

July 15, 1968

**Letter, Minister Willy Brandt to Chancellor Kurt G.
Kiesinger**

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Summary:

After 1 July 1968, when the NPT had been opened for signature, Brandt brought up the accession question in a letter to the Chancellor, arguing that the "credibility of our détente policy" depended on Germany's stance toward the NPT, which in his review it should sign by "early autumn." Brandt's letter mirrored arguments made previously by Georg-F. Duckwitz, who was State Secretary in the Foreign Office.

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Contents:

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WILLY BRANDT^[1]
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Bonn, July 15, 1968
Mister
Federal Chancellor Dr. Kurt Georg Kiesinger^[2]
B o n n

Dear Mr. Federal Chancellor,

I would like to take up the conversation we had last Tuesday regarding the subject of the NPT Treaty, and I am pleased that we will be able to talk about it further over the coming days.

With the position of the federal government on the Non-Proliferation Treaty - warranted or not -, the credibility of our détente policy is at stake. If Brazil or India, Japan or Sweden, are hesitating to sign, this will be regretted; but it will change nothing with regard to the general esteem these states are enjoying. However, if we are hesitant, the latent mistrust vis-a-vis the Federal Republic and its domestic development that exists with our Eastern neighbors, but also with some influential circles in the West, will receive a new impetus. The Eastern propaganda will know how to fan the flames of this smoldering fire.

The nuclear renunciation of 1954 has ultimately never been honored. Our good reasons for carefully reviewing the treaty before we sign it will not be honored either, as it is showing already today. Not the least, this is certainly due to the contradictory statements from politicians of the Grand Coalition^[3] including members of the government.

It may be the case that even our signature does not weigh much.

Every week of unforced hesitation in not signing, however, does weigh heavily and leads to detrimental permanent effects, which cannot be discarded any more even by an ultimate signature. We are in danger of once again missing an opportunity and deliver to our adversaries a cheap pretext for their propaganda. The reasons for further delay are indeed hardly convincing:

1) The American interpretations: We already knew them, and they have been published in the meantime. We could quickly clear up where our additional clarifications are required. Other issues remain significant for the consultations about the ratification law.

2) The conference of the non-nuclear weapon states^[4]: It does assume that the treaty exists. A majority of the participants will have signed it, none will have ratified it. We would have an easier position there, if we would have already signed or would be able to announce the soon upcoming signature.

3) The position of other potential nuclear powers: These powers have their own positions and concerns, which might partially coincide with ours. Nobody will be willing to declare solidarity with us and defend us. We are remaining alone.

4) Procedure according to Article 103 of the EURATOM^[5] Treaty^[6]: Here we have the position of the [EEC^[7]] Commission in Brussels that there does not exist an incompatibility between the goals of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and those of the European Atomic Energy Community. At the same time, the Commission deems it necessary that the member states declare a reservation at the time of signature to the effect that Article 3 of the Treaty shall only enter into force when, in the spirit of this article, a satisfactory agreement has been reached with the IAEA^[8].

(The disputes over such a reservation traded before the American Senate must be clarified. The official position of the U.S. government will probably not concur with that of Dr. Seaborg.^[9]).

If also the European Commission considers it necessary that the member states deposit the ratification documents jointly at a given time, we must assume that Italy and the Benelux^[10] countries will sign in the coming weeks. France has confirmed at the Bonn WEU^[11] meeting on the 8th of this month that it will act towards third parties as if it had already signed.

Given these circumstances, objectively much does actually argue for establishing the

conditions for signing from our side still this summer. I am aware how this is not easy for practical reasons, especially since contact with the leaderships of the [parliamentary] caucuses would be necessary.

I would have great concerns, however, over delaying the decision far into the fall. Already there are voices advocating to wait until after the American elections, what is basically -for us- a dangerous vote of no-confidence against the current U.S. administration and the majority of the Senate we will have to continue to deal with. Others want to take even more time. Then we are getting dragged into our own election campaign. This might break up the Grand Coalition at a time when it still has important tasks to fulfill.

A delay will cause pressure, from the East and the West. If there will be a signing then, the nationalist propaganda will not hesitate to accuse the parties of the Grand Coalition of a subservient policy and the betrayal of national interests. In the East, however, they will triumph and claim the success for themselves.

If, however, we are signing immediately -

- we are swimming with the current of international public opinion
- we are denying East Berlin and Moscow a significant propaganda tool
- we are generating support and goodwill with our allies and the Third World
- the Federal Government will gain respect because it will hold back the existing reasonable concerns in the interest of its policy of peace (here, as with most other aspects, a major effort has to be made to present our decision in a well-thought-through and effective manner)
- we are eliminating this subject from the election campaign between the democratic parties and are avoiding fierce debates in public
- we are winning enough time to calmly conduct the necessary review in the framework of the ratification process and finalize it after the elections
- we are having addressed an important point from the Soviet catalogue and thus have made our entire Eastern policy [Ostpolitik] easier (especially for the Czechs).

In recent days, now the argument has been raised ever more strong against our signature that the preamble [of the NPT] refers without reservations to the Charter of the United Nations, while the Soviet government does insist on articles 53 and 107 of that charter to derive rights of [military] intervention from there.

At the press conference on Friday I did strongly argue against this Soviet policy, and I think we have to continue to do so. However, I have the strongest concerns against turning this into a reason for not signing. Notwithstanding that this way we would assign to those paragraphs, which over time have become obsolete, an utterly undesired current relevance - we would also display a massive mistrust towards the United States. The political discussion must be conducted in a different manner, and here we must not overlook that we might unwillingly weaken the claim towards a peace treaty agreement^[12].

Therefore I am arriving at the result that we have to aim at a signing in all three capitals in early fall, as it is apparently not possible at an earlier date.

In spite of all that has happened, I think it is feasible to address from the Soviet Aide Memoire of July 8 point #7 and unmistakably clarify to the Soviet government our position. On this subject I rather like to convey my thoughts verbally.

With friendly greetings

[Signed Brandt]

^[1] Willy Brandt (1913-1992). Governing Mayor of West Berlin 1957-1966, West German Minister of Foreign Affairs 1966-1969 and Federal Chancellor from 1969 to 1974.

^[2] Kurt Georg Kiesinger (1901-1988). West German Federal Chancellor between 1966 and 1969.

^[3] West German government consisting of the two largest parties CDU/CSU and SPD from 1966 to 1969.

^[4] Held for a month in Geneva in August 1968.

^[5] European Atomic Energy Community.

[\[6\]](#) Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community, signed on 25 March 1957 in Rome.

[\[7\]](#) European Economic Community.

[\[8\]](#) International Atomic Energy Agency.

[\[9\]](#) Glenn Theodore Seaborg (1912-1999). American chemist and one of the winners of the 1951 Nobel Prize in chemistry.

[\[10\]](#) Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg.

[\[11\]](#) Western European Union.

[\[12\]](#) For Germany.