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## MARGARET THATCHER AND GERMAN UNIFICATION REVISITED

The eventful years 1989–90 not only led to the breaching of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and German unification in October 1990, but also to a great deal of concern among European politicians. In particular, the British prime minister was greatly alarmed. While the United States supported the unification of the German nation, both Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and French president François Mitterrand were strongly opposed. Thatcher was never able to overcome her deep personal dislike and suspicion of the developments which by late 1990 had led to the end of the Cold War and a year later to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Although in early 1990 Mitterrand and, within a few weeks, also Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev reluctantly and conditionally gave their agreement to the unification of Germany, Thatcher would never warm to the re-creation of a unified German nation.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the British prime minister, who had first entered Downing Street in May 1979, did not hesitate to make it repeatedly clear that for her, reunification was not on the agenda. Even after the fall of the Wall on 9 November and West German chancellor Helmut Kohl's cautious Ten-Point scheme for reunification of 28 November 1989, Thatcher continued to believe that tinkering with European frontiers was out of the question. Instead, she spoke in favor of maintaining the political independence of a democratized GDR.<sup>2</sup> While Thatcher had always

<sup>1</sup> For the best personal accounts, see Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: HarperCollins, 1993); George R. Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion at the Court of Margaret Thatcher: An Insider's View* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996); Percy Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major* (London: John Murray, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> See Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 793–94; and also for one of the best accounts of German unification, Andreas Rödder, *Deutschland einig Vaterland. Die Geschichte der Wiedervereinigung* (Munich: Beck, 2009), 158; Werner Weidenfeld with Peter Wagner and Elke Bruck, *Außenpolitik für die deutsche Einheit: Die Entscheidungsjahre 1989/90, Geschichte der deutschen Einheit 4* (Stuttgart: dtv, 1998), 131–32; Alexander von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands—ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel: Bush, Kohl, Gorbachev und die geheimen Moskauer Protokolle* (Berlin: Links, 2002). An excellent survey is also provided by Hanns Jürgen Küster's introduction to the volume Hanns Jürgen Küsters and Daniel Hoffmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit: Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989/90* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998), 21–236. See also the articles in Frederic Bozo et al., eds., *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal* (London: Routledge, 2008). Other good accounts are Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany's Road to Unification* (Washington, D.C., 1993); Angela Fischer, *Entscheidungsprozess zur deutschen Wiedervereinigung der au-*

shown a great deal of sympathy for the dissidents and liberation movements of Eastern Europe, she hardly ever mentioned their counterparts in the GDR. Instead, she publicly envisaged an extended period of transition of about ten to fifteen years and speculated on the difficulties of integrating the GDR into the European Community.<sup>3</sup> Thatcher also supported Gorbachev's November 1989 proposal for convening a second Helsinki summit conference. The cumbersome mechanism of the Helsinki process would have required the nigh-to-impossible consent of all thirty-five participating states. This had the advantage, as seen from London, of delaying reunification significantly, even though going down this road would have ignored the special responsibility of the four World War II victors for all questions concerning the whole of Germany and Berlin. During the entire postwar period Britain had been quite proud of this prerogative.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout her premiership Thatcher took it for granted that Germany was to remain partitioned for a long time to come. She always held strong anti-German sentiments. For instance, in 1984 she told George Urban, an occasional advisor who at times was rather close to her, that it was entirely wrong to claim that the Germans were the paymasters of Europe. "The Germans have been simply paying reparations for all the things they did during the war; we couldn't call it that, but that is what they have been doing."<sup>5</sup> Urban was alarmed. "The strength of the PM's views about Europe and Germany came as a surprise. I found them disturbing."<sup>6</sup>

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*ßen- und deutschlandpolitische Entscheidungsprozeß der Koalitionsregierung Kohl/Genscher in den Schicksalsjahren 1989/90* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Land, 1996). Specifically focused on Britain are Norbert Himmler, *Zwischen Macht und Mittelmaß. Großbritanniens Außenpolitik und das Ende des Kalten Krieges: Akteure, Interessen und Entscheidungsprozesse der britischen Regierung 1989/90* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001); Klaus-Rainer Jackisch, *Eisern gegen die Einheit: Margaret Thatcher und die deutsche Wiedervereinigung* (Frankfurt am Main: Societätsverlag, 2004). For an interesting MA thesis, see Sven Sochorik, *Die Rolle Großbritanniens beim Wiedervereinigungsprozeß Deutschlands 1989/90* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Mallaby (Bonn) to Hurd (London), 5 Jan. 1990, in Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Robert Twigge, eds., *Documents on British Policy Overseas III, vol. 7: German Unification 1989–1990* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009) (hereafter *DBPO*), 190.

<sup>4</sup> See George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 236. For Thatcher's attitude toward both the German "problem" and European integration, see her memoirs, *Downing Street Years*, chapters 24–26. For one of the best articles on this issue, see Lothar Kettenacker, "Britain and German Unification, 1989/90," in Klaus Larres with Elizabeth Meehan, eds., *Uneasy Allies: British-German Relations and European Integration since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99–123. See also Patrick Salmon, "The United Kingdom and German Unification," in Frederic Bozo et al., eds., *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal* (London: Routledge, 2008), 177–90; Yvonne Klein, "Obstructive or Promoting? British Views of German Unification, 1989/90," *German Politics* 5, no. 3 (1996): 404–31. For the Helsinki idea, see Kettenacker, "Britain," 114. See also the pamphlet Gillian Staerk and Michael Kandiah, eds., *Anglo-German Reunification* (London: ICBH Witness Seminar Programme, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion*, 82.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

At this time, as well as toward the end of the decade, she believed that the “German problem” was deeply linked to flaws in the German national character, which had developed partially due to Germany’s late unification in 1871. This had made Germany sway “unpredictably between aggression and self-doubt.”<sup>7</sup> The creation of a more integrated Europe, she was convinced, would not overcome this dilemma but make matters worse, since Germany would undoubtedly dominate Western Europe. Germany’s economic interests, moreover, would make the country continue to look west but also increasingly toward the east, as it had always done in the past. It could be expected, Thatcher reasoned, that Germany was “thus by its very nature a destabilizing rather than a stabilizing force in Europe.” She was deeply convinced that reunification would make Germany “simply too big and powerful to be just another player within Europe.” The “military and political engagement” of the United States on the European continent and close Anglo-American and Anglo-French relations were necessary, she believed, to contain and balance German power, “and nothing of the sort would be possible within a European super-state.”<sup>8</sup>

Thatcher was not only deeply opposed to German reunification, she also never managed to find a bridge between her strong anti-European convictions and the importance with which the European project was seen on the continent. The statement quoted below from Thatcher’s memoirs depicts particularly well her simultaneous bafflement about the latter and her own thinking along very traditional foreign policy lines.

This desire among modern German politicians to merge their national identity in a wider European one is understandable enough, but it presents great difficulties to self-conscious nation-states in Europe. In effect, the Germans, because they are nervous of governing themselves, want to establish a European system in which no nation will govern itself. Such a system could be unstable in the long term and, because of Germany’s size and preponderance, is bound to be lop-sided. Obsession with a European Germany risks producing a German Europe.<sup>9</sup>

Current literature on this topic reveals a certain re-evaluation of the attitude and role of the European actors in the process of German unification. This, in my view, has led to a more benign interpretation of the attitude and policy of both the French and the British foreign policy elite than is justified on the basis of the available documents and other primary and secondary sources.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 791.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. See also the insightful memoirs of her Foreign Policy Advisor Percy Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, 110; Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion* 81–87.

<sup>9</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 748.

<sup>10</sup> For a benign re-interpretation of Mitterrand’s policy, see the otherwise excellent book by Frederic Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War and German Unification* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); see also Frederic Bozo, “France, German unification and European integration,” in idem et al., eds., *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal* (London: Routledge, 2008), 148–60.

This chapter, however, is mostly concerned with Britain's foreign policy in 1989–90 and wishes to reassess this policy. This is because statements such as the following appear to distort the historical record: "Thatcher was not wholly opposed to German unity; the FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] was not 100 per cent in favour."<sup>11</sup> This chapter will demonstrate that the first part is entirely mistaken, while the second part is perfectly correct. It also is questionable whether "Britain's policies on Germany were closely aligned with those of its allies."<sup>12</sup> It will be shown that at least until February–March 1990 this was clearly not the case. It also confuses the issue when British foreign policy in 1989–90 is justified as follows: "If the British expressed reservations they did not concern the principle but the timing of the process and the framework within which it was to take place."<sup>13</sup> In fact, the timing very much was identical with the principle. If Thatcher, as she said at one point, wanted to postpone and delay unification for ten to fifteen years (or even just for a few years), she essentially wished to prevent German unification for a considerable period of time. And this was exactly a continuation of the policy of the Western allies during the Cold War years, when the high-minded principle of German unification was never questioned although it was expected that unification would only occur far in the future. Moreover, once Gorbachev had left the political scene in the Soviet Union, it was by no means self-evident that his successor would also agree to let the GDR go its own way and merge with West Germany. In fact, this appeared to be questionable. Margaret Thatcher was well aware of all this.

### Margaret Thatcher and the influence of World War II

Behind Thatcher's deep mistrust of the German national character and her fears of the emergence of a fourth German Reich, there were profound personal and political convictions. These strongly held beliefs made Margaret Thatcher bold enough to do her best to prevent German unification, or at least try to delay the process as much as possible. Like many other problems in Anglo-German relations over the years, Thatcher's mistrust dated back to the Second World War.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Salmon, "The United Kingdom and German Unification," 188. This is a good article on the whole, but Salmon is one of the British Foreign Office's most senior and respected historians and perhaps naturally he cannot approach the unification issue without a certain bias in favor of his employers, the British policy-making elite.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> For recent general accounts on British-German relations since 1945, see Larres with Meehan, eds., *Uneasy Allies*; Sabine Lee, *Victory in Europe: Britain and Germany since 1945* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); Edward Foster and Peter Schmidt, *Anglo-German Relations in security and defence: taking stock* (London: RUSI, 1997).

When war broke out, Margaret Roberts was almost fourteen years old. Due to the proximity of a munitions factory and an airfield run by the Royal Air Force, her home town Grantham in Lincolnshire in the English Midlands was the target of twenty-one raids by Hitler's Luftwaffe. The town also suffered from recurring difficulties due to the lack of food and electricity supplies. Above all, however, it was her father's patriotic stories, his deep Methodist faith and the excruciating narratives of Edith, a seventeen-year-old Jewish girl from Austria, that influenced Margaret highly. Edith was the daughter of friends in Nazi-occupied Vienna and she lived with the Roberts family for a short while in 1938. The girl told them about the painful living conditions of the Jewish population under the Nazis which she had herself experienced. Edith also referred to the terrible events in the camps of which she had heard. Both left a deep mark upon the future Prime Minister.<sup>15</sup>

This also influenced Margaret Thatcher's thinking after the end of the war, the more so as almost a quarter of the voters in her later constituency in the London district of Finchley were of Jewish origin. Many of them had managed to flee Germany during the Nazi period. When Thatcher ran for the parliamentary seat of that constituency, she was repulsed by the openly anti-Semitic policy of the local Conservative Party. Her opposition to these prejudices was certainly influenced by electoral tactics, but Thatcher's personal convictions did not allow her to tolerate anti-Semitic sentiment. She was appalled, for instance, that in 1957 many of the leading lights of the party had agreed with the decision of the Finchley Golf Club to refuse membership to Jews.<sup>16</sup>

After her election to parliament in the general election of October 1959, Thatcher studiously nursed the Jewish vote in her constituency. This continued when her enormous energy and inclination for hard work had helped her eliminate former prime minister Edward Heath as leader of the Conservative Party by means of a party political coup in February 1975. Even when she finally became head of government in 1979, Thatcher never forgot to look after the Jewish vote in her constituency in Finchley. A corollary of this was the new prime minister being very well informed about the situation in the Middle East; she always displayed great understanding for Israel's policies. Disregarding the traditional pro-Arab tendencies of British foreign policy, Thatcher was the first British prime minister to pay Israel an official visit in 1986.<sup>17</sup>

Not surprisingly, throughout the 1980s Prime Minister Thatcher's views on Germany were strongly influenced by the Holocaust and her experiences with her constituency. On top of this was her over-developed patriotism, her profound belief in a close Anglo-American "special relationship," and the important role

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 26–32. See also John Campbell's excellent biography, *Margaret Thatcher, Vol. 1: The Grocer's Daughter* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 38–39, and for her parents' influence on her, see *ibid.*, 16–31, 34ff.

<sup>16</sup> See Thatcher, *Path to Power*, 98–99.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 372–80; Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 509–12.

which in her view Britain continued to play on the world scene. Thatcher's convictions regarding the European integration process further fuelled her mistrust of the Germans, who seemed determined to build a federal European super-state. Only close economic cooperation between the European states on the basis of a Europe of sovereign nations was considered desirable by Thatcher. In this sense she was a Gaullist. At the same time her deep convictions about the sovereignty of the nation state made her firmly reject a federal European political union in any form that went beyond the idea of an economic Common Market.<sup>18</sup>

While Thatcher's anti-European convictions had always caused speculation and a great deal of concern among the other EC member states, by 1988 her hostility to and frustration with the EC Commission in Brussels had reached new heights.<sup>19</sup> During her speech to the College of Bruges in Belgium on 20 September 1988, Thatcher made no secret of her sentiments. She explained in no uncertain terms that her government had "not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them re-imposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels."<sup>20</sup> She lectured her pro-European audience that "the best way to build a successful European Community" consisted of "willing and active co-operation between independent sovereign states." Thatcher emphasized that Europe must look outward to the Atlantic Community. The prime minister did not hesitate to admonish her listeners to "let Europe be a family of nations" and relish "our national identity no less than our common European endeavour."

It was the North Atlantic alliance that represented Thatcher's ideal international organization. She tended to heap praise on NATO as, after all, NATO did not rest on a supranational foundation as did the EC. And instead of irritating Washington with competing trade and economic policies, the Alliance bound the United States to Europe in matters of security policy. Not surprisingly, in the UK the EC was regarded as of much lesser importance than the Atlantic alliance. Ever since Britain had joined the EEC in 1973, the country had nourished feelings of marginalization within the European Community. This did not help to create closer bonds with the other EC member states. During the 1980s Britain remained

<sup>18</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, chapters 24–25.

<sup>19</sup> Percy Cradock, Thatcher's loyal foreign affairs advisor, differentiates persuasively between three stages in her anti-Europeanism: between 1979 and 1984 her relations with Brussels were poor and dominated by her battles over the Community budget and a British rebate; the second much more positive stage lasted from 1984 to 1987, when Thatcher supported both the completion of the Single Market and the Single European Act; the third particularly dark phase covered her last three years in office (1988–90) when she strongly opposed the Delors' report on monetary union and when there existed severe differences of view about Europe in Thatcher's Cabinet and government. See Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, 125. See also Sharp, *Thatcher's Diplomacy*, 141ff., 160ff.

<sup>20</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 744–45. For the full text of the speech, see <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332> (accessed 3 June 2013).

an “awkward partner” within the EC. By contrast, within NATO Britain was able to play a superior role due to its nuclear status and its close cooperation with the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Fundamentally, Thatcher followed a Churchillian foreign policy which clung to the old concept of the necessity of a balance of power between the European great powers. A sub-heading introducing a brief but important section of her memoirs is entitled “The German Problem and the Balance of Power.”<sup>22</sup> Thatcher’s foreign policy was always greatly focused on continuing the old friendship with the United States, not least as she got on very well with US president Ronald Reagan. Thatcher and Reagan shared a common conservative outlook on the world’s major problems and a deep and profound anti-communism. They both also greatly believed in the desirability of unrestricted free enterprise and the substantial reduction of government interference in a country’s economic and social policies. The two politicians, and their spouses, managed to develop a genuine personal friendship.<sup>23</sup> This occurred despite the fact that this highly intelligent and dynamic prime minister was confronted with a president whose, in Roy Jenkins’ words, “grasp of his marbles sometimes seems precarious.”<sup>24</sup> Yet, as French president Mitterrand is said to have noted, “Mrs. Thatcher, who can be so tough when she talks to her European partners, is like a little girl of eight years old when she talks to the president of the United States. You have to cock your ear to hear, she’s really touching.”<sup>25</sup>

The close relations with Reagan survived a number of serious political disputes. For instance Thatcher was not impressed when the Reagan administration initially withheld support for Britain’s position in the 1982 Falklands conflict. Eventually, however, the United States strongly supported Thatcher’s war.<sup>26</sup> Reagan’s unilateral disarmament deals with Gorbachev, which occurred without much consultation with the Europeans, also alarmed her a great deal. After all, the Americans hardly even bothered to consult Europe’s two nuclear powers, Britain and France. Thatcher feared a bilateral deal between the superpowers and the gradual withdrawal of America’s security umbrella from Europe. She always remained deeply convinced that the cultivation of bilateral links with the United

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<sup>21</sup> See for example Stephen George, *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Larres with Meehan, eds., *Uneasy Allies*.

<sup>22</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 790.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Nicholas Wapshott, *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher: a political marriage* (New York: Sentinel, 1997); Geoffrey Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher* (London: Bodley Head, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion*, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>26</sup> See Richard Thornton, *Falklands Sting: Reagan, Thatcher, and Argentina’s bomb* (Washington, D.C. and London: Brassey’s, 1998); Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *The Signals of war: the Falklands conflict of 1982* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990).

States was of crucial importance for the successful conduct of Britain's foreign policy. "We must never again," she proclaimed after having studied the disastrous Suez Crisis of 1956, "find ourselves on the opposite side to the United States in a major international crisis affecting Britain's interests."<sup>27</sup>

She was not amused, therefore, when during a visit to Mainz in late May 1989, new President George H.W. Bush, Reagan's successor, referred to the West Germans as "partners in leadership." This smacked of a downgrading of Britain's jealously guarded "special relationship" with the United States, not least as previously Bush appears to have indicated to her that her influence in the White House might be less than under his predecessor.<sup>28</sup> This did not go down well. Percy Cradock, Thatcher's foreign policy advisor, is quite correct when he observes that Anglo-American relations under President Bush "remained very close." However, "some of the special intimacy was lost and British influence declined from its high point. The principal factors were reduced East-West tension, the growing importance of Germany and the Bush Administration's interest in European integration."<sup>29</sup> After all, at this point in time Anglo-German relations were strained. The brewing dispute over the modernization of short-range nuclear missiles in Europe (SNF) had put the British and German leaders in opposing camps. True to form as Europe's last cold warrior, Thatcher favored the modernization of these so-called tactical nuclear missiles despite the internal and foreign policy consequences of Gorbachev's reform policies and the rapidly changing nature of the East-West conflict, which could already be discerned.<sup>30</sup>

The West German government led by Christian Democrat chancellor Helmut Kohl believed that the modernization of these expensive weapon systems, which directly targeted German territory, would waste resources and, above all, would pull the rug from under Gorbachev's reform policies and give out the wrong signals. Kohl also had to take the strong anti-militaristic feelings of German public opinion and the country's large peace movement into account (which unbeknown to the West, received significant financial support from the East). Bonn favored NATO negotiations with the Soviets, above all, perhaps, to make the modernization of these weapons systems unnecessary. In contrast, London dismissively talked about the West Germans as having been seduced by Gorbachev's charm offensive. Thatcher believed she had to toughen up the Kohl government. Chancellor Kohl, she feared, might well give in to the pressure coming from both "an always instinctively neutralist German public opinion" and "Gorbymania," the German public's enthusiasm for the reform and disarmament policies of the

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, 53.

<sup>28</sup> See Herbert S. Parmet, *George Bush: The Life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 389–90; see also Michael Mandelbaum, "The Bush Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990): 5–22, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, 201.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Michael J. Turner, *Britain's International Role, 1970–1991* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 128–30; Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 771–2, 784–9.



dynamic Soviet leader.<sup>31</sup> And indeed Gorbachev's 1989 visit to the Federal Republic was a huge success; wherever he went he was enthusiastically received, almost like a rock star.<sup>32</sup> Thatcher's anti-communist position in the SNF matter was curious, since she usually went out of her way to support Gorbachev. In fact, she was greatly afraid that pushing for German reunification would undermine Gorbachev's position in the USSR and lead to his downfall, which in turn would de-stabilize East-West relations. And for Thatcher international order and stability took precedence over the introduction of democracy and, certainly, the establishment of German unity. Moreover, Thatcher felt rather possessive about Gorbachev and believed she had "discovered" him (if not "invented" him), since she had asked him to visit London before he had even become secretary general.<sup>33</sup>

During Thatcher's visit to Deidesheim in late April 1989, Kohl's hometown, the two of them discussed the SNF matter for two hours. But soon, "behind the stage-managed friendliness" of the meeting, their talks "became quite heated" and "acrimonious."<sup>34</sup> At an Anglo-German summit in Frankfurt a short while later, the tone was even worse. Kohl got rather "agitated" and "worked up" and shouted that "he did not need any lectures about NATO" from Thatcher.<sup>35</sup> Another few weeks passed before on 19 May Thatcher was forced to realize that the American policy had also shifted. In view of the winding down of the Cold War, the United States, as well as almost all other NATO countries, now favored SNF negotiations, although a "zero option" was to be excluded.<sup>36</sup>

At the next NATO summit in late May 1989 Thatcher was "the odd man out", as she saw it. And indeed, she was essentially the only head of government present who was still arguing very much along traditional Cold War lines as if nothing had happened.<sup>37</sup> She never tired of emphasizing that the West needed to be in a much stronger position and pursue a policy of strength. This meant that re-arming and modernizing were necessary prior to any negotiations with the Soviets.<sup>38</sup> In the course of the summit Thatcher managed with great effort to make SNF negotiations conditional on the implementation of reductions in conventional forces by both military blocs, but she had basically lost the main argument. Negotiations about the short-range nuclear missiles in Europe would be proposed

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<sup>31</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 747.

<sup>32</sup> See Kettenacker, "Britain," 105–6. Gorbachev visited West Germany from 12 to 15 June 1989 and was received with unprecedented popular enthusiasm. See Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990* (Munich: Droemer, 2005), 885ff.; Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 520–22. For a good account, see von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands*, 38ff.

<sup>33</sup> Craddock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, 200–1; see also Paul Sharp, *Thatcher's Diplomacy: The Revival of British Foreign Policy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 214–15.

<sup>34</sup> See Kettenacker, "Britain," 104–05; Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 747, 786.

<sup>35</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 787.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 788–89.

<sup>37</sup> For Kohl's view of the NATO meeting, see Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*, 868ff.

<sup>38</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 788.

to the Kremlin and a “zero” option could no longer be entirely excluded. Thatcher was greatly frustrated. She concluded that “the new American approach was to subordinate clear statements of intention about the alliance’s defense to the political sensibilities of the Germans. I did not think that this boded well.”<sup>39</sup>

The prime minister was not reassured when President Bush told her during his subsequent visit to London that not only the Germans, but “we too were partners in leadership.”<sup>40</sup> It was perfectly understandable that Thatcher was not impressed by this condescending statement, which took no heed of Britain’s much cherished “special relationship” with Washington. This greatly fanned Thatcher’s jealousy of and rivalry with the German leader for the ear of both the Americans and the Soviets. This came on top of all her other suspicions and mistrust.

In his speech in Mainz in May 1989, Bush had also called for the removal of the Iron Curtain and explained that “we seek self-determination for all of Germany and all of Eastern Europe” to create a “Europe whole and free.”<sup>41</sup> More direct references to unification, however, had been removed from the draft of the speech by Brent Scowcroft, the president’s national security advisor and closest political confidant. Scowcroft had not thought it wise for the United States to overtake Chancellor Kohl on the fast lane with references to the German national question.<sup>42</sup>

### **Lack of support for Thatcher’s policies in 1989–90**

Within a few months it became clear that Prime Minister Thatcher’s policy, inspired by her deepest convictions, had failed to maintain the partition of Germany and thereby the Cold War status quo. Essentially, three factors proved decisive in this respect:

1. The lack of support that Thatcher found for her position in the British public opinion and from British parliamentarians.
2. The much more far-sighted policy of the United States, which eventually was also adopted by France and the USSR. This greatly undermined Thatcher’s position.
3. Last but not least, the opposition of her foreign policy experts in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to their prime minister’s policy in the German unification question had a profound impact. However, this opposition was perhaps less pronounced than has been claimed in the years since Thatcher’s downfall.

In the following these three factors will be elaborated upon.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 789.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 799.

<sup>41</sup> See Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 83.

<sup>42</sup> See Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 31, 93.

*British public opinion and the Houses of Parliament*

By and large, public opinion in Britain was in favor of reunification. Despite a widespread mistrust of the Germans in large sectors of the population due to the experiences of the past, many Britons also had a great deal of understanding for the German desire to restore the unity of their nation. Impressed and astounded by the opening of the Wall on 9 November 1989, a full 71 percent of polled Britons supported reunification. In spite of the prime minister's anti-German warnings, on average an impressive 61 percent of the population in the United Kingdom welcomed reunification.<sup>43</sup> Simultaneously, however, almost half of all Britons (predominantly from the older generation) nourished apprehensions regarding the economic potential of a reunified Germany. Many (in fact 53 percent) also feared the return of Fascist tendencies in German politics.<sup>44</sup>

A similar acquiescence to reunification with a simultaneous uneasiness over its consequences for Britain characterized the debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The vast majority of British members of parliament (including a large number of older Members, who had been directly affected by the war) were convinced that a positive change in the political culture had taken place in the Federal Republic in the preceding decades. Most had no doubts about the well-anchored democratic character of the West German system. An impressive majority of MPs also believed that the three Western allies' repeated verbal assurances about their support for German unification during the last forty years should now be honored. Otherwise, Western credibility and friendly relations with the Germans would be put at risk.<sup>45</sup>

The time was long gone that statements such as the one made by British foreign minister Selwyn Lloyd in the context of the June 1953 anti-communist uprising in the GDR were acceptable. "Everyone—Dr Adenauer, the Russians, the Americans, the French and ourselves—feel in our hearts that a divided Germany is safer for the time being. But none of us dare say so openly because of the effect on German public opinion. Therefore we all publicly support a united Germany, each on his own terms."<sup>46</sup> Yet, this had been stated almost forty years previously. And most of those mentioned by Lloyd had changed their minds in the meantime—except No. 10 Downing Street. Here the concerns of yesteryear continued to exist in almost undiluted form.

Whereas there was a major consensus among MPs concerning the necessity to have a unified Germany remain in NATO, an intensification of the European

<sup>43</sup> See for the polls and for a good analysis Klein, "Obstructive or Promoting?," 422.

<sup>44</sup> See Kettenacker, "Britain," 103.

<sup>45</sup> Klein, "Obstructive or Promoting?," 417–21.

<sup>46</sup> Lloyd to Churchill, PM/MS/53/224, 22 June 1953, in UK National Archives, FO371/103 665/C1071/56. See also Klaus Larres, *Churchill's Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), 177–80.

integration process was rejected. Only a small minority of British members of parliament were convinced that the expected huge economic strength of the new Germany could be neutralized by integrating the Germans even more closely into the European Community.<sup>47</sup>

Together with a reunified Germany remaining in NATO, which Thatcher strongly supported, the deepening of European integration by means of monetary union was precisely the instrument, however, that was seen as the solution in the West to make the re-creation of a united Germany acceptable. Both US president George H.W. Bush and French president Mitterrand supported this. In fact the idea had originated in France. West German chancellor Helmut Kohl was also in favor. This way, he believed, the danger of any potential destabilization of the postwar European order by German reunification would be removed and Germany's neighbors would be greatly reassured. In principle, the European Monetary Union had already been agreed upon in June 1989 during the EC summit meeting in Madrid, but not much had happened since to realize this lofty goal apart from the plan to convene an intergovernmental conference some time in 1990.<sup>48</sup> The dramatic developments in the second half of 1989 gave the EMU new impetus. The construction of a united Europe, including monetary union, was, according to EC Commission president Jacques Delors, a Frenchman, "the only satisfactory and acceptable response to the German question."<sup>49</sup>

### *Accepting German unification: The US, France, and the Soviet Union*

In the late 1980s, in the context of Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union, a number of position papers were written in Western capitals about the German Question and West Germany's role within Western politics. Still, unification was only referred to in rather cautious and hypothetical terms, although the de-stabilizing developments in the GDR were watched carefully and not without concern.<sup>50</sup>

### The beginning of the end for the GDR

The first hole in the Iron Curtain appeared on 2 May 1989 when in the context of its "preemptive course from above,"<sup>51</sup> Hungary began to dismantle its frontier fences with Austria, without however opening the border. Fuelled by a

<sup>47</sup> Klein, "Obstructive or Promoting?," 420–21, 432.

<sup>48</sup> See Michael J. Baun, "The Maastricht Treaty as High Politics: Germany, France and European Integration," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (Winter 1995-96), especially 608ff.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 609.

<sup>50</sup> See *DBPO*, xi–xii; also Salmon, "The UK and German Unification," 180–81.

<sup>51</sup> See Timothy Garton Ash. *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), 344.

great deal of anger about the manipulation of the local elections in the GDR on 7 May 1989 and the GDR government's public support for China's bloody crushing of the Tiananmen Square protests in June, public discontent about the poor and restrictive living conditions in East Germany became ever greater. Furthermore, during his visit to West Germany in June 1989, even Gorbachev had said in a speech "that it was the right of all peoples and states to determine freely their destiny" and that every state was fully entitled "to choose freely its own political and social system as well as unqualified adherence to the norms and principles of international law, especially respect for the right of peoples self-determination."<sup>52</sup> The Brezhnev Doctrine seemed to have been buried for good. Gorbachev had also hinted at the possibility of holding free elections in East Germany and dismantling the Wall if the circumstances that had created it were to disappear.<sup>53</sup>

It was in August 1989 that events spiraled out of control for the old men who ruled the GDR. In early August the massive Monday demonstrations in Leipzig began. In late August a new Social Democratic Party was founded, and soon the civil rights groups "New Forum" and "Democracy Now" were set up. While many of the regular Monday protesters still hoped that the GDR would embark on a more reform-oriented course and could be stabilized again, an even greater number had given up and only desired to leave the GDR as quickly as possible. An increasing number of young people travelled to Hungary to camp near the border with Austria or began occupying the West German embassy in Budapest. Soon thousands of East Germans were refusing to leave the West German embassies in Prague and Warsaw.

On 19 August Hungary allowed 600 East Germans to cross the border into Austria in the course of what was termed the "pan-European picnic." Soon their place was taken by newly arrived young East Germans. Hungary clearly did not want to use force to honor the 1969 trade agreement with the GDR, which obliged Budapest to return refugees to the East German government. After a secret visit of the prime minister and foreign minister of Hungary to Bonn on 25 August, the Hungarian government opened the border to Austria. An East German delegation that had tried to negotiate with the East Germans was thrown out of the camp. The Kohl government offered substantial financial and economic aid to Hungary and from 11 September 1989, all East Germans camping at the Hungarian-Austrian border were allowed to travel to the West. Within three days, 15,000 East Germans had gone to West Germany. By the end of the month, 7,000 young East Germans were occupying the West German embassy in Prague and also clamoring to go West.

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Klaus Larres, "Germany in 1989: the Development of a Revolution," in idem, ed., *Germany since Unification: The Development of the Berlin Republic*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 33–59, 45.

<sup>53</sup> See *ibid.* 45–46. The following account is based on this article, 41ff.

Eventually West German foreign minister Genscher succeeded in negotiating a deal with the GDR authorities. Erich Honecker, the East German leader, wished to avoid any further embarrassment before the GDR's fortieth anniversary celebrations between 6 and 8 October. Honecker expected the visits of a great number of communist party leaders and heads of government, including Gorbachev. Honecker was suffering from cancer (though this wasn't admitted) and had only returned to work on 25 September, after an absence of some two months; the old and weakened leader was clearly unprepared for what awaited him in his country, which seemed to have changed radically overnight.

The East Germans were promised exit visas for West Germany, although the GDR government insisted on the face-saving device that the trains had to cross GDR territory to enable East Berlin to give the emigrants documents that released them from their GDR citizenship. Soon the embassy in Prague was again filled to capacity with East Germans. And once again Genscher negotiated the same solution as before. But this time the procedure turned into a debacle. Hundreds of people tried to jump onto the trains and join the emigrants when the trains passed through. On 4 October more than 3,000 people waited for the passing train at the railway station in Dresden with the desire to jump onto the train. Fierce battles with the police ensued. Throughout the GDR's anniversary celebrations a few days later, the protests continued, leading to pitched battles with the police.

During his visit to East Berlin Gorbachev was distinctly cool to Honecker, indicating indirectly that the latter's time in power was coming to an end. This further encouraged the demonstrators in East Berlin and other East German cities. During the mass demonstrations in Leipzig on 9 October, which brought more than 70,000 people to the streets, the state did not intervene to end the protest as had been expected, although an overwhelming police force had been assembled. The passivity of the state encouraged further mass demonstrations. Faced with widespread civil unrest, just over a week later, on 18 October 1989, Honecker was forced to resign all his leadership positions by his Politburo colleagues. He was replaced as secretary general of the SED Central Committee by Egon Krenz, his heir apparent. Krenz, however, was generally regarded as an orthodox, weak and opportunistic politician. He was a poor choice. Another mass protest took place on 4 November. Five days later, on 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall was unexpectedly opened. It was an event that changed world history and sounded the death knell for both the GDR and soon also the Soviet Union itself.

On 18 November, just over a week after the opening of the Wall, a new coalition government led by Politburo member Hans Modrow took over the reigns of power in East Berlin. Modrow was generally regarded as a reform-minded and more flexible communist. He did not hesitate to refer to his interest in talks about a "union by treaty" with West Germany. Throughout November and December he propagated a simple confederation of the two German states and the continuation of a separate East German government. This was also the hope secretly entertained by

the British prime minister and the French president. On 7 December 1989 Egon Krenz, the last head of state of the GDR and SED party leader, resigned his positions. He was succeeded de facto by Prime Minister Hans Modrow who remained in charge of the GDR government until the first and last democratic elections in the GDR on 18 March 1990. Election day had been put forward from May in view of the economic collapse and the huge number of people leaving the GDR. However, already by the time of Krenz's resignation in early December 1989 the course toward Germany unity had been set in motion, perhaps irreversibly so.<sup>54</sup>

### The Four Powers

In the course of September and October 1989, in the face of the increasing disintegration of the East German state, German unity had become an ever more distinct possibility. Western politicians, however, were careful not to approach the issue too openly or too directly. West German politicians also held back. Still, all three Western allies made positive albeit cautious and vague references about their support for reunification. The US government approached the issue carefully by means of a speech by Secretary of State James Baker on 16 October. Acting on the advice of Brent Scowcroft, Baker referred to "reconciliation" rather than "reunification."<sup>55</sup> This was interpreted as American backtracking by the media. Press reports also claimed that some Western countries were fearful about the likely emergence of a reunited and possibly neutralist Germany. A week later, on 24 October, President George H.W. Bush gave an interview to the *New York Times* in which he attempted to squash any rumors about US doubts regarding German reliability.<sup>56</sup> "I don't share the concern that some European countries have about a reunified Germany," he said. He was firmly convinced that "Germany's commitment to and recognition of the Alliance is unshakeable."<sup>57</sup> "With this interview," Zelikow and Rice write persuasively, "Bush showed sympathy for European concerns. But by taking the high road and reiterating support for German aspirations, he made it very difficult politically for any Western European leaders to give public voice to their private doubts and fears."<sup>58</sup>

Already on 20 September 1989 during a visit to Bonn, new British foreign secretary John Major, who had only been in office since July, had also made a somewhat positive though vague remark with regard to the evolving situation in the GDR. He reiterated the position which the UK had held for the previous thirty years about the desirability of German self-determination. Major added, however,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 93.

<sup>56</sup> See *DBPO*, xv.

<sup>57</sup> Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 94.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

“that there is likely to be some way to go before reunification can become a practical proposition.”<sup>59</sup> This was a rather diplomatic way of expressing Britain’s lack of enthusiasm about the developments in Germany. In the following weeks there were no major additional British announcements regarding the rapidly developing situation in the GDR. By late October and early November “Britain’s official silence on the subject was becoming conspicuous,” as the editors of the British volume of foreign-policy documents put it.<sup>60</sup>

In fact only three days after John Major’s speech, Prime Minister Thatcher had made her position crystal clear, albeit in private. During a visit to Moscow on 23 September 1989 she asked Gorbachev to stop the tape recorders and the note takers from recording what she had to tell him. “We are very concerned about the processes taking place in Eastern Germany,” she began. She soon came to the crux of the problem.

The reunification of Germany is not in the interests of Britain and Western Europe. It might look different from public pronouncements, in official communiqué at NATO meetings, but it is not worth paying one’s attention to it. We do not want a united Germany. This would have led to a change to postwar borders and we can not allow that because such development would undermine the stability of the whole international situation and could endanger our security. In the same way, a destabilisation of Eastern Europe and breakdown of the Warsaw Pact are also not in our interests.”<sup>61</sup>

Margaret Thatcher sounded just like Selwyn Lloyd in 1953. At about the same time, one of Gorbachev’s closest advisors and speechwriters, Vadim Zagladin,<sup>62</sup> was traveling in France and met with many French politicians, including President Mitterrand and his confidant Jacques Attali. “They all say in unison,” he reported back to Moscow, that “nobody wants a unified Germany.” Attali even “brought up the possibility of restoring a serious Soviet-French alliance, including military ‘integration,’ but camouflaged as a joint use of armies to fight natural disasters.”<sup>63</sup> According to Zagladin, Attali was horrified at the thought of German unification and said at one point that he would go and live on Mars if unification occurred.<sup>64</sup>

Gorbachev, however, seems to have been under no illusion regarding what the two Western leaders wanted him to do. As they could not speak out publicly against

<sup>59</sup> Mallaby (Bonn) to Major (London), 21 September 1989, in *DBPO*, 33.

<sup>60</sup> See *DBPO*, xv.

<sup>61</sup> Transcript produced from memory by Soviet note taker Anatoly Chernyaev of a conversation between Gorbachev and Thatcher, 23 September 1989. Published in *Times Online*, 10 September 2009, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6829735.ece> (accessed 3 June 2013).

<sup>62</sup> For a brief biographical sketch, see “Gorbachev’s aide Zagladin: when word is mightier than deed,” *RIANOVOSTI*, 22 November 2006, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20061122/55896229.html> (accessed 3 June 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 94.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* For Jacques Attali’s views see also *idem*, *Verbatim, Tome 3: Chronique des années 1988–1991* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), especially 237ff.



long-established NATO policy, it appeared to him that Thatcher and Mitterrand were attempting to maneuver Moscow into vetoing German unification or perhaps even to putting a stop to the destabilizing developments in East Germany by deploying Russian tanks.<sup>65</sup> To some extent this is confirmed by Helmut Kohl's memoirs, although at the time, he explains, he was not fully aware of the fact that the French and British leaders were hopeful that "Gorbachev would do the job for them." Mitterrand and Thatcher were convinced that "Gorbachev would never accept a reunited Germany as a member of NATO," Kohl writes.<sup>66</sup>

Decision time, however, came ever closer with the increasing strength of the protest movement in East Germany and the accelerating disintegration of the GDR. The continuing mass demonstrations on the streets of East Germany and, not least, an initiative by the West German chancellor proved to be decisive.

On 28 November 1989, in a speech to the Bundestag, Chancellor Kohl presented a cautious Ten-Point blueprint for German unification, much of which he had drawn up himself. Neither the Western allies nor even his own foreign minister had been consulted. The US government had only received a copy of Kohl's speech shortly before it was given and the US president had not yet read it. Paris, London, and Gorbachev had not received any advance notice and were less than pleased.<sup>67</sup> In the speech the chancellor expressed his view that "unity will come." While in his fifth point he referred to the possible creation of confederate structures between the two German states, he declined to mention a timeframe. Instead he said cautiously that "nobody knows how a reunified Germany will look."<sup>68</sup> Despite the guarded and carefully calibrated sentences, which did not refer explicitly to outright reunification, following Kohl's speech reunification was very much on the international agenda. No longer did it make sense for Western politicians to avoid talking about the issue and to refer to it only in an indirect and cryptic way.<sup>69</sup>

As for the United States, President Bush and most of his advisors recognized by early December 1989 that the course of events set in motion in the summer and fall of that year by the widespread protests of the East German population would unavoidably lead to German reunification. Instead of resisting this almost certain development and thereby antagonize the Germans without being in any

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<sup>65</sup> Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 94. For the hope that Gorbachev would issue a veto, see Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 792.

<sup>66</sup> Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*, 956. See also Rödder, *Deutschland einig Vaterland*, 160, 162; Horst Teltschik, *329 Tage. Innenansichten der Einheit* (Berlin: Siedler, 1991), 59–60. Whether Gorbachev in turn relied on Thatcher and Mitterrand since he thought that they would refuse his agreement to reunification, as claimed by Rödder, 162, is however doubtful.

<sup>67</sup> See von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands*, 122ff, 136ff; this is also confirmed in the various memoirs of the major participants.

<sup>68</sup> For the speech see for example Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944–1993* (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1994), 86–89.

<sup>69</sup> For a good analysis of Bonn's policy towards the GDR (and to some extent toward the four allies), see Markus Driftmann, *Die Bonner Deutschlandpolitik 1989/90* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

way able to alter the result, Bush decided to gracefully bow to the inevitable. Already during a meeting with Thatcher at Camp David on 24 November, that is, before Kohl's speech, he remained unconvinced by the prime minister's arguments that the West ought to do all it could to maintain the Cold War status quo to shore up Gorbachev's ever more precarious domestic position in the Soviet Union. At this stage Bush's national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, however, still displayed a certain amount of sympathy for Thatcher's point of view.<sup>70</sup>

A day after Kohl's speech, on 29 November, Secretary of State Baker proposed four principles that should guide the international dimension of German unification: self-determination for the Germans; an orderly evolutionary process; the inviolability of the European borders; and lastly and perhaps most importantly the continued membership of a united Germany in both NATO and the EC.<sup>71</sup> Bush repeated these four principles at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels on 4 December 1989.<sup>72</sup> The United States thus made clear its firm intention to support German unification if these conditions were met. Thatcher concluded in exasperation that "there was nothing I could expect from the Americans as regards slowing down German reunification."<sup>73</sup>

It was obvious: by late November 1989 the Bush administration had clearly made up its mind to support German unification. Although Secretary of State Baker advised Kohl on 12 December to be a little more careful when dealing with the Soviets, the British, and the French,<sup>74</sup> for Washington the ultimate outcome of the developments in the East that had started in the summer of 1989 were no longer in doubt. Already by mid-February 1990 this had led to the development of the Two Plus Four framework, as agreed by Western leaders at the Ottawa Open Skies conference, for negotiating the precise nature of German unification between the four World War II victors and the two German states.<sup>75</sup>

In the course of January 1990 the United States was joined in their pro-reunification policy by French President Mitterrand. Initially Mitterrand had attempted to prop up the GDR by, for instance, paying the disintegrating state an official state visit on 20 December and by expressing his interest in coordinated joint

<sup>70</sup> DBPO, xvi.

<sup>71</sup> See Rödter, *Deutschland einig Vaterland*, 150.

<sup>72</sup> DBPO, xvi.

<sup>73</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 795–96. For the United States and German unification, see above all the book by Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*; but also Robert D. Blackwill, "Deutsche Vereinigung und amerikanische Diplomatie," *Außenpolitik* 45, no. 3 (1994): 211–225; Robert L. Hutchins, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War. An Insider's Account of U.S. Policy in Europe, 1989–1992* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1997); Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*; James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: Putnam, 1995); Wulf Schmiese, *Fremde Freunde: Deutschland und die USA zwischen Mauerfall und Golfkrieg* (Paderborn: Schoenigh, 2000).

<sup>74</sup> Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 209, 215.

<sup>75</sup> See Reinhard Müller, *Der 2+4-Vertrag und das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Völker* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997).

Anglo-French attempts at preventing or at least delaying German unification.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, on 4 January 1990 Kohl and Mitterrand met at the French president's country residence in the Gascony and Mitterrand told him that "if the Germans want unity, the French know they cannot prevent it."<sup>77</sup> In his memoirs Kohl even writes that already during the Franco-German summit on 2 and 3 November 1989 (and thus before the fall of the Wall) Mitterrand referred to the necessity of further deepening the integration of the European continent and "in the course of our conversation François Mitterrand explicitly gave the green light for German unification, although during the next period he would pronounce a number of skeptical assessments."<sup>78</sup> Kohl continues by writing that "unfortunately he had been forced to conclude since then that Mitterrand pursued a game of deception" in the weeks after the bilateral Franco-German summit conference.

The French president had clearly recognized that in all likelihood reunification could not be prevented (and he thus emphasized the need to embed Germany even more firmly than hitherto in European structures). The NATO allies, he realized, were also bound by their many pro-reunification declarations over the previous forty years. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to commend the GDR, express his strong respect for Gorbachev, and secretly hope that Gorbachev would resolve the West's reunification dilemma. He was realistic enough, however, to recognize that a formal anti-reunification entente with the British as desired by Downing Street would be counterproductive. During the EC summit conference on 8 and 9 December in Strasbourg, Mitterrand and Thatcher met twice to consider a new entente between France, Britain, and perhaps even the Soviet Union.<sup>79</sup> Yet Paris soon grasped how unrealistic it was to attempt going back to the alliance system of the years 1913 and 1938. It might also well have lasting negative consequences, it was reasoned in the Élysée Palace, if reunification did in fact occur after all, as was increasingly likely. In a meeting with Prime Minister Thatcher on 20 January in Paris, Mitterrand told her extremely frankly that while both London and Paris might not like German reunification, they could do little to stop it. And if this were the case, they should remain silent and not attempt vainly to derail the process and its inevitable outcome.<sup>80</sup> Although this did not stop him to con-

<sup>76</sup> See Frederic Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War and German Unification* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 139–43; also Tilo Schabert, *Wie Weltgeschichte gemacht wird: Frankreich und die deutsche Einheit* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002).

<sup>77</sup> *DBPO*, xix, n.31. For the West German memorandum on the conversation, see "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand, Latche, 4. Januar 1990," in *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik. Deutsche Einheit*, 682–90.

<sup>78</sup> Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*, 956.

<sup>79</sup> Powell (Strasbourg) to Wall (FCO), 8 Dec. 1989, in *DBPO*, 162–66; see also Rödder, *Deutschland einig Vaterland*, 157.

<sup>80</sup> *DBPO*, xviii–xix. For the memorandum of the conversation, see Powell (London) to Wall (London), 20 Jan. 1990, *ibid.*, 215–19. See also Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War and German Unification*, 168–70.

tinue making skeptical remarks, by mid-January 1990 Mitterrand had reluctantly accepted the inevitability of German reunification.

Thatcher, however, was not impressed. She had intended to put “some specific proposals” to Mitterrand “on how Britain and France could work together more closely.” Prior to her meeting with the French president she had admonished her Foreign Office “to work out our own ideas in rather more detail” regarding German reunification. She had explained that “we should not simply regard this as inevitable and wait for events to overtake us.” Not least, she outlined, the Foreign Office “had to think through the consequences for Gorbachev: we did not want to lose the greater good of seeing his reforms succeed throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in order to satisfy a German wish for faster progress with reunification.”<sup>81</sup>

But this was all academic once Mitterrand had made it clear that Franco-British cooperation to derail reunification was out of the question. Thatcher was furious when she recognized to her great dismay that Mitterrand had resigned himself to putting up with reunification in favor of attempting to move “ahead faster towards a federal Europe in order to tie down the German giant.”<sup>82</sup> This was indeed Mitterrand’s objective as he had already explained to Gorbachev in early December 1989.<sup>83</sup> For him the German Question clearly needed to be transformed into a European question (and monetary union) before its resolution would be acceptable.

The Europeanization of the German Question, of course, ran counter to Thatcher’s ideas. While the prime minister was strongly opposed to reunification, she nevertheless did not develop much of a coherent strategy to either prevent it or embed it into structures which would make a unified and enlarged Germany acceptable. Mitterrand, by contrast, was the only opponent to reunification who did develop a convincing strategic structure that looked well into the future.<sup>84</sup> “Europe will be your revenge,” former West German chancellor Adenauer had told the severely shocked French prime minister after the British had suddenly halted the invasion of Egypt and the Suez canal in November of 1956. Adenauer may well have been right.<sup>85</sup>

As far as the USSR was concerned, Gorbachev also seemed to be quite relaxed about the possibility of German unification and the disappearance of the GDR as an independent state.<sup>86</sup> During a meeting with Bush on a ship off the coast of Malta on 2 and 3 December 1989, the two leaders formally declared the Cold War over. Yet during the subsequent weeks and months, Gorbachev appeared to retreat to a much more hard-line position regarding German unification.<sup>87</sup> The

<sup>81</sup> Powell (No.10) to Wall (FCO), 10 Jan. 1990, in *DBPO*, 199–200.

<sup>82</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 798.

<sup>83</sup> See Rödder, *Deutschland einig Vaterland*, 161.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> See Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, 134.

<sup>86</sup> Rödder, *Deutschland einig Vaterland*, 151–52.

<sup>87</sup> For Gorbachev’s policy, see also Ekkehard Kuhn, *Gorbatschow und die deutsche Einheit. Aussagen der wichtigsten russischen und deutschen Beteiligten* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1993) and

more the GDR began to disintegrate, not least after the free East German elections on 18 March 1990 which brought a conservative-led coalition government under Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière to power in the GDR, and the more desperate the economic and financial woes of the Soviet Union grew, the higher Gorbachev's price became. The Soviet leader also needed to pay more attention to his domestic audience. An increasing number of communist hard-liners viewed Gorbachev's policies in a very critical light and were strongly opposed to giving up the spoils of war gained by having defeated Hitler. They were appalled at the idea of rescinding the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe by abandoning the GDR and allowing the creation of a reunified Germany. In the end this would lead to the failed August 1991 coup against Gorbachev.<sup>88</sup>

Privately Gorbachev seems to have made up his mind as early as January 1990 that German unification was unavoidable. On 30 January 1990, at a press conference with visiting GDR Prime Minister Modrow, Gorbachev's statement recognized, in the words of the British Foreign Office, "that unification will take place."<sup>89</sup> On 10 February 1990 Gorbachev told visiting Chancellor Kohl in Moscow that he believed it was for the Germans in East and West to decide whether or not they wished to reunite. The Soviet Union would certainly respect their decision; it was up to the Germans themselves to select the timing and method for achieving it. Gorbachev, however, envisaged a united Germany to remain outside the two military blocs and to be equipped with only national forces for self-defense purposes.<sup>90</sup> Despite Gorbachev's reservations, in principle he had agreed to German unification. In the next few weeks Bonn would deliver to the Soviet Union meat and other foodstuff, clothes and many household goods worth more than 220 million deutsche mark. On the flight back from Moscow to Bonn, Kohl and his entourage opened champagne bottles. In his memoirs he used the subtitle "breakthrough" for the section about his visit to Moscow.<sup>91</sup>

Still, during the next few months Gorbachev stalled. In particular he wished to resolve the NATO question. But in the end, on 30 May 1990, during a visit to Washington, Gorbachev agreed with Bush that Germany had the right to decide which alliance it wished to join. The choices obviously included NATO.<sup>92</sup> There

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the chapter by Wolfgang Mueller, "The USSR and the Reunification of Germany," in this volume, 321–53.

<sup>88</sup> See Michael Gorbachev, *The August Coup: Three Days that Shook the World* (London: Harper-Collins, 1991).

<sup>89</sup> Powell (No.10) to Wall (FCO), 31 Jan. 1990, in *DBPO*, 233.

<sup>90</sup> Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*, 1066–68. See also von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands*, 252–79.

<sup>91</sup> Kohl, *ibid.*, 1069–70, 1062.

<sup>92</sup> Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 271–86. For good accounts on Soviet policy, see Gerhard Wettig, "Moscow's Acceptance of NATO: The Catalytic Role of German Unification," *Europe–Asia Studies* 45, no. 6 (1993): 953–72; Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998).

remained another issue however: Gorbachev wished to obtain as much financial aid as possible in return for agreeing to German unification. Negotiations with the West Germans had commenced in early May but, once again, the Soviets stalled since they wished to drive up the price. The final agreement was reached during a bilateral meeting between Gorbachev and Kohl in the Caucasus, at Gorbachev's dacha, in mid-July 1990. Kohl and Gorbachev agreed on a sum of 12 billion deutsche mark in addition to the food aid, financing of homes, and a vocational retraining program for returning Soviet soldiers that the Germans had already promised to Moscow.<sup>93</sup> After the Caucasus meeting, the Soviet Union no longer stood in the way of giving its agreement to German reunification, including the membership of a reunited Germany in NATO. The Two Plus Four treaty was signed on 12 September 1990 in Moscow, and on 3 October the GDR joined West Germany under Article 23 of the West German Basic Law.

Initially, therefore, it had been the United States that had taken the calculated decision to support the German reunification process. For both ideological and strategic political reasons, President Bush was convinced that this was the right policy to embark upon. Mitterrand and Gorbachev, as well as political leaders from countries like Poland, Italy and the Netherlands (as well as Israel), first had to overcome their deep reservations to this development before they were ready to join the United States.

For Thatcher, however, it was impossible to put her private suspicions aside. It did not help that she and Helmut Kohl never developed close personal relations. In fact, Thatcher and Kohl greatly disliked each other. Even when talking to the US president, the German chancellor tended to refer to the British prime minister as "that woman" and Bush was "uncomfortable" with Thatcher's constant "dismissive references" to Kohl and also, in particular, to Foreign Minister Genscher.<sup>94</sup> In her memoirs Thatcher attests to the difficulties between herself and Kohl when she writes somewhat insincerely that "in fact, we did not get on at all badly."<sup>95</sup>

More importantly, throughout 1989–90 the prime minister's thinking remained rigid and visionless. Her mind was imprisoned within a rather inflexible framework of thought that was strongly influenced by both the Second World War, including the Holocaust, and Cold War parameters. At the same time, her lack of sympathy for and understanding of the European integration process and her faulty concept of British patriotism, including her longing for past glories of empire and world power, prevented her from consenting to the further development of the EC into a genuine European Union that integrated an enlarged Germany. Even Margaret Thatcher's own foreign policy advisor, Percy Cradock, who was close to her personally, writes in his account of the Thatcher years that the prime minister

<sup>93</sup> See Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1990–94* (Munich: Droemer, 1997), 162–85.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander (NATO) to Wright (FCO), 18 Sep. 1989, in *DBPO*, 31–32.

<sup>95</sup> Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 747; see also Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, 135.

had on the whole a poor view of foreigners, other than Anglo-Saxons, just as she had little time for European traditions or statesmen. This lack of imagination about the other side was a real defect. Too often it meant a one-dimensional policy, the assertion of British claims in a vacuum, with inevitable surprises and rebuffs when the other party failed to fit into our preconceptions. In a world in which we had long lost a dominant role and had increasingly to live by our wits, this was dangerous.<sup>96</sup>

With these entirely different approaches among Western leaders, Bush reaped a renewal of the Germans' deep thankfulness and pro-American attitude for his country. Gorbachev received considerable financial payments and enormous personal admiration, which continued after his retirement (at least in Germany and the Western world, much less so in Russia). Mitterrand's price for French consent to German reunification consisted mainly in the reaffirmation of Kohl's agreement, already obtained in December 1989, to support the realization of European Monetary Union, including the creation of a European currency which Germany would adopt.<sup>97</sup> It was generally believed at the time that this would lead to the end of German monetary domination in Europe.

In contrast, Thatcher clung so long to a negative position, that she then had no option left but to retreat in view of the policy followed by the United States, France and the Soviet Union. This came close to a personal humiliation of the prime minister, since it appeared that she had made a last-minute U-turn. By this stage, moreover, the British prime minister had wasted a great deal of time and profoundly antagonized not only her American ally, but also the Germans and Chancellor Kohl. She therefore was unable to gain anything from her reluctant and belated agreement to German unification. Her ultimate agreement to and acceptance of German reunification evolved within the context of an internal British battle between Downing Street and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about the core of British foreign policy in the German Question.

*Two different foreign policies: Downing Street vs. the Foreign Office?*

It is commonly thought that it was only Thatcher and a very limited number of her loyal supporters, including her private secretary Charles Powell, who were strongly opposed to reunification. The Foreign Office diplomats, it is generally assumed, had a much more enlightened point of view and did their best to persuade the prime minister to give her agreement to German reunification.<sup>98</sup> This is perhaps a somewhat oversimplified version. In fact both the prime minister and many Foreign Office officials viewed German unification skeptically. While

<sup>96</sup> Cradock, *ibid.*, 21–22. See also in a similar vein, Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion*, 100–1.

<sup>97</sup> See Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War and German Unification*, 143–47.

<sup>98</sup> See Salmon, "The United Kingdom and German Unification," 177–90; also Klein, "Obstructive or Promoting?," 409–12.

Thatcher expressed her views bluntly and the officials were more diplomatic, nonetheless initially their point of view was not all that different. On 15 September 1989, for example, deputy ambassador Colin Munro wondered in his dispatch from the British embassy in East Berlin whether “the GDR can be preserved as a separate German state but with Western political, economic and social conditions” or whether or not reunification was “unavoidable.”<sup>99</sup>

In contrast to the prime minister, the British diplomatic officials, however, appear to have had a greater sense of realism. The Foreign Office diplomats realized significantly earlier than the prime minister that resisting German reunification made little sense. In a major Foreign Office draft memorandum on German reunification, dated 11 October 1989, it was argued that Britain, along “with others can exert some influence, [but] we cannot block reunification, if that is indeed the direction in which events lead.”<sup>100</sup> While listing a number of disadvantages for the UK if such a result were to occur, the paper explained that “these aspects should not be exaggerated. They can be largely averted by good management of any evolution towards reunification.” Moreover, “the advantages which could flow from reunification are considerable,” it was argued. It would clearly be a victory for Western values, would improve the West’s security, and would also strengthen the economic potential of the EC. The paper then presciently outlined why reunification was not to be feared but ought to be welcomed:

Much of the FRG’s surplus capital would be absorbed by the infrastructural projects that would be needed to bring the East up to West German standards, putting an end to the FRG’s chronic capital surplus and holding out the prospect of more balanced trade flows in the EC. The UK industry should also benefit from the opportunities offered (the FRG is already our second largest export market).

26. The UK’s best approach, therefore, is not to discourage reunification, but rather to exert influence over the speed and timing of any moves in that direction. Close contacts with the Germans at all levels, including the highest, will be a crucial element in this process. They will be particularly important if events in the GDR take a dramatic turn.<sup>101</sup>

However, the public utterances by the prime minister and her well-known private reservations about reunification soon put Britain in the unenviable position of being regarded once again as the “odd one out” among the Western allies. Still, in early November a good number of Foreign Office officials continued to hold the view that “our line on the German Question should be to stress the importance of self-determination and go no further.”<sup>102</sup> In the public imagination in Germany and elsewhere in the Western world, British silence regarding the unfolding events in East

<sup>99</sup> Munro (East Berlin) to Ratford (FCO), 15 Sep. 1989, in *DBPO*, 30.

<sup>100</sup> “Draft Paper on German Reunification” (WRL 020/4), 11 Oct. 1989, in *DBPO*, 50. This draft was then considerably revised and toned down. For the final version, dated 25 Oct. 1989, see *ibid.*, 68–78.

<sup>101</sup> “Draft Paper on German Reunification,” 11 Oct. 1989, *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Synott (FCO) to Broomfield (FCO), 3 Nov. 1989, in *DBPO*, 56, note 5.



Germany had convinced many observers in Germany and elsewhere that the British government was at best lukewarm about the possibility of the collapse of the GDR and German unification. The last formal but vague declaration concerning British support for Germany's national aspirations had been Foreign Secretary John Major's circumspect statement during his visit to Bonn on 20 September. But the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November required a response.

Ambassador Christopher Mallaby reported from Bonn that the "absence of any statement by a senior member of HMG" in response to the fall of the Wall, similar to those made by Mitterrand and Bush and Baker, "has been commented on here."<sup>103</sup> He believed that a British statement was highly desirable. Tellingly he emphasized in the memorandum to new Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd that "in our own interests" his statement should not "fall short in two respects: willingness to accept reunification, if that is the way things go, and confidence in the Federal Government to conduct FRG policy in ways which are consonant with Western interests." New Foreign Secretary Hurd, who had only been appointed to this position on 26 October 1989 in the course of a reshuffle of the government, took heed of Mallaby's advice, at least to some extent. In an interview with the BBC World Service on 10 November, Hurd declared that he "would welcome unification based on free institutions." The principle of German unity was not in doubt, he declared, "but the how and when," he said, was "not on the immediate agenda."<sup>104</sup> This was a rather cautious statement. Together with Thatcher's reservations which became increasingly known, Hurd's statement defined the British attitude toward German unification for both the international press and the West German government. After all, Hurd had used almost exactly the same words during a press conference in The Hague on 9 November and then again in a BBC radio interview in Bonn on 15 November.<sup>105</sup>

In the following two months the officials in the British Foreign Office were not only busy with following and analyzing the dramatic, confusing, and constantly changing developments in the GDR, they were also paying attention to the reactions of Gorbachev, Paris, Washington, and not least the Kohl government. They also had the unenviable task of attempting to persuade their own prime minister to adopt a more constructive and positive policy toward German reunification, which appeared to be ever more likely. The Foreign Office became increasingly aware that both the Germans and the American administration saw "our position as being outside the mainstream." A Foreign Office paper written by John Fretwell explained it well:

The impression we create on this arises from the nuances rather than from the basic statement of our position. It is all right to insist on the need for prudence in handling the present dramatic developments in Europe, but we need to convey to the Germans that we too have a positive

<sup>103</sup> Mallaby (Bonn) to Hurd (FCO), 9 Nov. 1989, in *DBPO*, 98.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in *DBPO*, Preface, xv.

<sup>105</sup> See *DBPO*, 190, note 3.

vision of what should emerge at the end of the day and what we are prepared to work for. [...] If we do not start conveying this impression to the Germans soon [...] they will conclude that we are fundamentally hostile to that sort of vision. They will be tempted increasingly to move ahead without us on these fundamental issues of European policy. We could ultimately impose a block, based on our position as one of the four Powers responsible for Germany and Berlin. But we should not count on carrying anyone else with us.<sup>106</sup>

The doubts and skepticism about reunification among the officials of the Foreign Office, including the foreign secretary himself, gradually dissipated or became considerably less pronounced. In particular, ever since Chancellor Kohl's Ten-Point speech on 28 November, Hurd, as indeed most Foreign Office diplomats, had clearly come around to accepting the inevitability of reunification. It was also obvious that this might occur a lot faster than had been predicted until then. The British as well as the other allies were skeptical when Kohl's primary foreign policy advisor Horst Teltschik attempted to tone down the importance of the Ten-Point program by explaining that Kohl's speech was meant "to put German unity at the end of a lengthy process and thus to head off calls for early unity." Britain's ambassador in Bonn, Mallaby, fully recognized that "Kohl's decision to set out a program culminating in unity, without agreement of coalition partners or prior consultation with allies, is a sign of the speed with which the debate is moving." He reported back to London that Kohl's "vision of a lengthy process before unity" was achieved might well be soon overtaken "by other views."<sup>107</sup>

Mallaby regarded Kohl's Ten-Point plan as a "major event" and a "landmark speech." He told the Foreign Office back in London that "reunification in the form of a German federation is now clearly an aim of policy, though without a timescale."<sup>108</sup> Kohl's speech, he wrote, "takes reunification out of the realms of aspiration and makes it the culmination and aim of a staged programme." The ambassador also noted that "it is helpful that Kohl has set no timescales and has linked his programme to wider European developments which will take considerable time."

The prime minister, however, was not amused. She read Mallaby's telegram with a great deal of concern and noted in the margin, "Christopher Mallaby seems to *welcome* reunification," implying that she herself did not.<sup>109</sup> During the NATO summit of heads of government on 4 December 1989, Thatcher did not hesitate to say that reunification ought not to take place for ten to fifteen years. This was immediately "quoted by German commentators as evidence of a negative and mistrustful British attitude," as ambassador Mallaby put it.<sup>110</sup> When at a private luncheon organized by the right of center Centre for Policy Studies on 18 December, Conservative MP David Willets expressed the view that reunification was unstop-

<sup>106</sup> Fretwell (FCO) to Wall (FCO), 29 Nov. 1989, in *DPBO*, 144.

<sup>107</sup> Mallaby (Bonn) to Hurd (FCO), 28 Nov. 1989, in *DBPO*, 138.

<sup>108</sup> Mallaby (Bonn) to Hurd (FCO), 29 Nov. 1989, in *DBPO*, 142–43.

<sup>109</sup> *DBPO*, 143, note 3.

<sup>110</sup> Mallaby (Bonn) to Hurd (FCO), 5 Jan. 1990, in *DBPO*, 190.

pable “the PM threw up her hands in horror: ‘No, not at all,’” she shouted.<sup>111</sup> Time and again she said in the course of the luncheon, “We’ve been through the war and we know perfectly well what the Germans are like [...] and how national character doesn’t basically change.” Thatcher also did not hesitate to express her fairly racist and dogmatic view that “once a German, always a German.” “You can never trust them,” she said.<sup>112</sup> George Urban, one of the participants at the luncheon, later wrote in his memoirs that “if allied governments knew just how narrow-minded, and in many ways xenophobic, MT has become, they would be even more disturbed than they are already.”<sup>113</sup>

There was indeed rising concern about the British standpoint. In early January Mallaby commented in a telegram to Foreign Secretary Hurd that in Germany the UK was “perceived [...] as perhaps the least positive of the three Western Allies, and the least important.” To drive the point home, Mallaby wrote unambiguously that the UK had an image problem which was to a large extent its own fault:

I remain concerned that despite our consistent support for the principle of German unity through self-determination, the UK is perceived here as opposing, or at least wishing to brake, reunification. The French, on the other hand, whose doubts seem if anything stronger than ours, manage to maintain a more positive public image [...] The US are perceived as the most supportive of German aspirations even while laying down conditions for German unity.<sup>114</sup>

Once again Prime Minister Thatcher was not impressed by Mallaby’s analysis. She believed, according to a note drafted by her confidant and private secretary Charles Powell, dated 9 January, that Mallaby “showed a lack of understanding of our policy which she finds alarming. She would like to see any reply before it is sent.”<sup>115</sup>

The rising tension within the government and the increasingly more desperate attempts by the Foreign Office to bring the prime minister to her senses in view of the damage done to Britain’s international standing by Thatcher’s inability to accept German reunification culminated in a seminar at Chequers on 27 January 1990, after the prime minister’s return from her visit to Mitterrand in Paris. Although the editors of the British volume of documents on German reunification write that “there was certainly no point at which Mrs. Thatcher explicitly accepted defeat,”<sup>116</sup> the Chequers seminar on “East-West relations and Germany” was important for persuading the prime minister to change her mind, however reluctantly.<sup>117</sup> Effectively the seminar at the prime minister’s country residence was a brainstorming session, attended by Thatcher and her most important foreign

<sup>111</sup> Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion*, 102.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 104–05.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>114</sup> Mallaby (Bonn) to Hurd (FCO), 5 Jan. 1990, in *DBPO*, 190.

<sup>115</sup> Powell (No. 10) to Wall (FCO), 9 Jan. 1990, in *DBPO*, 195.

<sup>116</sup> *DBPO*, xviii.

<sup>117</sup> For the proposed agenda and items to be covered, see *DBPO*, 180–82, 185–86, 192–94.

policy advisors, both ministers and officials. Thatcher gradually and hesitantly gave her “assent” in principle to the proposition of German unification closely embedded within NATO and further European integration.<sup>118</sup> In late January 1990, however, she still found “the overall picture very worrying” and was wondering whether she should fly to Washington to discuss matters with the US president. She thought that would somehow “convey a good political signal.”<sup>119</sup> Moreover, some of her most strident anti-unification remarks were made in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* on 25 January and on 12 February in the context of a speech to the Young Conservatives at the seaside resort Torquay.<sup>120</sup>

Still, it was on 6 February 1990, in a speech in the House of Commons, that the prime minister expressed the view for the first time that German reunification was on the cards.<sup>121</sup> Although Thatcher was coming round to accepting the inevitable, she did not let go without a rearguard fight. In practice she continued to attempt to delay reunification by, for example, expressing concern about the future of NATO, Kohl’s hesitation to recognize the Western frontier of Poland, and also about the form and substance of the Two-Plus-Four framework. She convened another all-day seminar at Chequers on 24 March 1990. This time she assembled British and American historians to talk about the German character.<sup>122</sup> The seminar became notorious due to the press being leaked a summary of the discussion written by her private secretary Charles Powell which grossly distorted the nature and conclusions of the discussions.<sup>123</sup> “By coincidence or design,” as John Campbell writes, the memorandum was leaked in July, in the same week as the Ridley affair broke.<sup>124</sup>

In the leaked document Powell referred to the unchanged German national character with words like “aggressiveness, assertiveness, bullying, egotism, excessive exaggerations, inferiority complex, self-pity, sentimentality.” The actual talks had been much more positive. Historian Trevor Roper (Lord Dacre), for example, re-

<sup>118</sup> See Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests*, 112; Alan Clark, *Diaries* (1983–1991) (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), 276–77.

<sup>119</sup> Powell (No.10) to Wall (FCO), 31 Jan. 1990, in *DBPO*, 233–34. See also Salmon, “The UK and German Unification,” 184–85.

<sup>120</sup> See for example Salmon, *ibid.*, 185.

<sup>121</sup> See *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates* (H.C. Deb.), Vol.166, 757 (6 Feb. 1990) and 1005–06 (8 Feb. 1990). This is pointed out by Kettenacker. “Britain,” 114 and n. 71. See also Teltschik, *329 Tage*, 134.

<sup>122</sup> Almost all of the participants have published their accounts about this meeting (though Thatcher herself remains silent in her memoirs), but the best, most detailed and most enlightening account can be found in Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion*, 118ff. See also Timothy Garton Ash, “The Chequers Affair,” *New York Review of Books*, 27 Sep. 1990, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1990/sep/27/the-chequers-affair/> (accessed 3 Jun. 2013).

<sup>123</sup> Powell’s leaked memorandum can be found in Jarausch and Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany*, 129–31; and also in Harold James and Maria Stone, eds., *When the Wall Came Down: Reactions to German Unification* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 233–35.

<sup>124</sup> Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher* 1, 635. It has been suspected that the Foreign Office was responsible for leaking the document to discredit Downing Street.

ferred to a “sea-change in German thinking” since World War II.<sup>125</sup> He also wondered why “the government was so horrified now that the original postwar aim of Allied policy was being suddenly achieved. [...] Why our apprehensions? How can we now possibly wish to put off or negate unification? We should rejoice, because we’ve won.”<sup>126</sup> The prime minister, it appeared, “was a little taken aback” by this forceful reasoning.<sup>127</sup> Still, during the seminar Thatcher did not “hide her cordial dislike of all things German [...] aggravated by her distaste for the personality of Helmut Kohl [...] The contrast between herself as a visionary stateswoman with a world-view and Kohl the wurst-eating, corpulent, plodding Teuton, has a long history in MT’s imagination,” George Urban, one of the participants, reported in his memoirs.<sup>128</sup>

While matters were moving rapidly ahead with the creation of economic and currency unity between the two German states on 2 July and the Caucasus meeting between Kohl and Gorbachev in mid-July 1990, Britain was still regarded as being opposed to reunification. This was further confirmed by the unfortunate Ridley Affair. The affair commenced on 14 July 1990 when an interview was published that the Minister of Trade and Industry Nicholas Ridley had given to the conservative British weekly *The Spectator*. The minister, regarded as a Thatcher loyalist and close friend, explained in outspoken language that thanks to the financial policy of the Bundesbank the Germans were set to take over the leadership of Europe with the envisaged economic and monetary union. The EC, he outlined, was “a German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe. It has to be thwarted.” The French would follow them on this course like poodles with no will of their own. Only the British remained in a position to put a stop to German ambitions. Ridley did not hesitate to put Kohl and the EC Commission on the same level as Hitler when he pontificated about European integration. He said that he was “not against giving up sovereignty in principle, but not to this lot. You might just as well give it to Adolf Hitler, frankly.”<sup>129</sup>

Regarding the future shape of postcommunist Europe Ridley explained that “it has always been Britain’s role to keep these various powers balanced, and never has it been more necessary than now, with Germany so uppity.” The interview was accompanied by a cartoon of Ridley adding a Hitler moustache to a poster of Helmut Kohl. While this was not Ridley’s fault, it added to the bad taste the text of the interview left behind.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion*, 134.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 140–41.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>129</sup> See Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher 1*, 635; Michael Seamark, “Margaret Thatcher feared reunited Germany would ‘make more ground than Hitler’” (review of *DBPO* volume), *Mail online*, 11 September 2009, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1212552/Secret-documents-reveal-Thatchers-fears-united-Germany-make-ground-Hitler.html> (accessed 3 Jun. 2013).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

In spite of a few cautious attempts on Thatcher's part to protect her minister from the indignant reactions to his declarations, he was eventually forced to resign. Nevertheless it was generally suspected that Thatcher's thinking still largely agreed with the sentiments expressed by Ridley. Indeed already in the *Spectator* issue of 14 July 1990 the magazine's editor, Dominic Lawson, had commented that "Mr. Ridley's confidence in expressing his views on the German threat must owe a little something to the knowledge that they are not significantly different from those of the prime minister [...] even though in public she is required not to be so indelicate as to draw comparisons between Herren Kohl and Hitler."<sup>131</sup>

### Concluding remarks

Both the Ridley affair and the leakage of the Chequers seminar in March greatly damaged the embattled prime minister, who had become rather unpopular in the country at large due to the imposition of a community tax (or poll tax). It was well known that her Cabinet was deeply split over the new housing tax as well as over a large number of other serious issues. Rumors multiplied about an impending internal coup against the prime minister. This occurred in November 1990 when Thatcher was unceremoniously ejected as leader of the Conservative Party and thus as prime minister. Her controversial opposition to German reunification and her inability to adopt a more constructive policy toward European integration played a large role in her downfall. Her attitudes appeared to defy common sense. By late 1990 both the country at large and the Conservative party grandees had realized that Thatcher's foreign policy was orientated along the lines of Britain's glorious past as an imperial world power, rather than along the more modest necessities of the present and future. Thatcher's foreign policy, and in particular her German and European policies, were clearly damaging the country's international standing. Germany was unified on 3 October 1990. Margaret Thatcher lost power on 28 November 1990. Just over a year later the Soviet Union ceased to exist. In her years in retirement the former prime minister became an embittered person who frequently attacked her successors from the sidelines. She clearly never forgave her party for having ousted her from power. While much feted in the United States as a distinguished statesperson, in fact Thatcher became ever more narrow-minded and developed an ever more vigorously anti-German and in particular anti-European frame of mind in her post-prime ministerial years.

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion*, 99 n. 1. Dominic Lawson was the son of former chancellor of the exchequer Nigel Lawson, who had fallen out with Thatcher over monetarist principles and resigned from the Cabinet in October 1989.