

Egon Bahr, The Treaty with the Soviet Union

Caption: Egon Bahr, a junior Minister in the Brandt Government and the leading proponent of the Ostpolitik, welcomes the signing of the Treaty of Moscow between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union on 12 August 1970 and emphasises the fundamental importance of the Treaty for the two countries and for Europe as a whole.

Source: The Treaty of August 12, 1970 between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Bonn: Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 1970. 204 p. p. 56-59.

Copyright: (c) Press and Information Office of the Federal Government

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/egon_bahr_the_treaty_with_the_soviet_union-en-891ad4d9-02a6-4a86-813b-1e806743326e.html

Last updated: 03/07/2015

The Treaty with the Soviet Union

by Egon Bahr, State-Secretary, Federal Chancellery

A peace treaty has still not been signed and Germany is still divided 25 years after the end of World War II. Today two states exist in Germany. When this situation will change cannot be foreseen. The Four Powers therefore still exercise rights in connection with Germany as a whole and with Berlin. It is equally impossible to foresee how long they will have to continue exercising these rights.

The Federal Republic is a partner to numerous treaties with the West, while the German Democratic Republic is a partner to numerous treaties with the East. Here, too, nothing will change.

In the last 20 years the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union have lived in an atmosphere of mutual distrust, yes, one might even say hostility — even after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1955.

The attitudes of both sides have been nurtured by their relations with one another in recent history. Both sides have been and are now faced with the question as to whether this situation should continue, whether it must continue as long as Germany is divided and no peace treaty has been signed, and whether it must continue for a period of time whose length no one is in a position to measure. Whoever answers this question affirmatively, at the same time frustrates the hopes and wishes of Germans in both parts of Europe to let bygones be bygones and finally to draw closer together.

With this treaty the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and that of the Soviet Union are undertaking an attempt—using an acceptance of present realities as the point of departure — to improve relations with one another. Certainly success in this attempt will not only not harm anyone else, but it will benefit many other countries and peoples. If peace in Europe is to be made more secure and co-operation to be intensified, then the existing frontiers — whether their course pleases us or not — must be respected and regarded as inviolable.

Actually, the Federal Republic has been following this policy all along. Nevertheless, it is something else again when it commits itself to this policy in the form of treaties signed with the Soviet Union and other East European states. Even the "Grand Coalition" Government (1966 to 1969) said that the Federal Republic had no territorial claims whatsoever. A treaty obligation has now followed this statement. Deeds have succeeded words.

But as serious, as honest and as necessary as these obligations are, they must be limited by two factors:

1. As long as the Four-Power rights remain in effect, the Federal Republic itself cannot invoke them; it cannot formally recognize the boundaries on German soil even if it so desired. No peace treaty has been signed and this fact has left its mark.
2. The goals of the Federal Republic of Germany (as anchored in the Basic Law and reflecting our convictions) continue to be free self-determination for the German people and reunification. A reconciliation between the peoples of the West and the peoples of the East can only result if the German people are not obstructed from achieving their goal of national unity. Otherwise, new distrust will replace the old.

It would also be wrong of anyone to awaken the impression that no outstanding issues will exist between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union once this treaty has been signed. This is too obvious to require elaboration. Yet the treaty's logic decrees that not only force but also the threat of force must be eliminated for controversial issues to be solved — whatever they might be. It is of profound significance that in future Soviet allusions to the "enemy states" articles (of the U.N. Charter) will cease as a result of the treaty. The Federal Republic of Germany cannot invoke these articles. Hence, the Soviet Union alone has had to renounce them. And this renunciation has been total. It is an expression of Soviet trust — the opposite of what has been heard on Soviet radio and television and read in Soviet newspapers for the past 20 years — that the Federal Republic is peace-loving country. A part of future contributions by the Soviet Union and

other East European states will be to provide a truthful picture of the Federal Republic of Germany to the people living in Eastern Europe. The overwhelming majority of our people does not feel any hostility towards the peoples of the East and wish a reconciliation. Peace is as vital to all peoples as their daily bread.

Only through the end of antagonism and distrust will such an atmosphere be able to develop in which wide-scale economic co-operation can be achieved. The growing West European market presents economic possibilities to Eastern Europe which can be exploited to the benefit of both sides if international developments point to peace and trust.

For this reason Berlin must be liberated from the situation in which it can become at any time — as experience has shown — a focal point of international tension. Today's realities simply demand this, for no one will be secure if Berlin is not secure. There can be no relaxation of tensions in Europe if there is no relaxation of tensions in Berlin. The conclusion of the treaty will encourage negotiations by the Four Powers on this problem. The Federal Government, which legally speaking is not competent in regard to negotiations over Berlin, nonetheless has a vital interest in the city's welfare, and the Chancellor, whose political fortunes have been interwoven with the city's recent history, can be relied upon to uphold this interest. This is known in all important capitals throughout the world.

No one can or will forget that the difficult negotiations with the Soviet Government would not have led to this result if the Federal Republic had not enjoyed the protection of the Western Alliance and had not negotiated with the approval of the U.S., Britain and France. Lacking this basis, the negotiations would have presented a risk no one would have dared take. As it is, a treaty has been drawn up that can be the foundation stone for trust and co-operation between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union and a source of hope for Europe.