THE GERMAN QUESTION

ROLF STEININGER

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THE STALIN NOTE OF 1952 AND THE PROBLEM OF REUNIFICATION

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DOCUMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

CAB	British Cabinet
CDU	Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands [Christian Democratic Union]
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union [Christian Social Union]
DoS	U.S. Department of State
EDC	European Defense Community
EU	Europe
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei [Free Democratic Party]
FO	British Foreign Office
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FRUS	*Foreign Relations of the United States*

Abbreviations

GDR	German Democratic Republic
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands [Communist Party of Germany]
MAE	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PM	Prime Minister
PPS	Policy Planning Staff, U.S. Department of State
PREM	Prime Minister's Office
PRO	Public Record Office, London
PUSC	Permanent Under-Secretary of State (Sir William Strang) Committee
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands [Socialist Unity Party of Germany]
S/P	Policy Planning Staff, U.S. Department of State
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social Democratic Party of Germany]
SRP	Sozialistische Reichspartei [Socialist Reich Party]

FOREWORD

In 1985, Rolf Steininger reopened a sensitive historical debate on German reunification. His timing was propitious, for at the same moment the Soviet Union embarked on a new era of perestroika and glasnost. With political reforms under way in East Germany, and the Wall no longer dividing Berlin, the "German question" has recaptured the limelight of international politics.

Did Western leaders miss an opportunity for German reunification in March 1952, when they refused to negotiate with Stalin? When Paul Sethe, the coeditor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, first raised this question in the mid-1950s, it provoked a divisive, and ultimately futile, debate over Stalin's intentions. The controversy subsided as West Germany became militarily integrated into the Western bloc, and as the three major West German political parties moved toward a tripartisan foreign policy in the 1960s. Yet, if the reunification issue receded temporarily from the purview of scholars, the mystery sur-

rounding the Western response to the Stalin Note was never fully clarified. Why did Western leaders refuse to convoke a four-power conference, thereby leaving themselves open to the charge of missing an opportunity to settle the German problem?

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's explanation has been frequently echoed by subsequent scholars: Western leaders viewed the Stalin Note as pure propaganda and therefore did not allow it to divert their attention from the task of ratifying the European Defense Community Treaty. This explanation has its merits. The timing, the content, and the public disclosure of the note all indicate that Stalin intended to mobilize public opinion in West Germany against the European Defense Community. There is, however, a circular logic to the official explanation: a conference failed to take place because the West concluded in advance that negotiations would end in failure. Nor is the government's argument altogether convincing. The negotiations over the European Defense Community, after all, had begun two years earlier and would continue for another two years, at which time French policy (not Soviet propaganda) undermined its success. Were there no moments to spare during those protracted negotiations when Western leaders might have discussed the Stalin Note with the Soviets?

After examining the newly opened British and American archival material in 1984, Professor Steininger realized that the Stalin Note episode was more complex than researchers had previously assumed. First, the West's initial response to the note was far from unanimous. British and American statesmen generally regarded the reunification offer as a sincere, albeit risky, solution to the German question. Both the U.S. State Department and the British Foreign Office expressed a willingness to convoke a four-power conference, in order to test Stalin's commitment to hold genuinely free all-German elections. Second, Chancellor Adenauer thwarted all negotations with the Soviets—even negotiations based on free elections—because he distrusted his own people as much as he distrusted the governments of the Eastern bloc. In deference to Adenauer, Western leaders answered Stalin by initiating a propagandistic "battle of the notes," designed to help Adenauer win public support for Western integration, while feigning an interest in reunification. In 1953, the newly elected Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced that he would make a "solitary pilgrimage to Moscow" to seek a unified, neutralized Germany "if the Germans so wished." He learned firsthand what the State Department and the Foreign Office had realized a year earlier: Adenauer preferred Western

integration to German reunification and therefore did not want the West to make any overtures to the Soviet Union.

Professor Steininger's critics accused him of "utopianism," of spreading a "missed-opportunity" myth, and of creating a new "stab-in-the-back" legend. Yet they could not dispute the fact that he had meticulously accumulated an overwhelming amount of archival evidence to support his conclusions: Adenauer's central role in the formulation of Western policy toward the Stalin Note is now indisputable.

This translation will make Professor Steininger's work more accessible to the Anglo-American scholarly community. Few historical problems can lay claim to greater contemporary importance than the question of German reunification.

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PREFACE

The present study first appeared as the introduction to the documentary collection *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*[1] The documentation took a long time to assemble. Under the Freedom of Information Act, the American documents were made available in 1980. But a publication based solely on American archival sources seemed to make little sense, given that the British had played an equally important role in handling the Stalin Note, as indeed they had in formulating all Western policy toward Germany since 1945.[2] Once the British documents became available in 1983, it was clear that waiting had been worthwhile.

This book aims to provide a solid basis for discussing one of the most controversial, difficult, and important chapters of German postwar history and to remove it from the usual realm of speculation. Readers can reevaluate the findings presented here and make their own judgments about what really occurred. What impressions, goals, and

considerations motivated the Western powers and Konrad Adenauer in their "policy toward reunification"? To what extent can one justifiably continue to speak of the "myth of the missed opportunity"? To what extent is Adenauer's premise true, "that we will only attain Germany's reunification with the help of the three Western allies, never with the help of the Soviet Union"?

In May 1955, almost ten years to the day after the capitulation, occupation ended for the West German state. The Federal Republic became conditionally sovereign and a member of NATO. The perpetuation of Germany's division was the price paid. Whether this price was not perhaps too high, whether indeed another path for German history did not exist that would have been worth pursuing (or at least exploring) in the interests of German unity—these concerns formed the theme of bitter controversies in the early years of the republic. The astoundingly successful history of the Federal Republic in the following years did not end this controversy but only hid it from view. The arguments of Adenauer's critics have lost nothing of their validity even today. A younger generation has begun anew to discuss the old questions and controversies. And the more documents from the 1950s that become available, the more solid will be the basis on which this debate can be conducted. If the evidence I have gathered gives a new impulse to the discussion of this topic, and if possibly new answers can be given to the old questions, then much will have been gained and it will have been worth the effort.

I would like to thank the following people: the officials in the Department of State in Washington, D.C., and in the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, who helped me overcome so many of the obstacles on my way to the documents; the employees in the Public Record Office in London, especially Mr. C. D. Chalmers, head of the Search Department, who always had time for my questions and whose assistance in deciphering many individuals' handwriting was invaluable; the Keeper of Public Records for permission to reprint the documents; Mrs. Angela Houston, who provided research assistance; Sir Frank Roberts, head of the German section in the Foreign Office from 1951 to 1954 for a fascinating, open talk about British policy toward Germany; my secretary, Fräulein Anita Goestl, for deciphering my handwriting; my assistants, Dr. Thomas Albrich and Mag. Klaus Eisterer—who also conducted research in Paris—for their help in reading the galley proofs; the editorial staff of the Archiv für Sozialgeschichte for including this work in their series; and especially to both Herr Dr. Dieter Dowe, whose great commitment benefited this project from its

inception, and the editorial secretary, Frau Holde Schwarz, for her patience and constant helpfulness.

My work on this documentation occurred during a move from Hannover to Innsbruck; nevertheless, my wife oversaw my return to my study with the same degree of forbearance she always shows. Thus, I dedicate this book to her—for Eva.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE STALIN NOTE AND GERMAN SCHOLARSHIP

The Historiographic Debate

On March 10, 1952, the Soviet deputy foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, delivered a note to the delegates of the three Western powers in Moscow. The Soviet government proposed, among other things, to

1. Reestablish Germany as a unified state within the boundaries "established by the provisions of the Potsdam Conference."
2. Obligate Germany "not to enter into any kind of coalition or military alliance directed against any power which took part with its armed forces in the war against Germany."
3. Withdraw all occupying forces by, at the latest, one year following the effective date of the peace treaty, the preparation of which was to involve a unified German government.
4. Allow Germany to have "its own national armed forces (land, air, and sea) which are necessary for the defense of the country."
5. Permit Germany to manufacture its own munitions for these armed forces.