
Living Next Door to Germany: Denmark and the German Problem

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Abstract

This article analyses Danish relations with the two German states. After 1949 Denmark found itself in a special position as the only West European country that was neighbour to both Germanys, having a land border with the Federal Republic and a sea border and important communications links with the German Democratic Republic. But Denmark recognised only the Federal Republic as the legitimate representative of Germany. Germany had historically constituted a serious problem for Denmark, and even in the after-war period Danish relations with its big neighbour were beset with problems. After 1955, when the minority question was settled and Denmark and the FRG were both members of NATO, relations with West Germany improved. Relations with the GDR were much more troubled because Denmark was to an extent forced to bow to West German interests, but could not ignore the existence of the East German neighbour state.

The Cold War, Denmark and defeated Germany

Denmark was one of the many countries affected by Nazi Germany's war against Europe. Like other small European neighbours of the Reich, Denmark had been attacked by Germany (on 9 April 1940) and thereafter occupied. The Germans spoke in terms of a 'peaceful occupation' which ostensibly respected Danish territorial sovereignty, political independence and neutrality and left Denmark with its own government, legislation and jurisdiction. The German occupiers restricted themselves to what they called *Aufsichtsverwaltung* (supervisory administration),¹ while the Danes pursued a policy of negotiation and co-operation – and sometimes even collaboration – towards the occupiers. Of course the idea that Denmark had preserved its national sovereignty was a fiction which eventually wore out; but it could also be described as a success insofar as political collaboration saved the

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¹ The term is attributed to Werner Best, the German *Reichsbevollmächtigter* in Denmark, quoted in Ulrich Herbert, *Best. Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903–1989* (Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachfolger, 1996), 329.

country and its inhabitants from most of the horrors of war (this included saving the Danish Jews from the Holocaust). The 'special regime' continued until 29 August 1943, when the Danish government resigned, the political system was suspended and the Germans took over real power and law enforcement.² The disadvantage was that Denmark, notionally neutral, never contributed to the struggle to bring down the Nazi Reich. Nonetheless in 1944–5 it earned the status of an ally, thanks to increasing sabotage and fighting by the Danish Resistance and the political break with the German occupying power. After the war Denmark was offered a seat in the United Nations, qualified as a recipient of German reparations and participated in the Paris Conference on Reparations in 1945. In 1946 the Danish government was asked to present its peace demands regarding Germany to the Allied Council of Foreign Ministers.³ As an 'Allied power' Denmark even took a share in the occupation and control of Germany: from 1947 to 1957 a contingent of Danish troops, the Tysklandsbrigade, assisted the British in their zone of occupation.⁴

The Allied great powers were unable to agree on terms for peace with Germany; negotiations finally broke down at the end of 1947, leaving something of a vacuum. The breach was primarily due to growing tensions and political divergences between the erstwhile Allies, leading to the East–West conflict that became known as the Cold War. The Allies could not agree on the future role of Germany under these circumstances. The configuration of the Cold War was becoming clear as early as 1947, foreshadowing a bipolar division of Europe.⁵ Owing to these drastic changes in the international situation, the Danish government was never invited to argue for its peace demands and they were never formally settled. In historical perspective, however, they can be regarded as an explicit formulation of Danish wishes towards Germany, the power that until May 1945 had always been seen, not unjustifiably, as a major security threat to Denmark.⁶ Hence the future status of Germany was of special concern to Denmark, as had been pointed out even before the war ended.

The history of Danish relations with Germany was a predominant cause of that concern. In 1944 the Conservative politician John Christmas Møller, then in exile in Britain, who was to become Minister of Foreign Affairs after his return home in 1945, commented on the historical evolution of the 'German problem':

It can rightly be claimed that no one knows the German problem as well as Germany's neighbours both large and small. We do not even need to know it from experience; we are, you might say,

² The most recent account of the German occupation is Claus B. Christensen, Joachim Lund, Jacob Sørensen and Niels Wium Olesen, *Danmark besat. Krig og hverdag 1940–45* (Copenhagen: Høst & Søn, 2005); see also Hans Kirchhoff, *Samarbejde og modstand under besættelsen. En politisk historie* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2001).

³ Cf. my recent study '*Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?*' *Det dansk-tyske forhold efter 1945* (Copenhagen: Schønberg, 2005), 64 ff.

⁴ *Danmark under den kolde krig. Den sikkerhedspolitiske situation 1945–1991* (Copenhagen: Dansk Institut for internationale studier, 2005), vol. 1, 127–8; Lammers, '*Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?*', 81 ff.

⁵ Cf. Hermann Graml, *Die Alliierten und die Teilung Deutschlands. Konflikte und Entscheidungen 1941–1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 105 ff.

⁶ For a historical overview see Troels Fink, *Deutschland als Problem Dänemarks. Die geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen der dänischen Aussenpolitik* (Flensburg: Christian Wolff Verlag, 1968).

born with it. German aggression, the German will to rule over and dominate others – that sums up a thousand years of Danish history.

Hence, argued Møller, no one had more interest in a ‘correct approach to the German problem’ than Germany’s neighbours.⁷

But what was the correct approach? And should it be determined by historical experience? The defeat and capitulation of the Reich in May 1945 seemed to have put a new complexion on the situation: Germany, prostrate under foreign occupation and control, had ceased to exist as a state. From the narrowly Danish viewpoint, mighty Germany seemed to have been eliminated as a threat to Danish security and territory. It looked like a tabula rasa. Did that also apply to what the Danes saw as the German problem? Had the situation changed in Denmark’s favour? And what did this mean for Denmark and its *Deutschlandpolitik*? Against this background, the Danish peace proposals can be seen as an indication of what the Danes wanted to do and see done with Germany, of how they contemplated the future status of Germany and future Danish–German relations. The Danish peace proposals can thus be regarded as central to Danish reflections on the German problem.⁸

But the peace demands belong to a transitional phase, whose dominant features were the change from a ‘predominantly bilateral setting to an increasingly multilateral context’, as Thorsten B. Olesen has pointed out.⁹ This also affected Danish relations with defeated Germany: Germany itself would no longer be the only or even the primary point of reference for Danish foreign policy, although it still played a major role, as we shall see.

The Danish peace proposals and visions of a future Germany

The end of the German occupation in May 1945 – or Denmark’s liberation, as it was called – naturally marked an important divide in Danish–German relations. But not in

⁷ J. Christmas Møller, *Det tyske Problem* (Copenhagen: Nyt nordisk forlag Arnold Busk, 1945), 10, 18. All translations are by the author.

⁸ Cf. Lammers, ‘*Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?*’, 64 ff. The Danish–German relationship after the end of the German occupation, and the Danish peace proposals, had received surprisingly little attention from historians prior to the publication of my study in 2005. It was touched upon briefly by Fink, *Deutschland*, and later by Nikolaj Petersen, *Denmark and New Germany* (Aarhus: Department of Political Science, 1994). See also Karl Christian Lammers, ‘Danmark og Tysklandsspørgsmålet. Hovedlinier i dansk Tysklandspolitik fra 1945 til ca. 1973’, in H. Dethlefsen and H. Lundbak, eds., *Fra mellemkrigstid til efterkrigstid* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 1998); idem, ‘Denmark’s Relations with Germany since 1945’, in H. Branner and M. Kelstrup, eds., *Denmark’s Policy towards Europe after 1945* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2000). For a more general treatment see Steen Bo Frandsen, *Dänemark – der kleine Nachbar im Norden. Aspekte der deutsch-dänischen Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994). Danish relations with the GDR are analysed in Karl Christian Lammers, ‘Nachbarschaft und Nicht-Anerkennung. Probleme der Beziehungen zwischen Dänemark und der DDR (1949–1973)’, in Ulrich Pfeil, ed., *Die DDR und der Westen. Transnationale Beziehungen 1949–1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2001), and from the East German viewpoint by Thomas Wegener Friis, *Den nye nabo. DDR’s forhold til Danmark 1949–1960* (Copenhagen: SFAH, 2001). See also Thomas Wegener Friis and Andreas Linderoth, eds., *DDR & Norden. Østtysk-nordiske relationer 1949–1989* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2005).

⁹ Thorsten Boring Olesen, ‘The Dilemmas of Interdependence: Danish Foreign Policy 1945–1972’, *Journal of European Integration History*, 7, 2 (2001), 37–63, 38.

all respects: there was considerable continuity. Immediately after the war Germany was still central to the Danish viewpoint. The recent German aggression against Denmark had confirmed the perception of Germany as a threat. But, while the occupation had left deep wounds, sowing distrust and openly anti-German sentiments among the Danish people and making them keenly aware of Germany as a threat to their security, the Danish government's official attitude to defeated Germany was on the whole pragmatic, determined by geography and by reason. Germany would remain as Denmark's nearest neighbour; but it would presumably be a somewhat different Germany, defeated and disarmed, no longer a security threat. The situation called for Danish moderation and some willingness to compromise. Danish views on the making of a stable peace reflected a wish to overcome the past and secure the future: the historical argument was still valid, but it was not the only one. The German military threat had to be eliminated definitively, but Germany needed to be helped to a new existence because trade with it was economically vital to Denmark and to other small European states. These concerns emerge clearly from Denmark's January 1947 proposals for peace with Germany: the main themes were the elimination of German militarism and the position of the Danish minority south of the Danish-German border.¹⁰

The Danish government defined the task of peacemaking as twofold: on the one hand to 'create security against future German wars of aggression' and on the other 'to provide the conditions for an economic and social development of Germany that will enable the German people to rebuild German society on a sound and durable democratic foundation'.

This was the prerequisite for a peaceful and fruitful political development in future. 'We must aim to ensure that Germany, with its rich natural resources that include some of the most important raw materials, makes a useful contribution to the work of rebuilding the social and economic structure and future prosperity of Europe.'¹¹ Whatever happened, Germany would still be there and would still be important to Denmark. The lengthy peace memorandum dealt with three major topics: the future military and political status of Germany, the Danish-German border and the minorities on both sides, and economic and reparation issues.

Most important was that Germany's military might should be totally dismantled: it must be disarmed and militarism must be annihilated. Denmark, after all, had been a victim of German aggression since 1864. Therefore Denmark had a 'special interest in the total disarmament of Germany and the permanent elimination of German militarism'. The military training of German youth must be prohibited, and so must

¹⁰ Memorandum indeholdende Den kgl. Danske Regerings Synspunkter med Hensyn til Tysklands fremtidige Ordning, Udenrigsministeriet, Rigsarkivet Copenhagen (RA) RA UM. 6.G.120.c; extracts in Bertel Heurlin, *Dansk udenrigspolitik efter 1945. Kilder til belysning af Danmarks udenrigspolitiske mål 1945-1970* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1971), 38-49. The following analysis is based mainly on the archives of the Danish Ministry of Foreign affairs in Copenhagen (Rigsarkivet, hereafter RA UM), but I have also drawn on the archives of the Auswärtiges Amt and the GDR Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, both now housed in the Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin.

¹¹ See the Memorandum.

the emergence of an arms industry. The Danes wanted young Germans democratised and human and democratic rights secured.

The Danish government claimed special Danish national interests in southern Schleswig, which was home to a substantial pro-Danish minority. The Danes did not ask for any revision to the border, which had been fixed by plebiscite in 1920 as a consequence of the Versailles treaty, but they did want Danish interests to be taken into consideration when the future of southern Schleswig, a region of historical interest to Denmark, was decided. Denmark wanted the new state (*Land*) of Schleswig-Holstein to be administratively separated into two parts in order to secure the interests of the Danish minority in southern Schleswig, and it wanted refugees from eastern Germany removed from the region. The question was of political importance:

whether the change of allegiance we have seen in many of the people of southern Schleswig is really permanent, only time will tell. Under these circumstances the Danish government has no intention of proposing a change to the national identity of southern Schleswig. It is up to the people of southern Schleswig to say whether they want to exert their natural right of self-determination.¹²

Along with some minor claims (including the removal of the German refugees north and south of the border), the Danes demanded reparations for 'systematic looting' by the Germans; but they also pleaded for the economic reconstruction of Germany to take place as soon as possible and for the return of its economy to international trade.¹³

The peace proposals might be said to reflect Danish concern with the *historical* German problem and how it should be solved after the German defeat, namely, Germany should be permanently eliminated as a security threat and military problem. Apart from that the proposals were, on the whole, moderate: after all, Germany, even after its defeat, would still be a powerful neighbour and would still be important to Denmark. For as long as Germany was demilitarised and under occupation it would be no threat, but how long would that last? The international situation was far from promising: after 1947–8 it became increasingly clear that the German problem would remain unsolved and that Germany's status would not be settled by a peace treaty: rather, as a consequence of the Cold War, it would be partitioned between West and East – an outcome regretted by the Danes, if only for economic reasons.¹⁴

International developments had changed the situation and position of Germany, and this would inevitably influence Danish attitudes to the new Germany, or at least the emerging West German state. The British, the occupying power in control of north Germany, pointed this out to the Danes during negotiations over southern Schleswig in London in October 1948: the Danes were going to have to shake off the chains of history and emotion and look squarely at what was actually happening in Germany and what the British and their allies were trying to bring about in Europe. Denmark needed to update its view of Germany; moreover it ought to include the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.; see also Lammers, *Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?*, 69.

¹⁴ Thus the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gustav Rasmussen, at a meeting of the parliamentary committee for foreign affairs (Udenrigspolitisk Nævn i Folketinget) on 14 May 1947, RA UM, 3.E.92.

Soviet Union in its views on national security. In the words of the British diplomat Lord Henderson,

Denmark is in a crucial position at the entrance to the Baltic, and Danish opinion must, I think, consider whether, in addition to facing this menace from the East, she is also to cultivate unfriendly relations with the new Power which is now going to grow up to the south of them . . . You have spoken of your national security as affected by the future of South Schleswig. I wish to suggest to you that you must now view your national security not in terms of South Schleswig but in terms of the security of the entrances to the Baltic against pressure and perhaps aggression from the east and the amount of willing political and other support which you will receive from your neighbours to the North, the South and of course to the West. Do you not think that your position will be somewhat adversely affected if you have a running sore in your relations with Western Germany?¹⁵

The British government thus left the Danes in no doubt that they were part of the Cold War whether they liked it or not, and that their national security would be determined accordingly. They would have to adjust to the fact that the international security situation had changed and that this would give Germany a new role. Denmark had to put its German policy in a wider context, forget history and embrace reality. Germany was no longer Denmark's primary problem; the new threat to Denmark and the other minor European powers was the new, expansionist superpower – the Soviet Union. In other words, the antagonistic bipolarity of the Cold War might turn the former foe into a future ally. If Denmark wanted to worry about something it should not be resurgent Germany but the new great power in the Baltic. How did the Danes react to this situation, and how did it influence their attitude to Germany?

The multilateralisation of the German problem after 1945

The 'German problem' now had to be set in the context of the Cold War. This did not mean, however, that Danish anxiety about, and distrust of, Germany were going to vanish overnight – not least with regard to the situation of the Danish minority south of the border. Germany might have disappeared as a political, military and security problem, but the 'German question' had not been answered, it had only changed. It was now about what should become of defeated and occupied Germany and what its future should be. The prospect of a common Allied solution began to fade in 1947–48 with the breakdown of the peace negotiations. Instead, the introduction of the Deutschmark as a new currency in the three Western zones in summer 1948 marked an economic, and also more general, subdivision of Germany and the emergence of two separate solutions, as the Western and Eastern sides both began to create and foster their own Germanys in their respective zones of occupation. The outcome was that by 1949 two independent German states had been established.¹⁶

At the same time, international bipolarisation was changing the political position of Denmark and other small states. The outcome was that Denmark had to give up its

¹⁵ Quoted from Julius Bomholts Arkiv Esbjerg (FIII.c.1.B – courtesy of Thorsten B. Olesen), Danish quoted in T. B. Olesen and P. Villaume, *I blokopdelingens tegn 1945–1972. Dansk udenrigspolitikens historie* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2005), vol. 5, 56.

¹⁶ Cf. Christoph Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung. Deutsche Geschichte 1945–1955* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 177 ff.

traditional neutrality. Danish efforts at bridge-building between the two blocs began to look hopeless in 1948, as the Cold War intensified and the East–West rift became an abyss. The Communist takeover in Prague in February, and Soviet pressure on Finland for an alliance, also made Denmark feel nervous and threatened from the East, encouraging it to look to the West for security. A bid to found a Nordic defence union encompassing Denmark, Norway and Sweden failed, and in April 1949 Denmark and Norway threw in their lot with the Western bloc and joined the new defence alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or NATO.¹⁷ Denmark also decided to take part in the Western economic and political co-operation that was developing through the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) and the Council of Europe. The country had chosen its side in the Cold War and allied itself with the Western bloc, which since 1948 had favoured and worked for the establishment of a separate German state in the Western zones of occupation. As a result, membership of NATO was to have deep implications for Denmark's stance on the German question: it meant more or less openly adopting the Western view. This in turn meant accepting the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), the state founded by the Western powers, and lending political and diplomatic support to its demand for reunification of the two German states. This commitment was made manifest in Danish adherence to an Allied declaration in 1950 and to a declaration by the NATO council in 1954.¹⁸ The only Germany that Denmark was prepared to recognise would be West Germany. This commitment also reflected Danish confidence in the new democratic Germany, the Federal Republic.¹⁹

What options did this commitment leave Denmark with regard to the German question? This refers not so much to its bilateral relations with West Germany, formally established in June 1951 when the undeclared state of war was ended and diplomatic relations were resumed, as to its relations with the second new, but formally unrecognised, German state in the East, the German Democratic Republic or GDR.

In reality Denmark had very few options with regard to East Germany.²⁰ In the beginning this other state on German territory simply did not exist formally in Danish eyes, so diplomatic relations with it were out of the question (although private relationships were acceptable, as stipulated in the Allied agreement of 1950). The territory was referred to as 'East Germany', implying that it was merely the eastern part of Germany, that is of the Federal Republic that had been recognised as 'Germany'. The Danish government stuck to this view until 1955.²¹

Denmark's attitude was very different when it came to the new West Germany, the bigger of the two German states, founded in May 1949 with the support of Denmark's international partners, the United Kingdom and the United States.

¹⁷ Olesen and Villaume, *I blokopdelingens tegn*, 91–2; *Danmark under den kolde krig*, vol. 1, 132 ff.

¹⁸ Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 176 ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 96 ff.

²⁰ On Danish–East German relations see Lammers, 'Nachbarschaft und Nicht-Anerkennung'; Friis, *Den nye nabo*.

²¹ Notits PJ. I, 3.1. 1951, RA UM 141.D-1.a.; see also Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 171 ff.

As far as Denmark was concerned, West Germany *was* Germany. It was with this Germany that Denmark had to resolve urgent bilateral problems that had not been solved by the German capitulation: the question of the minorities on either side of the Danish–German border and problem of the German refugees both north and south of that border. Here the German question impinged on Danish national interests and the Danish government had to deal with it.

The refugee problem in Denmark was solved in February 1949, when the last German refugees left Danish soil, although the refugees from the East did not leave Schleswig-Holstein until the 1950s.²² Harder to resolve was the question of the minorities: the Danes south of the border and the Germans north of it.²³ The border itself was not on the agenda: as far as the Danes were concerned it had been fixed in 1920. The knotty problem was the situation of the Danish minority in southern Schleswig, which had grown considerably since 1945 and was agitating for the return of the region to its historical fatherland, Denmark. The pro-Danish faction considered that its political and cultural rights had not been formally safeguarded in Schleswig-Holstein. The newly constituted FRG of 1949 included a new state (*Land*) known as Schleswig-Holstein, which contained a substantial minority of pro-Danes. Their situation had at first been taken up with the British occupation authority, which had turned down Danish appeals for a separation of the two regions (Schleswig and Holstein), but did arrange some discussions with the regional government concerning the situation of the Danish minority in southern Schleswig. The outcome of the negotiations was a political declaration by the local parliament (the Landtag) in Kiel in September 1949, recognising the rights of the Danish minority and guaranteeing their right to cultural freedom.

This did not, however, resolve all the tensions in the border region. In practice the Danish minority felt discriminated against by the regional state government, especially as certain innovations – such as the high threshold (percentage of votes necessary to gain parliamentary representation) at regional elections – were seen as malicious attempts at Germanisation. The situation deteriorated further in the 1950s: tension became acute, and the Danes were displeased with the Germans and had no faith in their goodwill. Nothing seemed changed by the advent of the new ‘democratic’ Germany: ‘The Germans are still out to suppress minorities’, as a Danish minister put it.²⁴ The issue was highly loaded, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ole Bjørn Kraft, pointed out while formally expressing Denmark’s gratification at seeing a democratic Germany again take its place in the ‘European community’: ‘your handling of the minority problem is to us the touchstone of how well-rooted democratic ways of thinking really are’. He could not imagine that a democratic Germany would

²² See Henrik Havredhed, *Tyske flygtninge i Danmark 1945–1949* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1987); Martin Klatt, *Flygtningene og Sydslesvigs danske bevægelse 1945–1955* (Flensborg: Det danske bibliotek, 2001).

²³ On the minority question see Johan Peter Noack, *Det danske mindretal i Sydslesvig 1948–1955* (Aabenraa: Institut for grænseregionsforskning, 1997).

²⁴ Meeting of the Commission for North Schleswig (Sønderjysk Udvalg), 6.1. 1954, RA UM. 7.y.41a.

deny the pro-Danes in southern Schleswig 'the right to free national, cultural and political expression on equal terms' with other citizens.²⁵

The West Germans, for their part, seemed willing to do a deal. When the question of West German accession to NATO came up in autumn 1954, the Danish parliament, the Folketing, passed a resolution urging the Danish government to use the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Danes of southern Schleswig. At a meeting in Paris the Danish Foreign Minister, H. C. Hansen, took up the matter with his German counterpart Konrad Adenauer, telling him and the NATO council that

nobody doubts that the rights of minorities are very closely linked to the ideals on which all human rights are based. In this context the way in which a minority is treated can easily become symbolic: it can become the symbol of our future co-operation and that is very much what we want to see.

Denmark hoped that

the same ideals that laid the foundations of NATO co-operation may inspire Germany to show the same understanding of the importance of liberal policies in all matters relating to minorities, and contribute to the maintenance of good relations between us.²⁶

Although Adenauer's mind was intent on the bilateral treaty he at once grasped the signal importance of settling the minority question. Pressure from Bonn on the regional government in Kiel finally led to Danish-German talks culminating in the 'Bonn-Copenhagen Declarations' of March 1955, in which both governments guaranteed the rights of their respective minorities and stated that every individual's choice of either Danish or German nationality and culture was free and would not be challenged.²⁷ This was indeed a liberal approach: those who wanted to belong to a minority were free to do so. To the Danes this outcome seemed to demonstrate that Germany really had changed and become liberal and tolerant. From the opposite viewpoint, the agreement could be regarded as an expression of Danish confidence in the new Germany, since it depended on trust in the good faith of the other side to live up to its pledges.²⁸

The minority question was implicitly connected with the much more controversial issue of West German rearmament. This issue had been on the political agenda since 1950, when the Korean War increased tensions between East and West, and demonstrated the urgency of strengthening conventional forces in Western Europe. The United States proposed that West Germany should be included in the military build-up. The original idea was to integrate West German troops into a new organisation, the European Defence Community (EDC), but when this proposal was torpedoed by the French Assembly in 1954, West Germany instead became a member of the West European Union (WEU), and discussions began on its

²⁵ Comment recorded by the German ambassador Wilhelm Nöldeke, 14.2.1951, AA Berlin: Politisches Archiv, B 11, 235; *Rigsdagstidende* 1950/51, Folketinget cols. 1364 ff.

²⁶ Speech at NATO meeting on 22 Oct. 1955, in Troels Fink, *Forhandlingerne mellem Danmark og Tyskland 1955 om de slesvigske mindretal* (Copenhagen: Selskabet til Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie, 2001), 80.

²⁷ Reproduced in Fink, *Forhandlingerne*, 205–6; cf. Noack, *Det danske mindretal i Sydslesvig*, 438 ff.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 544; Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 117 ff.

accession to NATO.²⁹ The issue of West German rearmament met with intense criticism and hostility in Denmark. Because, as we have seen, the Danes had called for the total disarmament of Germany, the idea of rearming the FRG so soon after the occupation was very hard to swallow. They did reluctantly agree to West German integration into the EDC. But what, to Denmark, greatly complicated the situation was the need to accept that the FRG was going to become an integral part of the whole process of Western political and economic reconstruction and consequently be freed from some of the existing restrictions on its sovereignty. The supposed threat from the East (i.e. from the Soviet Union) bulked large in this reconfiguration. Most controversial of all, in Danish eyes, was the notion that the United States wanted West Germany rearmed, and West German forces integrated into the Western alliance, solely in order to counter Soviet military power. In other words, the United States wanted the FRG rearmed and integrated into the very Western defence system which Danes were still inclined to see as a defence against Germany. Nevertheless, at a NATO meeting in 1950 the Danish ambassador supported the view that NATO's defence line needed to be pushed as far to the east as possible, that is to the other side of West Germany. And in 1951 a majority in the Folketing, while expressing strong reservations about German rearmament, had agreed that these doubts had to give way to the 'need to exploit every possibility of strengthening the defence of Western Europe and thus the defence of Denmark'.³⁰ Ole Bjørn Kraft told the Folketing in 1951 that German rearmament was not tantamount to a resurgence of German militarism: 'German participation in the defence of Europe is one thing, German militarism is quite another.' The integration of German forces into the Western alliance was even presented as a safeguard against a revival of German militarism.³¹ If Denmark were ever attacked, German military forces would help to defend it. The issue was in terms of internal politics a tough one, and Denmark was also put under Soviet pressure.³² The really decisive issue was how exactly the rearming of Germany would take place. In the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s the Danish government and most of the political parties admitted that the military integration of West Germany was unavoidable and could be viewed positively as helping to strengthen the West and with it, the defence of Denmark. 'Emotion spoke against German rearmament, but reason spoke for it', so long as the German forces were solidly integrated into NATO.³³

Insofar as the German question was viewed as one of reconstruction and rearmament, it was effectively multilateralised, that is debated and resolved within

²⁹ Poul Villaume, 'Mulig fjende – nødvendig allieret? Vesttysklands rolle i udformningen af dansk forsvars- og sikkerhedspolitik 1950–1961', in Carsten Due-Nielsen, ed., *Danmark, Norden og NATO 1948–1962* (Copenhagen: Jurist- og Økonomiforbundets Forlag, 1991), 162–3; idem, *Allieret med forbehold. Danmark, NATO og den kolde krig: en studie i dansk sikkerhedspolitik 1949–1961* (Copenhagen: Eirene, 1995), 221–3; *Danmark under den kolde krig*, vol. 1, 161–2; Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 119 ff.

³⁰ *Udenrigsministeriet, Dansk sikkerhedspolitik* (Copenhagen: Udenrigsministeriet, 1968), vol. I, 57 ff.

³¹ *Rigsdagstidende* 1951/52, Folketinget, cols. 64–5; Cf. *Danmark under den kolde krig*, vol. 1, 161 ff.

³² Cf. Olesen and Villaume, *I blokopdelingens tegn*, 323 ff.

³³ Quoted in Villaume, 'Mulig fjende', 157.

an international framework, as other aspects of it had been in other organisations such as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and would be again later in the European Economic Community (EEC), of which the FRG was a founder member. But most Danes did not see the ongoing process of European integration as a means of dealing with the German question.³⁴ The rearmament of West Germany was not a solely Danish–German matter, but the result of an agreement within NATO. As an unspoken condition for accepting West German rearmament and West Germany's entry into NATO the Danish government succeeded in obtaining a West German gesture on a symbolic, but to Denmark vital, issue: namely, the March 1955 agreement, discussed above, on the rights of the two minorities. This was not a formal treaty, but it had great symbolic value, and as far as Denmark was concerned it removed its last objection to West German membership of NATO; the Folketing formally approved this in April 1955. Even so, West Germany's admission was not supported by the majority of Danish public opinion, although it had previously supported West German rearmament.³⁵

After 1955, when the minority question reached a satisfactory solution and West Germany entered NATO, Danish–German tension greatly diminished. Denmark had already normalised its commercial and political relations with the new German state that it had recognised in 1951, and the two countries were political and military allies within a multilateral frame. In practice West Germany was to become Denmark's closest military ally. The two neighbour states were allied as formally equal partners. Without doubt the minority agreement was the turning point in Danish–German relations. It was regarded as proof that Germany really had changed and shown itself to be democratic, liberal and tolerant. By 1955, only ten years after the end of the German occupation, the whole relationship had been substantially transformed.

Denmark might thus be said to have reconciled itself to its 'German problem'. Germany was no longer the looming security threat that it had so long represented; it had become an ally, at least officially and at governmental level. The ordinary Dane in the street continued to feel suspicion, distrust and doubt about the new Germany and its people. Germany was still seen unofficially as the big bad wolf intent on devouring the little states around it. This attitude emerged, for instance, in reactions to military collaboration within NATO, where from time to time Danish anxieties about West German intentions and military aspirations were raised.³⁶ Danish public opinion long remained sceptical about the rebuilding of Germany, and anti-German feelings, resentments and prejudices still lurked, and were sometimes openly expressed.³⁷ Big bad wolf Germany as a political, and more particularly psychological, problem refused to go away, as can be gathered from a remark by the Minister of

³⁴ Cf. Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 92 ff.

³⁵ As shown by an opinion poll in *Ugens Gallup*, 7 (1955).

³⁶ Cf. Olesen and Villaume, *I blokopdelingens tegn*, 329 ff.

³⁷ Scepticism was apparent in Gallup opinion polls on the subject of West Germany in the early 1950s: *Ugens Gallup*, 2 (1950): fear of a strong Germany is quite outspoken. Opinions began to change in the mid-1950s.

Foreign Affairs, Per Hækkerup, in the 1960s: 'Denmark has three foreign policy problems: Germany, Germany and Germany.'³⁸ This discrepancy between the official Danish attitude and unofficial scepticism and distance was to overshadow Danish relations with the new Germany for many years.³⁹ The discrepancy was noted in the West German embassy, where the hostile attitude of the populace was put down to a fear of being 'economically, culturally and politically overwhelmed by their big neighbour'.⁴⁰

Germany as a problem: Danish attitudes towards the GDR

The normalisation of relations with West Germany and the political reconciliation with the FRG as *the* new, democratic Germany left the other state, the German Democratic Republic, out in the cold. There was no political room for another German state: 'Soviet Germany' as it was dubbed by a Danish daily newspaper, was of no interest or concern.⁴¹ As Denmark moved into a closer relationship with the FRG, particularly after 1955, its attitudes became more and more dependent on those of its partner, even as regards the unsolved 'German question'. Its hands were tied: it was bound to support what has been called West Germany's 'cold war'⁴² against the GDR, and it followed and even represented the West German standpoint on Eastern Europe. That was the political price Denmark, like the other smaller NATO states, had to pay: in everything pertaining to the German question, and particularly as regards relations with the GDR, their West German ally could effectively impose a veto.⁴³

How much room for manoeuvre did that leave Denmark vis-à-vis the GDR? Of course not much, as Denmark was officially bound by NATO agreements regarding the GDR, and by solidarity with West Germany. But the West Germans were very suspicious: every Danish contact and initiative was keenly observed by the West German embassy in Copenhagen, and any practical initiative might result in disagreements which would bring down West German wrath on Danish heads. How, then, could the GDR gain acceptance, let alone recognition? There was no way, especially as West Germany's Hallstein Doctrine (1957) could be invoked to punish any Danish move in the GDR's direction by diplomatic, and other, reprisals. And West Germany did in fact use the Hallstein Doctrine on several occasions and broke off relations with offending states.⁴⁴

³⁸ Quoted in Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 135.

³⁹ Ibid., 89 ff.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Buch, Bericht über die Lage in Dänemark, 1963, AA Politisches Archiv Berlin, B 26, 241.

⁴¹ Leading article 'Oprør i Sovjettyskland', *Berlingske Tidende*, 18 June 1953.

⁴² William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War. The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Gray does not deal explicitly with Denmark.

⁴³ Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 197 ff.

⁴⁴ Werner Kilian, *Die Hallstein-Doktrin. Der diplomatische Krieg zwischen der Bundesrepublik und der DDR 1955–1973* (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 2001); Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 81 ff.

It was not for this reason alone, however, that Denmark was reluctant to approach the GDR and establish formal relations. Denmark's attitude towards East Germany was determined from the outset by its commitment to and solidarity with the NATO alliance, as well as by consideration for the FRG, on which it was becoming increasingly dependent: not only in terms of trade and economics, but also politically and even militarily, owing to the regional NATO defence co-operation arrangement, BALTAP, in which Danish and West German troops co-operated from 1961, even in the defence of Danish territory.⁴⁵

The GDR issue had other aspects that further complicated the picture. It should not be forgotten that Denmark was the only NATO member that bordered on both the German states. With the FRG there was the land border dividing Schleswig. With the GDR Denmark had a common frontier on the Baltic, and also a line of traffic communications that dated back to 1898 and was reopened in 1948: the railway line between Copenhagen and Berlin (Prague) and the ferry that carried the trains between Gedser in Denmark and Warnemünde. That is the reason why Denmark might claim to be in a special position vis-à-vis the GDR as compared with other NATO states,⁴⁶ although neutral Sweden was in a similar situation. Nonetheless neither Denmark nor Sweden consented to recognise the GDR.

Government relations and official contacts with the GDR posed special problems and difficulties. The GDR was a state constituted on a part of German territory. It had had its own government and foreign policy since October 1949, and from 1954–55, when the Soviet Union surrendered some of its rights as the occupying power, the GDR had practically full sovereignty. In other words, it was a state which fulfilled the preconditions for official relations and diplomatic recognition in international law. But while Denmark traditionally recognised governments (and states) which had the necessary powers, there was no precedent for recognising two governments (and states) on one national territory. (The same problem arose with respect to divided Korea and Vietnam.) In the case of the GDR, above all, political considerations spoke against official recognition – including the need to preserve good relations with West Germany, which would see recognition as 'an unfriendly act'.⁴⁷

In 1955 the East German state had gained sovereignty in international affairs, and the East German government tried eagerly to establish official contacts and diplomatic relations with states outside the Eastern bloc and thus become recognised formally as an independent state. In Europe, special attention was paid to Denmark and the other Nordic countries because they were looked on as the 'weak link' in NATO and among Western capitalist states.⁴⁸ But this was in vain: Denmark, and especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, spurned all the GDR's overtures and efforts to make contact. They were not even formally noted.⁴⁹ In the eyes of the Danish government

⁴⁵ Cf. Olesen and Villaume, *I blokopdelingens tegn*, 323 ff.

⁴⁶ Lammers, 'Nachbarschaft und Nicht-Anerkennung', 174 ff.

⁴⁷ Notat Ikke-ankendelse af 'den tyske demokratiske republik', 23.I.1956, RA UM 141.D.1a.

⁴⁸ AA Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten MfAA, Berlin, A 13227, 1959.

⁴⁹ This is more thoroughly analysed in Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 174 ff.

the East German state did not formally exist and so there could be no dealings with it. Officially this was not ascribed to the nature of the East German state – ‘Soviet Germany’ – but was due mainly to the Danish stance on the German question. Denmark had recognised West Germany as the only Germany and supported its claim to national self-determination and reunification.

The GDR was nonetheless a problem. Even if its existence was officially ignored, it was there, only few miles south of the Danish border, and for many practical issues it most certainly did exist: old contacts were renewed and new contacts made, and Danes and East Germans visited each other’s territory. Travel was a delicate matter because the passport and visas of the ‘non-existent’ state were not recognised; GDR citizens had to purchase a Temporary Travel Document (TTD) from the Allied Military Government in Berlin in order to visit Denmark, and Danes had to get visas to go to the GDR.

The binding agreements among NATO states in 1950 and 1954 on relations with the GDR excluded all official contacts and relations, but did not exclude contacts and relations between private persons and organisations from NATO states and even East Germany itself. This applied, for instance, to bilateral trade. Denmark’s closeness to the GDR made commercial relations, trade agreements and general contacts with East Germany, inevitable, however ‘private’; and the result was the establishment of unofficial or semi-official East German agencies on Danish soil. When trade agreements with the Soviet occupying power ended in 1949, trade with the GDR continued on a ‘private’ and co-operative basis. The Danish railway company, DSB, made an arrangement with its East German counterpart, the Deutsche Reichsbahn (DR). In 1956 bilateral trade became more formalised when four Danish trade and commercial organisations – the Landbruksråd (agriculture), the Industriråd (industry), the Grosserer-Societet and the Provinshandelskammer (both trade) – established a joint association, the Foreningen til Formidling af samhandel mellem Danmark og DDR – the Association for the Organisation of Trade between Denmark and the GDR (FDS) – to enter into trade agreements with the East German Kammer für Aussenhandel (Chamber for Foreign Trade). The amount of Danish–East German trade was agreed on a yearly basis, and volumes slowly grew.⁵⁰ In 1957 the Kammer was allowed to establish an office in Copenhagen, though this was forbidden to assume an official ‘state’ character. In 1961 an East German travel and tourist office was established in collaboration between the state railways DSB and the DR, subject to the same conditions.

In many ways, therefore, the East German state did exist and did cause problems for the Danish government and other authorities. Many contacts were established and several relationships existed from the mid-1950s. Most were private or unofficial insofar as the Danish state and government were not involved, although it seems obvious that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had tacitly approved these in many instances. The official line was that the contacts did not imply any formal recognition of a separate East German state. The politically controversial question was whether

⁵⁰ Figures *ibid.*, note 374, 307.

the Danish state itself could have contacts and establish relations with the East German state, and if so, what contacts were possible without representing even small steps in the direction of a *de facto* recognition of the GDR as a sovereign state. Denmark's view was that its situation as a neighbouring state made it a special case – an attitude that became crucial in the mid-1950s and which led a good deal of West German harassment of the Danish Foreign Ministry in order to prevent a Danish slide in the direction of *de facto* recognition.⁵¹

The Danes nonetheless remained pragmatic and were prepared to sail close to the wind in order to facilitate relations with the GDR, even up to government level. Their excuse was that there were many practical matters that demanded some co-operation between Danish and East German authorities. The way was prepared by Professor Max Sørensen, the Foreign Ministry's expert on international law. In 1960 he wrote an astonishing memorandum explaining what sort of *official* relations with the GDR would be possible without bringing Denmark into conflict with its allies in NATO and West Germany:

The question is how to establish extensive official relations between Denmark and East Germany without implying a Danish recognition, whether *de jure* or only *de facto*, of East Germany as independent state . . . we may find that principle (politics) and practice (administration) may conflict, in that one state can recognise another state or government either through an explicit declaration or tacitly, through official actions the character of which presupposes a relationship between two independent states. The problem is considerably complicated by the fact that in international relations there are no clear and secure frontiers between acts that necessarily imply such a tacit recognition, and acts that do not.

Sørensen thought that the focus of international relations was moving towards 'intentions with regard to recognition' and away from the 'objective character of the given act'.⁵² In other words, the decisive factor was whether or not a given contact or action manifested an intention to recognise the other state, rather than the 'objective character' of the action. This would seem to offer considerable latitude to individual governments. Sørensen also thought that on some points NATO's instructions went further than was necessary to ensure that member states did not recognise the GDR as an independent state.⁵³ The essential criterion was whether or not the intention of recognition could be read into an action. Such an intention might perhaps be disputed, but it left the field wide open.

It was obvious that to Denmark West Germany mattered far more – whether in terms of trade, politics or defence – than the GDR, which meant that consideration for West Germany was implicit in Denmark's relationship with the GDR. It was an eternal triangle with West Germany as the third party. In consequence, Denmark had officially to support the West German stance on the German question and refrain from all attempts to give the East German state any formal existence.

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 190 ff.

⁵² 'Forholdet mellem Danmark og Østtyskland', 18.3. 1960, RA UM. 141.D.1b; cf. Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 194 ff.

⁵³ 'Forholdet'.

Détente and the German question

In the early 1960s the international climate began to improve and the Cold War entered a phase of détente and co-operation. The West was even prepared implicitly to accept the territorial and political status quo in Europe. Did this extend to taking cognisance of the GDR? Not officially, but as the GDR stabilised and consolidated itself as a state after the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, its de facto existence became impossible to ignore.

Even West Germany found this to be the case. From the beginning of the 1960s there were clear indications of a change in the FRG's Germany policy. After the building of the Wall official contacts were made; the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was ready to make approaches and advances to the GDR and its ruling party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), and by the middle of the decade it was plainly only a question of time before West Germany agreed to recognise the GDR as a state in its own right and establish official relations with it.⁵⁴

In principle the Danish stance was indisputable: Denmark recognised the Federal Republic and its government as the only legitimate Germany. But however fervent their solidarity with the FRG, small neighbour states like Denmark could not wait forever. From the beginning of the 1960s the Danish attitude towards the GDR started to undergo minor nudges towards acknowledging its de facto existence, always provided that they did not lead to controversies and conflict with West Germany. Officially, as stated again and again by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no change had taken place at all, but there was by now no denying that an East German state existed, even if it could not be recognised formally as an independent German state. While the official façade remained narrow and negative – as demonstrated in 1961, when a football match in Copenhagen against the GDR could not be given official status as an international⁵⁵ – it started to develop significant cracks. For example, the Foreign Ministry gave up its 'title fight' against the two East German agencies in Copenhagen which advertised themselves as offices of the GDR. The Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, Bodil Koch, answered a letter from her East German counterpart on the headed notepaper of her ministry, and she pleaded in public for de facto recognition of the East German state. And in 1960 the leader of the Folketing, the Social Democrat Gustav Pedersen, attended a reception held by the East German Chamber of Commerce to celebrate the eleventh anniversary of the GDR.⁵⁶ Thus during this decade the GDR came into existence even without being recognised in terms of international law – a situation that caused many headaches to the Danish

⁵⁴ Heinrich Potthoff, *Im Schatten der Mauer. Deutschlandpolitik 1961 bis 1990* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1999); Franz Eibl, *Politik der Bewegung. Gerhard Schröder als Außenminister 1961–1966* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2001).

⁵⁵ The Foreign Ministry forbade the flying of the East German national flag and playing of its national anthem: RA UM Cf. Karl Christian Lammers, 'Da DBU var på nippet til at anerkende DDR', in Klaus Petersen and Nils Arne Sørensen, eds., *Den kolde krig på hjemmefronten* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2004), 183 ff.

⁵⁶ Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 210 ff.

government and especially the Foreign Ministry, which had to deal with perpetual tensions caused by East German efforts to force recognition.⁵⁷

By the middle of the 1960s this de facto recognition seemed a *fait accompli*. How did it come about? The Danish government, like many others, was under growing pressure from the public and the press, and also from certain parliamentarians and even liberal parties, to recognise the second German state. A respected Danish expert on German affairs, Adolph Rastén, said in 1965 that to ignore the GDR was simply absurd; it had as much right to recognition as the FRG. Some people saw Rastén's arguments as encouragement to recognise the entire 'Soviet zone'. Meanwhile a newspaper criticised the government for its 'ostrich policy'.⁵⁸

There are even indications that Denmark was toying with de facto recognition at the beginning of the 1960s. When the Norwegian delegate at a meeting of the NATO Council in February 1962 referred to a cautions and 'presumably de facto recognition of East Germany', he got no support from the Danes. But inside the Foreign Ministry in Copenhagen it was being said that the Danish attitude was undoubtedly close to the Norwegian view: Denmark would be ready to 'accept some form of recognition of East Germany, if this were necessary to prevent a serious aggravation of the German situation'. At that moment, however, Denmark did not want to raise its head above the parapet for fear of attracting a salvo from West Germany.⁵⁹

The FRG was worried at seeing Denmark poised at the top of the slippery slope. Again and again it put pressure on the Danish authorities to refrain from recognition and even from official relations and contacts with the GDR. These efforts were successful insofar as Denmark was not officially prepared to go solo on such a politically delicate matter and risk serious problems with the FRG. But what if other states were prepared to take this step? The Danes in the 1960s often showed irritation with the Germans, especially with regard to their inflexibility in the matter of the Oder-Neisse frontier with Poland.⁶⁰

Throughout the 1960s the GDR, and how Denmark should behave towards it, moved steadily up the political and public agenda. Public opinion seemed in favour of formal recognition – but whether this was due to sympathy with the apparent German underdog or because of anti-German sentiment directed against West Germany has not been researched. However that may be, the Danish attitude to the GDR and its relations with it were frequently brought up in the Folketing. The opposition, or at least certain elements in it, generally favoured recognition, while Social Democratic and Liberal governments justified their refusals by invoking their commitment to and solidarity with NATO.

In 1968 political change was in the air. To begin with, Hilmar Baunsgaard, a member of the socialist-liberal party Radikale Venstre, which had voted for

⁵⁷ This is obvious from the sheer volume of relevant files in the Ministry's archives: RA UM 141.D.1.a-b.

⁵⁸ Adolph Rastén, 'Det vesttyske reb om dansk politik', *Politiken*, 31 May 1966; *Kristeligt Dagblad* 1966, quoted in Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 218.

⁵⁹ Notits, 15.2. 1962, RA UM 141.D.1b.5.

⁶⁰ Thus Per Hækkerup, the Foreign Minister, in January 1966: RA UM 5.D.29.a.

recognition at its 1965 congress, became Prime Minister, a fact which worried the West Germans; but this was not the most significant aspect. The real turning point came when the new opposition, the Social Democratic Party, which had hitherto voted in accordance with the strongly pro-FRG sentiments of its leaders, Jens Otto Krag and Per Hækkerup, did an about-turn and passed a resolution in favour of recognising the GDR when the time was ripe.⁶¹

It is clear that by 1968–9, when West Germany launched its new Ostpolitik, full diplomatic and state recognition of the GDR was no longer a matter of principle, but only of convenience and time. Denmark was prepared for a full international recognition of the GDR – but not yet. When the Social Democrats regained power in 1971, they judged that the time had come, or so the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, K. B. Andersen, announced in 1972. They only held back because they did not want to create difficulties for the new West German Federal Chancellor, Willy Brandt, and his Ostpolitik. Nonetheless, in June 1972 the Social Democrats in the Folketing pushed through a resolution calling on the government to recognise the GDR.⁶² In December 1972, when the FRG and the GDR at long last agreed the *Grundlagenvertrag* (basic treaty) that implied West German recognition of the East German state and forged a special relationship between the two, Denmark, in common with many other European states, stood ready to recognise fully the GDR and begin diplomatic and state relations with it. The GDR was officially recognised in January 1973, and embassies were established in East Berlin and Copenhagen in April 1973. The situation in Germany had finally been normalised, to the presumed satisfaction of most Danes.

The German partner

Apart from problems with Danish export of beef and other agricultural products, and the ensuing trade deficit, there had been no major disputes or disagreements between Denmark and West Germany since 1955. The Danish attitude to the GDR and thus the German question was of course a bilateral problem, but although the Danes were at times critical of what they saw as West German inflexibility, the Danish government always kept its head down so as not to cause serious trouble with its West German partner. From 1955 onwards relations had, as we have seen, improved substantially: the minorities question had been settled to Danish satisfaction, and Denmark had acknowledged the changes that had produced the new democratic Germany, the Federal Republic. The two states became close political and economic partners and even military allies: after Adenauer's retirement in the early 1960s relations became ever more cordial. Both states were members of NATO's Northern Region, and relations were further improved subsequently by West German support for the Danish application to join the EEC. Economic interests were another major factor after the FRG replaced the United Kingdom as Denmark's most important trade partner. By the end of the 1950s, in fact, West Germany had become Denmark's most important

⁶¹ Jens Otto Krag in *Aktuelt*, 17 June 1969; Hækkerup, speaking in the Folketing on 30 Oct. 1969, *Folketingstidende* 1969/70, col. 795. Cf. Lammers, 'Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?', 221 ff.

⁶² *Folketingstidende* 1971/72, col. 6818.

international partner in both bilateral and multilateral relations. Indeed, one reason for the general goodwill was that most contacts between Denmark and the FRG took place within an international and/or multilateral framework. Denmark was never left alone with, or confronted by, West Germany.

Even at the bilateral level Danish–German relations became closer, as was demonstrated symbolically in 1964 when Ludwig Erhard (Chancellor from 1963) became the first West German leader to pay Denmark an official state visit. The Danish Prime Minister, Jens Otto Krag, spoke of the positive developments in the Danish–German relationship and praised the ‘reborn democracy’ that had contributed to re-establishing such good relations with the outside world: ‘The neighbourly relationship between Denmark and Germany is solidly founded on mutual understanding and recognition of common ideals.’ Some years later Krag told the FRG’s new Foreign Secretary, Willy Brandt, that it was most gratifying to see how ‘the old antagonism had been replaced by confident and close co-operation in so many fields’.⁶³

The same tone was to be heard in 1971 when the new Danish Foreign Minister, Poul Hartling, made a speech to the Danish–German Society in Copenhagen. The society had been dissolved in 1943 but was re-established in 1969. He stressed that Danish–German relations were most cordial and tried to explain why this was so. The main reason, he thought, was the changes that had taken place in the new Germany: ‘If you want to understand why the Danish–German relationship of today is so different from what we knew in the 1930s, you have to remember this: Germany today is democratic, it no longer is and will never again become an independent power, and Danish–German problems are now negotiated and solved in higher places and in a wider context.’⁶⁴

Conclusion: the Cold War and Danish–German relations

It might be argued that the German question had at long last found a solution when the socialist GDR was internationally recognised in 1973 and Denmark had normalised its relations with this second German state. The normalisation of the situation in and with Germany found recognition almost everywhere. In the Basic Treaty (*Grundlagenvertrag*) of December 1972, West Germany had recognised the statehood of GDR and established a special relationship with it. This did not mean, however, that West Germany had accepted the division of the German nation or acknowledged that the GDR was a foreign country, so even now the FRG had not fully recognised the GDR.⁶⁵

To virtually the whole international community the *Grundlagenvertrag* implied the existence of two German states. Most other states now established diplomatic relations with the GDR (Denmark in January 1973), and in September 1973 both

⁶³ P.J. I Udkast til brug for statsministeren i Dialog 64, March 1964, RA UM 5.D.29.a; Krag, 18.6.1967, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Poul Hartling, ‘Danmark og Tyskland’, unpublished speech made on 25 March 1971, *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Potthoff, *Im Schatten der Mauer*, 104 ff.

Germany's were admitted to the United Nations as sovereign member states. Only the Finnish government spelt out what this really meant, namely that the German question had been solved by the international recognition of two separate and equal states on German territory. Member states of NATO such as Denmark could not be so outspoken owing to their solidarity with West Germany and the obligations they had assumed back in 1954. The formal recognition of the GDR as an independent and sovereign state, and implicitly of the division of Germany, was seen practically everywhere as a necessary and long-sought adaptation to the political realities of Europe as created by the Cold War and the bipolar system. This was certainly the Danish view, and bilateral relations with the GDR were soon normalised, to the satisfaction of the Danish public and media. It is very likely that the Danish government was equally satisfied with the outcome, although it continued to support the FRG's demand for reunification right up to the dissolution of the GDR in 1990. This satisfaction could not, however, be expressed officially.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ There is no record of internal Danish deliberations with regard to the German question when the Danish government and the Folketing decided to fully recognise the GDR in 1973. The problem, and Danish relations with both German states, are analysed in Lammers, *Hvad skal vi gøre ved tyskerne bagefter?*, 237 ff.