


# The idea of a pan-European security conference

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## The idea of a pan-European security conference

The idea of organising a pan-European security conference was first raised by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1954. At that time, the USSR accused France, the United Kingdom and the United States, all three members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), of ignoring the danger of a resurgence of German aggression and of creating a military grouping which, excluding only the USSR of the four major powers involved in the coalition against Hitler, was aggressive in nature and was helping to prepare the ground for another war. The USSR was also concerned about plans for the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to form a new military grouping called the European Defence Community (EDC), attached to NATO, which would lead to the rebirth of German militarism.

It was at the conference of the Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers held in Berlin from 25 January to 18 February 1954 that the Soviet Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, presented a draft general treaty on collective security in Europe. As a non-aggression and collective defence pact, it would prevent groups of European countries from taking sides against each other. The draft provided for conferences to be held periodically and for advisory bodies to be set up. All European countries, regardless of their 'social regime', could become party to the treaty, including the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) as equal parties in law, until a unified, peaceful and democratic German State was, in theory, created. The United States and China, as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, would have only observer status.

However, the three Western powers were against the conclusion of a treaty designed to achieve multilateral recognition for the post-war status quo, including the existence of two German states, acceptance of the USSR's hegemony in Eastern Europe, West Germany's neutrality and the sidelining of the United States.

In March of the same year, the Soviet Minister agreed that the United States could take part in the general treaty on collective security, but at the same time he called for the USSR to be allowed to join NATO, since in his view only the USSR's involvement would neutralise the aggressive nature of the NATO Treaty, which ran counter to the principles of the UN.

Adopting a cautious stance, the Western powers, who could not see the point of a general treaty on collective security that would duplicate the UN Charter, rejected the USSR's request to join NATO and demanded as the primary condition for security in Europe that certain specific problems be resolved, the most urgent being the German problem. They called first of all for Germany to be reunified by means of internationally monitored free elections held throughout Germany.

The failure in August 1954 of the EDC and, therefore, of German rearmament within a supranational framework led in October 1954 to the London and Paris Agreements, which ended the occupation of the FRG and allowed it to join Western European Union (WEU) and NATO.

A conference on security in Europe was held in Moscow from 29 November to 2 December 1954, attended only by the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe. In response to the London and Paris Agreements, the participating countries adopted a joint declaration on safeguarding peace and security in Europe which incorporated the main points of the Soviet argument in favour of establishing a general collective security system.

In May 1955, the USSR, in retaliation for the FRG joining NATO, concluded a mutual assistance treaty with Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the GDR: the Warsaw Pact. The creation of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO) confirmed that Europe was divided into two politically and militarily opposing blocs. At that point, the West's demand, as a prerequisite for concluding a pan-European security agreement, that the two Germanys be unified in line with the four-party Potsdam Agreements of 1945 and that a peace treaty be concluded with a reunified Germany no longer appeared achievable.

For a number of years, at the Soviet Union's instigation, certain Eastern European countries, and particularly Poland, confined themselves to proposing agreements on the creation of nuclear-free zones covering the

territory of a number of European states. The 1958 Rapacki Plan, for example, provided for the creation of a nuclear-free zone in central Europe covering the two Germanys, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1965, the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee, objecting to the creation of a multilateral nuclear force within NATO, gave its approval to the second Rapacki Plan (more commonly known as the 'Gomulka Plan'), submitted in 1964, and resurrected the idea of establishing a pan-European conference on security in Europe. Following this initiative, from 1966 to 1969, states belonging to different political systems managed to maintain diplomatic contacts in what was known as the 'Group of Nine' (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Romania, Sweden, Hungary, Yugoslavia), which became the 'Group of Ten' when the Netherlands joined in 1967.

The idea of a conference was again mooted in the July 1966 Bucharest Declaration on the strengthening of peace and security in Europe and in the April 1967 Karlovy Vary statement adopted by the members of the Warsaw Pact in Budapest on 17 March 1969. These proposed to recognise the status quo that had emerged from the Second World War, including the existence of two German states and the Oder-Neisse Line, the FRG's renunciation of its claim to represent all the German people and to be allowed to possess nuclear weapons, the conclusion of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), and the simultaneous dissolution of NATO and the WTO. On this last point, the states of Western Europe could not but be suspicious of a proposal that would result in the loss of their integrated defence system while a network of bilateral agreements between the USSR and the Eastern European countries would still be in force after the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. Furthermore, no mention was made of the possible involvement of the North American members of the Atlantic Alliance, the USA and Canada.

At the meeting of Foreign Ministers held in Prague in October 1969, the Warsaw Pact member countries for the first time put forward the points that they wanted to see on the agenda for the conference: renunciation of the use or of the threat of the use of force in mutual relations and the development of trade and economic, scientific and technical links on the basis of equal rights for all European states. A third item was added at the meeting held in Budapest in June 1970: the creation by the conference of a body responsible for security and cooperation issues in Europe.

In the West, a number of developments changed people's attitudes towards the Soviet proposal that a conference be organised:

— Firstly, at the meeting held in Budapest in June 1970, the Warsaw Pact countries agreed for the first time, explicitly, that the USA and Canada should take part in the conference.

— Next, the establishment of the Ostpolitik in the FRG in the early 1970s meant recognition of the territorial status quo and the need for a fresh start in East-West relations. The Germany-USSR Treaty signed in Moscow on 12 August 1970 and the Germany-Poland Treaty signed in Warsaw on 7 December 1970 marked a decisive turning point towards détente. In the FRG and the other Western European countries, priority was now given to the issue of security in Europe, an issue which took precedence over the question of German unification.

— As for the NATO Alliance, its position had also changed after the North Atlantic Council Ministers approved, in December 1967, the Harmel Report which urged the Allies to improve relations with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe and called on them to use the Alliance in the interests of détente. Accordingly, the final communiqué of the Ministerial Session of the North Atlantic Council in June 1968, known as the 'Reykjavik signal', reaffirmed the Allies' intention to continue their efforts to promote détente and called on the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European countries to associate themselves with the process leading to mutual and balanced force reductions. Lastly, at the Ministerial Session of the North Atlantic Council held in December 1969, the Allied governments agreed to the possibility of a general conference, or a series of conferences, being held at an early date on cooperation and security in Europe which would be attended by the North American members of the Alliance.

— Finally, some neutral and non-aligned countries, particularly Austria and Finland, undertook intense diplomatic activities in favour of the convening of a conference and, in particular, proposed the organisation of

multilateral preparatory meetings.

From 1970 to 1972, the question of the conference on security and cooperation in Europe was at the heart of the Atlantic Council's debates.

In May 1970, the NATO Member States put forward two items for the conference agenda which displayed a fundamentally different approach from the Eastern European proposal: the establishment of principles to govern relations between states, including renunciation of the use of force, and the development of international relations in order to help to secure greater freedom of movement for people, ideas and information and to develop cooperation in the cultural, economic, technical and scientific fields and those relating to the human environment.

In December 1970, the NATO governments put forward the idea of establishing wider multilateral contacts on the fundamental problems of security and cooperation in Europe, subject to a number of conditions: a successful conclusion to the four-party talks on the status of West Berlin, progress in bilateral talks on strategic arms limitation (SALT) between the USA and the Soviet Union and the launching of bloc-to-bloc negotiations between the NATO and Warsaw Pact Member States on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR). The four governing powers reached agreement on the first point on 3 September 1971. The SALT and MBFR negotiations would be held alongside the security conference as separate talks.

In May 1972, the NATO Member States, pleased at the progress made in East-West relations and particularly at the conclusion of major agreements and arrangements, gave the go-ahead for the launch of multilateral talks as part of the preparations for a conference on security and cooperation in Europe, and they accepted the Finnish Government's offer that the talks should be held in Helsinki.