

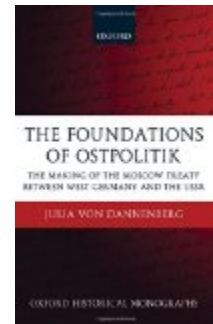


Julia Von Dannenberg. *The Foundations of Ostpolitik: The Making of the Moscow Treaty between West Germany and the USSR*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xvi + 301 pp. \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-922819-5.

Reviewed by Bernd Schaefer (Woodrow Wilson International Center)

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## A West German Account of Ostpolitik

This book is narrower in scope than its general title suggests. It strictly adheres to its subtitle and focuses on the West German background of Ostpolitik between 1966 and the negotiations for the Moscow Treaty of August 12, 1970. Certainly it can be argued whether this treaty, in spite of its eminent importance, constitutes in fact the “foundation” of Ostpolitik, in particular when the latter is exclusively viewed from a West German perspective without including views from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. All that said, this limited focus is applied extremely well and based on exhaustive research in West German archives. The book’s argument is made with concise points and is based on convincing evidence.

The first chapter “Setting the Stage” ploughs the ground of diplomatic contacts between the Soviet Union and West Germany from the 1950s all the way to the eve of the 1970 treaty. More new ground is broken, however, in the most interesting second part of the book where the author discusses, in an excellently researched chapter “New Ostpolitik—Whose Legacy?” the differences between the Ostpolitik of Willy Brandt and Kurt Georg Kiesinger. Brandt’s predecessor in the Bonn Chancellery between 1966 and 1969 was the head of a Grand Coalition between Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) and has been credited by many for his own “Ostpolitik.” For some, he even appears to be on equal footing in terms of innovative West German approaches toward Eastern Europe. While giving the CDU/CSU and Kiesinger credit where it is due, Ju-

lia von Dannenberg’s account makes unmistakably clear that Brandt’s approach in power from October 1969 represented clear change and a break with the past. The Grand Coalition under Kiesinger would never have been able to conclude a treaty with Moscow and subsequent bilateral and multilateral agreements in Eastern Europe. Any CDU/CSU chancellor was to be blocked by conservatives in his powerful parliamentary caucus. Only the complete sidelining of this caucus, as it happened for the first time in West German history in October 1969 after the formation of a social-democratic/liberal coalition, could pave the way for the bold and polarizing steps Brandt was to undertake in his policy toward the East.

In a long, and somewhat oddly organized, final third part with four subchapters, von Dannenberg first addresses Bonn’s decision-making process behind the Moscow Treaty in detail. She competently outlines the rivalry between Chancellery and Foreign Ministry. The former froze out the latter’s bureaucracy, almost a parallel to the relations between Henry Kissinger’s National Security Council and the State Department during Richard Nixon’s first administration (maybe that is one of the reasons why, despite their policy differences, Kissinger and Egon Bahr felt as kindred spirits and got along so well). Next the author addresses the CDU/CSU tactics toward the Brandt government, again well worked from German sources but omitting other published evidence from U.S. sources.[1] There follows a subchapter discussing whether interest-group pressures were a fac-

tor behind Ostpolitik, and finally there is a survey of reactions by the Western allies. Yet besides German records, only British sources were used here. Dannenberg ignores the rich U.S. archival documentation on West German Ostpolitik available since 2001, so the book defines American policy from German sources in a partially misleading way. Nixon and Kissinger did not share their actual misgivings about Ostpolitik with representatives of the Brandt government, so the latter walked away with wrong impressions of the United States being supportive.

The book nowhere claims to analyze the Soviet part in all this, so, on the one hand, it might be unseemly to flag this omission. On the other hand, this is a book about the Moscow Treaty. The author is correct to note that Russian archives remain almost completely closed on this historical period.[2] Still, there is scattered Soviet evidence available in several Eastern and Western archives, and it is simply a pity that Soviet “Westpolitik” is not further discussed. It was the corresponding equivalent to the success of Brandt’s Ostpolitik, with Moscow’s long-term economic and political objectives intersecting and an imminent perception of a Chinese threat looming large. The latter made the Soviet Union more conducive to détente in Europe, yet China does not even make it to the index of the book.

When the author somewhat overstates the Moscow Treaty as “multilaterally binding,” she also could have discussed that this West German perspective fed into Soviet hegemonic claims over Eastern Europe and delighted the USSR (p. 33). Undoubtedly, West German Ostpoli-

tik had to start in Moscow and conclude an agreement with the USSR first. Yet the Soviet Union did not hold all the keys in Eastern Europe. It could veto or block its satellites, but it could not deliver them. The subsequent West German treaties with Poland (1970), the GDR (1972), and Czechoslovakia (1973) were complex bilateral agreements very much in their own right.

In general, however, von Dannenberg’s book represents a welcome addition to the English literature on West German Ostpolitik under Brandt. It underscores how daring, imaginative, and consequent by West German standards that policy was at least in its initial stages. Though the author is denying this, it ultimately helped the evolutionary reform of Soviet communism under Mikhail Gorbachev that, in turn, inadvertently opened the path to the historical changes of 1989 and 1990.

#### Notes

[1]. Bernd Schaefer, “‘Washington as a Place for the German Campaign’: The U.S. Government and the CDU/CSU Opposition, 1969-1972,” in *American Détente and German Ostpolitik, 1969-1972*, ed. David Geyer and Bernd Schaefer (Washington DC: German Historical Institute, 2004), 98-108.

[2]. For some recent openings, see Andrey Edemskiy, “Dealing with Bonn: Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet Response to Ostpolitik,” in *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974: European and Global Responses*, ed. Carole Fink and Bernd Schaefer (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15-38.

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