

In 1990 during the negotiations surrounding reunification of Germany, several informal assurances were made by western leaders to Gorbachev and his foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze (as well as a few other lesser officials), that NATO would not expand eastward. These assurances have become the centre of a dispute between Russia and the west over whether these assurances constitute a pledge not to enlarge NATO eastward. A pledge that Russian and former Soviet leaders alleges was broken when Poland, Czechia and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, and is now being used as part of the Russian justification for its invasion of Ukraine amongst other things. This thesis seeks to answer the question: *“Was there a credible guarantee made to the Soviet officials not to expand NATO eastward, and if not, did Gorbachev assume that any verbal assurances were final and binding?”* The discussion over whether a promise not to enlarge was made inevitably boils down to whether repeated, but isolated, vague, and unofficial statements made during various preliminary negotiations should reasonably be expected to represent a credible pledge of commitment to not enlarge NATO, or if the lack of any legally binding treaty codifying this pledge means that no binding commitment exist. The conclusion drawn in this thesis, based on the available evidence is that since the assurances made early in 1990 are not legally binding, and there is no direct evidence of a discussion about enlargement beyond east-Germany ever having taken place in 1990, and since nobody at the time appear to have predicted it even being possible, as confirmed by both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze since, there is no evidence that such a pledge was ever made. The author rather argues that Putin’s repeated use of the argument that a promise was made and broken is a Russian propaganda narrative that Russian actors including Putin seeks to spread, despite knowing that no concrete evidence exists in support of the claim.