

Norbert Blüm and Wolfgang Schäuble Debate the Location of the Capital (June 20, 1991)

Abstract

During the Bundestag debate on the location of the capital, CDU social policy spokesman Norbert Blüm argued that Bonn stood for the Federal Republic's new democratic beginning and emphasized that moving the capital would be too costly. Blüm's CDU colleague, legal expert Wolfgang Schäuble, was of another opinion; he argued on behalf of moving the capital to Berlin. Schäuble presented Berlin as a symbol of national unity – one with the power to help reunite the European continent.

Source

Dr. Norbert Blüm (CDU/CSU): Madam President! Ladies and gentlemen! Dear colleagues! Whether Berlin or Bonn, whether parliament and government will be located here or there – the quarrel over this issue must not rob us of the joy that we are one people, reunited and free,

(Applause throughout the chamber)

and that we are able, once again, to debate where constitutional bodies in Germany should be located.

[...]

But the accomplishments of Bonn must not be minimized after forty years of the Federal Republic.

(Applause among deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, and the SPD)

The name of Bonn is associated with the longest liberal and peaceful period in our history. The period of time associated with Bonn was – and is – a good one.

[...]

Bonn has grown beyond being a provisional entity. It's not a way station where governing was done on suitcases. Bonn has gained republican significance of its own. Great historical moments are linked to Bonn. We passed the Unification Treaty in Berlin and in Bonn. We voted for it in Berlin and in Bonn.

The nation-state that we desire is embedded within Europe and divided into regions. Europeanization and regionalization, these are the poles of a modern nation-state. I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues: Does a dominating capital fit within such a federal solution?

(Dr. Margret Funke-Schmitt-Rink [FDP]: "Yes!" Shouts from the CDU/CSU: "No!")

I think not. A capital of Berlin with parliament and the seat of government would, I fear, create a wake that would also erode the newly won self-confidence of the new federal states.

Not without reason do states with a robust federal self-confidence refrain from locating their seats of parliament and government in their largest cities: the Americans didn't put their capital in New York but rather in Washington; the Canadians put theirs not in Montreal or Toronto but Ottawa; the Swiss not in Zurich but Bern. Shouldn't we be guided by the wisdom and experience of other federal states?

France and England show us what dominating central cities mean to regions and provinces. Even without the seat of government and parliament, Berlin will be the preeminent cultural and economic metropolis of our fatherland. It will be Germany's capital city in the truest sense of the word. Nobody disputes Berlin's rank in this regard. I ask: Does it need the seat of government and parliament on top of that?

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, and the SPD)

Let the much smaller Bonn keep her parliament and government! Bonn loses a lot with the relocation of the Bundestag and the government, and Berlin acquires many new problems: housing problems, urban planning problems, infrastructure problems.

[...]

Colleagues! Let us bring today's decision down from the lofty heights of historical, cultural, and political perspectives! For once, let us consider it from the perspective of those who are affected! A state that is not connected to life is a foreign, distant, a cold state.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU)

The jobs of 100,000 people in this region are affected by the move of the government and parliament.

(Shouts from the FDP)

One out of every three working people would be affected. On top of this are the families. One hundred thousand working people! It's as though ten steel plants or mines were being shut down in a single city. It's not only state secretaries or ministerial directors who are employed in Bonn. It's people who've created a life for themselves here.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU and the SPD)

You don't carry your home [*Heimat*] around like the shell of a snail.

This century has inflicted a lot of uprooting on people. The state shouldn't be the one carrying out a collective resettlement. Must be what need not be? Reunification must not be combined with a program of homelessness, in no part of Germany, in no city! We are already suffering enough from migratory movements within Germany; we must not add to them voluntarily.

Some skip too easily over the human costs of the move. And it's not petty to point to the financial burden of the move. Don't we need every Mark, today and tomorrow, for the rebuilding of the new federal states?

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, and the SPD)

The unemployed woman or the unemployed man, the young girl looking for an apprenticeship, the young man in Gera, Leipzig, Rostock, Erfurt, Frankfurt an der Oder, Schwerin, Magdeburg, Dresden, Chemnitz, Halle, or Bitterfeld – they probably have worries other than the question of what institutions a capital city needs to be outfitted with.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, and the SPD – boos from deputies of the FDP)

[...]

Bonn is associated with the democratic new beginning of our history. Bonn is associated with the most

peaceful and most liberal period of our history. It should never come to an end. Bonn is associated with Western integration, the basis of our readmission into the community of free peoples. It's not that Bonn has failed in its duty and can simply go. Together with Berlin, Bonn stands for a liberal and peaceful future for our country.

[...]

Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU/CSU): [...] I believe, during the forty years that we were divided, the vast majority of us, if asked where the parliament and the government should be located in the event of reunification, wouldn't even have understood the question; we would have responded with: Berlin, of course.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

[...]

And this is not about jobs, moving or traveling costs, about regional policy or economic development policy. To be sure, all of that's important,

(Otto Schily [SPD]: "Very true!")

but in reality this is about the future of Germany. That's the crucial question.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

With all due respect, let me say this: every one of us – I live neither in Bonn nor Berlin; I also don't live in Brandenburg or North Rhine-Westphalia, instead I live deep in the south-west on the French border – is not only the representative of his electoral district and his state but is also the representative of the entire German people.

(Sustained applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

Each one of us must be aware of this responsibility as we make our decisions today.

Last year we restored the unity of our people. That took a lot of effort. Now we still have to make it complete. That, too, will take a lot more effort.

Many have said that in order to overcome the division, we have to be willing to share. That's true. But anyone who thinks that can be done only through taxes and levies or collective bargaining and grouping is mistaken. Sharing means that we must demonstrate a collective willingness to jointly suffer the changes that arise from German unity.

(Sustained applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

That's why even in the so-called eleven old federal states – incidentally, Baden-Württemberg is not all that old compared to Saxony – not everything can stay as it was, and that includes Bonn and the Rhineland.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

If we want to overcome the division, if we truly want to find unity, we need trust and we must be able to depend on each other. Therefore, in making this decision, it's important to me that, over the course of 40 years, no one had any doubts that parliament and the government would have their seat in Berlin again after the restoration of German unity.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

In these forty years – this much is also true – the Basic Law, the old Federal Republic of Germany with its provisional capital of Bonn stood for freedom, democracy, and the state under the rule of law. But it always stood in that way for all of Germany. And the symbol for unity and freedom, for democracy and constitutional statehood for all of Germany was, like no other city, always Berlin:

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

from the airlift to June 17, 1953, from the building of the Wall in August 1961 to November 9, 1989, and to October 3 of last year.

Integration into a unified Europe and into the alliance of the free West has preserved peace and liberty for us and made unity possible. And the free world's solidarity with the unity and freedom of the Germans expressed itself nowhere more strongly than in Berlin. Would we really be reunited today without Berlin? I think not.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

German unity and European unity are interdependent. We have always said that, and it has proven to be true. My home, as I have said, is in the neighborhood of Straßburg. But Europe is more than Western Europe.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

Germany, the Germans, we have won our unity because Europe wanted to overcome its division.

That is why a decision for Berlin is also a decision for overcoming the division of Europe.

(Applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens)

I say it once more, dear colleagues: the issue today is not Bonn or Berlin, the issue is the future of all of us, our future in our reunited Germany, which must still find its inner unity, and our future in a Europe that must realize its unity if it wants to live up to its responsibility for peace, liberty, and social justice.

That is why I ask you sincerely: vote with me for Berlin.

(Long sustained applause from deputies of the CDU/CSU, the FDP, the SPD, and Alliance 90/The Greens – Deputies of the CDU/CSU and the SPD rise. – Deputy Willy Brandt [SPD] congratulates deputy Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble [CDU/CSU])

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