

HONORING WILLY BRANDT

Symposium at the GHI, March 18, 2003, sponsored by the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung. Convener: Christof Mauch (GHI). Participants: Egon Bahr (Former German Federal Minister), Professor Johannes Heisig (Former President of the Art Academy of Dresden) and Henry A. Kissinger (Former U.S. Secretary of State).

More than 100 invited guests gathered at the GHI on March 18 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the death of former German Chancellor Willy Brandt, one of the “founding fathers” of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. GHI Director Prof. Christof Mauch welcomed the two distinguished speakers, longtime Brandt associate Egon Bahr and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. Together they had set up a “backdoor channel” to facilitate communication between the American and West German administrations, and in the process they established a lasting friendship. The audience, which included Wolfgang Ischinger, the German Ambassador to the United States, Guido Goldman and Marc E. Leland, the two chairmen of the board of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, as well as Professor Dieter Dowe of the Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, not only witnessed the moving encounter of the two elder statesmen but was also happy to see the unveiling of a portrait of Brandt by Professor Johannes Heisig that the Social Democratic Party of Germany and the Chancellor Willy Brandt Foundation had commissioned and donated to the GHI.

Both speakers recalled Willy Brandt and, on the eve of the war in Iraq, commented on the current state of transatlantic relations. Egon Bahr, praising the close cooperation between West Germany and the United States in the era of détente and *Ostpolitik*, emphasized the common values as well as the many personal, political, cultural, and economic ties that had bound both countries together in the past 50 years and would continue to do so despite current events. He also described how the very success of Germany’s political and social reorientation after the Second World War has made Germans deeply skeptical about using military means in international conflicts. It should therefore not come as a surprise, Bahr pointed out, that Germany would favor a non-military solution of the Iraq crisis. Citing Willy Brandt’s unequivocal position, Bahr stressed in conclusion that when it comes to defending democracy and freedom, Germany and all the other free European nations will stand by the United States. Henry A. Kissinger reminded the audience of the contribution German leaders had made to West Germany’s democratization

after World War II. Concurring with Egon Bahr's description of German-American cooperation in the era of "Ostpolitik," he praised Willy Brandt for his vision and courage. Expressing his dismay about the present rift in transatlantic relations, he pointed out that the new form of terrorism apparent in the attacks of September 11 demands strategies that look beyond traditional notions of state sovereignty. While faulting the Europeans for not adequately recognizing this new challenge, he called upon Europeans and Americans to join forces in devising appropriate strategies of preemption. Kissinger was confident that relations would be mended in the spirit that had prevailed in the past decades and had been conveyed by Egon Bahr in his remarks. (The complete texts of both speeches have been featured on the website of the GHI.)

After Johannes Heisig had taken the floor briefly to thank the audience for the warm welcome and to speak about his experience of portraying Willy Brandt, Christof Mauch joined the artist to unveil the painting to warm applause. A reception concluded the event, which was memorable for its cordial atmosphere as well as for its lasting intellectual and artistic contribution to the work of the GHI.

Dirk Schumann



Dedication of the Willy Brandt portrait