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A Conservative Journalist Criticizes the Disappearance of the Term “Germany” (1972)

The conservative journalist Matthias Walden inveighs against the disappearance of the term “Germany” as a result of the *de facto* recognition of “the GDR” as denoting the East and “the FRG” as standing for the West. Walden feared that any hope for the recovery of a united country might disappear as well.

Instead of Germany, Now Just ‘FRG’?

In the three years of rapprochement with the “GDR,” the Federal Republic of Germany has been subject to a change that cannot merely be felt and understood but also read: it has shrunk down to the three letters “FRG.” This soulless abbreviation is an import from that other three-letter-region whose division-strategists hope to extinguish the term “Germany.”

It didn’t take long for the SED coaches and their drills to bring the West German valedictorians of rapprochement to fluent repetition. Now you hear it all across the country, even from us: “FRG.” It is easier to say, sounds like ABC and Pkw,¹ and no one needs to waste a second thought on it. Yet another bit of added comfort.

Yes, but don’t people know that the “GDR” (adjective: “German”) is trying to get the country to stop using the name of its fatherland (noun: Germany)? They know it in the palace whose name is so rich in associations: Schaumburg.² And they let it go on nonetheless – or even for that very reason. The “GDR,” liberated from nothing but its quotation marks, is on equal grounds with the “FRG”; two German states, one recognized as much as the other, and no more Germany.

That is the reason for the Basic Treaty. When the declaration of division was signed, Egon Bahr, the representative of the Federal Republic of Germany, spoke once of the “FRG” and once of the “German Democratic Republic.” He felt that it was worth the effort to say these twenty-four letters for the benefit of the other side’s prestige, the two sides having dressed in the “partner look.” He compensated for the added effort by saying “FRG.” We abbreviate things. “Germany” takes too much time. The matter was also pressing since the election was approaching. Our election! We

¹ Pkw means car [*Personenkraftwagen*]. When FRG, ABC, and Pkw are pronounced in German, they all rhyme – trans.

² *Schaum* literally means froth, so the word Schaumburg evokes the image of a palace filled with nothing but airy froth. This is ironic since, at the time, Schaumburg Palace was the site of the Chancellery of the Federal Republic. The name derives from its former owner, the Prince of Schaumburg-Lippe – trans.

get to choose! The others have no choice, but they, too, live in Germany – or don't they anymore?

When the Four Powers offered their aid in the forceps delivery of the Basic Treaty, they insisted on the continuation of their responsibility, but they could no longer say what they were responsible for. Their declaration omits the term – Germany has become ineffable.

In exchange, we now have good relations between the two German states. But the preamble to the neighborly agreement offers proof of inherent incompatibilities: The unity of the nation, which in the lead-up [to the Treaty] had been advertised as its cement, was negotiated down to a “question.” They agreed not to agree. It's the same thing with citizenship, which is indeed a fundamental question. That, too, went unanswered in the Basic Treaty, since it touches upon the untouchable: Germany.

And if someone else comes and asks about Germany, they'll be admonished with an index finger to the lips: Shush! Not so loud, it could disturb the neighbors. They don't like to hear that. And besides, since Willy Brandt, “Germany” is one of those great words that is less great than small steps.³

It was, as one hears in the election campaign, Union-led governments in the past that neglected to make an arrangement with the “GDR” for twenty years, so now the left-wing coalition has to make up for all the lost ground. Of course, it is hard to make up for two decades of big words with no action, but people know how to make things easier.

Franz Josef Strauss had hardly finished saying that we could have had that kind of treaty twenty years ago when the *Frankfurter Rundschau* “realized” that Konrad Adenauer was to blame for the fact that the people in this divided Germany could not meet. Wasn't it the SED state that drew the borders? And wasn't it the SPD that used sharp, incisive words to rebuff Ulbricht's siren call: “Germans to the negotiating table.” Back then, Germany still counted and one of its politicians in the free part said:

“In West Germany, the national Bolsheviks . . . are going further than many would like to believe, while unprincipled Rapallo⁴ ideas have made their way up to high echelons within the government parties. They are supported by business interests, which people on the East side know how to cleverly exploit. But the real danger in this circle comes from the ‘coordinators,’ the successors to the failed ‘bridge builders.’ They explain that the Eastern government should not be ignored; it is the present reality. Somehow there has to be a way to get along, they say, since, after all, the people on the other side are also Germans, so practical agreements should be made with them. These arguments are supported by the lack of thought from those who want to have their oh-so-deceptive Western peace and quiet, and who, within a portion of the media, act as if there were two German governments working together to do what they can for the mutual good.”

Who said these words, for which those of us today on the free side of the unutterable country would be accused of being anti-rapprochement? It was Willy Brandt. The former one.

And the government party he suspected of wanting its Western peace and quiet was the Union. That's how times change, and our political prophets change along with them. And with the times,

³ This refers to Willy Brandt's “policy of small steps” with respect to the East – trans.

⁴ The Treaty of Rapallo was an agreement of April 16, 1922, between Weimar Germany and Bolshevik Russia, reestablishing diplomatic relations – trans.

Germany is unfortunately also changing beyond recognition. Now we have an “FRG.” Well isn’t that fitting.

Source: Matthias Walden, “Statt Deutschland nur noch ‘BRD’?” [“Instead of Germany, Now Just ‘FRG’?”], *Die Welt*, November 16, 1972.

Translation: Allison Brown