

Abstract

The dissertation “Brandt’s Ostpolitik” deals with the concept of Brandt’s foreign politics towards Eastern Europe. The concept was not only a short-term plan after Brandt gained government functions after 1966, but it is concerned with the essence of understanding of Willy Brandt’s policy. The paper views the topic from three different points. The first area consists of an ideological-theoretical level that focuses especially on the analysis of long-term trends of Brandt’s Eastern Policy. Therefore, it distinguishes from existing approaches, which apply the concept only to the period of 1969-1974, when Brandt ruled the Federal Republic of Germany, but also from academic papers that consider the second Berlin crisis and the Berlin wall construction to be the beginning of the Eastern politics. One of the conclusions of the dissertation shows the necessity to search for the roots of Brandt’s policy already in his stay in exile in Norway and Sweden, due to the fact that Brandt obtained basic idea about the way parliamentary democracy works there, and about the importance of European cooperation for the after-war recovery of Europe and Germany. Thanks to the fact that he did not spend the period of the World War II in the German area, he became a symbol of “different, better” democratic Germany after 1945. His stay in exile enabled him to profile himself as a journalist interested in foreign politics. That helped him a lot when creating his political speeches and lectures later.

The following period of his stay in Berlin meant an underlying contribution to his concept of Eastern Policy based on the everyday experience of life in divided Berlin under constant pressure from the Soviet Union. Though the experience with the first Berlin crisis and uprising in East Berlin in 1953, he finally rejected optimistic considerations of Communism and foreign policy of the Soviet Union. He also realized the importance of democracy and the ties between West Berlin and West Germany. Hence, he supported all steps of Bonn government towards integration of West Germany into Western European military and economic structures. On the other hand, he did not agree with the majority of politicians in West Germany who claimed that it was the best for the sovereignty of West Germany to interrupt all contacts with the Eastern part of Germany. Thanks to his experience from Berlin he was aware that especially ordinary Germans in both parts of Berlin would have suffered from such government’s decision. That is why he added important term “coexistence” into his concept of Eastern Policy, which meant peaceful coexistence of two different systems. For the system to function efficiently, he had to change the international system first, which would not have preferred military confrontation but would have been built on a stable peaceful base that would have allowed for changes in relationships between both ideological blocks.

Therefore, he became a supporter of so called “détente” in the middle of the 1950s, which emphasized liberation and dialog.

“Coexistence” should have touched particularly the coexistence of ordinary people, who solved their everyday problems, and did not care about “big” politics. Accordingly, Brandt preferred so called small steps policy, which signified that politicians who did not manage to agree on key international questions, focused on small legislative tasks that facilitated ordinary people’s lives on both sides of the iron curtain. The Berlin Wall construction in 1961 did not mean a major shock to Brandt. He was more disappointed by the reaction of Western powers to the step of SED , since the Western countries as well as German government basically had not taken any concrete measures towards such a non-precedent violation of international agreements. Brandt understood the events to be confirmation of his actual policy based on the idea that reunification of Germany was not possible in a short horizon. Hence, it became important to continue with the policy of coexistence and the policy of small steps. He introduced the concept of Eastern Policy during two lectures at the Harvard University, where he added two more important notes. First Brandt suggested that his concept was not only a confirmation of international status quo in Europe after 1945, but a possible acknowledgement of status quo was a necessary assumption for its later change. As the second point he introduced the term “transformation” by which he understood that through contacts in the areas of culture, science, technology and business it was possible to consider the change of Communism. The change would not have been conducted by Western countries in a war conflict but by the inhabitants of the Eastern Block.

The second global view on Brandt’s Eastern Policy is related to a necessary change of the international Cold War system in the 1960s, because the concept could not have happened during the “hot” phase of the Cold War in the 1950s as a war conflict was a possible threat. It was at the beginning of the 1960s with the emphasis on communication, dialog and cooperation when the practical use of Brandt’s concept could be used. Non-state actors played the key role in the change of the international system, and significantly influenced the ideological alternation of the West German society and its look at Eastern Europe. The paper analyzes especially the motivations of German-Polish religious dialog in the middle of the 1960s and the activities of expelled Germans from the Western Europe after 1945 in the West German society at the turn of the 1950s and the 1960s.

The last level deals with the practical usage of Brandt’s Eastern Policy during the negotiations with Eastern European countries. The dissertation shows that the West German government attempted to approach each country separately with specific demands. In case of dialogues

with the Soviet Union, West Germany accepted the post-war status quo in order to reach release in relations between West Germany and its Eastern neighbors thanks to an agreement with Soviet Union. The negotiations with Poland experienced the atmosphere of dealing with the past Nazi crimes and recognition of the German-Polish border on the rivers Oder-Neiße. The quick acceptance of the treaty crowned by the memorable „Kniefall“ of Willy Brandt in Warsaw, was allowed by an overall change in German-Polish relations substituting the so far confrontational approach by dialogue and cooperation covering particularly the economic area. As the dialogues with Eastern Germany touched several intra-German questions, they were very complicated. The agreement of West Germany to internationally recognize the Eastern Germany allowed for the final treaty. Negotiations with Czechoslovakia lasted the longest, although no problem existed between the countries. Despite that, it took three years to formulate the annulments from the Munich Treaty from 1938. Besides the separating treaties Brandt reached his success in the matter of a treaty on a new status of West Berlin signed by the representatives of post-war winning powers. The Treaty allowed West Berlin to be part of West Germany and a sovereign area in Eastern Block.

The conclusion of the paper evaluates the contribution of Brandt's Eastern Policy. The contribution lies mostly in the impact of Brandt's Eastern Policy on West German society, as the West German society showed its "maturity" and self-recognition by supporting the policy. The success of SPD in elections in 1972 proved that the West German society had accepted West Germany and did not prefer reunification anymore. On the other hand the Eastern Policy did not reach several goals that Brandt connected with it. West Germany recognized the post-war status quo, but it did not manage to initiate the transformation of the Communist regimes. The question of the improvement in lives of ordinary citizens was also questionable, as the Eastern European countries understood the treaties with West Germany as German concession and recognition of the post-war reality. They feared further deepening of the cooperation due to the threat to their monopolistic power.