

Speech by Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev at a Soviet-Polish Meeting in Moscow (November 10, 1958)

Abstract

In November 1958, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev accused the Western powers of violating the demilitarization clause of the Potsdam Agreement of 1945 by rearming West Germany. He also accused them of using their privileges in West Berlin to undermine the integrity of the GDR. Khrushchev therefore threatened to put an end to the occupying powers' presence in Berlin. He wanted to force the Western powers to recognize the GDR and eliminate their outpost in West Berlin. Two weeks later, the Soviet Union demanded that West Berlin be demilitarized within six months and declared it a "free city." Negotiations defused the crisis by the early summer 1959.

Source

[...]

The imperialists have turned the German question into an abiding source of international tension. The ruling circles of Western Germany are doing everything to whip up military passions against the German Democratic Republic, against the Polish People's Republic, against all the socialist countries. Speeches by Chancellor Adenauer and Defence Minister Strauss, the atomic arming of the Bundeswehr and various military exercises all speak of a definite trend in the policy of the ruling circles of Western Germany.

We want to warn the leaders of the Federal Republic of Germany: The road followed by Western Germany today is a road dangerous to peace in Europe and fatal to Western Germany herself. Indeed, can realistically minded politicians today hope for the success of a new "march to the East"? Hitler in his time also did everything to fan war hysteria, in order to prepare the ground for an attack on the Soviet Union. However, it is well known how it all ended. It is not hard to imagine the fate of those who would try to unleash new aggression against the socialist states. No speeches by Chancellor Adenauer or his Minister Strauss can change the balance of forces in favour of imperialism. To march against the East would mean marching to death for Western Germany.

It is high time to realise that the times when the imperialists could act from "positions of strength" with impunity have gone never to return, and try as they may, the imperialists will not be able to change the balance of forces in their favour. Nor should they forget the geographical position of Western Germany – which with military techniques as they are today – would not survive a single day of modern warfare. We do not want another military conflict. It would be fatal to Western Germany and would bring untold calamities to the peoples of other countries. The Soviet Union and the other socialist countries are doing everything to keep the adventurists dreaming of new wars from taking the fatal step. The West German policy-makers would do well to consider more soberly the existing situation and desist from whipping up military passions.

[...]

The western press today often says that the government of the Federal Republic of Germany is planning to approach the Soviet Union, the United States of America, Britain and France with a proposal to call for a new four-power meeting to settle for the Germans, and without the Germans, the question of the unification of their country. But this is nothing but a continuation of the old, unrealistic policy which is

contrary to common sense and devoid of legal justification. No powers have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the German Democratic Republic and to dictate their will to it.

We quite understand the German people's natural yearning for the restoration of their national unity. But German militarists and their American patrons are using these heart-felt national sentiments for purposes that have nothing to do either with the reunification of Germany or with ensuring a lasting peace in Europe. The militaristic circles of Western Germany are in fact following the road of widening the division of the country and preparing military adventures. If the West German government really wanted reunification, it would have followed the only way leading to this, the way of establishing contacts with the government of the German Democratic Republic, the way of agreement that would suit both the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany.

The German question, in the sense of the reunification of the two German states now in existence, can only be settled by the German people themselves along the lines of *rapprochement* between these states. The conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany is an entirely different matter which, indeed, should be settled primarily by the four powers which formed the anti-Hitler coalition, in co-operation with representatives of Germany. The signing of a peace treaty with Germany would help to normalise the entire situation in Germany and in Europe in general.

The Soviet Union has proposed and is proposing that this measure should be tackled without delay.

If one were to speak of the four powers' undertakings with regard to Germany, one should speak of undertakings springing from the Potsdam Agreement.

Let us recall what were the main undertakings that the parties to the Potsdam Agreement assumed with regard to their policy in Germany, what was the way that Potsdam indicated for the development of Germany.

At that time, the members of the anti-Hitler coalition assumed clear-cut and definite undertakings: To extirpate German militarism, to prevent its resurgence once and for all, to do everything to prevent Germany from ever again threatening her neighbors or world peace.

The parties to the Potsdam Agreement also found it necessary to put an end to German fascism, to block its revival in Germany, to curb all fascist activities and propaganda.

Another important component of the Potsdam Agreement was an undertaking to liquidate the rule of cartels, syndicates and other monopolies in the German economy, that is, forces that had brought Hitler to power and had encouraged and financed his military gambles. Such was the substance of the agreements concluded in Potsdam in 1945.

And what do we have today, more than 13 years after the Potsdam Conference?

No one can deny that the Soviet Union, for its part, has scrupulously observed these agreements and that they have been carried out in full in the eastern part of Germany, the German Democratic Republic. Let us see how the Potsdam agreement is being carried out in the western part of Germany, in the Federal Republic of Germany, the responsibility for whose development rests with the three western powers – the United States, Britain and France.

It should be openly said that militarism, far from having been eradicated, is rearing its head ever higher in Western Germany. The powers which should have fought against the resurgence of German militarism have drawn Western Germany into the aggressive military bloc, N.A.T.O., that they have created. They are doing everything to promote the growth of German militarism and the establishment in Western Germany of a mass army supplied with the latest military equipment.

By decision of the government of the Federal Republic of Germany, and naturally, with the approval of the N.A.T.O. powers, Western Germany is building an army which the German militarists envisage as stronger than the armies of Britain and France. It is perhaps, already stronger than the French army, considering that a substantial part of the French army is kept outside the country, in the colonies, where the liberation movement against the French colonialists is at boiling point.

The armed forces that are being recreated in Western Germany are again headed by Nazi generals and admirals. The West German army is being trained in the spirit of the predatory aspirations of the Nazi Wehrmacht, in the spirit of revenge and hatred for the Soviet Union and other peaceable states.

Moreover, the German militarists – with the blessing of the western powers, and primarily the United States – are receiving nuclear weapons. The Federal Republic already has American rockets which can be fitted with nuclear warheads.

Economically, Western Germany is literally taking its West European allies by the throat. It is enough to note, for the sake of comparison, that in 1957, for instance, the Federal Republic produced 24,500,000 tons of steel, as opposed to 22 million in Britain and little more than 14 million in France.

Financially, too, Western Germany is today stronger than either Britain or France. Consider their gold and currency reserves, for instance. According to official figures, Western Germany's reserves amounted to over 5,600 million dollars at the end of 1957, as compared with Britain's 2,370 million and France's 775 million dollars. All these economic resources of Western Germany are being placed at the service of reviving German militarism.

Whichever basic provisions of the Potsdam Agreement concerning the demilitarization of Germany and prevention of the resurgence of fascism we may consider, we shall arrive at the conclusion that these provisions, bearing the signatures of the United States, Britain and France, have been violated by them.

What then is left of the Potsdam Agreement?

One thing in effect: The so-called four-power status of Berlin, that is, a position in which the three western powers – the United States, Britain and France – have the possibility of lording it in Western Berlin, turning that part of the city, which is the capital of the German Democratic Republic, into some kind of state within a state and, profiting by this, conducting subversive activities from Western Berlin against the German Democratic Republic, against the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Treaty countries. On top of all this, they have the right of unrestricted communication between Berlin and Western Germany through the air space, by the railways, highways and waterways of the German Democratic Republic, a state which they do not even want to recognise.

The question arises: Who stands to benefit from this situation and why have the United States, France and Britain not violated this part of the quadripartite agreement as well? The answer is clear: They have no intention of violating this part of the Potsdam Agreement. On the contrary, they cling to it, for the agreement on Berlin is advantageous to the western powers and to them alone. The western powers, naturally, are not averse to perpetuating such privileges of "allies" forever, even though they have long demolished the legal basis for their presence in Berlin.

Is it not time for us to draw appropriate conclusions from the fact that the key items of the Potsdam Agreement concerning the maintenance of peace in Europe and, consequently, throughout the world, have been violated, and that certain forces continue to nurture German militarism, prompting it in the direction in which it was pushed before the Second World War, that is, against the East? Is it not time for us to reconsider our attitude to this part of the Potsdam Agreement and to denounce it?

The time has obviously arrived for the signatories of the Potsdam Agreement to renounce the remnants

of the occupation regime in Berlin and thereby make it possible to create a normal situation in the capital of the German Democratic Republic. The Soviet Union, for its part, would hand over to the sovereign German Democratic Republic the functions in Berlin that are still exercised by Soviet agencies. This, I think, would be the correct thing to do.

Let the United States, France and Britain themselves build their relations with the German Democratic Republic, let them reach agreement with it themselves if they are interested in any questions concerning Berlin. As for the Soviet Union, we shall sacredly honour our obligations as an ally of the German Democratic Republic – obligations which stem from the Warsaw Treaty and which we have repeatedly reaffirmed to the German Democratic Republic.

If any forces of aggression attack the German Democratic Republic, which is a full-fledged member of the Warsaw Treaty we shall regard this as an attack on the Soviet Union, on all the Warsaw Treaty countries. We shall then rise in defence of the German Democratic Republic, and this will mean defence of the vital security interests of the Soviet Union, of the entire socialist camp, and of the cause of world peace.

The western powers which, in their time, signed the Potsdam Agreement, are today working to worsen the international situation, to encourage the growing militarist tendencies of German revenge-seekers, that is, they support all that the Potsdam Agreement denounced. They have long since been guided by the aggressive North Atlantic Treaty and not by the Potsdam Agreement.

They have violated the Potsdam Agreement repeatedly and with impunity, while we remain loyal to it as if nothing had changed. We have every reason to set ourselves free from obligations under the Potsdam Agreement, obligations which have outlived themselves and which the western powers are clinging to, and to pursue with regard to Berlin a policy that would spring from the interests of the Warsaw Treaty.

The leaders of Western Germany say that good relations between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany can only be established if the Soviet Union ceases to support the German Democratic Republic and if it brings pressure to bear on it in a direction needed by the West. Bonn does not, apparently, desire good relations with the Soviet Union if it entertains such absurd hopes. If the government of the Federal Republic really wants to have good relations with the Soviet Union, it should abandon, once and for all, the hope that we shall cease to support the German Democratic Republic.

[...]

Source: Address by Premier Khrushchev at a Soviet-Polish Meeting, on Germany and Berlin (November 10, 1958); reprinted in *Documents on Germany, 1944-1959: Background Documents on Germany, 1944-1959, and a Chronology of Political Developments affecting Berlin, 1945-1956*. Washington, DC: General Printing Office, 1959, pp. 308-12.

Recommended Citation: Speech by Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev at a Soviet-Polish Meeting in Moscow (November 10, 1958), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-3089>> [May 04, 2024].