The Impact of the German Question on Polish Attitudes toward CSCE, 1964–1975

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For several decades after World War II, the German question was one of the central issues of Polish foreign policy. Many aspects of the issue, especially in the context of bilateral relations, have been studied by scholars.1 With respect to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and multilateral relations, former members of the Polish delegations to CSCE have shed some light on Poland’s role in the late 1970s and 1980s.2 However, the impact of the German question on Polish policy during the preparation and beginning of CSCE has only recently been subject to scrutiny.3

Many aspects of CSCE were connected with the German question. The Ostpolitik of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) had a direct impact on Polish attitudes toward CSCE. However, it would be simplistic to depict Polish leaders’ interest in CSCE only in the context of the German problem. Polish officials also saw the conference as a chance to introduce changes in


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East-West relations and extend the room for maneuver of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) in international relations, including economic relations. A proposal for a European security conference had been set forth as early as 1964 at the United Nations (UN) by Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Adam Rapacki. For Poland, the envisaged forum would be a substitute for a peace conference ending the Second World War and would confer official recognition on Europe’s territorial and political status quo. The safeguarding of borders would go hand-in-hand with the stabilization of Communism as a legitimate political system.

This article assesses the official Polish view of CSCE. The wider public discourse did not have a significant impact on the official stance and is therefore not covered here. However, the German question was an important issue not only for Polish authorities but for society at large. For both, it was an important factor in the legitimation of the regime. Nevertheless, the impact of the broader society on Polish foreign policy was meager. During the Communist era in Poland, policy was made mostly by the highest PZPR officials.

The impact of the German question on Polish foreign policy is best understood with reference to Poland’s historical and geopolitical situation. Poland after World War II was confronted with two German states but always had to assume the possibility of their reunification. Hence, for Warsaw the heart of the German problem was the struggle for recognition of the Oder-Neisse (Odra-Nysa) line as Poland’s western border. The more specific questions discussed in the negotiations with the FRG in 1970 and in the Polish–West German relationship after the signature of the Treaty of Warsaw were concerned with economic relations and financial assistance, the question of compensation for the Polish victims of the Third Reich (specifically those deported to Germany for forced labor), the German minority in Poland, and family reunification, citizenship, and consular custody.

The Polish regime’s attitude toward the German question has to be seen in the context of Poland’s Warsaw Pact membership and subordination to

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the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{7} Poland did not have an independent foreign policy and therefore cannot really be compared directly with other small countries in the international system.\textsuperscript{8} Poland’s room for maneuver was strictly limited by Soviet hegemony. Within these limits, however, Poland tried sometimes to pursue its own interests and political aims. The other Soviet-bloc states also attempted to realize their own goals.\textsuperscript{9}

After Władowsław Gomułka’s return to power as the PZPR First Secretary in October 1956, a new understanding of Poland’s role in the Soviet bloc became evident. Poland was no longer slavishly obedient to the Soviet Union on every point. The new authorities attempted to achieve certain goals that were considered to be in the national interest, including on the German question. In light of the new political situation, CSCE was perceived as an opportunity to gain even greater room for Poland. Consequently, the Poles not only prepared outlines and detailed plans for the conference, but also started extensive diplomatic activities in Western as well as Eastern Europe.

This article draws mainly on declassified archival documents. Polish policymaking papers and drafts and PZPR materials are stored in the Archive of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych) in Warsaw. The PZPR Politburo, and in some cases the PZPR First Secretary on his own, made the final decisions. At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs played an important role, and the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, or AMSZ) is thus indispensable. Most of the relevant documents at the AMSZ are located in territorial departments (Department I: Soviet Bloc; Department III: United States, Canada; Department IV: Western Europe) as well as in the planning department.


\textsuperscript{8} On the Polish diplomacy, see Wojciech Matorski and W. Michowicz, eds., \textit{Historia dyplomacji polskiej}, Vol. 6, 1944/45–1989 (Warsaw: PISM, 2010).

The article is divided into three parts. The first part covers developments from Foreign Minister Rapacki’s announcement at the UN in 1964 through the mass unrest in Poland in 1968. The second part covers the period from 1969 to 1972. In the spring of 1969, the Polish authorities decided to put forth their ideas about a European security conference. They also proposed talks with the FRG on the establishment of diplomatic relations and the recognition of Poland’s Western frontier. In late 1972, the Multilateral Preparatory Talks for CSCE started. The third part of the article focuses on the negotiations leading to the signature of the Helsinki Accords in 1975. Throughout this time, the German question remained at the forefront of Polish foreign policy.

In late 1970, Gomułka was replaced by Edward Gierek as PZPR First Secretary. Gierek introduced new policymaking methods, but continuity was largely maintained in Polish policy on the German question (at least through the end of 1972) and on the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the FRG. Gierek’s policy focused on attempts to gain the funds necessary to achieve his economic aims. In the case of CSCE, once the process began and the talks entered a new stage, the Poles were less active in presenting their ideas.

**Maneuvers in Security Policy and Policy toward Germany, 1964–1968**

One of the main intentions of Rapacki’s statement of December 1964 was to launch talks on a European security system in order to safeguard the interests of small and middle-size countries. He wanted to take advantage of the easing of tensions in international affairs that had followed the Berlin and Cuba crises. Because the signing of a peace treaty with Germany (or two German states, as the Soviet bloc wanted) seemed impossible, Polish leaders expected that the status of the postwar borders in Europe could be settled through other means. The lack of international recognition of the Oder-Neisse line strongly influenced Polish foreign policy and also Polish-Soviet relations. The Communist government regarded the Soviet Union as the guarantor of Poland’s territorial integrity, but Moscow’s role was in fact more qualified. Soviet leaders also used the question of the Oder-Neisse line in bilateral relations to “discipline” the Poles. At various points, Soviet officials perceived Polish activities as too independent. Thus, after 1956, Polish authorities tried to convince the Western powers responsible for resolving the German question (Great Britain, France, and the United States), as well as smaller countries, to make the borderline permanent. Meanwhile, the Poles tried to establish bilateral
relations with the FRG, but this endeavor failed because of Bonn’s political priorities.\textsuperscript{10}

The situation began to change after the FRG published its “peace note” of March 1966 proposing a declaration on the renunciation of force with Soviet-bloc countries (apart from the GDR). The Soviet Union and some other Warsaw Pact countries regarded this proposal as an opportunity to improve bilateral relations and to start closer economic collaboration. For Poland, however, the “peace note” was unsatisfactory because it did not include recognition of the Oder-Neisse line.\textsuperscript{11}

Other factors also accounted for the Polish reaction. Polish leaders suspected that a more flexible Ostpolitik might facilitate the normalization of relations between the FRG and the GDR and eventual reunification before Poland had obtained formal West German and international recognition of its Western frontier.\textsuperscript{12} Officials in Warsaw also feared that Ostpolitik would enhance Bonn’s international political status and thus weaken Poland’s position. The Poles feared that some countries in the East, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, which had no territorial disputes with West Germany, might normalize their relations with the FRG and leave Poland alone with its problems. Hence, the Polish government’s answer to the German “peace note” set forth preconditions for “security and peace” and for the normalization of bilateral relations: recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as Poland’s Western border, a declaration that the Munich Agreement was null and void \textit{ex tunc}, acknowledgment of the GDR as an equal German state, and the FRG’s renunciation of nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{13} The Poles wanted these points to become a common line for the whole Soviet bloc, but Poland’s leverage was weakened when Romania decided unilaterally (and not wholly unexpectedly for the Poles) to establish diplomatic relations with the FRG.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Gomułka spoke about his fears, for example, in a conversation with the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party’s First Secretary, János Kádár. Protocol from the First Secretary Comrade (Cde.) Władysław Gomułka and the Prime Minister Cde. Józef Cyrankiewicz unofficial visit in Hungary, Budapest, 8–9 March 1967, in Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archive of Modern Records, AAN), Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej (Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party, KC PZPR), XIA/64.
\textsuperscript{14} Polish diplomats were informed about such a possibility; for instance, after the Romanian-Yugoslavian talks in Belgrade. Szyfrogram z Belgradu, Malecki do Wiernej, 23 September 1966,
At the next meeting of Warsaw Pact foreign ministers, held in Warsaw in February 1967, Polish officials went partway toward fulfilling their goal, as the Polish point of view (partly shared by the GDR) had a great impact on the formulation of the bloc’s common stance. Gomułka succeeded in firmly establishing his “doctrine,” which was not new but had continually shaped Polish policy toward the FRG. The GDR’s impact on Polish–West German relations at that time has been overestimated. When a bilateral Polish-GDR treaty was concluded in 1967, it conformed to Gomułka’s preferences. For instance, in drafting the preamble, the Poles did not agree to include any information that would stress Moscow’s role in resolving the German question, to treat German reunification as a problem between two German states, or to describe West Berlin as a separate unit.

From 1965 on, Poland propagated the idea of a European conference among West European countries and laid out Polish views on ties with West Germany. During this time of sharpening conflict in Vietnam, Poland tried to be active as well. Rapacki visited numerous countries, and Polish politicians gave public lectures at foreign institutes of international relations, as well as interviews for the foreign press. In early 1967, the Poles called for a European conference that would focus on security questions including the territorial status quo. They tried to promote their ideas in the context of bilateral talks with Western diplomats and politicians. During regular bilateral consultations with Belgium, the two sides discussed the question of a European conference among West European countries and laid out Polish views on ties with West Germany. During this time of sharpening conflict in Vietnam, Poland tried to be active as well. Rapacki visited numerous countries, and Polish politicians gave public lectures at foreign institutes of international relations, as well as interviews for the foreign press. In early 1967, the Poles called for a European conference that would focus on security questions including the territorial status quo. They tried to promote their ideas in the context of bilateral talks with Western diplomats and politicians. During regular bilateral consultations with Belgium, the two sides discussed the question of a European


16. I use the term “Gomułka Doctrine” not only to characterize Polish behavior in the years 1966/1967, but to describe policy toward a central concern of Polish foreign policy since 1956—namely, the German question with respect to international recognition of the Oder-Neisse line. Gomułka was the leading champion of this policy. To achieve his goal, he exhorted Soviet leaders and attempted to limit the other Warsaw Pact countries’ room for maneuver. This stance influenced Gomułka’s political behavior in other situations, notably in 1967 toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. Polish views on the German question and security questions were shaped in important ways by the global Cold War context. See Jarząbek, PRL w politycznych strukturach, pp. 44–45.


18. For instance, lectures were delivered in Copenhagen, Vienna, and Oslo. Rapacki was interviewed by F. Schlosser for “Réalité.” See A. Rapacki, Przemówienia, artykuły, wywiady 1957–1968 (Warsaw: KiW, 1982), pp. 477–482.

19. For the Polish proposal concerning the questions relating to security, see Jarząbek, Polska wobec Konferencji, pp. 181–182.
security conference, including how to convene it, its agenda (political, military, economic, cultural issues), and its follow-ups. Although the views of the two countries regarding conference elements were not identical, many of their opinions were remarkably similar. Gomułka appreciated that Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel was ready to start talks on European security and cooperation prior to any talks on the German question. Poland also tried to discuss these topics with French diplomats and politicians such as Maurice Couve de Murville during his visit to Poland in May 1966. However, this was done on a general level and without bringing up issues pertaining to Germany. The German question was discussed at length during French President Charles de Gaulle’s visit to Poland in September 1967 but did not enter the European conference planning talks. De Gaulle’s visit caused many anxieties in the FRG. The West German ambassador in Paris informed the French that Bonn expected de Gaulle to maintain relations with Poland in the spirit of French-German friendship. The French, however, also took into account the German stance toward the borderline. With respect to the German question, the diplomat Hervé Alphand said that a visit by de Gaulle to Poland could incline some West German elites to question the FRG’s stance toward the borderline question.

Rapacki tried to gain backing for his proposal for a European conference during a visit to London in February 1967, but the British did not engage the full scope of the security agenda. The Oder-Neisse line was also briefly mentioned. In March 1962, the British had informed both Warsaw’s

21. Note on the bilateral talks on 19 May 1966, in AMSZ, z. 17, w. 16, t. 124.
diplomats and General Władysław Anders in London that they considered Poland’s new “western lands” integral Polish territory and would not treat the Oder-Neisse line as an object of “barter” during the eventual peace conference.28

The Polish determination to keep an eye on West German policy toward the Soviet bloc as well as Bonn’s policy on convening the CSCE helped to shape Polish activities within the Warsaw Pact. Declassified Polish documents, including the background policy papers and reports from the talks with Soviet and East European leaders, indicate that the Polish interest in internal reforms of the Warsaw Pact and in establishing a forum to devise a common policy was a consequence of Gomułka’s attitude toward the German question—especially Ostpolitik—and the CSCE.29 The Poles supported the general Soviet line of establishing institutions that would be a forum of coordination of bloc policy. But they differed from the Soviet Union and insisted on reform of the Soviet bloc, which would also serve the interests of the Soviet client states. From the Polish point of view, this mainly meant protecting Polish interests vis-à-vis Germany.30 Even the Communist leaders in Poland never trusted Moscow. The abuses of the Stalin period, the Rapallo complex, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact were permanently fixed in the Poles’ collective memory and heavily influenced their perception of European politics.31

Kingdom (TNAUK), London, FCO 28/271; and History of the Polish initiative, March 1967, in TNAUK, PREM 13/1919.


31. In Rapallo in 1922 the Soviet Union and Germany concluded agreements on economic and military cooperation that ended the Soviet Union’s isolation. The Nazi-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939 was an agreement on German-Soviet cooperation and a de facto alliance that demarcated the two sides’ spheres of influence in Poland. On 1 September, Germany attacked Poland, and on 17 September the Soviet Union moved in from the east. From the Polish perspective this was another example of German and Russian/Soviet collaboration against Poland, reviving memories of the successive partitioning of Poland in the eighteenth century.
Poland, the German Question, and a European Security Conference, 1969–1972

Polish diplomatic activities on behalf of a European security conference came to a halt for two reasons. The first was domestic developments in Poland (student protests, internal fights in the PZPR, and the weakening of Gomułka’s authority as attempts were made to remove him from his post by Mieczysław Moczar and other senior officials). The second was the Prague Spring and the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 by Warsaw Pact forces, among them Polish troops. In the spring of 1969, events appeared to be taking an unfavorable turn from the Polish point of view. In Warsaw, leaders suspected that the USSR was thinking about concluding a bilateral convention with the FRG on the renunciation of force, without mentioning guarantees for borderlines.\(^{32}\) The Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries seemed to be interested in starting talks and creating an atmosphere that would enable the development of economic relations without heeding Poland’s priority, the recognition of the territorial status quo.

Polish suspicions were reinforced in March 1969 when the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact met in Budapest and issued its “Appeal for a European Security Conference,” mentioning the inviolability of the Oder-Neisse line and of the GDR-FRG border as a “fundamental requisite for Europe’s security,” but without setting recognition of this border by all participating states (above all West Germany) as a precondition for a European conference as the Poles had wanted.\(^{33}\) Because this wording did not fully meet Polish expectations, the Poles sought to intensify their pressure on the Soviet Union, the other Warsaw Pact states, and the West in order to secure Polish interests. In early April 1969, Foreign Minister Stefan Jędrychowski sent a memorandum on further Polish actions to party leaders, who embraced it as a guideline.\(^{34}\) Jędrychowski contended that the Soviet Union primarily wanted to secure its global interests, and he stressed the need for “better coordination of the activities of the socialist countries.”\(^{35}\) The Poles wanted a pan-European treaty confirming the European status quo to be signed by all European


\(^{35}\) Ibid.
countries, including the two German states. They also considered pushing for a separate declaration on the recognition of the status quo that would be signed by non-European powers. In particular, the Polish side repeated what Rapacki had said in 1964 in his UN statement calling for the participation of the United States in a European security conference. This was not yet a common position of the Warsaw Pact, but it was clear to the Polish government that no serious decision concerning security questions could be made without U.S. participation.  

Poland considered an all-European security conference a substitute for a peace conference with Germany. The Polish approach to the conference may also be described as an attempt to avoid a situation in which the Soviet Union would subordinate the border problem to its overriding national interests, treating it as an object of barter. Even if German reunification was not imminent, Polish Communist leaders worried that it might occur in the long run.

According to Polish legal doctrine, Poland’s western border had been definitively set at the Potsdam Conference and needed only to be confirmed by a peace settlement. In accordance with international law, a “peace settlement” could be realized in different ways—for instance, by bilateral and multilateral agreements—and not necessarily by securing a formal peace treaty. With this in mind, Polish officials were interested in signing a bilateral treaty with the FRG that would include recognition of the territorial status quo. Furthermore, Poland wanted its western border to be recognized by a multilateral pan-European conference.

Gomułka took the initiative in announcing on 17 May 1969 that Warsaw was ready to start talks with the FRG on a bilateral treaty. His announcement signaled an evolution in his thinking. The only major precondition he demanded was recognition of the Oder-Neisse line, not the full range of issues mentioned in the Warsaw Declaration of the Warsaw Pact Foreign Ministers in February 1967. Gomułka also expressed his expectations about a European

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36. This was a widespread opinion among Polish officials, as I found in interviews with Deputy Foreign Ministers Józef Czyrek and Jan Bisztyga and members of the Polish delegation Marian Dobrosielski, Andrzej Skowroński, and Adam Daniel Rotfeld. See also Jarząbek, *Polska wobec Konferencji*, pp. 49–52, 249–251.


security conference that might solve the basic problems in Europe by recognizing the postwar order, including the GDR. Gomułka did not inform Moscow and the other Warsaw Pact allies beforehand, thus provoking some concerns.\footnote{Jarzabek, “Ulbricht Doktrin,” p. 113. The Polish ambassador to Moscow, Jan Ptasiński, tried to explain the Polish move to Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semenov. Among the “astonished” countries were Hungary and the GDR, which were suspicious about Polish intentions and sometimes opposed to Polish actions.} Polish leaders in this instance felt they had to give priority to Poland’s own interests. After 1969, they ceased to demand formal recognition of the GDR as a second German state, catching Walter Ulbricht off guard.\footnote{Bemerkungen der Abteilung Benachbarte Länder und der Abteilung Westdeutschland, 22 December 1969, in MFAA, C 789/73, PA AA.} Polish diplomats made clear that in the case of a European conference, Poland would be interested in formal recognition of the Oder-Neisse line but not a borderline between the two German states.\footnote{Note: Vues polonaises sur les rapports avec l’Allemagne, 26 June 1969, in AMAE, Europe, Status de l’Allemagne, Vol. 65.} France and Great Britain were also interested in the normalization of relations between the FRG and Poland (and other Soviet-bloc countries). The Polish side, however, was ready to look for a formula that was also acceptable to Bonn.

The next step taken by Poland was to prepare a draft of the Treaty on Security and Cooperation in Europe.\footnote{Several drafts of a “Treaty on Security and Cooperation” exist, including one from September 1969 in AAN, KC PZPR, XIA/246. One of the drafts, dated 24 October 1969, has been partly translated into English. See Mastny and Byrne, eds., A Cardboard Castle?, p. 350.} Not surprisingly, recognition of the territorial status quo was the main issue. The question of disarmament was also dealt with in line with Poland’s long-standing interest in this topic and its awareness of the appeal and importance the issue held for Western countries. Regarding further cooperation in Europe, the Polish draft envisaged economic and cultural cooperation. In talks with Soviet leaders in September 1969 and with other Warsaw Pact allies in October 1969, Poland insisted on an unambiguous formula for recognition of postwar borders in Europe.\footnote{Short note on consultations with Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semenov on 30 September 1969 by Deputy Minister Zygfryd Wolniak, in AAN, KC PZPR, XIA/ 87. The long version is published in Jarzabek, Polska wobec Konferencji, pp. 200–205. See also Jarzabek, “Hope and Reality,” pp. 16–29.} However, when Warsaw Pact foreign ministers met in Prague at the end of October, they took note of the Polish stance but endorsed less-explicit wording and issued a communiqué that mentioned agreements on the renunciation of force as well as the improvement of East-West trade and scientific-technological cooperation as priority aims of a European security conference.\footnote{Note by S. Jędrychowski, 3 November 1969, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 60/77, w. 1.}
Meanwhile, a new government was formed in Bonn. On 23 November 1969 an interview with Willy Brandt was published in *Życie Warszawy* announcing a West German proposal to start bilateral talks. Two days later, the head of the FRG trade mission in Warsaw passed to Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Józef Winiewicz a West German note in which Bonn expressed its readiness to start talks on any topic without preconditions.\(^\text{45}\) When Polish-FRG bilateral talks began in February 1970, Polish leaders did not expect them to last so long. The protracted nature of the negotiations stemmed not only from the scope of the issues under discussion but also from Poland’s status in the international system. The Moscow Treaty between the Soviet Union and West Germany was to be concluded first, and Poland had to wait. The Warsaw Treaty on “normalization of bilateral relations” between Poland and the FRG was signed in December 1970. Unlike the Moscow Treaty, it was not primarily a treaty on the renunciation of force. This topic was mentioned only in Article II, referring to the UN Charter. As the FRG Foreign Ministry explained to West German diplomats, Bonn now understood Poland’s desire to live within secure borders, leading to the conclusion that the mere renunciation of force would be insufficient.\(^\text{46}\)

In Article I, both countries stated that the Oder-Neisse line, as codified in the Potsdam Declaration, constituted the western border of Poland. They announced that they did not have any territorial claims against each other and would not press any claims in the future.\(^\text{47}\) Officials in Warsaw treated these provisions as a success for Poland. The Polish government’s emphasis on the border question and altered treaty formula regarding the renunciation of force stirred objections in Moscow. During a sudden visit to Warsaw on 27 February 1970, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko tried in vain to convince the Poles not to include the borderline question in bilateral talks because it was “too difficult” a topic for the West Germans. He even asserted that if the West Germans sought to resolve the border question on their own, U.S. officials would obstruct their efforts.\(^\text{48}\)

\(^{45}\) Bingen, *Polityka Republiki Bośnińskiej*, p. 117.

\(^{46}\) Note with introductory letter by B. von Staden, 24 November 1970, in PA AA, B.1, Bd.354.

\(^{47}\) The Polish side pressed the West Germans to include references to the Potsdam Conference in the bilateral treaty. Polish leaders assumed that deadlines regarding the drawing of borders would be set forth by the great powers and then confirmed in the “peace settlement.” According to the West German legal position, all final decisions would wait until the peace treaty.

\(^{48}\) Gromyko told Gomułka it was possible “that the Americans suddenly would grasp Brandt’s collar and tell him that he goes too far.” See the memorandum of conversation, 27 February 1970, in AAN, KC PZPR, XIA/88.
The title of the final document, “Treaty between the Polish People’s Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany on the Basis of the Normalization of Their Bilateral Relations,” indicates that it was an introduction to further talks aimed at “complete normalization,” as mentioned in Article III. The Polish government expected diplomatic relations to be established soon and for the bilateral talks to lead to other agreements on economic cooperation and scientific and cultural collaboration, including the revision of schoolbooks and individual compensation for Polish victims of Nazi Germany’s occupation policy.49 The Poles wanted the liquidation of Radio Free Europe too. The FRG, for its part, wanted first of all to resolve the problem of Germans living in Poland and those wishing to leave the country.50 All these questions were treated as part of a “package deal.” In part because of the complexity, a long time was needed to iron out a final agreement. The fact that the Warsaw Treaty (as well as the Moscow Treaty) was not ratified until May 1972 made the bilateral talks more difficult. In September 1972, Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Olszowski visited Bonn, the first such visit ever by a Polish foreign minister. On this occasion, diplomatic relations between Poland and the FRG were established, but this stopped short of the full normalization of the Polish–West German relationship. Highly controversial issues remained to be solved; among them, the emigration of ethnic Germans, compensation for Polish citizens who had been victims of German wartime occupation, and a wide range of bilateral economic issues.51

Security and Cooperation through CSCE, 1972–1975

After the ratification of the treaties of Moscow and Warsaw, important elements of the European security had been settled. What was still missing was a multilateral system, something that would emerge from CSCE. In preparing a first round on this issue, a Soviet draft of a “General Declaration” was transmitted to the Polish side in September 1972. The draft included some formulations that had been used in the Polish documents submitted in 1969.


51. Note on the working visit of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs in Bonn on 6–7 December 1973, in AMSZ, Dep. IV, z. 47/77, w.13.
though not to the extent the Poles would have liked. The Soviet draft rejected any proposal concerning more liberal economic cooperation that could eventually give the East European countries greater room for political maneuver. Moreover, the Soviet draft did not embrace Polish ideas concerning disarmament steps in Europe and follow-up conferences—measures that, in the Polish view, were important factors in any European security system. Still, the Soviet draft stressed the principle of recognition and inviolability of borders in Europe. Any attempt to question the territorial integrity of a state should be treated as an act of aggression. After ratification of the Eastern treaties, it was easier for the Soviet Union to include these issues, using them as confirmation of the USSR’s own sizable territorial gains at the end of World War II. After 1972, Poland was less active in presenting new ideas to the Soviet bloc because of bad experiences in earlier activities and the rise of new political tactics—Gierek’s regime concentrated much more on bilateral contacts with Western countries. As the global situation changed, Cold War tensions relaxed and created new possibilities for Poland.

The Multilateral Preparatory Talks for CSCE started on 22 November 1972. The Polish delegation, led by Ambassador Adam Willmann, received instructions to look out for stipulations dealing with territorial questions. The Polish Foreign Ministry expected Western countries to be interested in giving priority to the principle of sovereignty and non-interference and not to the territorial status quo. Strengthening the GDR’s international position was mentioned as another important goal, albeit one of lower priority.

The West German stance strongly influenced Polish officials’ attitude toward two main issues: first, in Basket I, the question of the peaceful alteration of borders; and second, in Basket III, the principle of allowing families to be reunited. From the Polish perspective, the border issue was still of fundamental importance, despite the solution that had been found in the Treaty of Warsaw. The Polish authorities wanted to strengthen border guarantees by embedding them in the CSCE principles of international relations. This stance was caused mostly by the West German interpretation of the Warsaw treaty as being only temporarily valid. Furthermore, the Poles demanded that bilateral treaties should be treated as sources of international law and that

52. Note on Soviet proposals by J. Czyrek, 7 September 1972, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 63/77, w. 1.
53. Minutes of a conversation with the Soviets, 20 November 1972, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 63/77, w. 3; and Instruction for the Polish Embassy in Helsinki, November 1972, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 63/77, w. 3.
54. Olszowski on the Polish aims at CSCE, 2 November 1972, in AMSZ, Dep. IV, z. 45/77, w. 15.
this stipulation should be included in the CSCE Final Act.\textsuperscript{56} Soviet officials preferred, however, to concentrate on multilateral agreements, an approach supported by the majority of Western states. During bilateral consultations, Western governments informed the Polish side about this position.\textsuperscript{57}

Polish politicians and diplomats were well aware that the FRG was interested in formulations that would not hinder future German reunification. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Józef Czyrek, Poland should do its utmost to prevent the final document from keeping the door open for possible reunification of the two German states.\textsuperscript{58} The West German side, by contrast, wanted to keep this option open, something that did not escape the attention of Polish policymakers.\textsuperscript{59} Consequently, the Polish delegates demanded that borders be deemed unalterable. What they had in mind was Poland’s western frontier. In the Polish documents, the eastern frontier was not taken into consideration. Because of Poland’s subordination to Soviet hegemony, this topic was not an issue in Polish foreign policy and public discourse.

During the CSCE negotiations, Polish diplomats had a critical attitude toward any formulations concerning territorial integrity that included even an iota of leeway for territorial claims in the future. Some Polish protests were sparked by the view that the peaceful adjustment of frontiers was practically impossible, but officials in Warsaw soon concluded that they could not exclude this option entirely, partly because it had to be seen in a wider European context.\textsuperscript{60} Now Poland wanted to make border alterations possible only in some restricted cases.\textsuperscript{61} The Polish delegates were aware of West German

\textsuperscript{56} Information from Helsinki, No. 13, 9 March 1973, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 1/82, w. 2.

\textsuperscript{57} The CSCE process and Polish-FRG relations were important topics of these talks, which were primarily informational. However, the talks never went into much depth because of Poland’s membership in the Eastern bloc. See: Pilna notatka z rozmowy z Sekretarzem Stanu Williamem P. Rogesem w dniu, 31 May 1972, in PDD 1972, p. 323; Sprawozdanie z wizyty Towarzysza Edwarda Gierka I Sekretarza KC PZPR w Stanach Zjednoczonych 8–13 października 1974 roku, in PDD 1974, pp. 625–628; Notatka informacyjna dot. konsultacji polsko–francuskich w Warszawie, 9–10 May 1973, in PDD 1973, p. 86; Information note on the Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Olszowski visit to London, 13 April 1974, in AMSZ, Dep. IV, z. 20/79, w. 18; and Information note on British Secretary of State James Callaghan visit to Warsaw, 13–15 July 1975 by S. Olszowski, 26 July 1975, in AMSZ, Dep. IV, z. 17/81, w. 11.

\textsuperscript{58} Pilna notatka na temat działalności Polski w związku z Europejską Konferencją Bezpieczeństwa i Współpracy, 20 June 1972, in PDD 1972, p. 352.

\textsuperscript{59} On the FRG’s position, see Niedhart, “Peaceful Change of Frontiers as a Crucial Element in the West German Strategy of Transformation,” in Bange and Niedhart, eds., Helsinki 1975, pp. 39–52.

\textsuperscript{60} The early Polish plans did not discuss the possibility of peaceful change. When the question emerged, Poland tried to explain the Polish stance during bilateral talks with delegates from different countries. Author’s interviews with Marian Dobrosielski and Adam D. Rotfeld, both members of the Polish delegation.

\textsuperscript{61} Report from CSCE by A. Willmann, 29 December 1973, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 3/82, w. 2.
activities concerning the possibility of territorial changes. They observed these activities themselves and were also informed by various Western diplomats that the possibility should be considered.\footnote{The French diplomat Jacques Andréani informed a Polish colleague that, during a meeting of the Nine, the French delegation suggested a change of attitude on the question of the peaceful change of borders but was opposed by the FRG and Great Britain. As the Polish diplomat wrote, “information from the head of the French delegation for the talks in Geneva about the German attitude toward the question of the inviolability of frontiers helped the Poles to prepare better for the talks.” Nevertheless, Polish officials were dismayed by the French attitude toward this topic later on. See Jarząbek, “Hope and Reality,” p. 40.}

Reaching agreement on where in the declaration of principles to place a formula for the peaceful change of frontiers took some time. The West Germans wanted the principle of national self-determination to be included as a separate item in the Declaration of Principles, something Polish leaders deemed unacceptable.\footnote{This question was a topic in the conversation between the Polish ambassador in Rome with the director of the Political Department of the Italian Foreign Ministry in April 1973. See Szyfrogram Nr 4858 z Rzymu, 6 April 1973, in PDD 1973, p. 176.}

The Poles preferred to subsume that principle, if mentioning it at all, in the principle of the sovereign equality of states.\footnote{Note on the peaceful change of boarders, n.d., in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 3/82, w. 2.}

Polish diplomats wanted also to introduce language affirming “that signatories of the final agreement did not have and would not make any territorial claims in the future,” a position supported by Moscow, which had its own interest in deflating any potential separatist movements in the USSR’s western borderlands. Finally, a formula was agreed upon by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in Geneva in February 1975 allowing for the peaceful change of borders “in accordance with international law, by peaceful means and by agreement.” The Poles learned about the agreement from their own sources before being informed by the head of the Soviet delegation, Anatolii Kovalev.\footnote{M. Dobrosielski from Geneva, 5 March 1975, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 3/82, w. 3.}

In Warsaw, the result was considered satisfactory.\footnote{Notatka informacyjna o końcowych wynikach II fazy KBWE, M. Dobrosielski, 24 July 1975, transcribed in Jarząbek, Polska wobec Konferencji, p. 254.}

As for Basket III, the Polish authorities, like the other Warsaw Pact countries, were not interested in extending the flow of people and ideas. Because of the division of labor within the Eastern camp, the Soviet Union asked the Polish and Bulgarian delegations to deal with this topic during the second phase of CSCE. Beforehand, Poland had already been more interested in determining political or economic questions, but the Soviet Union most likely did not trust the Poles on these questions and preferred that they deal with other topics. Polish Foreign Ministry background materials emphasized
cultural collaboration and gave less weight to “human contacts.” 67 Regarding religious freedom, traveling, books, newspapers, and some other aspects of cultural cooperation, the Polish delegation was fairly liberal by East-European standards. 68 At the same time, Polish officials wanted to keep some elements of Basket III out of the conference proceedings and agreements. The Polish posture toward the third basket was not always spurred by Soviet pressure and instead stemmed mostly from a wide range of domestic factors and political calculations. Further, one should not ignore ideological motivations and the typical desire of a Communist regime to control everything.

Among the issues in Basket III was the Western proposal to deal with the problem of reuniting families, which was an issue in Poland’s relations with Western countries such as the United States, France, and Sweden. Above all, it was a serious problem in relations with the FRG. The Poles wanted this question to be settled in bilateral talks with Bonn as part of a package deal that would include economic cooperation, compensation for the Polish victims of the Nazi occupation, and the return of shares paid by Poles to German social security institutions during the war. 69 Poland initially opposed a common Western position on this matter but could not prevent it from becoming a topic on the CSCE agenda. 70 The Polish delegation participated in the talks and in 1974 finally accepted a document on reuniting families, which sparked severe criticism in some quarters. The head of Department IV at the Polish Foreign Ministry, Henryk Sokolak (who took up this post after serving as head of Communist Poland’s intelligence service), accused the delegation of having applied wrong tactics. He argued that the document was harmful to Polish national interests because the definitions of “family” and “family reunification action” were not precisely settled and could be used against Poland. 71 Other officials, among them members of the Polish CSCE delegation, argued that the stipulations concerning the status of families recognized the priority of domestic law and therefore provided ways to avoid unwanted interpretations,

67. Instruction for the Polish delegation for the Helsinki talks, April 1973, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 1/82, w. 2.
68. Interviews by the author with J. Andréani and L.-V. Ferraris as well as with Dobrosielski, and Rotfeld.
69. For more, see Jarząbek, “Die Haltung der Volksrepublik Polen.”
70. Dispatch from Helsinki, Willmann to Bisztyga, 26 March 1973, in AMSZ Dep. IV, z. 47/77, w. 17. The Soviets asked the Poles to prepare a document on reuniting families based on the Polish experiences, but the Poles were against discussing this topic during the conference.
including in bilateral relations with the FRG. Polish leaders supported the CSCE delegation and took no measures taken against them.

After the Helsinki Final Act was signed, the Polish Foreign Ministry prepared a formal interpretation of the documents—an interpretation partly based on the final report of the Polish delegation. The Polish government was satisfied that the Soviet bloc had managed to subordinate the formula on peaceful change of borders to the principle of sovereign equality. Equally important for the Poles was the distinction made between the “Declaration of Principles,” which referred to bilateral and multilateral treaties as sources of international law (among them the UN Charter), and other provisions that were treated merely as declarations of political will. Finally, the third basket stipulations were perceived as securing Polish interests. Regarding the flow of ideas, people, and information, the CSCE formula ran parallel to the mutual obligation to promote international understanding and to refrain from interfering with the interior affairs of other states. This was perceived as a perfect frame for the protection of both Polish and Warsaw Pact interests. Beyond that, the Helsinki summit in August 1975 was important for the further development of the Polish–West German relationship. When Gierek and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt met there, they reached agreement on the most contentious issues.

Conclusions

Polish leaders’ attitudes toward the German question and CSCE were both intertwined and separated. On the one hand, the FRG’s Ostpolitik had a permanent impact on Poland’s foreign policy. On the other hand, Polish expectations concerning CSCE went far beyond the German context.

With regard to the German question, the function of CSCE, as seen from Warsaw, was absolutely clear. The Polish authorities were concerned about the increasing international status of the FRG and wished to minimize (without

72. Interpretation of the decision of CSCE, 2 August 1975, in AMSZ, DSiP, z. 3/82, w. 5.
73. A complex of agreements was initiated, among them on pension questions for Polish citizens (1.3 billion DM), a financial loan (1.0 billion DM), and an emigration protocol (120,000–125,000 Germans in four years). Poland and the FRG also defined a long-term program of industrial, technological, and economic cooperation. However, any official record of the talks remains unknown, and the context in which the parties discussed the question of individual German compensation for the Poles is unclear. From the legal point of view, only signed agreements mattered. Agreements were signed in Warsaw during Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher’s visit on 9–10 October 1975. See “Pilna notatka o wizycie Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych H. D. Genschera w Polsce,” from Stefan Olszowski, 13 October 1975, in AMSZ, Dep. IV, z. 17/81, w. 6. Excerpts are published by Tomala, Polityka i dyplomacja polska wobec Niemiec, Vol. 2, pp. 419–429. However, the section on CSCE is missing.
excluding) the chances for possible German reunification. Although Polish leaders expected that reunification would eventually occur, they wanted to delay it as long as possible and to shape it to their interests. In the Treaty of Warsaw, the existing border—namely, the Oder-Neisse line—was described as “the Polish Western border.” Both sides affirmed that they respected the inviolability of the existing borders, not only for the time being but also in the future, confirming that they had no territorial claims. The Warsaw Treaty seemed not to be a secure guarantee of the permanent character of the Oder-Neisse line insofar as Warsaw and Bonn understood the “wording” in different ways. According to West German legal doctrine, the government of the FRG was not entitled to express final recognition of the border, which could be settled only by a peace conference. According to Polish legal doctrine, the “peace settlement” mentioned in the Potsdam Declaration did not mean “peace conference” or “peace treaty.” Concerns about these differences inclined the Poles to look for other ways of gaining formal “confirmation” of the post-1945 territorial status quo. Officials in Warsaw initially wanted CSCE to become a quasi-peace conference and proposed a multilateral treaty on the inviolability of frontiers and a Final Act that would be binding internationally. In the event of German reunification, any discussion of the border or—even more important—any attempts to make the border a tool to be used by the great powers for their own gains should be avoided. Thus, contrary to Poland’s maximal aim, CSCE did not become a substitute for a peace treaty.

Even so, CSCE, as an integral part of international détente, was a promising undertaking. The Declaration of Principles in the Final Act with its reference to the renunciation of force was regarded as satisfactory for Polish security interests. Moreover, the Poles treated CSCE as a chance to transform the status of Poland from an object to a subject in international affairs. Initially, the hope was that the all-European conference would enlarge Poland’s leeway for political maneuver and bolster its economic relations with non-Communist countries. These expectations were only partly realized. The climate of détente seemed to create new possibilities for international and economic contacts while leaving the interior political system basically untouched.

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74. Jarząbek, Polska w politycznych strukturach, pp. 42–43.