

## The Federal Republic of Germany's Ostpolitik

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From 1949 onwards, contact between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was affected by the ups and downs of international relations and the vicissitudes of the Cold War. Tension peaked with the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961.

Walter Hallstein, former Foreign Affairs Adviser to Konrad Adenauer and President of the European Commission since 1958, advocated breaking off diplomatic relations with every country that recognised the GDR. Only the USSR was to be exempted from that approach, known as the Hallstein Doctrine.

The Hallstein Doctrine was called into question following the recognition of the GDR by Yugoslavia, an important trading partner of West Germany. When the Social Democratic Party (SPD) came to power, Willy Brandt, former Mayor of West Berlin, was appointed Foreign Minister, and the Hallstein Doctrine was discreetly dropped. In 1967, diplomatic relations were resumed with Yugoslavia and Romania. However, the policy of small steps towards Eastern Europe met both with resistance from the conservative wing of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and distrust among some senior politicians in East Germany and the Soviet Union, who feared ideological contamination.

The year 1969 marked a turning point in the political life of West Germany. For the first time since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, the Christian Democrats were excluded from the Government. The Social-Liberal coalition headed by Willy Brandt from October of that year sought a new direction for foreign policy and to break the existing taboos. The major powers were keeping a close eye on the East-West rapprochement policy pursued by the new Chancellor, Brandt, but they did not intervene.

The balance therefore began to shift, though existing alliances were never called into question. The main architects of the new German policy in favour of détente in Europe were the German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, and his senior diplomatic adviser, Egon Bahr. On 28 November 1969, the FRG signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty with the USSR. This policy of normalising relations and openness towards the East, known as 'Ostpolitik', was established within the overall context of East-West détente and sought to restore the economically powerful West Germany to its rightful place on the international stage.

The key to the East-West rapprochement lay in the treaties with the East, the *Ostverträge*, of which the first was concluded between the FRG and the USSR in Moscow on 12 August 1970. This treaty formed the basis for the Ostpolitik by opening the way for diplomatic relations and confirming the peacetime territorial status quo. It ruled out any use of force between the two States and stipulated respect for territorial integrity and the existing borders. It was rapidly followed by a number of trade agreements — the FRG was the largest Western importer of Soviet goods — and the two countries' leaders began to meet more and more frequently. On 3 September 1971, a quadripartite Allied agreement between the United States, France, the USSR and the United Kingdom laid down conditions for travel by West Berliners and the Allies on the transit routes.

West Germany subsequently recognised the new western borders of Poland, known as the Oder-Neisse Line, which it had hitherto rejected. After the signing of the treaty with the USSR, the FRG went on to sign a treaty with Poland in Warsaw on 10 December 1970 which included a clause allowing Polish nationals of German origin to settle in the FRG. The treaty with Czechoslovakia posed more difficulties, mainly because of the disputes arising from the Munich Agreements of 1938 and the deportation, immediately following the Second World War, of a German minority settled in the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia.

The framework agreement on the status of West Berlin, signed on 3 September 1971 by the Four Powers, demonstrated the FRG's acceptance that Berlin was neither a constituent part of the FRG nor an autonomous political unit, although, in practice, all federal laws continued to be adopted without debate by Berlin's regional parliament. The agreement provided for the resumption of overland and telephone communications between East and West Berlin. Border controls were relaxed, and it became easier for residents to cross the Wall.

On 21 December 1972, in East Berlin, the two Germanys signed the Basic Treaty in which the two States recognised one another and established normal political and trade relations. The diplomatic status quo and the inviolability of the border dividing the two German States were recognised, although reunification remained a long-term goal. This opened the way for recognition of the GDR by the Western countries, and both Germanys were admitted to the United Nations (UN) in September 1973.