



Volume 9. Two Germanies, 1961-1989
Coalition of the Center (October 13, 1982)

In his inaugural address to the *Bundestag*, Helmut Kohl not only discusses the country's economic stagnation but also describes the intellectual and political crisis that necessitated a "coalition of the center" between the CDU/CSU and the Free Democrats. As part of the proposed policy measures, Kohl promises new jobs, the protection of the social net, a humane policy towards foreign-born residents, and a rethinking of the basic principles of German foreign and security policy.

"Coalition of the Center: For a Policy of Renewal": Policy Statement by the Federal Chancellor, Delivered on October 13, 1982, before the German Bundestag in Bonn

Mr. President, honored ladies and gentlemen, the coalition of the center formed by the CDU, CSU, and FDP is starting its work during the most serious economic crisis since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany. This crisis has shattered the confidence of many people, of many citizens, in the ability of our political system to act. This new government became necessary because the previous one proved unable to jointly fight unemployment, guarantee a social safety network, and bring order to devastated state finances.

Since the SPD party congress in Munich, at the latest, it became increasingly clear that the former coalition partners were moving in different directions. With respect to pressing foreign and domestic policy issues, the SPD abandoned its own head of government. Federal Chancellor Schmidt lost his majority.

The Free Democratic Party, as all of us know – and particularly as all of us experienced in the debate on the floor of this assembly – did not make its decision an easy one. In the interest of our country, it has made a new government possible, as prescribed by the constitution. This coalition of the center will lead our country out of the crisis.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, in this hour the people of our country have a right to hear the truth, the truth about what has been done, and the truth about what has to be done. What is the state of the Federal Republic of Germany? At the present time we are experiencing unemployment that is even worse than during the years of reconstruction. Almost one in every fourteen people of working age is currently out of work. This winter, almost 2.5 million might be unemployed. Even more are afraid of losing their jobs. After a two-year stagnation, aggregate production has been declining for months. Never before in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany have as many companies gone bankrupt as this year, and never before have so many independent livelihoods been destroyed. This alone has cost roughly 500,000 jobs in recent

years. The number of insolvencies this year will even surpass the sad previous record. Perhaps 15,000 or more companies will have to file for bankruptcy. This will mean an additional loss of far more than 100,000 jobs. Worst of all, almost 200,000 young people are unemployed. Many cannot find a place to receive training and are therefore not only without work, but without a chance to gain professional qualifications.

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The ideologies of the go-getters and the saviors have not intensified any sense of reality in the country, not reinforced self-responsibility; they have misjudged the challenge of the time. We again need the virtues of wisdom, courage, and moderation for the future of our country. The question of the future is not how much more the state can do for its citizens. The question of the future is how can freedom, dynamism, and self-responsibility unfold anew. The coalition of the center is based on this idea. Too many have lived too long at the expense of others: The state at the expense of the citizens, the citizens at the expense of other citizens, and – we need to say it honestly – we have all been living at the expense of future generations.

It is also now a precept of social peace and social justice that we give honesty, achievement, and self-responsibility another chance. Ladies and gentlemen, the CDU/CSU and the FDP are again forming a coalition of the center in order to make a historical new start.

What was possible in 1949 under serious psychological wounds and material burdens is also possible and necessary today. The bringing together of social, Christian, and liberal ideas was the defining characteristic of an epoch that is correctly considered the most successful era of German postwar politics. I would like to quote a liberal comrade-in-arms of that time, Thomas Dehler, who said: “The liberal idea of man is profoundly tied to Christian truth. Man has dignity, having been created in the image of God, as bearer of an immortal soul, as a unique, distinctive personality. Preserving that dignity in earthly life is the liberal obligation.”

Our state, the Federal Republic of Germany, was founded upon the free consent of its citizens. More than thirty years ago, Konrad Adenauer led the Germans into the community of the free nations of the West and built the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany upon that foundation. Reconciliation with France was possible, and with the people and state of Israel. And we became a respected partner in NATO, the Western alliance.

The social market economy was a creative piece of work. It means more than affluence. It is based on a social order of peace that is still considered exemplary in many countries of the world. This year we implemented the principle of solidarity: through wage-index-linked pensions and co-determination, through continued wage payments during illness, through the Labor Management Act and the formation of wealth.

Twelve million ethnic Germans and refugees from the East helped build up the Federal Republic of Germany in those years. People gained trust in the constitutional state; a democratic consciousness and a new political culture developed. In an era filled with tension, the Federal Republic gained inner stability and the trust of its neighbors. The Germans relearned – to quote Ernst Bloch – the dignity of walking upright. Ladies and gentlemen, we can build upon this inheritance, and it gives us the strength to do what we need to do today. What do we want today? What needs to be done now and today?

Our emergency program focuses on four points: First: We want to create new jobs. Second: We want to secure the social system. Third: We want to implement humane policies as regards

foreigners. Fourth: We want to renew the foundations of German foreign and security policies. We especially want to create and preserve jobs, first by stimulating private and public investments. For this, the economy needs future prospects that are free from unnecessary burdens, insecurities, and bureaucratic requirements from the state. Public budgets have to shift more weight from consumptive to future-oriented use. This applies to spending as well as income.

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Source: "Koalition der Mitte: Für eine Politik der Erneuerung." Regierungserklärung des Bundeskanzlers am 13. Oktober 1982 vor dem Deutschen Bundestag in Bonn ["Coalition of the Center: For a Policy of Renewal": Policy Statement by the Federal Chancellor, Delivered on October 13, 1982, before the German Bundestag in Bonn], in *Bulletin* (Press and Information Office of the Federal Government), no. 93, October 14, 1983, p. 853 ff.

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