

# Germany's role in Namibia's independence

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My personal relationship to Namibia was and is explicitly manifold: It was my concern to help Namibia on her way to independence. I have my birthday on the same day as Namibia, on March 21st. My sympathy for Namibia is so immense that I would have wished Namibia to be born in the same year as I – instead of 1990.

## Framework conditions of German foreign politics

On May 16th, 1974 I became the federal foreign minister and, hence, also responsible for Germany's Africa politics. In order to understand the framework conditions of politics then, especially foreign politics, one has to recall that time.

Retrospectively, one can say that German post-World War II foreign politics were divided into several time components. The first 20 years were mainly dedicated to the integration of the Federal Republic of Germany into the western communities. We belonged to the founding members of the European Community, we became a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and of the European Council. We were fully concentrating on the Western Alliance, whilst having a deferring and critical position towards the development taking place east of us. The West had developed a real guarantee concept for its security against the threat coming from the East, but it had no concept to deal with the East.

This is why individual events in the power sphere of the Soviet Union were criticised, for example, suppression of the rebellion in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and permanent repression measures in Poland. However, a political concept of the West towards the East was missing with the aim ... – well, with which aim, actually? It was our objective as Germans, as envisaged in our constitution, the Basic Law, to reach a stage which enabled peaceful reunification.

In 1967, at the end of these initial 20 years, NATO finally developed a political concept under the chairmanship of Belgian foreign minister Pierre Harmel, with the intention to

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1 Translation by Margaretha Rumpf, Windhoek. The translation is presented in its approved original form.

strengthen NATO as a permanent peace factor in Europe and securing defence through adequate military strength and as a foundation for the creation of permanent relations with the East in order to solve fundamental political issues. Military security and a policy of détente were no contradiction in the so-called Harmel Report, but mutually complementary. Security was understood as the sum of defence and détente. I wish NATO would have such a political concept of cooperation today with the aim of ensuring a blueprint for peace everywhere in Europe. The main obstacle of this blueprint for peace continued to be the division of Germany.

Based on this fundamental concept, the German contract policy of the Brandt/Scheel government was developed, and of which I was part insofar as it could be envisaged that the Eastern Treaties (*Ostverträge*) of the CDU/CSU opposition were focusing on the creation of German unity because of the issue of compatibility, especially in the Preamble of our Basic Law to be submitted to the federal constitutional court. In my capacity as minister of the interior and, hence, constitutional minister, I had to monitor that this process would not be lost.

What was the link of this to Africa and German African politics? The answer is clear: During the time until the creation of Eastern Policy (*Ostpolitik*) no Africa politics in an actual sense had been developed because German foreign politics were caught up in what came to be called the Hallstein Doctrine. Since 1955, the Federal Republic of Germany had insisted in the following: Those who have relations with the GDR, cannot be a partner for us. Politics towards the entire Developing World aimed at encouraging countries which had existing relations with the GDR, to cancel them, and to discourage countries, which had no relations with the GDR yet, from forging them. This should be mentioned since countries outside Europe were no spectators but victims of the East-West-Conflict. This East-West-Conflict was not limited to Europe, but affecting the whole world. Africa, too, was a victim in this power struggle for zones of influence.

In 1961, German foreign politics had created a new instrument of cooperation with states in the Developing World: The newly founded federal ministry for economic cooperation and development. The first development minister was Walter Scheel who later became the foreign minister and federal president. He had experience as a German parliamentarian and member of the Bundestag, and as a member of the European Parliament which was vested with very few rights then. He was the Chairperson of the Committee on Overseas Territories, which dealt with the overseas areas of member states of the European community, i.e. Africa, the Pacific and Caribbean, in short, where the former colonial powers still had their relations.

## The anti-colonialism of the non-aligned movement

When I became foreign minister in 1974, I was free of all burdens of the Hallstein

Doctrine. At this point in time, the Eastern Treaties (*Ostverträge*) had been concluded as well as the Basic Treaty with the GDR. Our political activity in Africa, hence, did not have to focus any longer on inhibiting countries to maintain or assume relations with the GDR. Moreover, we could interact normally with African states and other parts of the Developing World. This opened up chances for new cooperation partners. Another possibility of influence was our admission to the United Nations, enabled by the Basic Treaty. We could take part in shaping international relations as a UN member and, of course, also in our neighbouring continent Africa.

There was an additional third phenomenon in which Germany played a very active role: The relationship to the non-aligned movement. Reading newspapers of the 1960s and early 1970s, one realizes that the non-aligned movement was mainly regarded as Moscow's fifth pillar. One suspected that this group of states was acting directly or indirectly under Moscow's influence. However, one had not understood that the non-aligned movement had, in reality, been formed as an anti-colonialist movement acting in favour of independence and participation of developing countries. It was important for us as Europeans that, with former Yugoslav president Tito, a European was part of this non-aligned movement and that it could not be perceived as an anti-European movement neither by itself. I really tried very hard then to enter into discussions with non-aligned states and I gradually succeeded.

## Indifference towards the last decolonization movements and apartheid

Moreover, Europe including the Federal Republic of Germany, took an indifferent attitude towards the decolonization process, especially, towards the remaining four decolonization tasks in southern Africa. On the one hand, there were the direct independence movements in the colonies of Portugal, which had to finally accept Mozambique's and Angola's independence. On the other hand there were quasi-decolonization developments in Southern Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe) and South West Africa/Namibia. I use the word "quasi" because the colonial powers there were not European powers which had received these colonies. It was mainly South Africa raising domination claims under non-transparent pretexts.

Indifference was also the position taken in many western states on apartheid in South Africa. This led to a situation in which many resolutions taken by the United Nations were only supported by the Warsaw Pact States. This is how the false image of the anti-apartheid movement being a socialist movement was created. In reality, it had completely different objectives, namely the principles of human rights and self-determination.

Here in Europe these issues of peoples' self-determination and human rights were the theme of a current Europe-wide discussion forum - the consultations on the Helsinki

Final Act – signed in Helsinki on August 1, 1975. In addition to questions regarding the peaceful shift of borders also issues of human rights and the right of self-determination were central points of discussion with the Soviet Union and her partners. In the end, a concept reached the final act of which one can say today that it had a system-changing and even a system-overcoming function regarding Europe.

In domestic political discussions on Namibia's independence and on overcoming apartheid in the Republic of South Africa I could make use of arguments we had used in the dispute and discussion with the Soviet Union. We claimed the right of self-determination for us Germans in order to reunite peacefully. How could we have denied the right of self-determination to the Namibian people? Many opponents of Eastern Policy (*Ostpolitik*) as well as our newly developed Africa politics got into vivid argumentation trouble.

## The “Group of the Five”

In 1974, I spoke at the United Nations for the first time, underlining the need of change in politics in Africa. Later, I severely criticised South Africa's apartheid politics and dealt with Namibia's decolonization.

Then and today, Germany was no permanent member of the UN Security Council (this will also not be the case in future even though some people in Germany believe that it would be necessary. In the future, I rather see a European base than a German base, and it would be closer to reality.) In 1976, the Federal Republic of Germany was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for two years. Five western states were represented in the Security Council at the time: beside the permanent members, the United States of America, France and the United Kingdom, it was Canada and the Federal Republic of Germany.

We were thinking alike regarding Namibia's independence. Based on this accord and the close cooperation of the staff at our UN missions, the “Group of the Five” was consolidated, called the “*gang of the five*”, named after the “*gang of the four*” in China.

The Preamble of our constitution/the Basic Law committed us Germans “to serve the peace in the world” and the same applied to the United Nations Charter. This is why we had and wanted to take this position in Africa, jointly with our partners. Cooperation in the “Group of the Five” unfolded in an extraordinarily positive way. However, it found no broad-based support in political bodies, neither in the Federal Republic nor in the global public. We had emphasised very soon that the question of Namibia's independence was not only a claim for national independence, but also a demand to overcome apartheid.

The reason why South Africa was against Namibia's independence as much as possible was because an independent Namibia was perceived as a danger where people would live together peacefully and regardless of their skin colour as citizens of that state. This

freedom could have had a contagious effect on the Republic of South Africa. Insofar, also on our side, there was an inseparable link between the refusal and denial of apartheid and the claim of self-determination for the Namibian people.

We tried step-by-step to overcome the mistrust of our partner states in Africa. Germany had a particular handicap in this: Many years ago already, the Federal Republic of Germany had opened a consulate in Windhoek with the explanation that the Germans living in Namibia needed consular support. This consulate, however, could only be implemented under the prerequisite - according to the conditions imposed by the Pretoria government - that it would be part of the German embassy in the Republic of South Africa. Pretoria saw this position as a confirmation that the Federal Republic of Germany would consider Namibia as being under the sphere of influence of South Africa. In reality, it was interpreted as the acknowledgement of ongoing South African dominion in Namibia.

This is why it was urgently necessary to take courageous steps to dissolve this consulate. The decision on its closure was taken at the end of October 1977 by the SPD and FDP coalition. At this point I would like to mention that in this question and with all resistance existing in my own party and in the SPD, I had a fantastic co-fighter from the ranks of the social democrats: former development minister Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski, who had been state minister of foreign affairs from 1974 to 1976. With his support we could in the end reach a decision with the federal government - with muttering in government circles and very strong resistance in the opposition. Closure of the German consulate in Windhoek in 1977 was a decisive step in German Africa politics and mainly in its credibility vis-à-vis states still waiting for their independence and the abolition of apartheid.

## Germany's role in Namibia's independence

### **How does one interact with independence movements?**

Closure of the consulate was one step and another one was the question: How does one interact with liberation movements? In almost all my speeches at the United Nations I claimed freedom for Nelson Mandela, and I discovered that I was enormously misunderstood and criticised. People who had otherwise fully supported my foreign politics always said: "I agree to everything you do, but this matter will not be possible." And also: "*One man, One vote- will never work*".

Whenever I have to talk about these issues I think of the short-story "*Kassandra*" by Christa Wolf, which has deeply impressed me. Christa Wolf states: "One knows exactly when war starts. But when will the pre-war start?" And one can add a question to this, namely: WHERE does the pre-war start? It starts in the heart of people, in their heads, where the poison of prejudice, the poison of imagined self-supremacy and higher

intelligence poisons people's thinking. We all know what this means in German history. This is why it was extraordinarily important for me to tell these peoples that persons who advocate their freedom are our respected and accepted discussion partners.

On an Africa trip which took me to Zambia in 1975 I spoke to President Kenneth Kaunda and I had first contacts with a SWAPO representative there. Later, I made contact with Sam Nujoma, first at the United Nations and then in official talks in Bonn.

These changes and formulations of Germany's Africa politics had a positive impact on the position of African states and efforts of the "Group of the Five". Of course, it was helpful that American President Jimmy Carter had nominated a UN ambassador who had been a co-fighter of Martin Luther King who embodied a very particular affection for Africa and in whom we had found a great promoter of our efforts: Andrew Young.

However, things became very difficult during Ronald Reagan's term of government. The Reagan Administration suddenly made a link between progress in the Namibia issue and civil war in Angola where, in addition to the Angolans themselves, also Cuban military units and camouflaged military units of the Republic of South Africa were opposed to one another. The Reagan Administration said that only Cuba's withdrawal from Angola could free the way for Namibia's independence. Otherwise, the South Africans at Namibia's northern border would have to defend South Africa's independence which, in reality, also meant that they were operating from there.

Looking back, today one can say that eight precious years were lost that way for Namibia's independence. As important as Ronald Reagan's later contribution to nuclear disarmament and middle distance agreement may have been, as regards Namibia, the United States' involvement was inhibitive.

### **South Africa's pursuit of an "internal solution"**

In 1979 and in a critical phase of our negotiations, I suggested to my four colleagues to go on a trip together to the Republic of South Africa. These four colleagues were Jimmy Carter's foreign minister Cyrus Vance, British foreign minister David Owen of the Labour Party, a permanent secretary from France as well as Canadian foreign minister Don Jamieson, a liberal like myself.

The memories of this visit are one of the most interesting moments of my time as foreign minister. There was a dinner, and only prime minister and later president P.W. Botha<sup>2</sup> and foreign minister Pik Botha, not related - only having the same name - were at the same table as well as we, the four foreign ministers and a French permanent secretary. P.W.

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2 South Africa only introduced a strong executive presidential office in a constitutional reform in 1984, which was held by P.W. Botha until 1989.

Botha started his welcoming speech at the table as follows: "Gentlemen, I am delighted that you have come here, but there is no point in talking to you since all your governments will be voted out in very short time." I have to say that the man was right in four out of five cases. It was really like that: Jimmy Carter was not re-elected in America, the labour government of James Callaghan was voted out and replaced by Margaret Thatcher, there was a government change in Canada and later also in France.

Thank goodness P.W. Botha picked me last in his table speech which was linked to the fact that he had close relations to a rather regionally active party in Germany, which had developed a true human image of me. When he addressed me I said: "Before you continue to talk, I would like to inform you that I have decided to stay in office for as long as you are in office. I want to survive you politically." This ended the matter for me and I stood up and went outside. Both Bothas followed me saying: "This is not what it was intended to mean. Do return to the table." I said: "No. But if you want to sit with me now, we can talk about the matter." This finally led to a factual discussion in which I had the feeling that foreign minister Pik Botha had read the signs of the times much better than his Prime Minister P.W. Botha had.

South Africa could feel that something had to happen and one tried now to achieve something called the "internal solution". This meant that one wanted to enter into discussion with groups inside Namibia and to show-case SWAPO outside. SWAPO was considered as a group acting from outside and one did not want to involve SWAPO inside. This was the meaning of the term "internal solution". This "internal solution" could be taken back step-by-step and in the end it was still possible for Namibia to reach its independence from South Africa – albeit years after that dinner.

The question is: Has over-coming of the East-West-Conflict played a role in this respect? Yes, I think so. Détente between West and East in the northern hemisphere and, in particular, the appearance of Mikhail Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze enabled that disturbing influences were no longer feared.

It is symbolic for me that the first substantial discussion on the preparation of the Two-Plus-Four Talks at the beginning of February 1990, which dealt with external aspects of German reunification, between Eduard Shevardnadze and myself, took place in Windhoek. We were also both in Windhoek on the occasion of Namibia's independence day. In the middle of the German embassy's garden there was an umbrella and we were sitting under it. However, we did not talk about Namibia, but about Germany. This shows how deeply integrated the history of our peoples is.

### **Namibia's independence process as a model case**

It is worth studying the historical process leading to Namibia's independence in detail. I will spare you that at this point, but you can take one thing with you politically and

historically: You can only solve issues if you approach them with the willingness to solve them peacefully. You can only solve them if you take your contracting partner, whom you can also call your negotiation partner, seriously and if you get a picture of the situation and of what moves this man or this woman? What are their motives? To which constraints are they exposed? The third matter is that their approach to their basic attitude is not selective, in other words, that they don't say to the Soviet Union: "You must introduce human rights in your sphere of power!", but close both eyes when human rights in the Republic of South Africa are violated. You cannot claim independence and self-determination for Germans if you look at the issue of self-determination of Namibia's people only with a twinkle in your eye. You must acknowledge that politics that aims solely at creating zones of influence cannot last forever.

We have experienced wars in Europe over centuries and always around the question: Who is the strongest? Who is the number one in Europe? Until World War I. Hitler's war of extermination was of a completely different quality, but previously it was like that in the classic European war scene and war motivation. Europeans have drawn lessons from that and they have learnt that a stable order, which is perceived as fair, can only be created if "Big" and "Small" people can negotiate at eye level. It may be a mood of history, a gift given to us by history, but founding of the European Community by six countries was originally based on a community of three larger countries - Italy, France and Germany – and three smaller countries – Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands. "Big people" have learnt what it meant to deal equally with partners. This also includes our thinking on the new world order of today.

Matters regarding Namibia then also meant the protection of vested rights for many countries in the northern hemisphere. If one has a look today at how the G8 is composed and how some refuse to include other parts of the world - not the German federal government, also other member states - then one can see that this protection of vested rights of the North has not been overcome yet. We can learn a lot from the European unification process after World War II and from having overcome the East–West Divide. The message for Europe is: We have to try and put ourselves in the shoes of others.

Why did liberation movements in Africa rather go to Moscow than any other capital in the West? It was because the West was not on their side, because the West had not said in absolute clarity: Africans are entitled to independence as much as we are!

Only when we had shown with regard to Namibia that it was a matter of self-determination and human rights, saying at the same time that this must and will have an effect on South Africa, only then did we find the broad-based support and trust needed.

I believe that Namibia's process leading towards independence became a model case of new thinking. One could also say: for a new culture of conviviality in the world. For this reason it is so important that we remember it. A good method always calls for imitation, and much still has to be done also here before we achieve a world based on equal rights