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The Birth of the Grand Coalition (December 13, 1966)

In his policy statement to the Bundestag, Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger addressed mainly economic policy and foreign policy issues and signaled a change of course in policies towards East Germany and Eastern Europe. This change would become manifest in the erosion of the Hallstein Doctrine, among other things.

Policy Statement by the Federal Chancellor to the German Bundestag in Bonn on December 13, 1666

Mr. President! Ladies and gentlemen! The formation of this government, in whose name I have the honor of addressing you, was preceded by a long, smoldering crisis, whose origins can be traced back for years. The crisis burst into the open barely one year after the elections to the 5th German Bundestag, which produced an impressive vote of confidence for my predecessor, Professor Ludwig Erhard, and enabled the parties of the previous coalition to continue governing. Subsequently, domestic political difficulties, internal party quarrels, and foreign policy concerns encumbered the work of the government, until disagreements over balancing the 1967 federal budget and over fiscal policy measures that are necessary in the long-term finally led to the breakup of the previous coalition and to a minority cabinet.

The new Grand Coalition government emerged from the ensuing coalition negotiations. The negotiations between the parties led to what was probably the most thorough stock-taking of the opportunities and necessities of German politics prior to any government's formation.

For the first time, the Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union and the Social Democratic Party have decided to form a joint government at the federal level. This is, without a doubt, a milestone in the history of the Federal Republic, an event to which many hopes and concerns of our people are tied. The hopes center on the ability of the Grand Coalition, which commands such a large majority in the Bundestag, well exceeding two-thirds, to solve the difficult problems before it: that it will, first of all, put the public budget in order, run a frugal administration, and tend to the growth of our economy and the stability of our currency.

These are all prerequisites for private and public welfare in our country, as in any other country. They guarantee that the government and the parliament have the necessary power to take

action in all areas of domestic and foreign policy. Many of the concerns regard the possible dangers inherent to a Grand Coalition, which is faced by only a relatively small opposition.

We are determined, insofar as we can, to fulfill the hopes placed on us and to ward off the possible dangers. In this coalition, ladies and gentlemen, power and offices won't be divided up between partners, abuses and problems won't be covered up, and the momentum of parliamentary life will not be crippled by behind-the-scenes deals, as is implied by the catchphrase "consociational" democracy.* The opposition will have every opportunity afforded by the parliament to have its views represented and heard.

The strongest guarantee against any possible abuse of power is the firm resolve of the partners in the Grand Coalition to partner only for a limited period of time, that is, to the end of this legislative period. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

During this period of collaboration, the government believes that a new electoral law should be laid down constitutionally. For future elections to the German Bundestag, such a law would allow clear majorities after 1969. [*Renewed applause from the government parties.*]

This will create institutional pressure to end the Grand Coalition and an institutional defense against the necessity of forming coalitions altogether. The possibility of a transitional electoral law for the Bundestag elections in 1969 is being examined by the government.

This decision to form only a temporary coalition, however, will not prevent us from tackling all important issues with the utmost determination, for as long as this coalition lasts.

Our most immediate concern is balancing the budget for 1967. This has to happen quickly. The Financial Planning Law, the Tax Amendment Law of 1966, and the Supplementary Budget Law of 1967 are not enough to completely close the budgetary gaps. In spite of these three laws, we are anticipating a gap of around 3.3 billion Deutschmarks for 1967. The government will present new proposals for balancing the budget amounting to this figure as soon as possible.

In coming years, the financial situation of the federal government looks even bleaker. We might face budget gaps that are as large, averaged annually, as the entire budget of one of the financially strongest states in the Federal Republic – and this in spite of the three laws recently passed by the Upper House.

[. . .]

The recovery of the federal finances is less a question of expertise than of political courage and acquiescence on the part of all those responsible. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

* *Proporzdemokratie*: awarding offices based on the strength of a few major parties sharing power and patronage. Stands in contrast to democratic systems based strictly on majority rule – trans.

The government knows this and will prepare the decisions that are necessary to fill the budgetary gaps looming in 1968 and will see to it that high-priority tasks can be performed better. This will not be possible only with measures that hurt no one. [. . .]

Careful mid-range financial planning that represents more than simply the sum of different department's proposals must put us in a position to reclaim this necessary financial leeway and to thus make new political decisions feasible again.

Of course, we must keep an eye not only on the federal budget in these considerations. We live in a federal state, in which federal government, states, and local authorities all have their own responsibilities to fulfill. Whether the division of responsibilities is still appropriate today, or whether certain federal responsibilities ought to be transferred to the states and state responsibilities to the federal government will need to be examined in conjunction with the reform of the constitutional rules governing public finances. This government sees this reform as one of the major challenges in domestic politics and wants to carry it out. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

[. . .]

All our efforts on behalf of domestic order, economic growth, and social justice, ladies and gentlemen, of course only make sense and will only last if we succeed in preserving peace and a liberal way of life. That peace be preserved is the hope of all nations, and the German people wish for this no less than the others. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

Therefore, working for peace and understanding among nations is the first word and the basic concern of the foreign policy of this government. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

Indeed, every [government's] foreign policy most immediately serves the interests of its own people; but in a world in which the fates of all peoples are so closely bound up with each other, the shared responsibility for this world and for peace in this world must not be shirked by anyone. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

The German government advocates a consistent and effective peace policy through which political tensions are removed and the arms race checked. We will collaborate on proposals for arms control, arms reduction, and disarmament. Vis-à-vis its alliance partners, the Federal Republic has forgone the manufacturing of nuclear weapons and submitted to the corresponding international controls. We seek no national control over nuclear weapons and no national possession of such weapons. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

We resolve to maintain relations that are based on understanding, mutual trust, and a will to cooperate with all nations.

This also applies to our relationship with the Soviet Union, although our relations are still burdened by the unresolved issue of the reunification of our people. In 1955, during our visit to Moscow – allow me this personal reminiscence – I belonged to those who emphatically advocated for establishing diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union. Doubtlessly, the development of these relations has disappointed expectations on both sides. But this should not diminish our step-by-step efforts toward understanding and greater mutual trust. In my last speech before the German Bundestag on October 1, 1958, in Berlin, I said that the German people harbor neither hostility nor hatred for the peoples of the Soviet Union; on the contrary, they want to live as good peaceful neighbors, and they also do not even think of interfering in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. I added that the Soviet Union sees problems with respect to the reunification of Germany, the resolution of which will seem difficult to her. Political astuteness and a long-sighted willingness for understanding on the part of all involved would be able to overcome such difficulties, however. This is still my conviction today. And this government will act on this conviction. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

The last federal government, in its peace note from March of this year, also offered mutual renunciation of force to the Soviet Union in order to clarify, once more, that it does not intend to achieve its goals by any other than peaceful means. Today, the federal government repeats this offer, which also extends to the other Eastern European states. It is prepared to incorporate the unresolved problem of Germany's division into this offer. [*Applause from SPD members of parliament.*]

Moreover, we hope to continuously promote and deepen mutual understanding and trust through the development of our economic, intellectual, and cultural relations, in order to create the preconditions for successful talks and negotiations in the future.

For centuries, Germany was a bridge between Western and Eastern Europe. We would like to play this role in our day and age, too. Thus, improving our relationship – in every area of economic, political, and cultural life – with our neighbors to the East, who hope for the same, is important to us. Wherever circumstances permit, we would like to establish diplomatic relations as well.

Among large sections of the German people there is a strong wish for reconciliation with Poland, whose sorrowful history we have not forgotten and whose desire to at last live in a territory with secure borders is something that we, in view of our divided nation's current fate, understand better now than in earlier times. But the borders of a reunified Germany can only be defined in an agreement, freely negotiated, with a pan-German government. This agreement should lay the foundation for a durable and peaceful relationship of good neighborliness sanctioned by both peoples. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

[. . .]

We are grateful to our allies for supporting our point of view with respect to our divided people and their right to self-determination. Political circumstances have hindered the reunification of our nation thus far. And it is not yet foreseeable when reunification will succeed. Even this question, which is so decisive for our people, is about peace and understanding for us. We are not thoughtless troublemakers, for what we really want is to eliminate the trouble spot that is Germany's division, which is also a European division, by peaceful agreement, and to restore the inner peace of our people and their peace with the world. This federal government, too, regards itself as the only German government that was freely, legally, and democratically elected and thereby entitled to speak for the entire German people. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

This does not mean that we want to override our compatriots in the other part of Germany, compatriots who cannot choose freely. We want, to the extent that we can, to prevent the two parts of our people from becoming estranged while they are divided. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

We want to ease tension not worsen it; we want to overcome rather than deepen rifts. That is why we want to promote human, economic, and intellectual relations with our compatriots in the other part of Germany with all our might. Where this necessitates the establishment of contacts between government agencies of the Federal Republic and their counterparts in the other part of Germany, this does not constitute the recognition of a second German state. We will handle these contacts on a case-by-case basis so as not to awaken the impression in world opinion that we might be moving away from our legal vantage point. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

The federal government strives to expand intra-German trade, which is not foreign trade. It will also attempt to expand credit opportunities and contemplate certain organizational measures to strengthen intra-German contacts.

The federal government will do anything to keep Berlin as a part of the Federal Republic and, together with the Senate and the Protecting Powers, will examine how the economy of Berlin and its place in our legal system can be secured. [*Applause from the government parties.*]

We want to do what is possible for the welfare of the people in the divided Germany and make possible whatever is necessary.

[. . .]

Source: Kurt Georg Kiesinger, "Regierungserklärung des Bundeskanzlers am 13. Dezember 1966 vor dem Deutschen Bundestag in Bonn" ["Policy Statement by the Federal Chancellor to the German Bundestag in Bonn on December 13, 1966"], *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages: Plenarprotokolle, Stenographische Berichte* [Proceedings of the German

*Bundestag: Plenary Records, Stenographic Reports], 1966/67, vol. 63, pp. 3656-65; reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, ed., *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955-1970* [Two States, One Nation. German History 1955-1970]. Göttingen, 1988, pp. 526-31.*

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