

Environmental diplomacy in the German Democratic Republic between the 1950s and 1970s

In the 1950s neither the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany) nor the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) had obtained sovereignty. Increasingly the Western allies treated West Germany like a sovereign state but not East Germany. The West German government claimed an exclusive mandate to represent the whole of Germany, and thus developed the Hallstein doctrine in 1955. According to this doctrine the West German government would regard recognition of the GDR by third parties as a hostile act, which isolated the country internationally for years. From then on the GDR's foreign policy focused on obtaining sovereignty and the government increasingly pursued different strategies including environmental diplomacy to reach its goal. The International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) denied the GDR's application for state membership but instead accepted the GDR's Institute for Landscape Research and Nature Protection (ILN) as a member, which subsequently interacted in the international nature protection arena. Since the 1960s the United Nations and – amongst other states – the United States of America increasingly supported the GDR's efforts of gaining sovereignty because environmental diplomacy had been discovered as a useful tool in the political détente process. East Germany approached its goal of being recognized as a sovereign state through systematically applying for membership at the UN special organizations and conferences. I put forward the hypothesis that the GDR's diplomatic strategy to reach sovereignty was a long-term one. Thus, applying for admission as a full member at the first UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm 1972 - even though there was only little chance to get and in the end was denied it, which resulted in most Eastern bloc states boycotting the conference - was part of East Germany's long term strategy to accelerate their recognition as a sovereign state and wasn't just a stunt.