

■ The Treaty of Moscow (1970): Germany's earliest recognition of the inviolability of the frontier on the Odra and Nysa Łużycka Rivers (Oder-Neisse)

Signed five decades ago, on August 12, 1970 in Moscow, the Treaty on mutual relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union carried a number of provisions of essential importance for Poland. The Treaty contained not only an article on the renunciation of the use of force in mutual relations and the signatories' commitment to regard the frontiers of all States in Europe as inviolable. The contracting parties also reaffirmed they had no territorial claims against any state and would not assert any such claims in the future. They assured they regarded the borders of all signatory states inviolable now and in the future - the "Oder-Neisse line, which forms the western frontier of the People's Republic of Poland" and the frontier between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic were specifically mentioned. However, Władysław Gomułka, who at the time led the Polish United Workers' Party, announced that Poland could by no means be satisfied with this solution. Even the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party could not help noticing distressing parallels with the German-Soviet pact that had demarcated Poland's borders. Owing to his persistence, the People's Republic of Poland concluded a separate pact with West Germany on December 7, 1970.

The tensions in international politics between the East and the West that gradually grew stronger in the 1960s significantly affected Bonn's foreign policy. Changes in West German foreign policy were heralded early by the so-called peace note of the Ludwig Erhard (CDU/FDP) administration issued in March 1966, which proposed to conclude non-aggression agreements with socialist states (with the exclusion of the GDR for the time being).

The accession of the Social Democrats (SPD) into the so-called Grand Coalition with Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), with Kurt Georg Kiesinger serving as Chancellor and Willy Brandt holding the office of Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, opened up a new chapter in West Germany's eastern policy. The following year saw the launch of negotiations with the USSR on a treaty to renounce the use of force. Progress in these negotiations was made possible by the subsequent elections of September 1969 which led to the formation of a Social Democratic-Liberal government headed by Willy Brandt as Chancellor and the Liberal (FDP) leader Walter Scheel as Vice-Chancellor and Head of Diplomacy. The most significant role in the negotiations was played by Secretary of State in the Chancellery Egon Bahr, one of the founders of the West German "new eastern policy" (neue Ostpolitik).



Relations between West Germany and the Soviet Union were watched closely by Polish leaders. Władysław Gomułka was a communist who genuinely believed that an alliance with the Soviet Union was in Poland's best interest. He was nevertheless cautious in his dealings with Moscow. His particular concern was the danger of the Russians and the Germans making a deal behind Poles' backs in what he associated with the "Rapallo policy" (the Soviet-German treaty of 1922). He was well aware that the Zgorzelec treaty with East Germany on the frontiers on the Odra and Nysa Łużycka Rivers of 1950 was of relatively little value as the long-term survival of the East German state could not be taken for granted. Gomułka did not trust East Germany either, and in fact personally disliked the East German leader Walter Ulbricht. He realized fully well that the friendship between the People's Republic of Poland and the GDR was merely a front.

Signed on August 12, 1970, the Treaty of Moscow was the first in a series of "eastern treaties" concluded by Germany between 1970 and 1973. Signatures on this West German-Soviet pact were placed by Brandt and Scheel, Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin and Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko. In a letter to Minister Gromyko, Minister Scheel stressed that the agreement did in no way undermine the efforts of the German nation to reunify. A verbal note by the German government (which, by the way, had been agreed with the Soviets) pointed out the absence of a peace treaty.

According to some authors, the Kremlin assured to the authorities in Warsaw that the Treaty of Moscow satisfactorily resolved the issue of the frontier on the Odra and Nysa Łużycka rivers. However, Gomułka must have realized that complacency with such a pact would weaken Poland and make it dependent on the Soviet hegemon. It is also quite likely that the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party strived for greater prestige. In any case, the negotiations between Poland and Germany held in 1970 in Warsaw (with the respective delegations headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Józef Winiewicz and Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, Secretary of State at the West German Ministry of Foreign Affairs) led to the conclusion of a separate treaty that was acceptable to both parties. The Polish-West German treaty concerning the basis for normalizing relations, in which Bonn recognized the border on the Oder and Nysa Łużycka, was signed in Warsaw on December 7, 1970 by Willy Brandt and Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz. One other reason why Brandt's visit to the capital of Poland made history was the symbolic gesture by the German Chancellor, who knelt down in front of the Monument to the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Due to the misgivings raised by West German Christian Democrats, the Moscow and Warsaw agreements were not ratified until May 1972. At the time of the ratification, the Bundestag adopted a resolution, agreed by the German government and opposition, stating, inter alia, that the treaties that the Germans had concluded with the Soviet Union and Poland had been made by West Germany, but not on behalf of the future reunified German state and that the agreements did not prejudge the question of a future peace treaty. As a result of this approach, guarantees of an inviolable Odra and Nysa Łużycka border was back on the table in 1990 during negotiations of the external framework of the German reunification.



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