



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961

Speech by Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the Federal Republic, at a Reception Given by the Allied High Commissioners (September 21, 1949)

The first parliamentary elections in the Federal Republic of Germany took place on August 14, 1949. On September 15, the German Bundestag elected CDU politician Konrad Adenauer chancellor of a liberal-bourgeois coalition government comprising the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union), the FDP (Free Democratic Party), and the DP (German Party). A week later, Adenauer and his cabinet members paid their first official visit to the Allied High Commission. In his speech, Adenauer reminded his listeners of the material and spiritual misery of the immediate postwar years and the beginning of reconstruction with Allied help. Adenauer professed his support for an active European policy that would secure peace in Europe through economic and political cooperation. The first steps in that direction had already been taken with the Ruhr Agreement of April 28, 1949, and the establishment of the Council of Europe on May 5, 1949. Finally, Adenauer urged that the Occupation Statute, which took effect the day of his visit, be applied with the greatest possible restraint – at the reception, he symbolically underscored Germany's claim to sovereignty by standing on the carpet reserved for the High Commissioners.

I have the honor to pay you a visit in company with some of the members of my Cabinet, thereby establishing the first contact between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the three High Commissioners. Now that the German Federal Assembly has convened, and the Federal president been elected, and now that I have been chosen Federal Chancellor and the members of the Federal Cabinet have been appointed, a new chapter of German history of the postwar years begins.—The disaster of the second world war has left in its wake a Germany almost totally destroyed. Our cities were in ruins. Economic life was largely smashed. All vestiges of a government had ceased. The very souls of men had suffered such injuries that it seemed doubtful whether a recovery would ever be possible. During the four years following the disaster of 1945, legislative and executive power was largely vested in the occupation powers. It was only step by step that executive and legislative functions were redelegated to German authorities on various levels, and with a limited power to make decisions. It is fitting and proper to acknowledge gratefully that the German population was saved during these trying years from starvation by Allied help in supplying food which at the time could not be purchased with the proceeds of German exports. It was this help which made possible the start of reconstruction. Now that the governmental and legislative elements of the German Federal Republic are being built up, a large part of the responsibility and the authority to make decisions will pass into German hands. We do not, of course, possess as yet complete

freedom; since there are considerable restrictions contained in the occupation statute. We will do our part to bring about an atmosphere in which the Allied powers will see their way clear to apply the occupation statute in a liberal and generous manner; only in this way will the German people be able to attain full freedom. We hope that the Allied powers will, by making a corresponding use of the revision clause in the occupation statute, hasten the further political development of our country.

It is the unshakable wish of the new Federal Government first and foremost to tackle the great social problems. The Government is convinced that a sound political entity can only develop when each individual is assured a maximum of economic opportunity to earn a livelihood. Not until we succeed in converting the flotsam millions of refugees into settled inhabitants by providing them with housing and adequate opportunities for work will we be able to enjoy inner stability in Germany. Disorder and crises in this part of Europe, however, constitute a serious threat to the security of the entire continent. For this reason, the social program of the Federal Government should at the same time act to ensure a peaceful development in Europe. We will, of course, do everything in our power to master these problems with the forces at our command. Nevertheless, I feel I am justified in believing even now that the problem of expellees is not only a national, but an international one. To solve it, the help of the rest of the world is needed. The Federal Government would, therefore, welcome it greatly if the members of the High Commission would urge their governments to devote in future more attention to this problem.

If we want to establish peace in Europe, we can in the view of the Federal Government achieve this only by working along entirely new methods. We see opportunities to do so in the efforts for a European federation which has just borne its first fruits [at] Strasbourg. We do believe, however, that such a federation will only have vitality if built on close economic cooperation among the nations. The organization created by the Marshall Plan represents a good start in this direction. Germany is fully ready to cooperate responsibly in this regard. We see another opening for creating a positive and viable European federation in the hope that the control of the Ruhr region would cease to be a unilateral arrangement and that it would gradually grow into an organism which would embrace the basic industries of other European countries as well. We are certain that the narrow nationalistic conception of the states as it prevailed in the 19th and early 20th centuries may now be said to be overcome. This conception gave birth to nationalism, with its attendant splintering of life in Europe. If we now turn back to the sources of our European civilization, born of Christianity, then we cannot fail to succeed in restoring the unity of European life in all fields of endeavor. This is the sole effective assurance for maintaining peace.

Source: Speech by Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the Federal Republic, at a Reception Given by the Allied High Commissioners (September 21, 1949), in United States Department of State, *Germany 1947-1949: The Story in Documents*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office 1950, p. 321; reprinted in Beata Ruhm von Oppen, ed., *Documents on Germany under Occupation, 1945-1954*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 417-19.