

**January 2, 1958**

**Address by Polish Foreign Minister Rapacki at the  
United Nations General Assembly, 'Polish proposal  
for a European Zone Free From Atomic Weapons'**

**Citation:**

"Address by Polish Foreign Minister Rapacki at the United Nations General Assembly, 'Polish proposal for a European Zone Free From Atomic Weapons'", January 2, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Subimal Dutt Subject File No. 96, Installment I  
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/134008>

**Summary:**

In response to the arming of West Germany, Rapacki proposes a European Nuclear Weapon Free Zone.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Transcript - English

Title: The Polish proposal for a European Zone Free From Atomic Weapons

BY: The Historical Division, Ministry of External Affairs,

DATE: 2 January 1958

Pg: 53-58

□ On 2 October 1957 the Polish Foreign Minister Rapacki, addressing the United Nations General Assembly, declared:

□ "Until the system of collective security has been organized in Europe, we shall give our support even to partial solutions leading to this ultimate aim, irrespective of whether they will constitute elements of a wider programme on the subject of separate agreements. Therefore we were and we are still of the opinion that the idea of creating in Europe zones of limited and controlled armaments will serve this purpose...In the interest of Poland's security and of a detente in Europe, having agreed on this initiative with the other members of the Warsaw Pact, the Government of the Polish People's Republic declares that should the two German States express their consent to impose a ban on the production and stock-piling of atomic and thermo-nuclear weapons in their territories, the Polish People's Republic is prepared simultaneously to impose a similar ban on her territory."

Later the Czechoslovak Government also associated themselves with this offer. The suggested ban on production of nuclear weapons is aimed at a remote possibility. For the Paris Agreements of October 1954, whereby the Western Powers recognized West Germany as a sovereign State and admitted her to NATO, expressly forbade her from producing "atomic, biological and chemical weapons"; and Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia are unlikely to be able, for some years at least, to produce atomic weapons. The Polish proposal will amount in practice to a ban on stockpiling such weapons in West Germany, East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

2. The suggestion for an "atomic free zone" in Central Europe has a long and involved pedigree. At the end of the Second World War the United States was eager to prevent a revival of German militarism by demilitarizing Germany, but thereafter the "German question" ceased to be a problem in itself and became an issue between the Western Powers and Russia. As the United States, Britain and France began to contemplate the arming of West Germany, Russia favored demilitarization of both Germanies as the first step to re-unification. In 1951, the Western Powers decided to re-arm West Germany, and Russia shifted emphasis from demilitarization to an insistence on German neutrality. However, in 1953 Van Zeeland, then the Foreign Minister of Belgium, suggested that when Germany was re-unified the area which now forms East Germany should be demilitarized, and only Polish troops should be allowed in Poland. At the Geneva Conference of Heads of Government in July 1955, Sir Anthony Eden suggested a pilot scheme of disarmament on the lines of the Van Zeeland scheme. According to the Eden Plan, troops should be withdrawn from both sides of the border between East and West Germany. It seemed as if agreement was possible on the creation of such a demilitarized zone "between East and West," and this item was among those referred for examination to the Council of Foreign Ministers. But the Western Powers showed little enthusiasm for the principles of the Eden Plan, and it was left to the Communist Powers to keep it alive. In October 1955, the East German Prime Minister, Grotewohl, stated that a pre-requisite for reunification was the creation of zones of partial disarmament on both sides of the intra-German border, and a ban on the use of atomic weapons. In January 1957 Russia and East Germany called for the creation of "an area of reduced armaments" which would include the two Germanies. When plans were being considered for the supply by the United States of atomic armaments to West Germany, Russia warned the West German Government in a series of notes from April to September that the acceptance of atomic weapons would expose the West German population to "a terrible danger" and make it likely that the whole country would be converted into "one big cemetery." The Soviet Government, however, stated their willingness to reach an agreement with the Western Powers that no atomic weapons would be stationed on German territory.

The Berlin Declaration of the Western Powers (29 July 1957) brushed aside suggestions for demilitarization. But with the need of the United States for missile bases in Europe, this particular issue of stock-piling atomic weapons in West Germany has again come to the forefront; and Rapacki's proposal for "nuclear demilitarization" of Central Europe is merely an elaboration of the Russian demand for a ban on atomic weapons in Germany.

3. It is thus clear that Rapacki's proposal was not the product of independent Polish initiative, but fits into the pattern of Russian foreign policy. Indeed, Rapacki himself disclosed that he had made his offer in consultation with the other members of the Warsaw Treaty system; and since his speech in October Russia has repeatedly advocated the proposal for an "atom free zone." On the eve of the NATO Conference of the Heads of Government, Rapacki sent for the ambassadors of Britain, France and the United States to repeat his proposal and state Poland's fears of the consequences of supplying nuclear weapons to West Germany; and the Soviet Prime Minister, Bulganin, wrote to the chief of NATO Governments supporting the Rapacki Plan. The suggestion of "nuclear disarmament" in Central Europe is a shrewd move calculated to appeal to various trends in present-day Europe. Besides being an obvious means of relaxing international tension which had once been sponsored even by Western statesmen like Eden, it enables a form of spatial disarmament at a time when any general agreement on disarmament seems remote. Ballistic missile with thermo-nuclear warheads have changed the face of war, and countries in Europe are attracted by the prospect of refusing atomic weapons and thereby turning away the full force of Soviet counter-attack. The next war may not be a localized one: but "nuclear disarmament," even if it cannot prevent the extent of war, can mitigate its intensity. The creation of such a zone in Central Europe has in addition some special advantages. The formation of an enclave of peace which includes both East and West Germany satisfies one of the conditions imposed by Russia for re-unification and brings the possibility of German unity nearer. It will also relax Russian influence in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia and strengthen the Governments of these countries in their relations with Russia. On the other hand, the atomic armament of West Germany will revive fears of German aggression and emphasize the military dependence of the East European countries on Russia.

4. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Rapacki Plan has been received with considerable sympathy in Western Europe. In Britain opinion outside the government favours the idea. Early in 1957 the British Labour Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell, had suggested that the Eden Plan for demilitarization along the German frontier should be extended to cover the whole of Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and if possible Rumania and Bulgaria; and now both Gaitskell and Bevan have spoken in favour of attempting "disengagement" in Central Europe on the lines of the Rapacki Plan. The British Liberal Party is also sympathetic; and, more surprisingly, The Times has also advocated a "nuclear self-denying ordinance" in both parts of Germany. George Kennan in his Reith Lectures has argued that the withdrawal of Western armies from West Germany should provide the only chance of securing Russian withdrawal from East Europe; that the larger the number of nations entrusted with nuclear weapons, the greater the chances of an outbreak of war, and that it was advisable to separate geographically the forces of the great nuclear Powers.

5. It is, however, in West Germany that the desire for an "atom-free zone" is most intense. Both the major opposition parties, the Social Democrats and the Free Democrats, support the suggestion. Ollenhauer, the leader of the Social Democrats, has stated publicly that his party does not favor the supply to the German arms of atomic weapons and the storing of such weapons by the United States on German territory. In Bremen and Hesse, where the Social Democrats are in power, the local parliaments have decided to frustrate any effort on the part of the Federal Government to set up atomic stock-piles and missile bases. This attitude has been supported by the leading atomic scientists of Gottingen and Heidelberg Universities. Indeed the West German press was so convinced that the suggestions in Bulganin's letter to Adenauer of 10 December should be examined in detail that the West

German Chancellor, who till now had taken the line that re-unification was a condition precedent to the establishment of a neutral zone in Central Europe, announced in Bonn that no decision on missiles would be taken at the NATO conference. At the conference itself, while Eisenhower made no reference to Bulganin's letters, Adenauer, speaking next, stated that he was impressed with Bulganin's "moderate language" and saw no objection to exploring through diplomatic channels the Russian proposals. The passage on nuclear missiles in the final communiqué reflects Adenauer's views. It does not approve of the Norwegian and Danish viewpoint refusing to accept atomic stock-piles and missile launching-sites; but it has also not granted the United States demand for immediate commitments. The supply of nuclear weapons have been accepted in principle, but decisions regarding the implementation have been postponed. "We are therefore resolved to achieve the most effective pattern of NATO military defensive strength, taking into account the most recent developments in weapons and techniques. The deployment of these stocks and missiles and arrangements for their use will...be decided...in agreement with the States concerned."

6. In other words, the Rapacki Plan has been rejected in theory, but it is still possible that in fact West Germany may not receive missiles with nuclear warheads. That decision has been postponed, according to Adenauer, till March 1958. The Governments of the United States, Britain, France, and Germany are inclined to go ahead with their plans of atomic armament. The United States government, lacking the inter-continental missile, requires bases in Europe for missiles of intermediate range, and feels the Rapacki Plan is really a move to favour Russia militarily. But with missile bases in England and Italy, the United States could afford to have no bases in West Germany. The British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, has said that Russia is trying to split West Germany from the other NATO countries. Gaillard, the French Prime Minister, has described the Rapacki Plan as a "very dangerous idea" because it would require United States forces to leave Europe while the Russians would only fall back a few miles. Adenauer himself, having already agreed to the location of small-range "tactical" atomic weapons in West Germany, regard the Polish proposal as a means of weakening West Germany and compelling de facto recognition of East Germany. But public opinion in Western Europe is so strongly in favor of the principle of the Rapacki Plan that in the coming months Britain, France, the United States and West Germany are likely to discuss the Rapacki Plan with Poland and Russia.