

# Sharing the Red Carpet

## *A Visit to Bonn*

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THE IMPECCABLY proper German official is visibly impatient. Holding open the door to the nearest of a fleet of black Mercedes that were waiting, he rushes us in—"Surely we do not want to keep the president waiting." We are leaving Petersberg, the official guest house of the German government in Bonn—a group of eleven Americans invited to Germany as the personal guests of Chancellor Helmut Kohl.<sup>1</sup>

Just before we leave, Professor Werner Weidenfeld, who greets us in the name of the Chancellor, shares with us an anecdote that foretells much that is to come. After World War II the Allied High Commissioner, representing the occupational powers, had his seat in Petersberg. The new German government, headed by Konrad Adenauer had come to call on him. Protocol called for the High Commissioner to stand on the red carpet and for the Germans to stay off it. Adenauer, however, deliberately mounted the carpet; and did so in front of the press. The American High Commissioner acquiesced.

Our first official visit is with the President of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker, a gray-haired gentleman who looks like a most distinguished professor. A gracious host, he speaks English for his American guests, although his command of it is somewhat less than complete. The

President gently teases the U.S. Ambassador to Germany, Robert M. Kimmitt, who together with the new German Ambassador to the United States, Dr. Immo Stabreit, accompanies us during much of the visit. The subject at hand is the "Euro-corps," the German-French agreement to form a joint military force. The United States is concerned because the German troops to be assigned to this force are to be taken from those that are supposed to be available for NATO. The Germans maintain that in the case of war the Euro-corps would coordinate with NATO; the French, more independent, resist this notion. With this in mind, I can follow Weizsäcker's comment to Kimmitt: "I would not worry about Euro-corps," and Kimmitt's quick retort: "We are not worried about *the German side*." It seems to me that if

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<sup>1</sup>The group included three CEOs of giant American corporations (Boeing, Proctor and Gamble, and California Edison Company); three top officials from leading universities (the Presidents of Rice and Boston University and a Vice President of Duke University); the head of the Council on Foreign Relations; the Dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard; the head of the Kennedy Center; a member of the Federal Reserve system; and myself (possibly German media reports about my role as the "guru" of the new communitarian movement put me on the invitation list).

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the United States and France both court Germany, and if we insist that they should be less involved with France, we are increasing Germany's leverage over both sides.

During the discussion that follows in Weizsäcker's office, I tell the President that although I am a Jew, born in nearby Cologne and forced to leave Germany at the age of five, I do not believe that one should hold what happened fifty years ago against contemporary Germany; one need not forget history to be able to put it aside and judge Germany by its current actions. Later, a Jewish member of our group takes me aside to express misgivings: the past is too horrible to be set aside. I look at the young German guide assigned to me, whose *parents* were small children when the Nazi regime ended, and I cannot feel any animosity towards him or hold his Germany responsible for the atrocities committed by his grandparents' generation.

The distance from the President's office to the German State Department is short but we find a rather different climate. Soft-spoken is not exactly a term that would apply to the new Foreign Minister, Dr. Klaus Kinkel (he is a young 55 while the President is a full 72). Kinkel chooses to speak German, "for the sake of accuracy." Referring to the situation in Yugoslavia as of September 1992, he indicates that the West is close to having exhausted all peaceful options and that military options, such as bombing the Serbian forces, will have to be seriously considered. Kinkel explains that Germany is seeking to modify its constitution to allow it to send its armed forces outside its borders, in the first instance as part of UN peace-keeping forces. Noting that Germany is being called upon to help pay for United Nations "blue helmet" operations, the Foreign Minister adds, with considerable emotion, that "Germany is tired of paying for the fire brigade, but not being on the ladder."

In a discussion concerning the long-term future of Germany, Dr. Kinkel asserts that Germany should gain a seat on the UN

Security Council, should sit at the table with the big powers. He explains that at first Germany was not particularly keen on pushing its way in, but now that "Japan is running around seeking a seat and suggesting that this is not a problem because Germany is not interested, it is time to clarify our position." As he sees it "the UN was set up at the end of World War II by the victorious nations. Since then the reality changed drastically and the time is ripe for the UN to adjust." Kinkel says this would also entail including some Third World powers like Brazil on the Security Council, along with Japan and Germany.

Before I have a chance to figure out whether the difference between the two leading Germans we have met is best interpreted as one of personalities or of generations, we are ushered into Chancellor Kohl's conference room. He marches in surrounded by aides. He is an immense man who visibly has more important things to worry about than dieting. In manner as well as age, we find him, at 62, somewhere in between the somewhat assertive Kinkel and the restrained Weizsäcker. For three hours Kohl answers each of our questions with twenty minutes or so of rambling exposition, adding little to what can be read in the daily press. Next, we are served dinner in his pleasant and rather modest home, called a "bungalow," without any of the highly visible security you see around and inside the White House.

The Chancellor repeatedly stresses the need to sustain close German-American relations. He refers several times to his two pairs of eyes on America, his two sons, one a Harvard graduate and the other a former student at MIT. Kohl never explicitly states that he sees America and Germany as the pillars of the new world order, but he scoffs repeatedly at the other powers, especially Japan and Britain. I will not repeat the cracks he made at their expense, because the Chancellor warned us (though, it seems, half in jest), "I would be in trouble if you repeat what I just said." It is, though, fair to report that he is

not overwhelmed by Japan's readiness to assume international responsibilities or by the stature of British leadership. About the French, Kohl speaks in what can at best be described as bemusement. At one point he observes rather tartly that the French were still "marching up and down the Champs Elysées, celebrating their victory over Germany, while if anyone visited a museum they would soon discover that actually it was the Americans who won the wars." He adds, "If it were us, we would have long ago stopped such merriment, but one has to live and let live." Perhaps Kohl's comments are best interpreted as light ribbing, the kind that occurs among people who work closely together.

Chancellor Kohl, as one would expect, says he subscribes to the idea of political unification. Still, the statement that Germany will blend into Europe is heard much more often in Britain and France than in Germany itself. On the other hand, at one point a German colleague who is escorting us leans over and says to me quietly, "Germany is best when it is not in isolation; when it is involved with someone who holds it back." (He may have said "down.")

It seems quite evident—as Kinkel's comments about Germany's role suggest, and Kohl's aside helps to confirm—that the pace at which Germany seeks to follow its own course, build up its national strength and pride, and overcome hesitation due to its history (a process that is commonly referred to in the press as "the normalization of Germany"), is likely to outpace European political unification. If anybody is taking bets, I'll wager that ten years from now, Germany will be a full-blown, independent world power, not the Texas or California of a United Europe. As I see it, to ask how one may hold Germany down, which implicitly assumes that it is by nature dangerous, is the wrong question. One cannot restrain Germany's ambitions much longer; moreover, on the face of it German aspirations are not illegitimate. The correct question is:

Where is the new Germany headed and how can we encourage its constructive tendencies.

With this question in mind, I listen with particular attention when the Chancellor turns to a subject that many people believe casts light on the nature of the new Germany—the treatment of the asylum-seekers. Kohl explains that Germany is flooded by a huge number of immigrants, legal and otherwise (in the first nine months of 1992, 280,000 refugees entered Germany following about one million immigrants in 1991). By comparison, immigration to the United States—already very high—would have to *triple* to reach the same level proportionally. The influx of refugees and immigrants, coming on top of several millions of "ethnic Germans" returning from Eastern Europe, Kohl elaborates, seriously strains Germany's facilities. They also add to the already existing cultural strains caused by the numerous *Gastarbeiter*, the Turks and other foreign workers. Kohl adds that special problems are caused because asylum-seekers are concentrated in eastern Germany, where unemployment is rampant.

We face similar problems with Haitian refugees, and prevent them from entering the United States. I see nothing evil in Germany's plan to prevent refugees from certain countries, where there is presently no political persecution, from being admitted, housed and subsidized for months on end, until a hearing is held to determine whether they are political or economic refugees. But when German leaders trot these explanations out one after the other, spend only the briefest time expressing concern about the ways young Germans articulate their objections, and treat the rioters relatively gently, one cannot help but be troubled. After debating the asylum issue for over two years, the German government is tightening asylum requirements only now, in direct response to fire bombings. This cannot but send the message that violence is being rewarded. (A colleague later explains that Kohl and his party, the Christian Democratic

Union (CDU), are careful not to antagonize the fair number of Germans who oppose immigration; otherwise, those Germans might lend their support to right-wing parties that make opposition to immigration one of their leading issues, thereby undermining the CDU-led coalition government which, as it is, is only narrowly holding on.)<sup>2</sup>

After our meeting with Chancellor Kohl, there is no doubt in my mind that Germany will successfully emerge from the current economic difficulties, successfully complete the reconstruction of eastern Germany, and become a major European power. I am confident that eventually Germany will become a member of the UN Security Council. None of this troubles me in spite of Germany's past.

It is the direction that Germany will cast its power in the future about which I wonder. As the visit to Germany draws to its conclusion, I mull hopefully over an answer Kohl gave to a question I raised during our meeting in Bonn. I had wondered: "Would Germany take the lead in pushing for a foreign policy and a world that is morally ennobling rather than join a world of *realpolitik*; one in which each nation is preoccupied with its own national interest and little else? For instance, would Germany take the lead and reduce the world-wide trade in arms, starting with chemical and nuclear weapons?"

The Chancellor, probably aware that I grew up in Israel (it was clear that he had been carefully briefed about us), began his answer by referring to the Middle East: "We are blamed for the arming of Iraq although at most we were number five or six in the queue." He insists Germany is a "very free country," and "we do not monitor exports." He then noted that Germany had destroyed arms found in the eastern provinces rather than sell them. In fact, he added, Germany has refused to sell arms on several occasions, including a sophisticated tank which the Arabs wanted, and submarines. To me, Kohl's answers hold out some hope that the new Germany may lead in the true sense of the term: that it will not just throw its weight around or exact a new place at the top of world councils, but also offer new directions for a more benign and peaceful world. □

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<sup>2</sup> Kohl's support is about as low as that of Bush on entering the 1992 Republican National Convention, and like Bush he is trying to bring back into the tent those who might otherwise join the German equivalent of the followers of David Duke or those of Pat Buchanan—the *Republikaner* or the *Deutsche Volks-Union*.