

Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik

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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, 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 leaders of the two countries 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.

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.