



Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AH

19 July 1983

MS

Prime Minute

An interesting despatch
about Kohl's character and
methods of government.

Dear Sir,

Chancellor Kohl

A. J. C. 19/7

/ You may find interesting the enclosed despatch from Sir Jock Taylor. We agree with the central operation conclusions that Kohl, likely to be around for a long time, is an asset to Britain and represents an opportunity which we should grasp.

Yours ever

(B J P Fall)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street



DR HELMUT KOHL

SUMMARY

1. Kohl is German in style and proud of it. He is also provincial, and would not be ashamed of that either. He is wordy and can be boring. But he is also open and relaxed, and his uncomplicated manner makes it easy for ordinary people to identify with him and helps to explain his success with the voters. Behind this exterior, he is intensely ambitious and has spent his adult life in politics (paras 1-4).
2. Kohl's career has consisted of a series of successes achieved at early ages, uninterrupted only by occasional failures. His recent achievements have silenced the doubts of many people about his abilities and his capacity to be an effective Chancellor (para 5).
3. Kohl has chosen a good team of Ministers. His close relations with Genscher help to compensate for his own lack of experience in central government. He manages the Cabinet with a light rein, delegating as much as possible. He relies greatly on a small team of close advisers in the Federal Chancellery, brought by him into government (paras 6-8).
4. He is no ideologue but a flexible pragmatist. He wants to roll back the State but without harming ordinary people. Beyond this, he seems to lack a political philosophy. He may not be good at generating new ideas (paras 9 and 10).



5. Kohl has not so far become deeply interested in foreign policy. But he cares about three major areas: the German question; European union, where his idealism will be tempered by his pragmatism; and the importance of solidarity with the United States (paras 11-13).

6. Kohl is thus an asset for the West. He is also very well disposed to Britain. We should cultivate him in order to advance our interests in fields where the Germans play a crucial role (paras 14-16).

Sir

In my despatch of 10 March I described Helmut Kohl's victory in the recent German election as a landmark for the right in government not only for the first time in the parliamentary period but for two or even three decades. Kohl, at 53, might well be the dominant figure in German politics in the 80s. He is described in the press as a politician and a popular populist. I have not had much chance to confer with you on this. You have not met him and know that, while unimpressive, he is a very effective figure. But there is much more to be said about this figure, as a person and as a politician. I have made an attempt to say it, drawing partly on my own observations and with some of his closest advisers.

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Sir Jock Taylor KCMG



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BRITISH EMBASSY,
BONN.

1 July 1983

The Right Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs
FCO

DR HELMUT KOHL

Sir

1. In my despatch of 10 March about Dr Kohl's convincing victory in the recent German elections, I said that the CDU might be in government not only for one four year parliamentary period but for two or even three. I said that Kohl, at 53, might well be the dominant figure in Federal politics in the 80s. I described him as an effective politician and a popular populist. Events since March confirm these descriptions. You have met him several times and know that, while uninspiring, he is frequently effective. But there is much more to say about this key figure, as a person and as a politician. This despatch attempts to say it, drawing partly on conversations with Kohl and with some of his closest advisers.

/The Man

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The Man

2. Kohl is in many ways a typical German. He is tall, broad and healthy. He is wordy and can be dull. His heavy sense of humour can remind one of Mark Twain's dictum that a German joke is no laughing matter. He is proud of being German, does not speak foreign languages and would not be ashamed to be called provincial. His life has been spent in the towns of the Rhineland: born in Ludwigshafen; studied in Heidelberg and Frankfurt; achieved his first political success in Mainz, the capital of the Rhineland-Palatinate, some 40 miles from his birthplace; and then continued to stardom on the Federal scene some 60 miles further north in Bonn.

3. As a person he is open and relaxed. He seems to enjoy life and to be always smiling. Success has made him confident and optimistic, and his attitude to difficulties is that of the positive problem-solver. These things combine to produce a pleasing public manner, which with his appearance of sturdy reliability and his frequent repetition of simple points in speech after speech, provides a large part of the reason for Kohl's proven popularity with the voters.

Because he seems so ordinary and warm, it is easy for many people to identify with him. As one of his election posters said, "This Chancellor inspires confidence". You would jump at the chance to buy a secondhand car from him.

/Behind



4. Behind this reassuring exterior there is single-minded ambition. It has often shown itself in energetic pushiness, and sometimes in ruthlessness to rivals. At university, Kohl concentrated on law, economics and political science, a sound but not outstanding student whose highest marks were for diligence. He joined the CDU at 15 and has spent virtually all his adult life in politics. His only relaxation is reading, especially history, and he is said to have a conscience about devoting insufficient time to his wife and two sons (who have studied in Britain and France). Some people who knew him in his late teens say that he has barely changed since then in personality or attitude. Even then, he is said to have been emulating Adenauer, whose political grandson he now claims to be.

5. All the way up the ladder, Kohl has always been the youngest: at 29, the youngest member of the Land Parliament of the Rhineland-Palatinate; at 34, the youngest party leader in that Parliament; at 39, the youngest Minister-President of a Land; at 43, the youngest Chairman of the CDU; and then, when 52, the youngest Federal Chancellor. This success story has only occasionally been interrupted, the notable example being Kohl's replacement by Strauss as CDU/CSU Chancellor-Candidate in the Federal Elections of 1980, after he had almost beaten the SPD and the FDP in 1976. And Kohl owes his triumphs to no-one but himself: his father was a junior official and he had no political patron. He has been much helped in his

/advance



advance by his ability, as a rising political star, to attract capable lieutenants. The current CDU leadership is full of people whom Kohl has helped at some stage. After 10 years as Party Chairman, he now dominates the CDU machine. A large minority in the party which, until last year, thought him longwinded and lacking grasp and wanted him replaced as Chancellor-Candidate, has been silenced by his election success and early performance in office. His one problem is Strauss, who certainly would like to replace him if the opportunity arose. But the latter is 67 and it is highly unlikely that his influence could now become dominant.

Style of Government

6. Kohl became Chancellor last October without any experience of central government, but with much experience of Federal politics and government at regional level. His talent for choosing good lieutenants has produced a generally capable team of Ministers, with several really strong figures - notably Stoltenberg at Finance and Wörner at Defence. Genscher is a particularly valued colleague, because he and Kohl are close friends and because he has ample experience as a Minister.

7. Helmut Schmidt as Chancellor knew the subjects for decision inside out. His style in Cabinet was that of the

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tough managing director who knows most things better than his managers. Kohl's touch is much lighter. He loathes paper, and prefers to brief himself before meetings through discussion with subordinates. In line with his pragmatic style, the Cabinet no longer has fixed weekly meetings. Its business is conducted informally. Kohl often lets the discussion run and does not intervene until agreement begins to jell. His colleagues say he is basically cautious about decision-making and, if Ministers' positions turn out to be irreconcilable, he is likely to instruct the protagonists to bring a joint recommendation to a later meeting. He is generally willing to take time over a problem in order to find the right answer. But he will sometimes formulate a compromise and push it through. Once a proposal is approved in Cabinet, the responsible Minister is left in no doubt of his executive responsibility for carrying it out. Kohl motivates the Ministers by identifying them with success or failure. He delegates to them absolutely as much as he can. Thus, he can set the general lines of policy and preside over the taking of decisions without getting embroiled in the detail.

8 . Kohl's day begins early, with a briefing meeting at 8 am on what the papers say. At 9 am, he has a meeting with his closest advisers in the Federal Chancellery. This highly influential group consists principally of a Minister of State, a politically appointed Permanent Under Secretary and

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a couple of Deputy Secretaries. All are long-standing associates of Kohl, who brought them from the provinces into government. They are intensely loyal to Kohl and he, although sometimes impatient with them, gives them his full trust. According to them, he does not like yes-men and encourages them to argue with him: and is big enough to change his mind when the argument goes against his initial view. After this 9am meeting, Kohl's day follows no regular pattern. There are, for instance, no periodic meetings of all the Heads of Divisions in the Federal Chancellery. In Germany, this approach is considered almost slap-dash, and it certainly leaves more room for improvisation and perhaps for chance than did Schmidt's structured management methods.

Attitudes

9. Kohl is no ideologue or radical, but a flexible pragmatist. Religion is important to him. He takes seriously the "C" in CDU. He is a practising Catholic but no bigot, and his wife is Protestant. He originally made his name in the politics of the Rhineland-Palatinate as a reformer, especially in education and social policy. He has a personal commitment to the importance of the family and particularly the role, which he feels should be recognised, of mothers. Today, he wants to roll back the encroachment by the State, but he remains very concerned about ordinary people and wants to do so without altering any more than absolutely necessary

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the social balance and the generous welfare system that this prosperous, egalitarian State has built. Another way of saying this is that he favours not so much the market economy as the social market economy.

10. Beyond this, it is doubtful that he has fundamental objectives or a comprehensive game plan for the Federal Republic. If he has, even his closest associates cannot discern them. I think the question over his ability is whether he, or the people around him who are also managers rather than innovators, have the capacity to produce new ideas. Many people believe that they do not. Kohl's critics have usually been wrong before, and their numbers have diminished greatly with his successes. But they could be right that he, more than most of us, will be content to react to events rather than to shape them.

11. I do not think that Kohl so far is really deeply interested in foreign policy. But he has started well in this field, and it may in time become for him the passion it was for Brandt and Schmidt. There are three central issues about which he already cares: the German question, Europe and relations with the US. Ten years ago he was the first leading politician to rehabilitate the word "Vaterland", long shunned in the Federal Republic because of its Nazi associations but for Kohl reflecting only normal patriotism. The relatively detached view of the

/Hitler



Hitler period which this implies is not by any means uniform among West Germans of Kohl's generation. It may be connected with the fact, which is said to have given him great confidence when he first grew up, that his family were completely untainted by connections with the Nazi Party. I suspect that Kohl wants quietly to encourage similar detachment among others and to spread his own pride in being German. He believes that the desire for reunification must be kept alive but is fully aware that it is only a long-term ideal. He cares about the Allied commitment to Berlin and has bent his own efforts to winning new investment as a boost to the city's economy.

12. Kohl is committed, intellectually and emotionally, to progress towards European unity. He sees this as a key part of the Adenauer tradition. He often repeats a phrase about the uncomplicated coming together of the European countries through the overcoming of traditional barriers. He would like, if he could, to rekindle the European ideal but will be pragmatic and realistic about this too. As we have already seen, there are limits to the extent to which he is prepared to sacrifice German interests, for instance in a fairer budget in the Community, for the sake of idealism.

13. As for America, Kohl's attachment is partly an emotional one going back to the US role in reestablishing German democracy after the war. The intellectual element is his

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firm conviction that the security of the Federal Republic, in its frontline position in Europe, depends on the US commitment to NATO and on solidarity in the West. Unlike Schmidt, whose first reaction to the invasion of Afghanistan and to the imposition of martial law in Poland was to try to preserve at least some of the fabric of East-West relations, Kohl's first thought would be for minimising the differences with Washington. That said, he will want to develop relations with the East as a major but not a first priority.

Conclusion

14. In recent months Helmut Kohl has proved himself to be a vote winner and a consummate political tactician. He is an effective manager who succeeds by choosing loyal lieutenants and by delegating to them. He is a pragmatist for whom politics really are the art of the possible. The question about his ability is whether he or his team have any real sense of direction or the capacity to produce new ideas. But whatever the answer to this question may prove to be, Kohl is a welcome ally for the West.

15. He is an asset for Britain, too. He admires our traditions and never stops quoting Churchill. He recognises our past contribution to reestablishing democracy in the Federal Republic, and our present one to Germany's security

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through our armed forces stationed in the Federal Republic and our commitment to Berlin. He is very conscious of the affinity between the Conservative governments in Bonn and London. He also recognises, as he made clear in a private meeting of the CDU/CSU here recently, that a country with our traditions and geography cannot be expected to embrace the ideal of European union with alacrity.

16. Because of these factors, because Kohl is likely to be around for quite a time, and for the sake of the major British political, defence and economic interests where Germany's role is crucial, I recommend that we should make it a major priority to foster Kohl's good opinion of Britain and to build up cooperation and contact with him. He represents an opportunity which we should grasp.

17. I am sending copies of this despatch to HM Representatives at NATO and the EC in Brussels and at the UN in New York; in the NATO and EC capitals; in Moscow, East Berlin and Warsaw; in Stockholm, Helsinki, Vienna and Berne; and to the GOC in Berlin, the British Consuls-General in the Federal Republic and the Commanders-in-Chief's Committee, Germany.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

Jock Taylor

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