

Freedom at the Core of the German Question (March 15, 1984)

Abstract

In this report on the “State of the Nation in Divided Germany,” which was delivered to the Bundestag, the chancellor emphasizes the right of all Germans to liberty and self-determination and stresses the unity of the German nation. He also underscores the government’s duty to improve relations between the two German states to better serve the interests of the citizenry and to promote peace in Europe.

Source

Report by Federal Chancellor Dr. Helmut Kohl on the State of the Nation in Divided Germany

Mr. President, honored ladies and gentlemen, we are speaking today of the state of the nation. Regarding the state of the nation, it must first be said that the division of Germany is a bitter reality for Germans. But the hope of overcoming this division is also a reality. The unity of the nation is and will remain alive.

There is intensive dialogue between the two German states; there are diverse contacts and constructive cooperation in numerous areas. Since the last report on the state of the nation in divided Germany, the network of relations has become firmer. Especially in difficult times of east-west relations, the two states are making an important contribution to maintaining peace by actively using all available options to work together.

This state of intra-German relations is the result of determined and level-headed policies. The idea, results, and prospects of these policies are recorded in this report on the state of the nation in divided Germany in six points:

First: Freedom is the core of the German Question.

The national task remains valid and achievable: to bring about the unity and freedom of Germany in free self-determination in a unified Europe.

Our most important legal and moral position remains the entitlement of all Germans to freedom and self-determination. The unity of the nation should and must be achieved first and foremost in the freedom of its people.

For us, the protection of freedom takes priority over all other goals. The Federal Republic of Germany is a liberal democratic state. Our commitment to a liberal democracy is one of the foundations of our state. Our decision for the European Community and NATO constitutes the base of our policies. We know where we belong; we know where we stand: on the side of freedom. We share our basic values and our political culture with [other] democratic states under the rule of law, a common basis that has grown over centuries of cooperation and conflict.

Because we want to remain free people in the free West, there is no inconstancy for us as regards this issue: From the sorrowful historical experience of a totalitarian regime internally and aggression directed externally, we have learned that freedom, human rights, and the peace they offer are the primary determinants of our state.

Our friends in the West know that they can rely on us. From historical experience and common values, and not least due to well-understood self-interest, they and we belong together. We firmly declared our commitment to the alliance in the free West in the Paris Accords thirty years ago. And in the same way the Three Powers, our most important allies, have obliged themselves to the goal of the unity of a free Germany.

The German Question remains an open one: This is true both politically and legally. The legal foundations that I named in detail in my policy statement of May 4, 1983, remain authoritative and offer an orientation for the policies of the federal government.

[...]

Second: The German nation is a reality in the consciousness of Germans.

Shaped by many centuries of common history in the heart of Europe, we Germans understand the unity of our nation as self-evident.

The historical and political changes on German soil have not extinguished the consciousness of national unity. We in the free part of our fatherland are confronting our entire history, with its dazzling chapters and its horrible, somber ones. And we know that in this century especially the common experience of arrogance and guilt, of misery and suffering is what holds all Germans together and what keeps the consciousness of our unity alive.

[...]

Third: it is our duty to make the consequences of the division more tolerable and less dangerous for the people.

We want to find practical solutions that serve the people. This too is part of satisfying our national obligation. And of course this cannot be achieved at the cost of democracy, freedom, and human rights.

We are aware of the complexity of intra-German relations. These relations have remained stable, even in view of the political decisions of recent months. It benefits both sides, it benefits our allies in the West, and I can declare this with satisfaction.

[...]

Fourth: As a contribution to peace in Europe we wish to intensify our relations with the GDR.

We are committed to the treaties we have concluded. We want to continue to reinforce the fabric of our relations.

I welcome—let me say this explicitly—the fact that the Social Democratic Party of Germany and its party caucus also agree with these policies. The broad agreement in the decision of the German Bundestag of February 9, 1984, was an expression of this. Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know why you are suddenly so unsettled. You should be pleased that this is a clear sign of some common ground.

We want to protect and expand what we have accomplished; we want to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the Basic Treaty and the other intra-German treaties and agreements.

We are prepared to further develop our relations with the GDR on the basis of balance, adherence to the treaties, and reliability, and with the goal of practical results that are directly useful to the people.

[...]

Fifth: We must unify Europe in order to also complete the unification of Germany in freedom.

As a country in the heart of Europe, at the focal point of the European power systems, Germany was repeatedly the site where other countries asserted their respective interests. There were also phases in which Germans repressed the dangers associated with our central location in Europe. They yielded to the temptation to take an independent route as a nation and in those days put their faith in a politics of hegemony. We all know that our country then failed. Our generation learned a lesson from that historical experience. No special path [*Sonderweg*] by Germany can lead our country out of the heart of Europe. We have to and want to shape our future within a European framework and resolve our national question as a work of peace.

We are aware of the European dimension to Germany's division, which we can only overcome with the support of the peoples of Europe, that is, our neighbors. We are also aware of the great responsibility that our country in particular has as a stabilizing factor in the heart of Europe. No one should believe that Germans would ever again disregard their European responsibility. Peace must go forth from German soil. We are immune to any temptation to shed our European ties, ignore the stability of all of Europe, and strive to overcome the division in isolation from our neighbors.

There is also another side to these European ties. With Germany's claim to free self-determination, divided Europe can find a strength that can also serve its renewal and its unification. At the same time, all Europeans know that overcoming the division of Europe requires a peaceful order for Germany, and this must be approved by the entire German people in free self-determination. We are aware of the fact, ladies and gentlemen, that the national conception of Germans and the European idea are interdependent. For us, European policies and *Deutschlandpolitik* are two sides of the same coin. Being a driving force for the unification of Europe has been part of the national task, the reason of state, of the Federal Republic of Germany from the very beginning. Our liberal political culture needs the European horizon of shared basic values.

[...]

Sixth: The German nation belongs to the West.

Our place is and will always be in the alliance for freedom. The political system of the western democracies—with civil liberties, rule of law, political self-determination—is worth protecting internally and defending externally. For us, that means that some things are self-evident, also in the future: free elections, freedom of opinion and expression, independent trade unions, freedom of movement, and much more. We owe this to ourselves and to our allies, and, ladies and gentlemen, we also owe it to the people in central and eastern Europe. They too want to be free, to live in freedom and to exercise self-determination as regards their polity and their political will. Therein lies the true problem of German and European division: in the lack of freedom and self-determination for the people of central and eastern Europe.

[...]

Ladies and gentlemen, the border between East and West separates what belongs together in peace. Just as the German Question is at the focal point of European history—let me repeat—freedom is the core of the German Question. Freedom is the precondition for unity. It cannot be its price. I issue a firm warning not to be fooled by any illusion that our freedom and our security could be played off against our wishes for unity.

[...]

Source: Bericht von Bundeskanzler Dr. Helmut Kohl zur Lage der Nation im geteilten Deutschland, March 15, 1984, in *Bulletin* (Press and Information Office of the Federal Government), no. 30, March 16, 1984, pp. 261–68; reprinted in *Deutscher Bundestag – 10. Wahlperiode – 59. Sitzung*. Bonn, Thursday, March 15, 1984, pp. 4158–64. Available online at: <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/10/10059.pdf>

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Recommended Citation: Freedom at the Core of the German Question (March 15, 1984), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/two-germanies-1961-1989/ghdi:document-1144>> [April 27, 2024].