

The Hallstein Doctrine (June 28, 1956)

Abstract

The Hallstein Doctrine is named after Walter Hallstein, secretary of state in the West German foreign office from 1951–1958. However, its origins go back to the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949 and the claim that it owned the exclusive right to represent all Germans internationally. However, problems with this claim were bound to arise, once another German state with its own government and administration was established in the East Berlin suburb of Pankow in 1949 with the help of the Soviet Union. To buttress its claim to statehood and international recognition, the East German government was encouraged by Moscow to open diplomatic missions and trade delegations in the Communist sphere, while the Western Allies refused to recognize it, thus supporting the Federal Republic as it began to establish diplomatic relations throughout the world. After gaining full sovereignty in 1955 and with the Cold War between the West and the Eastern Bloc now in full swing, it was Wilhelm Grewe, the expert on international law in the West German foreign office who cast the policy of non-recognition into a doctrine. It postulated that any foreign government that tried to establish diplomatic relations with East Berlin would be faced with the closing of the West German mission in that country and the cancellation of any foreign aid that Bonn had been giving. For many countries in the non-Western world this posed a serious dilemma, as they did not wish to lose the support of the wealthier Federal Republic, even if their left-wing or Communist governments were more sympathetic toward the GDR. To demonstrate that Bonn was dead serious about its doctrine, the West German foreign office in fact broke off diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia in 1957 when Belgrade established relations with East Germany. Cuba under Fidel Castro became another case in point. However, during the 1960s the Hallstein Doctrine increasingly became a toothless tiger. Applying it rigidly began to run counter to the political and commercial interests of the Federal Republic. It was also undermined when Willy Brandt decided to establish relations with West Germany's eastern neighbors. It was finally abandoned in 1969 when Brandt as foreign minister and then as chancellor negotiated treaties with Eastern Bloc countries and established embassies in Warsaw, Prague and other Communist countries.

Source

[...]

The recognition of the German Democratic Republic would mean international recognition of the partition of Germany into two states. Reunification would then no longer present itself as the elimination of a temporary disturbance in the organism of our all-German state: instead it would become the infinitely more difficult task of uniting two separate states. The history of the unification of Germany in the nineteenth century illustrates what that can mean. Were the Federal Republic to take the lead in recognition, it would itself contribute to a state of affairs in which Europe and the world would no longer realize the anomaly of the present situation and become resigned to it. It would relieve the Four Powers of their responsibility for the re-establishment of the national unity of Germany, a responsibility which they—including the Soviet Union—have so far always recognized. Instead, it would accord to Pieck, Grotewohl and Ulbricht the right to veto any reunification. Furthermore, recognition of the “German Democratic Republic” would mean that the Federal Republic would relinquish its claim to speak for the entire German people, a claim established in our constitution and which no Federal Government can ignore.

The Federal Government cannot refrain from making it clear once again that it will feel compelled in

future to regard the establishing of diplomatic relations with the so-called German Democratic Republic by third states with which the Federal Republic maintains diplomatic relations as an unfriendly act calculated to intensify and aggravate the partition of Germany. The Federal Government would in such a case have to re-consider its relations to the state in question.

The question has been variously discussed in recent times as to whether or not it is useful and possible to establish relations with Germany's eastern neighbors. The Federal Government has examined this problem in all its detail and has come to the conclusion that, under present circumstances, diplomatic relations cannot be established with those countries. That does not mean that the Federal Government is not interested in the establishment of normal relations with the countries in question. [...]

Source of original German text: Heinrich von Sieglar, *Wiedervereinigung und Sicherheit Deutschlands*. 3. Aufl., Bonn/Wien/Zürich: Verlag für Zeitarchive, 1958, p. 194.

Source of English translation: Carl-Christoph Schweitzer et al., eds., *Politics and Government in Germany, 1944–1994*. Providence-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995, p. 127.

Recommended Citation: The Hallstein Doctrine (June 28, 1956), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-5230>> [April 29, 2024].