

Willy Brandt, My Life in Politics

Caption: In his memoirs, the former German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, recalls the signature of the German-Soviet treaty on 12 August 1970 in Moscow. Under this treaty, the two countries recognised, in particular, the inviolable nature of borders in Europe.

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On 12 August 1970 both parties to the treaty promised to solve any future disputes exclusively by peaceful means. This pledge of non-aggression included an obligation not to violate any existing European frontiers, including the Oder-Neisse Line, and to make no territorial claims; we recognized the principle of the inviolability of borders. I did not see this as being at all inconsistent with making it as easy as possible to cross those borders. The very idea of our attacking the Soviet Union was pure fantasy! However, one could not very well say, out loud, that the Soviet promise of non-aggression carried a good deal more weight on that point. Explicit recognition was given to the validity of treaties and agreements concluded at an earlier date, thus including those between the Federal Republic and its Western allies. The preamble referred to the aims and principles of the United Nations. The aim of German unity through self-determination was not affected. In a special letter, endorsed by the Soviet Government, our Foreign Minister stated 'that this treaty does not contradict the political aim of the Federal Republic of Germany in working for a state of peace in Europe in which the German people regains its unity in free self-determination'.

The Opposition had been particularly anxious that European union should not be affected by the Moscow Treaty, and we took this into account. The expected extension of the EEC was discussed, and it was suggested that experts should have talks with Comecon. In Bonn in 1973 Brezhnev took the line that the Soviet Union was against bloc policies in economic questions. He did not see, he said, why you should go to Brussels when you wanted to buy something from Krupp in Essen; it would only complicate matters. On the other hand, the Soviet side did not ignore the existence of the EEC. Perhaps, he said, it would be a good idea to seek co-operation between the EEC and Comecon, whatever form such co-operation might take. However, one of the main consequences of the treaty negotiations was the dropping of reference to the enemy states clause of the UN Charter from the relations of the Soviet Union towards the Federal Republic.

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In Moscow in 1970 we were concerned, over and beyond many small details, with the transition to a new period in European post-war history. At the same time I had an opportunity to set the parameters for settling certain practical questions. In the first place, there was Berlin: I said we would ratify the Moscow Treaty only when the Four Powers had concluded their negotiations on Berlin satisfactorily. If we wanted détente, Berlin could not remain a factor in the Cold War; it must play a part in peaceful co-operation instead of being an apple of discord. This package deal annoyed Brezhnev. He thought my attitude implied giving the USA a right of veto. In fact many points were not settled, but the misuse of the Berlin question as a means of making trouble was reduced, although unfortunately not eliminated. At the end of October 1970 Gromyko let it be known indirectly, at a meeting with Scheel in the Taunus before the Hessian Landtag elections, that the Soviet Union could live with our package deal on Berlin.

We also had our sights set on human rights, which we described as 'humanitarian questions' to make them sound more innocuous. We were concerned for the repatriation of people in the Soviet Union who were German citizens when the war broke out, and with actual cases of the reuniting of families. Kosygin said that the two Red Cross associations should continue to deal with the matter (as they had been all along, although not with much success up to that time); I managed to lend a hand here, even when I was no longer occupied with government business. In the years after 1970 many people of German origin were able to emigrate from the Soviet Union, and eventually better general living conditions for Soviet citizens of German nationality even seemed a possibility. Without wishing to boast, I can say that over the years I was able to intervene in a number of cases involving the fate of so-called dissidents. The results were modest; in some cases intellectuals who would rather have stayed at home emigrated, in others they found that their conditions became easier.

Thirdly, of course, there were economic interests at stake: I wanted a clear statement by the Russians from the start that further reparation payments - in addition to those imposed after the war - would not be expected of us. Brezhnev took his time over responding; next year in the Crimea he said, briefly, that the

question did not arise in the Soviet Union. Intelligent commentators could have discovered that this was the only point where comparison to Rapallo was in the least relevant.

Both Brezhnev and Kosygin spoke of 'great, indeed mighty prospects' in the economic, scientific and technological spheres; above all, they were eager to sell us the idea of co-operation in exploiting the mineral wealth of Siberia. This was and remained a constant factor in German-Russian discussions. I looked the subject up and found that Karl Radek, the Bolshevist expert on German affairs, who was of Polish origin and died in one of Stalin's camps, told the leader of the Eastern Section in the Foreign Ministry as early as 1922 that: 'Germany has the advantage of being able to exploit the great Russian stocks of raw materials. German labour will now find support in Russia.'

Many castles in the air were built in the years that followed. Kosygin was not inclined to exuberance: 'We are not a charity and nor are you; co-operation must benefit both sides.' He also knew that there was vociferous complaint from interested German parties about the cumbersome and often unproductive procedures of Soviet economic administration. Trade with the Soviet Union, however, did come to develop very satisfactorily by comparison with trade figures at the start.

The Moscow Treaty was of importance both in principle and in practice for the Government I led. It was significant for European politics as a whole, and not just for us in Bonn, to see the spectre of the eternal German threat disappear from Soviet utterances and the political indoctrination of the Soviet fighting forces - and in the same connection to see the anti-German card removed from the inter-Communist game.

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