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**From an interview with the President of the SI,
Brandt, for the French newspaper Le Nouvel
Observateur
30 March 1980**

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Summary:

Willy Brandt's interview for the French newspaper on Camp David and recognition of the new Jewish state.

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From an interview with the President of the SI, Brandt, for the French newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur* 30 March 1980¹

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Willy Brandt: “The Jews should know ...”

JEAN DANIEL. – What is your reaction to the speeches of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing in the Emirates and in Jordan? Will the German government be in agreement with French policy toward the Arab world?²

WILLY BRANDT. – Something had to be done to prevent leaders open to negotiations, such as Yasser Arafat, from being marginalized by Islamic radicalism, which has emerged in certain countries of Asia, the Middle East and in Palestine itself, in the areas occupied by Israel.

That being said, the great admiration which I feel for the President of the French Republic cannot prevent me from remarking that he said nothing new, even though he said it very well. For a long time now, self-determination has been clearly coming to the forefront. It has been accorded to the Israelis; it must also be granted to the Palestinians.

J. D. – And recognition of the PLO?

WILLY BRANDT. – I have to confess to you that we Germans do not know precisely what the French understanding of the concept “*recognition*” means. In international law we recognize countries, not

governments or organisations. Even less so organisations without a country. Of course, I know that my friend Bruno Kreisky has “*recognised*” the PLO. But how is this manifested, other than in the fact that the PLO representative in Austria will have the title of ambassador in the future?...

J. D. – You know Yasser Arafat: do you believe that he himself is willing to recognise the state of Israel and that he has the authority to do so?

WILLY BRANDT. – Actually, I met Yasser Arafat at Bruno Kreisky’s.³ Of course, I spent quite a few hours with him; however, I saw him only that one time and for that reason cannot claim to know him well. I just read a speech which he gave in Caracas and which appears to me to reflect this maximalism which I spoke about earlier.⁴ This speech does not have the same tone as our discussions. In any event, Yasser Arafat said something very appropriate to me which I can well understand: the question of mutual recognition will have been answered at the moment when both adversaries agree to sit down at the same table to negotiate. It will no longer be necessary at all to emphatically declare any recognition. The negotiations will signify recognition.

J. D. – This could have already happened in the framework of the Camp David Accords.⁵...

WILLY BRANDT. – Undoubtedly. I belong to those who deeply regret that this has not happened. I endorsed President Sadat’s noble initiative. To return to Arafat, the sole condition which he made for sitting down at one table with the Israelis was to amend UN Resolution 242.⁶ You know that this resolution characterises the Palestinians as “*refugees*,” not as a nation.

J. D. – Are you prepared to contribute to the creation of a common European policy which advocates a Palestinian state in West Jordan and in Gaza, which Valéry Giscard d'Estaing seems to want?

WILLY BRANDT. – Certainly, but that is not the only problem. There are the Palestinian people who have fled to other Arab countries. I have just come from Kuwait. There I saw a Palestinian elite which in all regards was reminiscent of the Israeli elite: intelligent, dynamic, ambitious, proud. These people want a passport. Even those who find themselves in a agreeable and comfortable situation have had enough of being foreigners without a country. The obvious interest of the Israelis is to reach an agreement with a people which is beginning to resemble them so much.

J. D. – The Jewish community is far from seeing this interest as obvious.

WILLY BRANDT. – I know. I realized this myself in Strasburg. I was moved by some expressions of Jewish indignation which reveal considerable anxiety. Naturally, I am especially sensitive to that. The Jews should know that we will not accept any loss of “*secure, recognized and guaranteed*” borders by the Israelis. Should there ever be a common European policy, it will have to retain this obligation. In addition to that, we Germans have special obligations.

[...] ⁷

¹ Only after considerable delay did Willy Brandt's office learn of the publication of the interview. After consulting with Brandt, office manager Thomas Mirow protested in a letter dated 9 June 1980 that Brandt's comments had not been intended for the general public. He confirmed, however, that the SI president's content had been correctly reported. A week later Jean Daniel conceded in his sharply worded reply that he had also understood that the conversation was originally not supposed to be published. Nevertheless, he decided to publish the passages in which Brandt repeated publically known positions. See the correspondence and the copy of the interview in: AdsD, WBA, A 3, 808.

² Giscard d'Estaing travelled through the Middle East from 1 to 10 March 1980. There he advocated, among other things, the “legitimate rights of the Palestinians.” The French president also expressed his readiness to meet with PLO leader Arafat. Cf. AdG 50 (1980), p. 23350.

³ Cf. No. 36.

⁴ According to the newspaper *El Mundo* (Caracas/Venezuela) of 11 February 1980, Arafat reportedly said that peace for the PLO meant the destruction of Israel. They would not rest until Israel was destroyed. See <http://www.netreach.net/~zoa/newsLinks/shockers/m96.htm>

⁵ Peace treaty of 26 March 1979 between Egypt and Israel mediated by the USA.

⁶ Cf. No. 24, Note 3.

⁷ In closing, Daniel reports on a statement about the PLO by an associate of Federal Chancellor Schmidt.