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File

HR70-14

13 March 1969

MEMORANDUM**SUBJECT : The Mini-Crisis over the Bundesversammlung**

1. The West Germans, like others involved in the recent tug-of-war over holding the Federal Assembly in West Berlin, have been puzzled by the curious sequence of events involving the Soviet missions in Bonn and East Berlin and the East German regime. At this point, they can only speculate about the coherence of Soviet policy on Berlin and the nature of the relationship between Moscow and Pankow. These developments, however, are likely to give new impetus to reexamining the old assumptions about the client-state relationship between Moscow and Pankow, and there may be increased readiness to concede to East Germany a more important role in the Soviet Union's policies and planning with respect to Europe.

2. It is still too early to predict with any degree of accuracy the longer-term effects of these developments on West German politics. But it might not be unreasonable to expect a strengthening of the hand of those in West Germany who maintain that Bonn, in pursuing its policy toward the East, cannot continue to ignore the existence of East Germany or the important military and economic role it plays in central and eastern Europe. In the wake of this most recent crisis over Berlin, Foreign Minister Brandt has already publicly declared that it is "unrealistic" to bypass the government in East Berlin by direct contact with the Soviet Union." In Brandt's view, "the GDR today plays too important a role in the Warsaw Pact."

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3. This view may appeal to a growing number of Socialists and Free Democrats who are anxious to breathe new life into Bonn's eastern policy which has been stated since the occupation of Czechoslovakia last summer. Although there are no clear signs yet that the question of Bonn's relations with East Germany will be a major issue in the September national elections, the campaign may provide a good sounding board for these elements to publicize their views. This in turn could lead to sharpening the differences now existing between the Christian Democrats, who generally favor a firmer line toward East Germany, and the Socialists and Free Democrats who tend to be somewhat more flexible on matters concerning relations with the other half of Germany.

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In the following paragraphs we attempt to recapitulate some of the more significant developments leading up to the Federal Assembly as they may have been viewed from Bonn and West Berlin.

4. Many Germans are inclined to believe that the Soviets from the very beginning of this latest "crisis" over Berlin did not favor actions that might increase East-West tensions and cast a cloud over relations between Moscow and Washington. At the same time, the Soviets were faced with the need to repay a debt to the East German regime for its unwavering support during the Czech crisis last summer. Faced with this situation it was not surprising that the Soviet propaganda machinery consistently supported the East German view that the Federal Assembly session was provocative and that Bonn (and the West Berliners) would have to bear the unspecified consequences if the meeting were held in the city. The Soviets were undoubtedly also aware that official opinion in West Germany was divided over the wisdom of holding the election in West Berlin and that these doubts continued to persist even after the official announcement on 18 December selecting West Berlin. Moscow may have expected Bonn to back down and hold the meeting elsewhere once it became apparent that East Germany and the Soviets were prepared to escalate the war of nerves over this question.

5. As the election approached and there were still no clear signs that Bonn intended to yield, the Soviets began to crank up their diplomatic machinery. During

-2-

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January and February there were numerous contacts between Soviet ambassadors Tzaraphin (Bonn) and Abrasimov (East Berlin) and various West German and West Berlin officials. In all these meetings the Soviets generally took a hard line, seeking to persuade the West Germans to change the site of the election while offering no concrete concessions in return. The Soviets did try to mollify the West Germans by holding out the prospect of improved relations between Bonn and Moscow if the decision were made to hold the election elsewhere.

6. Although Bonn officials continued to vacillate and privately express doubts about the wisdom of holding the meeting in West Berlin, no West German leader seemed willing to assume the onus for advocating postponement or transfer of the election. By mid-February, with the election only a few weeks away, the Soviets intensified their diplomatic activity. They were supported by the East Germans who began to make noises about a possible Easter pass agreement if Bonn were to change the venue of the election. In the meantime, however, Chancellor Kiesinger and other high West German officials had decided to hold out for such specific concessions as passes for 4-5 holiday periods (rather than just Easter) and lifting of the 1968 prohibition on travel of West German officials to West Berlin.

7. At this point, the East German and Soviet roles and relationships in the drama become more obscure and one can only speculate about the interplay between Moscow and Pankov. In his meeting with Kiesinger on 25 February, for example, Tzaraphin advised the chancellor that contacts were already underway between Senat and East German representatives on the question of passes. The West Germans were not aware of this development, nor apparently were the East Germans. Tzaraphin may have been referring to Ulbricht's letter to Brandt a couple of days earlier suggesting that Pankov would consider granting passes to West Berliners at Easter if Bonn changed the location of the Federal Assembly.

8. It was during the last week of February when intensive contacts were being pursued in Bonn, West Berlin, and East Berlin that it began to appear that the Soviets and the East Germans were not entirely in step. There were even some signs that the Soviets were quietly trying to nudge the East Germans into

-3-

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offering additional concessions which break the deadlock between Bonn and East Germany. If indeed the Soviets were trying to influence the East Germans to compromise, it became apparent by the end of February that Moscow's efforts were having little success. Bonn was still holding out for a firm offer of an extended pass period, while the East Germans continued to insist that the election would first have to be moved out of West Berlin before negotiations could proceed on matters relating to passes.

9. The Soviets made another attempt to end the stalemate on 1 March when Tearephkin met with Kissinger for another unproductive discussion of the Berlin situation. The following day, however, the Soviet Embassy in Bonn called the Foreign Ministry to suggest that it might be a good thing if the West Germans were to get in touch with East Berlin once more. Shortly thereafter, the First Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Bonn advised the chancellor's office that he had grounds to believe that further contacts in Berlin would have successful results in meeting the chancellor's views on "adequate concessions" by the Eastern side. At Bonn's suggestion, the Senat negotiator contacted the East Germans to propose another meeting. There was no response until 4 March--after most of the Federal Assembly delegates had arrived in West Berlin--at which time the East German representative agreed to another meeting in East Berlin. As it turned out, the East Germans had little new to offer and still seemed to be waiting for concessions from the Western side. Pankov would grant passes to West Berliners at Easter and would also be willing to enter into negotiations which might involve additional pass periods but only after the Senat announced that the Federal Assembly would not convene in West Berlin.

10. There is speculation that this was a last-minute ploy by the Soviets to bring East and West Germans together, since it appears that the Soviets had indicated to each that the other had something new to say on the Federal Assembly issue. The Soviets might have hoped that, with both German parties operating under increased pressure as the date for the election drew near, a new meeting might result in a last-minute compromise changing the site of the election. The US embassy in Bonn is inclined to believe that the West Germans would probably have

-4-

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called off the election in Berlin in the negotiating situation then pertaining if the East Germans had added Pentecost and Christmas passes to their final proposal of Easter passes along with subsequent negotiations.

11. In any event, Kiesinger, Brandt, Wehner and Schuetsch decided that the East German proposal did not go far enough and the GDR negotiator was advised accordingly. The Federal Assembly convened in West Berlin the next day.



Chronology attached

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A chronology of the more important developments bearing on the Federal Assembly session in West Berlin:

- 18 December 1960** Bonn announces its decision to hold the Federal Assembly in West Berlin on 3 March 1961.
- 23 December** First Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov orally protests to Ambassador Thompson plans for the election in West Berlin.
- 3 January 1961** Deputy Foreign Minister Koumenov raises the election question with German Ambassador Allardt.
- 10 January** Ambassador Tsurupkin (Bonn) calls on Foreign Minister Brandt to protest the Federal Assembly session in West Berlin.
- 31 January** Ambassador Abramov (East Berlin) calls on Mayor Schuetz and in relatively low key tries to persuade the West Germans not to hold the election in West Berlin.
- 1 February** ~~Henk Doringhien~~ ~~South-South-West~~ describes the scheduled election in West Berlin as a move intended to provoke the GDR and the Soviet Union.
- 6 February** East German Foreign Ministry formally protests to Bonn about the "provocative" nature of the Federal Assembly and warns about the unspecified consequences which might result.
- 7 February** Ambassador Tsurupkin meets with Foreign Minister Brandt and urges him to reconsider the decision to hold the election in West Berlin.
- 8 February** East Germans announce new travel restrictions effective on 15 February proscribing travel by members and staff workers of the Federal Assembly.

- 25 February** East German Premier Stoph turns down Schuetz' proposal (contained in a letter sent the same day) proposing immediate talks on a pass agreement.
- 26 February** Senat negotiator Grabert meets with East German representative, Kohl, who holds to the line that if the election is not held in West Berlin the GDR would be willing to grant Easter wall passes. The West Germans continue to hold out for a more extended pass agreement.
- 27 February** The East Germans inform the Senat that they cannot agree to further negotiations on passes unless Bonn first announces that the election will not be held in West Berlin.
- Grabert sends a message to Kohl proposing that a second encounter be arranged in West Berlin on afternoon of the 27th. No response from the East Germans.
- 28 February** Kiesinger and Brandt meet and reach a decision that the election will be held in West Berlin unless there is "a lasting and convincing counter-concession" by the GDR, covering expanded contacts of West Berliners with East Berlin and East Germany.
- Soviets deliver notes to the three Western powers alleging a breach of postwar agreements on demilitarization of West Berlin and misuse of GDR lines of communication for transport of military production.
- 1 March** Soviet Ambassador Tsarapkin in meeting with Kiesinger repeats the standard Soviet line on Berlin and the Federal Assembly session.
- 2 March** Soviet First Secretary Brezhnevski in Bonn suggests to the West German foreign ministry that it might be a good

- 12 February** East Germans present notes to the US, UK, and France protesting Federal Assembly plans.
- 13 February** Ambassador Tsurupkin delivers a note to Chancellor Kiesinger protesting Federal Assembly plans, describing the meeting as a "provocation."
- 18 February** West German trade negotiator Klopfenstein sends a telegram to his East German counterpart complaining about slowdown in processing road traffic to Berlin.
- 21 February** Ulbricht sends a letter to Foreign Minister Brandt proposing Easter passes for West Berliners.
- 22 February** Ambassador Tsurupkin meets with Chancellor Kiesinger and proposes that the election be held elsewhere.
- West Berlin Mayor Schuske meets with Chancellor Kiesinger to discuss the statement made by Henschke (GDR/W) that the GDR might grant Easter-civil passes if the Federal Assembly does not convene in West Berlin.
- Kiesinger and other high Bonn officials decide that the East Germans must agree to passes for all major holidays and refrain from enforcing the 1962 prohibition on travel of West German officials to Berlin as the price for having the election out of West Berlin.
- 23 February** Ambassador Tsurupkin requests a meeting with Kiesinger and "confirms" that a transfer of the election would contribute to diminishing tensions and would have a "positive significance." Tsurupkin goes on to say that contacts are underway between representatives of the GDR and the West Berlin Senat on question of passes.