

*Sir R. Braithwaite (Moscow) to Mr Hurd*¹

No. 2055 Telegraphic [WRL 020/4]

Confidential

MOSCOW, 8 December 1989, 8.20 a.m.

*MIPT: Soviet View on Germany: Comment*²

1. I do not know Falin's mood (the German Ambassador, who knows him well, says he is temperamentally apocalyptic). But he had the depressed air of a man whose life's work was crumbling.

2. Falin, like Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn tel. no 1191)³ sees Kohl as playing for high stakes. But as far as Falin is concerned, Kohl is overplaying his hand, and has

¹ Repeated to desk by 8.09 a.m., UKDEL Strasbourg; information Immediate to Bonn, East Berlin, BMG Berlin, Paris, Washington, UKDEL NATO; information Routine to Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, UKREP Brussels.

² Moscow telegram No. 2054 reported a conversation between Sir R. Braithwaite and Mr Falin, a former Ambassador to Bonn and Gorbachev's senior adviser on German affairs, who was 'exhausted and lugubrious'. He expressed 'deep concern at scale and tempo of events' and warned of 'possible dramatic consequences'. Soviet bitterness about Kohl's ten-point programme was due to the fact that 'Literally two days before he announced his plan, Kohl had told Gorbachev that the FRG would not launch any pan-German initiative: and promised to consult him on any important developments, in the spirit of their talks this year in Bonn'. Asked about the Soviet attitude to Four Power talks, 'Falin said the Russians did not yet have the latter in mind: but that he did not exclude the possibility. For political reasons it would probably have to come as a Western initiative. He agreed that we should keep in touch through different channels, though the value of this depended on the degree of frankness and constructiveness' (WRL 020/4). In fact the Soviet Union itself proposed a Four Power meeting on 8 December: see Nos. 72, 73. When Moscow telegrams No. 2054 and 2055 were shown to Mrs Thatcher before the Strasbourg meeting, Mr Powell minuted: 'This underlines the seriousness of developments. You should *NOT* refer to these exchanges openly, but will want to have *them in mind*, as you *pursue your discussions*' (PREM: Internal situation in East Germany).

³ In this telegram of 6 December Sir C. Mallaby reflected on Herr Kohl's preoccupations as he approached the forthcoming Strasbourg meeting of the European Council. He wrote: 'Kohl is on the highest wire of his life. If he handles the German question well he should win the general election

reopened the breach which was closed with difficulty when Gorbachev visited Bonn. Falin was openly worried that events in the GDR were about to take a violent turn, and that the tempo of disorder plus reunification pressures seriously threatened stability.

3. Falin is only part of the Moscow picture, and has no executive responsibility. He was bewailing the situation, rather than suggesting ways of mastering it. He is one of Gorbachev's close advisers on the subject of Germany, but Gorbachev has taken the more statesmanlike approach of toning down the rhetoric, playing for time, and leaving options open (including reunification).

4. Nevertheless the collapse of political authority in East Germany is bound to worry the Russians intensely. It probably is sufficient explanation for the distinct sharpening of the tone of public comment on 5 December, which is no doubt intended to convey to the Federal Government that this is definitely not the moment to say or do anything which could bring nearer a real crisis, including a violent breakdown of order in East Germany.

5. It would not be surprising if Kohl's own performance in the last week or so had aroused wide Soviet suspicions of the Federal Government, which are always just below the surface. Falin was strikingly bitter about Kohl's alleged failure to warn Gorbachev about the 10 points (despite the numerous contacts between Kohl's and Gorbachev's advisers referred to by Teltschik: Bonn telegram 1156).⁴ As seen from here, one major step Kohl could make to repair the damage would be to state firmly, publicly and unequivocally that he agrees with Genscher that the post-war boundaries of Germany (i.e. the Oder-Neisse Line, not the Elbe, which is a qualitatively different matter) are definitive, and that there is no question of them being challenged by the Federal Government, or even discussed, at an eventual peace conference or anywhere else. This would go very far to allay Soviet (and Polish: see Warsaw telegram 745)⁵ fears of revanchism. I know that it would upset the susceptibilities of German international lawyers: and that it would complicate Kohl's electoral calculations (as Genscher indicated to you: FCO tel 694 to Bonn).⁶ But now that things are going so much his way, he can surely afford this gesture of international statesmanship.

6. With the Russians in a suspicious and emotional mood, it is desirable to maximise exchanges with them about Germany at all levels. Falin favoured bilateral exchanges between the Allied Ambassadors in Berlin, and said he would pass to Shevardnadze the thought that his Ministry should intensify their contacts

in one year's time. That would give him the chance of going down in history as the man who ensured German unity. But putting a foot wrong on the German question could lose him the election. The next few months—or possibly weeks—could make or break his prospects. He knows it. The international limelight is gratifying yet somewhat alarming. The Federal Republic is not accustomed to acting on its own in pursuit of goals not shared by others, and the handling of Kohl's ten points showed the lack of deftness and experience. Kohl wants two things that may not be entirely compatible: to be the one to map the route to unity and also to retain the support and comfort at all stages of his allies and partners. The Bush Administration has been assiduous in its public support. But the European neighbours, not excluding France, are trickier for Kohl to handle' (MWF 100/22/89).

⁴ No. 59.

⁵ Not found.

⁶ This telegram of 29 November recorded the discussions between Mr Hurd and Herr Genscher in London on the evening of that day. The relevant paragraph read: 'The constraints on the Chancellor were not always the same as the considerations which Genscher had in mind. For example he had wanted to repeat what had recently been said about the permanence of Poland's borders but this could have created domestic political problems for Kohl' (WRE 014/2).

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with me and my colleagues. The proposed dinner for Shevardnadze and the European Ambassadors on 19 December will provide a good occasion, though at the present speed of events it looks rather a long way away.