
Relations between Pakistan and the GDR until 1973

Alexander Benatar

In: *Archival Reflexicon*, Anandita Bajpai and Heike Liebau (eds.), pp.1-7


Year of Publication: 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25360/01-2022-00018>

Year of Publication on perspectivia.net: 2022

Copyright



This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivatives 4.0 International License  (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/), which permits copying and redistributing the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Relations between Pakistan and the GDR until 1973

Alexander Benatar, *Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (EZW)*

This is a translated version of the 2018 MIDA Archival Reflexicon entry “[Die Beziehungen zwischen Pakistan und der DDR bis 1973](#)”. The text was translated by **Rekha Rajan**.

While the relations of the two German states with India have already been the subject of several publications, their engagement with the second-largest nation of the subcontinent has been completely ignored by historians so far. Until it officially recognised the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on 8 October 1972, India, as one of the most important non-aligned nations, was indeed one of the main addressees of the Federal Republic of Germany’s (FRG) Hallstein-Doctrine, and could always be assured of equal attention from both the internationally competing German states.

This applied to a lesser extent to Pakistan, which was politically and economically not so significant internationally, especially since as India’s arch-enemy, it had committed itself early on and unequivocally to the US-led alliance system by becoming a member of the international defence alliances CENTO and SEATO. For the GDR, Pakistan must have appeared to be a “lost cause” to some extent, where it was hardly worthwhile to fight for recognition. In its dealings with India, and later with Bangladesh, which had become independent from Pakistan, the GDR tried to win support with this fact. Only a week before Pakistan also recognised the GDR, on 15 November 1972, the then external affairs minister of the GDR, Otto Winzer, reiterated in a conversation with his counterpart from Bangladesh, Abdus Samad Azad, that Pakistan’s attempts to establish contacts with the GDR had always been rejected. However, contacts with Pakistan went back much further than the chief diplomat of the GDR was willing to admit at the time, and the GDR had certainly played an active role in this.

Early Contacts

Pakistan had already shown interest in bilateral trade with the GDR in the mid-1950s. However, on the “German question”, which was decisive for the GDR, Pakistan, in keeping with its Western alliance pact, clearly supported the standpoint of the FRG much to the regret of the East Berlin Ministry for External Affairs (MfAA). However, when the Indo-China border conflict of 1962 led to Pakistan’s proximity with the Peoples’ Republic of China, the MfAA saw this as a general course correction of the Pakistani government towards the socialist alliance system. Although they were aware of the persisting differences between the GDR and Pakistan (like the Soviet Union, the GDR supported India on the Kashmir question), the diplomats in East Berlin felt that a window had opened up for strengthening relations with Pakistan, if not also for establishing diplomatic relations.

The MfAA moved into action. In the summer of 1963, a first GDR trade delegation visited Pakistan, albeit unofficially, en route to India and offered Pakistan a trade agreement similar to the one that they had with India. In the same year, a delegation of the GDR Ministry for Foreign and Intra-German Trade (MAI) visited Pakistan to explore the possibilities for initiating bilateral relations between the two countries. However, the MfAA strongly recommended that the delegation proceed with discretion: “The delegation must endeavour to avoid publicizing its stay and negotiations in the Pakistani press in order to prevent any possible intervention by West Germany in the process of negotiations. Press conferences and interviews are to be refrained from.” The GDR was also very conscious of its own conflict of interest with Pakistan: “The delegation must avoid commenting on the Kashmir question, even if it is directly asked to do so by the Pakistani side.”¹ However, all these efforts by the GDR to engage with Pakistan through official channels, soon came to nothing.

From the mid-1960s things appeared to start moving, at least at the level of civil society. In February 1968, a book exhibition on the GDR was organised in Karachi and an office of the Leipzig Trade Fair, headed by a Pakistani, was opened. In addition, from 1969 onwards, a number of independent Pakistan-GDR Friendship Societies were founded without the active involvement of the GDR. These societies, however, could not always be controlled by the GDR as desired, which occasionally led to considerable friction. In the spring of 1970, for example, Pakistani students set up a Pakistan-GDR Friendship Society on their own initiative, and its representatives complained bitterly about the lack of support and unwanted instructions from East Berlin: “I want to make you very clear that we do not, don’t want and will never take any instruction from you. We are educated enough to prepare our plans independently.”² However, the efforts of these self-confident Friendship Societies did not bear fruit.

In May 1970, the GDR once again told the government of Pakistan that it was willing to establish official state relations and, towards this end, proposed the finalisation of a bilateral trade and payments agreement as well as the setting up of state-run trade missions. The timing was well chosen: The GDR missions in India were converted into general consulates in the summer of 1970. Soon after, the West German ambassador in Delhi was quoted in the press saying that the FRG government would not only not impose sanctions because of this step, but in fact it would increase the development aid to India. Thereupon, the Pakistani government also began to test the Hallstein-Doctrine and at the very least indicated to the West German government that it wanted to formalise relations with East Berlin.

Despite the generally sympathetic attitude of the government of Pakistan towards the FRG, it now became apparent that the Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt) was ready for a determined effort to safeguard its own inter-German political interests in Pakistan. When the then West German ambassador in Islamabad, Norbert Berger, found out from the local press at the end of January 1971 that an official atlas of the GDR showed the disputed region of Kashmir as part of India, he requested the AA headquarters in Bonn to send him a copy of the map so that he could submit it to the Pakistani Foreign Ministry. As an unambiguous explanation he added: “This map could perhaps influence the plans of the Foreign Ministry here to grant permission for a GDR trade mission.”³

The GDR's response in the conflict over East Pakistan, later Bangladesh, which erupted at the end of March 1971, in which it quickly and unequivocally took a stand in favour of the Indian-backed separatists, did little to arouse Pakistani sympathies. After the end of the Indo-Pak War in December 1971 and the GDR's official recognition of Bangladesh in January 1972, the plans to establish diplomatic ties between the GDR and Pakistan were put on hold for the time being.

The Path to Recognition

This only changed with India's diplomatic recognition of the GDR on 8 October 1972. A good one week later, the Pakistani ambassador in Bonn visited the AA to enquire about the implications of this step by India on inter-German affairs. The information he received appears to have reassured him. On 21 October 1972, a representative of the Pakistan foreign office informed the West German ambassador Berger that Pakistan would also "in the near future establish diplomatic ties with the GDR." Pakistan could no longer wait "to keep pace with developments."⁴

The FRG government reacted promptly and indignantly. On the same day, it directed its representative in Islamabad to convey to the government of Pakistan that this announcement, coming only a day after the signing of two important capital and debt-restructuring agreements, had "led to considerable irritation" in Bonn. For its part, the FRG government had at least consulted the Pakistan government and given reasons for its decision to grant recognition to Bangladesh in February 1972, a step which was undesirable from Pakistan's point of view. One would, therefore, expect Pakistan to at least do the same. Otherwise, the FRG government "could not rule out the possibility of a shadow falling on the future nature of German-Pakistan relations that had hitherto been close and friendly."⁵ On the following day this threat was backed up by the instruction to convey this message to the Pakistani government before the protocols to the agreements were signed. It was signed in the expectation that the Pakistan government would "refrain from the announced step vis-à-vis the GDR until the negotiations of the basic treaty in the matter have been concluded."⁶

Bonn's efforts were effective. Ambassador Berger was placatingly told that "the expression 'in the near future' did not mean that recognition would happen 'the day after tomorrow'".⁷ It was announced that the earliest date for recognition of the GDR was now 15 November 1972. Pakistan had indeed waited until the basic treaty had been initialled.

After Recognition

On 24 January 1973, the Embassy of the GDR in Pakistan began its activities with the arrival of the chargé d'affaires. Walter Schmidt was the first representative of the GDR in Pakistan⁸ who was succeeded at the end of April 1973 by the first regular ambassador, Hans Maretzki. On 6 April 1973, Pakistan opened its embassy in the GDR. In mid-May 1973, the government of Pakistan appointed Jamshed K.A. Marker, its former ambassador in Ottawa, as its first ambassador in East Berlin. The appointment of this distinguished diplomat, who had earlier been Pakistan's ambassador to the USSR, was generally seen by the MfAA to be a positive sign of the high regard in which Pakistan held the GDR.

In Bonn, the recognition of the GDR was not accepted without objections, despite Pakistan's concession. The FRG did not allow this matter to prevent the signing of an agreement on

scientific and technological cooperation with Pakistan on 30 November 1972. However, the planned trip of State Secretary Paul Frank to Pakistan for inter-governmental consultations was postponed indefinitely. The AA headquarters in Bonn also decided that for the time being it would not grant Pakistan's wish for a lifting of the arms embargo on the subcontinent that was imposed after the last Indo-Pak conflict. In India, on the other hand, the establishment of diplomatic relations between the GDR and Pakistan did not evoke any media response, contrary to the fears in East Berlin.

The first noteworthy action of the GDR in Pakistan was the founding of a Pakistan-GDR Friendship Society in Peshawar, near the Afghan border at the end of June 1973. According to the assessment of the FRG embassy, the main purpose of this society was to support the insurgent Pashtuns in this notoriously ungovernable part of the country on behalf of the Soviet Union – a country that Pakistan regarded with suspicion. Apart from this Friendship Society and the previously mentioned smaller groups, however, there was still no central Friendship Society in Pakistan. In any case, a collaboration between the GDR embassy and the Friendship Society in Lahore, for example, was hampered by the fact that the Pakistani government refused the necessary approval for the activities of such Friendship Societies in the country and demanded that invitations already extended to visit the GDR be withdrawn. Nevertheless, Pakistan soon began to make demands of the GDR as Marezki reported: “With regard to the development of relations Pakistan has high expectations which, although not yet formulated concretely, presume unrealistic economic and scientific-technological help from the GDR.”⁹ However, the GDR was not interested in paying out substantial development aid to Pakistan.

After diplomatic relations were established, the GDR was less interested in playing an economic role in the politics of the Indian subcontinent than in improving its visibility in the host country. Already at the beginning of 1973, Walter Schmidt, the first representative of the GDR in Pakistan, realised that this was not particularly good: “The first official and unofficial contacts with Pakistanis shows that the GDR as a state is completely unknown and that as far as this is concerned, we have to begin from scratch. Even the Speaker of the Parliament [...] welcomed me warmly, but then wanted to show me that he already knows the names of some politicians in my country and named Adenauer, Erhardt, Kiesinger and Brandt.”¹⁰

After establishing diplomatic ties with Pakistan, the GDR first of all, adopted the foreign policy concerns of the Soviet Union by propagating the “creation of a collective security system in Asia”. Any bilateral goals of the GDR had to take a secondary place. Thus, a trade agreement, for example, could not be concluded immediately after diplomatic ties were set up. One of the main reasons for this was that the GDR did not want to be bound to concrete commitments on the scope of this trade by Pakistan. It was only in 1974 that the GDR concluded a trade and payments agreement as well as a cultural agreement with Pakistan. Apart from this, personal contacts and mutual visits between the GDR and Pakistan remained sporadic and the effectiveness of the different Friendship Societies remained limited. The GDR was now officially represented in Pakistan, but it hardly left its mark there.

Sources

While relations of both the German states with India have already received considerable academic attention with Johannes Voigt's *Die Indienpolitik der DDR. Von den Anfängen bis zur Anerkennung (1952-1972)* [Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2008] and Amit Das Gupta's *Handel, Hilfe, Hallstein-Doktrin. Die bundesdeutsche Südasienspolitik unter Adenauer und Erhard, 1945-1966* [Husum: Matthiesen Verlag, 2004], there is no secondary literature whatsoever on the exchange between the FRG or the GDR with Pakistan. As long as Pakistan's archives continue to remain closed to foreigners, historians interested in Germany-Pakistan diplomatic history are compelled to carry out primary source research in German archives. These would be the Political Archives of the Foreign Office (*Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes*, PA AA) in Berlin and the Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv, BArch) in Berlin and Koblenz.

For the period till 1979, the archival holding of the MfAA in the PA AA is organised thematically according to the principle of pertinence. All internal MfAA correspondence and reports pertaining to Pakistan are in the PA AA in the holding M1-Zentralarchiv. Archival documents covering the time-period until 1966 have a signature beginning with A, while the signature of the documents belonging to a later period begins with C. Beyond the MfAA holding, however, the assessments of the "other side" are of course also informative.

The West German AA organised its archival documents from the beginning according to the principle of provenance. The files of the country desk "IB 5 Süd- und Ostasien, Australien, Neuseeland und Ozeanien" (IB 5- South and East Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and Oceania), which also handled the bilateral political relations of the FRG to Pakistan are found in the holding B 37. A curious fact is that the PA AA has evidently wrongly classified a file belonging to the country desk IB 5: the volume 306 deals with relations of the GDR to Pakistan, but instead of being in the B37 holding, it is in holding B 38 – Berlin und Wiedervereinigungsfragen (Berlin and Issues of Reunification). In addition, the relevant correspondence and reports of the FRG embassy in Islamabad are found in the holding "AV Neues Amt" (New Office) under the abbreviation ISLA. As part of the "relations of the host country with third countries", regular reports of the diplomatic missions abroad always also dealt with the exchange between the host country and the GDR.

Finally, in the Federal Archive (B Arch) in Berlin, in the holding "DY 13 Liga für Völkerfreundschaft der DDR" (League of the GDR for Friendship among the Peoples), the umbrella organisation for the national Friendship Societies in the GDR, there are documents of an independently operating Pakistan-GDR Friendship Society requesting the competent German-Southeast Asian Society of the GDR for support (mainly financial).

Endnotes

- ¹ Schwab in “Außenpolitische Direktive für den Besuch der Delegation des Ministeriums für Außenhandel und Innerdeutschen Handel in Pakistan”, 30 October 1963, PA AA M 1, A 13948.
- ² Parvez Masud Baig to the German-Southeast Asian Society, 9 December 1971, BArch, DY 13/2240.
- ³ Berger to the AA, 25 January 1971, PA AA, B 37, Vol. 634.
- ⁴ Berger to the AA, 23 October 1972, PA AA, ISLA, Vol. 8149.
- ⁵ Diesel to the embassy in Rawalpindi, 23 October 1972, PA AA, ISLA, Vol. 8149.
- ⁶ Van Well to the embassy in Rawalpindi, 24 October 1972, PA AA, ISLA, Vol. 8149.
- ⁷ Berger to the AA, 26 October 1972, PA AA, ISLA, Vol. 8149.
- ⁸ Berger to the AA, 25 January 1973, PA AA, B 37, Vol. 100303.
- ⁹ Maretzki to Willerding/MfAA, 27 June 1973, PA AA, M 1, C 89/78.
- ¹⁰ Schmidt to Radde/MfAA, 8 February 1973, PA AA, M1, C 97/98.

MIDA Langfristvorhaben, gefördert durch die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.
MIDA Long Term Project, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation).

Herausgeber/*Editors:* Anandita Bajpai, Heike Liebau
Layout: Monja Hofmann, Nico Putz
Anbieter/*Host:* ZMO, Kirchweg 33, 14129 Berlin
Kontakt/*Contact:* archival.reflexicon@zmo.de

ISSN 2628-5029

© MIDA 2021