG sought different constellations within the West. As early as in 1969, the Bonn Group was engaged as a control mechanism, filtering out problematic *Deutschlandpolitik*-related CSCE questions in advance. In the spring of 1972, particularly in the context of freer movement, the West Germans increasingly utilised the EPC as a clearing house to arrive at joint positions for NATO discussions. When it suited its interests, the FRG also forged ad hoc alliances, such as with the US and the UK in order to persuade Canada and Turkey to give in on the question of self-determination of peoples and human rights in 1972. With all these options to choose from, the multilateral framework broadened the West German room for manoeuvre.

Moreover, this discovery of multilateralism was a broader phenomenon, going beyond being an effective tool in individual cases. One of the essential arguments of this book has been that from the perspective of Bonn, the multilateral nature of the CSCE was valuable in itself. Well before the actual conference in 1973–75, the West Germans saw the CSCE as a means for the Federal Republic to control European détente, acting as an antidote to a potentially dangerous rise of bilateralism. As has been argued in Chapter 5, by early 1972 at the latest the FRG began actively to pursue jointly agreed negotiating positions of the West for the East–West

negotiations. Having itself already gained most of what was to be gained from its own bilateral *Ostpolitik*, the FRG stood only to lose if its allies were to approach the East individually.³ In contrast, the CSCE platform provided the FRG with its first opportunity to operate in the international sphere on an equal footing with others. Therefore it was crucial for the FRG to raise all future détente efforts to the multilateral level. Effective multilateralism helped the FRG safeguard its essential national interests and defend the accomplishments of *Ostpolitik*. There were also exceptions to the rule, though, as we have seen in the final chapter. When the inner-German relationship and the distant prospect of unification were somehow involved, the FRG did not hesitate to revert to bilateral arrangements if necessary.

The general multilateralisation of détente was accompanied by a particular feature of the CSCE process. Intensifying CSCE consultations in the various Western constellations saw the influence of individual officials rise to unprecedented heights. Although major policy changes still required a high-level blessing, in the CSCE context a large number of important decisions were actually taken on a fairly low level. In the EPC and in NATO, the CSCE was the playing field of a handful of foreign ministry officials. Enjoying a fairly high degree of independence, individual middle-rank officials specialising in CSCE affairs were able to punch above their weight and exert a formidable influence in Western CSCE policy formulations. This characteristic, typical of the CSCE process throughout the Geneva phase in 1973–75, has been referred to in existing literature often enough.⁴ The novel aspect of this book, however, has been to show how far advanced this ‘bureaucratisation’ of the CSCE in the West was already well before that. And in fact, as the involvement of Genscher shows, during crucial phases of the Geneva years politicians were back in the CSCE with a vengeance.

During the preparatory phases, however, direct political intervention in the work of CSCE officials was rare in all the Western countries, but nowhere was this phenomenon more apparent than in the FRG. The preceding chapters have made it clear that in Bonn, in striking contrast to the Chancellery-driven bilateral *Ostpolitik*, the CSCE preparations were firmly in the hands of individual diplomats in the *Auswärtiges Amt*. This resulted partly from the general nature of the CSCE discussion in the West, but also from the particular German circumstances. As soon as Brandt moved from the *Auswärtiges Amt* to the Chancellery in 1969, his interest in the substance of the CSCE began to fade. Whereas Chancellor Brandt saw concrete disarmament projects such as MBFR as the most important form of multilateral détente, he doubted whether the CSCE would amount to much more than a talking shop. In this, he was supported by Bahr, who

had from the outset had a rather cynical approach to the security conference. Accordingly, the few direct interventions the Chancellery made in the CSCE policy of the FRG during the Brandt era were always either about MBFR or an instrumentalisation of the conference – Bahr’s pet project of Berlin as a CSCE host being a particularly exotic example.

Thus, it was the *Auswärtiges Amt* where the substantive CSCE policy was made. After a weak start in office, Foreign Minister Scheel began to make his presence felt, but his direct involvement in the specific details of the CSCE preparations was by necessity limited. Individual officials did most of the spadework. In the specific case of the CSCE, these efforts, which may have appeared minuscule to outside observers, had large-scale political ramifications. Moreover, in the small and exclusive bureaucratic circle responsible for the CSCE, the enthusiasm of certain individuals played a major role. This was witnessed by the qualitative and quantitative change in West German efforts following the entry of Götz von Groll and Jürgen Diesel to the scene in 1970–71, responsible for the CSCE and EPC, respectively. Their activity on the working level was supported further up in the chain of command in the *Auswärtiges Amt*, above all by Political Director Berndt von Staden and State Secretary Paul Frank.

In the previous chapters, Allied insinuations of a lack of coherence in the West German CSCE position occasionally popped up. They were not wholly unfounded, for there certainly were several curious episodes caused by solo acts without explicit instructions, most notably those of Ambassador Grewe with MBFR in March 1970 and of Bahr with the Berlin precondition in November 1971. Moreover, when clear instructions did exist, certain officials, particularly in the West German NATO mission in Brussels, made a habit of protesting against them in private conversations with Allied colleagues. There is no doubt that this criticism and gossiping, usually coming from the more conservative wing of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, undermined the credibility of West German policy to a certain extent. But from late 1971 onwards the sheer volume of the West German CSCE effort outweighed these credibility problems.

In the end, then, the policy conceived by the handful of officials in the *Auswärtiges Amt* was consistent and coherent enough to ensure a leading role for the FRG in the Western CSCE preparations. This book has argued that in 1970–72, von Groll, Diesel, von Staden and Frank, to name the key players, created a West German approach to the CSCE which bears a striking resemblance to the ideas put forward by Brandt and Bahr in 1966–69. In terms of strategy and ideology, Brandt’s earlier ideas of a European peace order were taken more or less literally on the working level, constantly affecting concrete policy decisions as a declared long-term goal. In terms of tactics and pragmatism, Bahr’s negotiating approach of engaging

the other side and hoping for small steps as a result of rapprochement, rather than presenting controversial maximal positions, became almost an article of faith for West German CSCE policy. Thus, there was both a Brandt flavour and a Bahr flavour in the mix, setting a prime example of the interaction of ideas and interests. Ironically, these influences came in with a delay, without any direct involvement from the Chancellery.

Furthermore, the fact that only a small circle of officials was truly on the inside of the CSCE preparations in the years this book mainly covers ensured the relative exclusion of the parliamentary opposition and public opinion from the equation. Pressure on the West German officials from the conservative parliamentary opposition was limited because it had its hands full with the bilateral *Ostpolitik*. Pressure from the left-wing and radical segments of public opinion was virtually non-existent, since the FRG was clearly engaged in détente efforts already. During the formative years of the conference, the CSCE was prepared in a niche, isolated from external influences. When the CSCE was exposed to a broader public awareness in 1973, it had already acquired a life of its own.

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Finally, there is the quintessential question about the overall nature of détente, the CSCE, and West German foreign policy. Were they in essence aimed at continuity or change? From the perspective of 1989–90 it appeared that the CSCE had been a miraculous agent for change. Since the CSCE Final Act retrospectively appeared to have made an enormous contribution to the implosion of the Warsaw Pact, to the end of the Cold War division of Europe and to German reunification, it was also seen as a colossal success for the FRG. This book has argued, however, that seen from the perspective of the 1970s the CSCE was indeed a West German success, but one of an entirely different nature.

Already before the multilateral preparatory talks of the CSCE opened in November 1972, the FRG had managed to get a firm grip on most of the central goals it had set itself in the conference. But in the short term, those goals were very cautious. Fundamental change, if any, was envisaged only as occurring in the very long term and only by consensus with the other side. The key argument of this book is therefore that during the early preparations of the CSCE, West German policy was primarily aimed at making the Cold War more bearable, not at overcoming it. Those improvements that were pursued were expected to occur within the Cold War framework.

This becomes evident with a closer look at the dual nature of West German CSCE policy. The inviolability of borders, leaving the option of

peaceful change open, as well as the refusal to engage in anything resembling a substitute peace treaty, leaving the German question open – these defensive elements kept open the possibility of change, but did not actively pursue it. In the field of cooperation, where the FRG was proactive rather than defensive, the West German initiatives focused on cautious small steps and on avoiding unnecessary disputes. Economic cooperation and an increase in personal contacts in all walks of life were seen as suitable first steps in a long-term process, leading to East–West rapprochement and small-scale practical improvements.

This West German approach, blunting the more confrontational suggestions of some Allies, was an important contribution to ensuring that the ‘softer’ elements of security and cooperation ended up on the CSCE agenda. Although precisely these elements turned out to have a subversive effect in the long run, there were no immediate revolutionary aspirations behind this strategy at the time. Engaging the East in a common process was considered to be a valuable aim in itself, but nobody could foresee where the process would lead.

None of this is to be understood as a moral verdict on West German CSCE policy. Nor is it to side with the contemporary Cold Warriors in accusations of appeasement, let alone Finlandisation. Instead, this book has aimed to put West German CSCE policy in the years 1966–75 in its historical perspective. In that era, focusing on keeping options open and on pursuing small-scale improvements was arguably the most intelligent policy option available for the FRG. But that was a far cry from actively pursuing fundamental change, from overcoming the status quo, or from striving for German unification.⁵

Instead, as one of the West German diplomats told the author, the idea of a European peace order and the improvements in personal contact that were pursued in the CSCE were increasingly seen as a substitute for German reunification (*Wiedervereinigungsersatz*). ‘Although the idea of reunification was kept alive, there was no active policy for reunification.’⁶ Paul Frank, State Secretary of the *Auswärtiges Amt* for most of the period covered in this book, confirmed that the main idea was to improve the situation of the people in the GDR.⁷ For his part, Bahr underscored that in the early 1970s nobody thought that an agreement could change the Soviet system or make democrats out of communists. What one could reasonably expect from the CSCE was just to make the East–West conflict more civilised and more manageable. ‘Helsinki was a miracle’, Bahr added.⁸

Quite apparently, then, there is a pressing need for further scholarship to break free from the way in which the end of the Cold War continues to influence our perceptions of the preceding decades. This book has, for its part, hinted at a demand for further research on the history of détente, the

CSCE and West German foreign policy without prejudices based in the events of 1989–90. Without the benefit of hindsight, the seating of the two German delegations next to each other at the CSCE was not only a symbol of East–West and inner-German rapprochement. It also seemed to imply that the division of Germany and Europe was a permanent state of affairs. This was also ‘a state of peace in Europe’, but not yet the one that the FRG was pursuing.

Notes

1. Schmidt’s speech at Stage III of the CSCE, 30 July 1975, available on the OSCE website http://www.osce.org/documents/osce/1975/08/15773_en.pdf.
2. ‘Realistische Entspannungspolitik’, declaration of the Federal Government to the *Bundestag*, 25 July 1975. Published in Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik: Ausgewählte Grundsatzreden 1975–1980*, Stuttgart: Bonn aktuell 1981, 43–62.
3. Wilkens has pointed out that already during his tenure as foreign minister, Brandt understood the need to integrate West German policies into a coordinated Western approach, as a means to prevent Moscow’s attempts at selective détente. Andreas Wilkens, ‘New Ostpolitik and European Integration: Concept and Policies in the Brandt Era’, in: Ludlow (ed.), *European Integration and the Cold War*, 67–80, here 72.
4. For a good characterisation of the ‘charmed circle’ of EPC diplomats dealing with the CSCE, see Nuttall, *European Foreign Policy*, 2.
5. In this respect this book differs somewhat from Gottfried Niedhart’s argument in his otherwise persuasive article. Gottfried Niedhart, ‘Revisionistische Elemente und die Initiierung friedlichen Wandels in der neuen Ostpolitik 1967–1974’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002), 233–66.
6. Author’s interview with Bräutigam.
7. Author’s interview with Paul Frank, 19 Dec 2003.
8. Author’s interview with Bahr.