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FRANCE, THE EAST EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 was certainly the most important landmark in the succession of upheavals that occurred in the years from 1987 to 1992, upheavals that significantly altered the balance of the international system as it had gradually developed from 1945. It is clear that the shock wave following this event was also to have an impact on French diplomacy.

The attitude of the French government during this period has been examined from various viewpoints. Several recent publications are quite valuable in this analysis due to their use of French archives, i.e. first hand sources, which were not always used in earlier research.¹ These works reveal French policy as having been more proactive than had been previously described.

¹ Cf. Tilo Schabert, *Wie Weltgeschichte gemacht wird. Frankreich und die deutsche Einheit* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 2002); in English: *How World Politics is Made: France and the Reunification of Germany* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009); Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, la diplomatie française et la fin de la guerre froide* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005); in English: *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); Marion Delamarre, *La politique allemande de François Mitterrand, 1981–1995* (Paris: PHD Institut d'Etude politique de Paris, 2007); Georges Saunier, "A special relationship: Franco-German relations at the time of François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl," in Carine Germond and Henning Türk, eds., *A History of Franco-German Relations in Europe. From "Hereditary Enemies" to Partners* (New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2008), 235–47; idem, "Le tandem François Mitterrand-Helmut Kohl. Une gouvernance franco-allemande?," in Wilfried Loth, ed., *La gouvernance supranationale dans la construction européenne* (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2005), 239–54; Georges Saunier, "СССР v mitterranovskoi diplomatii," in Yu.I. Rubinskii and M. Ts. Arzakanyan, eds., *Rossiya–Frantsiya 300 let osobykh otnoshenii* (Moscow: ROSIZO, 2010), 279–88. In this regard, it is important to mention the recent publication of a selection of documents from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning German unification. In their introduction, the editors, Maurice Vaïsse and Christian Wenkel, state that "myths die hard. From the time of the unification and until now, the idea of François Mitterrand being hostile or at least very reluctant vis-à-vis German unification is well established, while the archives, now open, do not confirm that." Maurice Vaïsse and Christian Wenkel, *La diplomatie française face à l'unification allemande* (Paris: Tallandier, 2011), 29. This controversy still surrounds the issue. Indeed, unlike the books mentioned above, the recent work of Ulrich Lappenküper, which includes documents from the archives of the French presidency as well as pages from Jacques Attali's book, supports the idea of a French diplomacy raising barriers between the two Germanys. See Ulrich Lappenküper, *Mitterrand und Deutschland. Die enträtselte Sphinx* (Munich: Oldenbourg 2011). Cf. Matthias Waechter, "Ulrich Lappenküper: Mitterrand and Germany", *Sehepunkte* 12, no. 3 (2012), <http://www.sehepunkte.de/2012/03/20486.html> (accessed 19 October 2012); Tilo Schabert, "Mitterrand and the Germans. Ulrich Lappen-

Rather than attempting to delay a move toward German unification, Paris seems to have tried to reach a number of diplomatic goals in this period of important and rapid changes. The French were interested in guiding German unification, not stopping it.

This chapter will present, in four sections, the chronology of these goals, as well as their reasons and consequences. The analysis of this series of events will be based on French sources² and will focus on the Franco-German dimension, which was a significant factor during this period.

The post-Yalta era and the return of the German Question (summer 1988 to autumn 1989)

As the post-Yalta era slowly emerged, the Franco-German relationship was multifaceted; it included not only political aspects, but also cultural, social, and economic ones. Both bilateral meetings and meetings within the framework of multilateral institutions were the basis of political relations, which involved senior administrative executives as well as political actors. These various forums for the Franco-German relationship had been more or less formally framed in the Élysée Treaty of 1963, which subsequently underwent several modifications.³

At the political level, the disagreements between the two countries were numerous, particularly in the years following the fall of the Wall. One might see the political function of the so-called Franco-German couple as having been the identification of dissent concerning upcoming issues and, as far as was possible, attempts to overcome them. This nearly permanent state of negotiation often called for political arbitrations. On the French side, the decision-making process involved many persons, in particular the staff at the Foreign Ministry on Quai d'Orsay and a few counselors at the president's office in the Élysée palace. Most important decisions were made by the president, together with the minister of foreign affairs or other ministers as required by the topic at hand.

küper has worked on French policy regarding Germany since 1989," in *Die Welt*, 23 June 2012, http://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/literatur/article106998490/Mitterrand-und-die-Deutschen.html (accessed 19 October 2012).

² In order to write this article, I have used several sources, including: private archives (advisors, ministers); Archives nationales de France, fonds 5AG4, boxes AH (35), CD (52, 67–68, 73–74, 76, 177, 187, 189, 274, 304, 358, 360, 372, 384), EG (58–59, 60–61, 156, 204, 212–214), CDM (13, 33–36, 38–39, 43), 4160; Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères (AMAE), boxes 6119–6125, 6135–36; Archives de l'Institut François Mitterrand (IFM), fonds service de presse, fonds discours; interviews (with advisors, ministers).

³ For a complete historical overview of the Franco-German relationship, see Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'alliance incertaine: les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands, 1954–1996* (Paris: Fayard, 1996); and Germond and Türk, eds., *A History of Franco-German Relations in Europe*.

The main motives behind these negotiations need to be noted, since they were the grounds upon which French diplomacy regarding the Federal Republic of Germany was based:

- protection of specific interests (trade, cultural, etc.);
- the context of the European Community and, more widely, the context of Europe as a whole;
- the background of the Cold War and the French attitude toward the two superpowers, the United States and the USSR;
- French security and, more specifically, the autonomy of French nuclear deterrence policies;
- the delicate balance of powers between the two countries, which was the result of economic competition, cooperation and partnership, including how Germany was perceived in France based on the history of Franco-German hostility, as well as Germany's specific situation, including its partition, its supposed eastwards tropism, and its potential neutralism.

It is clear that for France, all of these elements had already begun to shift from the mid-1980s, especially from 1988, before being deeply altered by the fall of the Wall, the collapse of the Eastern bloc, and the prospect of German unification. In other words, the basis of the German Question changed.

Although the expression "German Question" was never clearly defined, it nevertheless was always high on the French diplomatic agenda. As mentioned above, the partition of Germany and the political consequences thereof long determined France's Western Germany policy as a whole.

However, Germany's partition was not a main concern when François Mitterrand came to power in the early 1980s. On the contrary, the issues debated at the meetings between Paris and Bonn had to do with East-West tensions, the integration of the European Community, or economic difficulties. It is true that on a few occasions, the French president and the German chancellor did raise the issue of German unification, but they kept their discussion to a theoretical analysis, since the division of Europe imposed its own structures.⁴

- The consequences of Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985 called for new considerations on the part of the French government. The effects of these considerations were felt as early as Mitterrand's re-election to the presidency in 1988.⁵ Two aspects must be highlighted:

⁴ For example, at their first official meeting in Latche in October 1981, Mitterrand declared to Helmut Schmidt: "You'll need time to achieve reunification, but it's the course of history. It corresponds to objective and subjective realities. A generation will have to go by. The Soviet Union will weaken, which will be the case in fifteen years." The German chancellor responded: "In my opinion, it will take much more time." See Bozo, *Mitterrand, la diplomatie française*, 33; Schabert, *Mitterrand et la réunification allemande*, 136.

⁵ See Bozo, *Mitterrand, la diplomatie française*, 94–102; Saunier, "L'URSS dans la diplomatie mitterrandienne."

- The will to renew a Franco-Soviet partnership. This meant supporting and encouraging Gorbachev's policies to the degree that their positive effects could be seen in Paris;
- Connected to the above, a desire to boost relations between France and Eastern Europe, which materialized in state visits by Mitterrand to these countries as early as late 1988 and in 1989. All Eastern European countries were involved, including the German Democratic Republic.

This new Eastern European policy was part of a wider political interest that was high on the French agenda: the deepening of integration within the European Community. For Paris, two things were essential: the implementation of a monetary union (the EMU), and the establishment of European defense structures.

From the spring of 1988, owing to the changes occurring in Eastern Europe, the Quai d'Orsay as well as the Élysée began to engage in substantial reflections on how the post-Cold War world might be structured. In these reflections, the integration of the European Community played a central role, as integration seemed to be the means for overcoming the antagonisms of the continent. In an integrated Europe, of course, France would play a major role, along with its natural partner, West Germany. It was also foreseen that the end of the Cold War and of the division of Europe would force the question of German unification to evolve.⁶ Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that these changes were not expected to occur over a short-term period.

Because of the Eastern revolutions in the summer and autumn of 1989, French diplomacy renewed its interest in the potential unification of Germany.⁷ While this was primarily due to the events in Eastern Europe, it was also due to statements by German and Soviet representatives. Mitterrand was interviewed on several occasions by journalists. His statement of 3 November 1989 reflects the trend of the thoughts in Paris perfectly:

I do not fear unification. [...] History is moving forward. I accept it as it comes. I believe that the will for unification is proper for the Germans. If they want it and can manage it, France will adjust its policy in order to support European and French interests.⁸

⁶ In April 1989, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, head of the Center for Prevision and Analysis at the Quai d'Orsay, wrote a memo in which, especially considering the "apparent fluidity of the situation in the East," he suggested a new direction for the Franco-German partnership and a redefinition of the common European ambition. But, he stated, "such clarification [would] immediately raise the question of German sovereignty and relations with the GDR." He then called for a common policy toward East-European countries. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "La relation franco-allemande", 30 April 1989, in AMAE, Centre d'analyse et de prévision, 1988–1992, 111.

⁷ A good example of both Cold War and unification reflections can be found in the Quai d'Orsay's papers. See, for example: Jacques Blot, "Réflexion sur la question allemande," 30 October 1989, in Archives nationales, 5AG4, CD (177). See also the notes of the different Quai d'Orsay services: *ibid.*, 5AG4, CDM (33).

⁸ "Conférence de presse conjointe de Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République,

On this occasion, the president was clear in his position that unification would have to be peaceful, democratic and European. The latter point was paramount. In his view, the upheavals in Eastern Europe would have to be supported by a deepening of European integration in the West.

The above statement of the French president can be augmented by a memo dated 18 October 1989 of Hubert Védrine, his diplomatic advisor, entitled “Reflections on the German Question.”⁹ Here Védrine states that:

- the legitimacy of German unification is incontestable;
- it is not a French issue;
- “the coming together of the two Germanys is inevitable”;
- and that the final framework of this unification is unclear at the moment and could range from the liberalization of the border to the formation of a single state.

With these points in mind, he adds that “since it would be illogical to oppose this will, and since it is impossible to stop the coming together, we must go along with this move toward unity, if not toward unification.” Under these circumstances, Védrine supported the idea that France should be ready with supportive policies, which he outlined in the following terms: to keep the European construction abreast with the unification in order to anchor “the FRG into the Twelve,” to realize the EMU, to unite Germany with both Eastern and Western Europe, to maintain a system of alliances, which he considered “stability factors,” and to maintain a proactive policy from all of Europe towards the Soviet Union, “so that the USSR does not feel deeply threatened” by these events. The final point proved vital in the period that followed.

A few days before the fall of the Berlin Wall, French authorities had already begun to discuss a possible unification of Germany. This does not mean, however, that the events about to occur in Berlin had been predicted in Paris. No one would have ventured the idea that Germany would be unified in less than a year.

French scenarios for the end of the Cold War and unification involved developments in which the agreement of the FRG was decisive.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the French government, which at that time chaired the EC, knew of its partner’s reticence on several points, notably the EMU. Thus, the main concern on the French diplomatic agenda, which was Community integration, required the Germans to make the necessary concessions. Early in November, the French government was relying on the Franco-German relationship to reach these results. The French were expecting that the EC would come first on the German agenda.

et du Chancelier Helmut Kohl, à l’issue des 54e consultations franco-allemandes à Bonn,” 2–3 November 1989, in Archives IFM, fonds service de presse.

⁹ Hubert Védrine, “Réflexions sur la question allemande,” 18 October 1989, in Archives nationales, 5AG4, CD (177).

¹⁰ Saunier, “A special relationship”, 239–40.

Keeping the fall of the Berlin Wall under control (November 1989 to January 1990)

The events that occurred during the night of 9 to 10 November 1989 altered this scenario, and the French government and President Mitterrand had to react.

Without going into details, in this period French public opinion, both in the media and in political circles,¹¹ might be described in two words: enthusiastic and anxious. There was enthusiasm regarding the return of freedom to Eastern Europe, particularly in the GDR. There was also enthusiasm regarding détente, which was hoped would last. And there was enthusiasm regarding the reunion of the German population, since the French took their friendship for granted. But at the same time there was fear regarding the upheavals, since their effects were unpredictable. It was clear that a future greater Germany would have a lasting impact on Europe and its relations. While specialists and policy makers remained optimistic about this latter point, they all called attention to a number of uncertainties:

- What would be Germany's priorities? Would it turn to the East? Would it be tempted by neutralism?
- What would become of its Western commitments, such as those regarding NATO, the EEC or France?
- What would be the final framework for unification, a single state or a confederation? And how long would the timeframe be, short-term or mid-term?
- At the end of these historical events, where would the Americans, Soviets, Europeans and the French themselves stand?

Most of the French political parties, both those in the government and in the opposition, with some variations, desired clear official statements on these issues, as well as on European commitments and alliances. At the same time, they wanted to remain positive about the developments in Germany. There was one exception: the radical opposition of the French Communist Party, which was clearly hostile toward unification and demanded the clear-cut opposition of the French government. This was a major factor: it must be remembered that at this time, the presidential majority relied on the support of the communists.

The first official French reactions shared the public opinion. The French foreign minister Roland Dumas's statements in Parliament reflected a dichotomy of enthusiasm and concern.

On 10 November, Mitterrand talked to journalists in Copenhagen¹² concerning the events of the previous night. He referred to "propitious events" that announce the end of the "Yalta order." He also stated that the future European order re-

¹¹ For the French public debate about the German unification, see Marie-Noëlle Brand Crémieux, *Les Français face à la réunification allemande, automne 1989–automne 1990* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004). I also refer here to Archives IFM, fonds presse.

¹² "Conférence de presse de Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République, lors de sa visite à Copenhague," 10 November 1989, in Archives IFM, fonds service de presse.

mained to be defined and realized. Regarding unification, he repeated his statements of just a week earlier: "France expresses no reservations." Nevertheless, he refused to see the events in Berlin as "an organic phenomenon that would entail immediate unification." He declared that "a number of acts and some time will intervene [before one can talk about unification]."

As a matter of fact, the French government, as well as Mitterrand himself, wanted to remain cautious and pragmatic. Indeed, the events confirmed that "the time of unification had come." But when? And what remained to be settled? French priorities lay elsewhere: the success of the European Council in Strasbourg, to be held in early December, during which decisions favoring the EMU were expected to be made.¹³ For Mitterrand and the French government, it was essential that the changes in Germany not intimidate the Kremlin, as this would result in Gorbachev's position being weakened, a position that was reputed as being fragile.

However, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Ten-Point Plan, announced on 28 November 1989, despite being wary, seemed to challenge the French caution.¹⁴ It is noteworthy that Paris was not informed in advance of Kohl's initiative. At a time when Paris was examining the future of the Franco-German couple, the plan, which was not entirely clear, was met with reservations. If the preliminary considerations of the chancellor are disregarded, the Ten Points overlooked the future of the Community completely, the Community only being referred to with regard to enlargement in the East. This was not, as has been mentioned above, the main objective of the French. The declaration also did not mention the issue of alliances. While it did mention a future European balance of forces, it did not go into details. Finally, it did not mention the issue of borders, although this was to become an important element in future negotiations. The chancellor asserted that "German policy is now committed to a new phase."¹⁵ The French government wanted to know if this meant that all German policy would now be subjected to unification exigencies, disregarding other issues.

In the days following the chancellor's announcement, the statements and decisions of Mitterrand and his ministers focused on the following:

- to make the French position clear—notably concerning the delicate issue of the Oder-Neisse border;

¹³ On the European priorities and the European Council of Strasbourg, see Archives nationales, 5AG4, EG (58–59, 61), CDM (13). This was the reason for the decision to hold the "Dîner de l'Élysée" on 18 November, before the European Council. This was a way to frame the German Question within the European context, but also to keep it from disturbing the European discussions in Strasbourg. On the "Dîner de l'Élysée," see Archives nationales, 5AG4, EG (52); interviews.

¹⁴ On the French reactions to the Ten-Point Plan, see Hubert Védrine, *Les mondes de François Mitterrand* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 430. See also AMAE, Europe (6123, 6681); private archives; interviews.

¹⁵ "Déclaration du chancelier Helmut Kohl au sujet de la politique de l'Allemagne lors des débats budgétaires (Bonn-Bundestag, 28 November 1989)," *Documents d'actualité internationale*, no. 6, 106–108.

- to emphasize that German unification could only occur within a wider process—a wider European process—which ultimately came down to looking for a way to thrust the German Question onto the international stage;
- to reassure the Soviets.

All this was aimed at “*donner du temps au temps*,”¹⁶ in Mitterrand’s own words, in order to keep events under control and obtain the necessary commitments from Bonn and Moscow, as well as all other involved countries. It is important to recall that this was a time in which the events both in Germany and Eastern Europe were exceptionally unpredictable.

One point—a point that has been hotly debated since that time—must be emphasized. Nothing in diplomatic sources or in French public statements shows any attempt to stop German unification.¹⁷ On the contrary, unification was deemed inevitable, although no one knew the when and the how. France approved the successive moves forward, both within the contractual community and the project of “federal structures,” both of which the Ten Points had envisaged for binding the two German states together in the future until unification was achieved. Mitterrand—despite his real concerns about the pace of unification and the possibilities for controlling it—reaffirmed on several occasions that France considered unification legitimate. But after the fall of the Wall, Mitterrand’s affirmations were aimed at keeping the issues raised by unification high on the agenda. This was the motivation for his visits to Kiev and the GDR.¹⁸

At the end of 1989, it seems that this strategy had borne some fruit:

- France’s Western partners had also set conditions for unification;
- the concerns of the Soviet Union had subsided, although it showed hostility toward any rash steps;

¹⁶ “Give time to time,” that is, do not rush and make the most of the time you are given. Mitterrand was well known for using this maxim.

¹⁷ The recent publication of the Thatcher–Mitterrand private talks—based on documents of Charles Powell and published by the Foreign Office—has not changed our point of view. As a matter of fact, Mitterrand repeated to the British prime minister that “we have to accept that there was a logic to reunification.” But, at the same time, these documents attest to the concerns of the French president. He said that “everything depended on the how and when, and on the reactions of the Soviet Union. Britain and France were arguing for caution. The trouble was that the West Germans did not want to hear this.” 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), 164–66, 215–19. The British papers about these talks are close to the French ones, which are already known; see for example Delamarre, *La politique allemande de François Mitterrand*, 46, 118. On this issue, see also Frédéric Bozo, “Thatcher’s European Delusions,” in *Prospect*, 30 November 2009 <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/thatchers-european-delusions/> (accessed 19 October 2012).

¹⁸ On Mitterrand’s trip to the GDR, see Christian Wenkel, *Auf der Suche nach einem anderen Deutschland, Die Beziehungen Frankreichs zur DDR im Spannungsfeld von Perzeption und Diplomatie* (Paris: Institut d’étude politique, 2008), 533–50. See also the papers on the preparations for this trip: Archives nationales, 5AG4, CD (187).

- after the announcement of the Ten-Point Plan, the West German government displayed their caution by emphasizing the gradual character of the projected steps;
- the debate concerning unification did not stop an agreement being made between France and the FRG on the EMU, which stood as a major success at the European Council in Strasbourg;
- plans for a CSCE meeting, which would outline the future of all Europe, seemed well under way.

Paris was fully aware from the summer of 1989 that the situation in the GDR was deteriorating. But it still believed in the possibility of a mid-term development, as confirmed by the talks that Mitterrand and Kohl held in Latche on 4 January 1990, during which the German chancellor still mentioned a process that would last years.¹⁹

At this time, how did Paris envisage the timetable of future events? The president himself often mentioned publicly that “things move so fast, it is difficult to make predictions.”²⁰ His advisors’ notes all mention the transitory character of the situation. However, in Paris, one was still thinking in terms of two or three years.²¹

Negotiating unification (January-October 1990)

As we have since seen, the timetable as imagined by the French, with unification a mid-term process, was to be contradicted by events. By mid-January it became obvious that the unification process would be much faster. There were several signs supporting this:

- the collapse of entire sectors of the GDR’s economy;
- the increase in the number of demonstrations in the GDR;
- the rescheduling of East German elections from May to March;
- requests by the GDR for financial support from the FRG and the increase of joint projects;
- the feeling that the Soviet Union had become aware that it could not stop unification, and that Gorbachev’s opposition was only temporary, or would in fact be used in future bargaining.²²

¹⁹ On the 4 January meeting in Latche between Kohl and Mitterrand, see Delamarre, *La politique allemande de François Mitterrand*, 27–32, 47, 61, 80–82, 87–91, 145, 158.

²⁰ The French president made this statement during a visit paid to the GDR. “Conférence de presse de Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République, à l’issue de sa visite d’état en République démocratique allemande,” Berlin, 22 December 1989, in Archives IFM, fonds service de presse. On that visit and the French intentions, see Archives nationales 5AG4, CD (187), EG (204).

²¹ See, for example, the anonymous declarations of French advisors to the press during the visit of Mitterrand to Kiev on 6 December 1989. Archives IFM, fonds presse.

²² On these events, see Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

It became clear that it had become too late to attempt to slow the pace of unification to a mid-term process. Nonetheless, it was necessary to ensure that French interests were taken into account. The Germans would have to make concrete decisions and not only verbal statements.

This diplomatic phase was to last from February 1990 until the following summer, when a climax was reached. Before analyzing the French position in detail, it is best to list chronologically the steps that were taken, as well as their underlying logic.²³

With this acceleration of events, the French primarily feared unification being realized without an international framework in which France could advance its interests. It was therefore urgent to raise the process to an international level. Once this had been achieved, it would then be necessary to bring Germany and the Soviet Union to a negotiating table to discuss a number of issues.

The difficulties in the French position were the following:

- How could France obtain the necessary concessions from the Germans without intimidating them at this crucial stage in their history, bearing in mind that German participation would be absolutely necessary in the future European order? This was particularly delicate because Bonn was reluctant to negotiate anything that might jeopardize its sovereignty, present or future.
- How could concessions be obtained from the Soviets, while making sure that they would not feel isolated in the process?
- How could France ensure that the unification process was accompanied by real progress regarding European integration, with the end of Germany's partition as part of a wider framework? Questions here included disarmament as well as the structure of the European Community.

As can be seen, in this phase of unification acceleration, the path for French diplomacy was quite narrow.

From February to April 1990, the French emphasized primarily the following:

A conference had to be summoned in which the four Allies of 1945 could agree on a diplomatic settlement of the problems raised by German unification. Involving both German states, this was referred to as the Two Plus Four conference, as was suggested by the US administration based on a plan that had already been worked out in Paris political circles.²⁴ An agreement reached by Kohl and Gorbachev on 10 February 1990 enabled the convening of such a conference.

²³ For the German unification talks discussed here, the author has used, in addition to the books mentioned above, the detailed account of Bertrand Dufourcq, who was the French negotiator and the head of the French delegation during the Two Plus Four negotiations. Bertrand Dufourcq, "2+4 ou la négociation atypique," *Politique étrangère* 65, no. 2 (2000): 467–84, http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/polit_0032-342x_2000_num_65_2_4952 (last accessed 13 April 2010). His papers related to the talks have also been used: AMAE, Affaires stratégiques et désarmement (15–17); Archives nationales, 5AG4, CDM (34–36).

²⁴ On the genesis of the conference from the French side, see, for example, Hubert Védrine, "Note pour le Président de la République," 6 February 1990, in Archives nationales, 5AG4, EG (213).

The French government had to make sure that definite commitments would be secured in the process, with legal writs by which all parties would have to abide. This process would have to be carried out at least as fast as the process of unifying the two German states.

This first stage ended more or less in April 1990, when the Quai d'Orsay and the Élysée judged their main objectives to have been reached. It remained to support West Germany in its approach toward the Soviet Union, and to make sure that the process was undertaken in accordance with the agreed decisions. On 22 June 1990, Roland Dumas suggested that the final treaty be written down, in order to ensure that the conference taking place in Paris the next month, on 17 July, would be a success.

In the course of these negotiations, the French had a number of concerns. The first was to ensure the democratic character of the self-determination of the German people, which meant the freedom to vote in East Germany. The conditions and outcome of the East German elections on 18 March 1990 gave a clear signal on this point. In Paris, this was seen as another indication that unification would be undertaken quickly. Mitterrand's response to the election results was: "Good luck Germany."²⁵

The second concern regarded the peaceful character of the process. Paris wanted the Two Plus Four conference to deal with what it called the external issues of unification. The objective of the Quai d'Orsay was nothing less than to reach a global settlement for a unified Germany, a settlement that would leave no room for future political or judiciary claims. The following aspects had to be settled:

- The future of international treaties involving the GDR and other countries;
- Collective security measures that would guarantee peaceful unification (prohibition of weapons of mass destruction [ABC weapons] in Germany, a limitation on the size of the German military, etc.);
- The end of quadripartite prerogatives (the status of Berlin, the 1951 Treaty of Paris, etc.);
- The future of Soviet troops on East German territory;
- The place of the future Germany in NATO, as well as within the European Community;
- The future of French troops in Germany.

While these points were important, they were not a priority for France. For example, it was soon clear that the reunified Germany would not seek to acquire ABC weapons. And it also soon became clear that the West German decision to carry out unification by simply absorbing East Germany—in the end, a decision approved by the French—put an end to many legal issues.

²⁵ In a message he sent to the Germans while dining with Václav Havel, who was in Paris at that time. "Allocution prononcée par Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République, à l'occasion du dîner offert en l'honneur de Monsieur Vaclav Havel," 19 March 1990, in Archives IFM, fonds service de presse.

The issues concerning military alliances were of course more tricky, but they also did not cause major difficulties, since it was commonly agreed in Paris at that time that the nature of these alliances was bound to evolve. Thus, although NATO membership of the future unified Germany was a prerequisite, the French government was able, without any difficulties, to support the various demilitarization projects in the ex-Eastern German territories.

Regarding collective security matters, the cornerstone for the French government was the recognition by the reunified Germany of the Oder–Neisse border. The judiciary problems concerning the border are well known.²⁶ In Paris—and particularly at the Élysée,²⁷ where some leaflets from the German Christian Democratic Union Party were circulated showing maps of Germany including former German territories in Poland²⁸—the matter was carefully monitored. While Chancellor Kohl always sought to reassure Mitterrand during their meetings that Germany would not claim these territories, his hesitation to make a public declaration in this regard was a matter for concern.²⁹ Paris felt it necessary to urge Bonn to clarify its position. For this reason, the French insisted on involving Poland at this stage in the negotiations, and to make sure that a border agreement was an integral part of the Two Plus Four Treaty. The French insistence on this point can certainly be seen as one reason for the chancellor's actions in March–April.³⁰ It must be noted France did not suggest that the treaty be a written document until the German parliaments had guaranteed that the border would be accepted.³¹

What was left at this stage was the issue of European unity. The French priority was to link the unification process with significant progress in the area of Community integration. German unification raised difficulties, which were soon identified in Paris as the following:

²⁶ Jochen Abr. Frowein, “The Reunification of Germany,” *The American Journal of International Law* 86, no. 1 (1992): 155–57; Jochen Abr. Frowein, “Legal Problems of the German Ostpolitik,” *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1974): 105–26.

²⁷ This particular issue has been described by Marion Delamarre as the feeling of “*responsabilité historique*” (historical responsibility) of the French president, a feeling that was confirmed by the private talks he had with several leaders, including Chancellor Kohl. Delamarre, *La politique allemande de François Mitterrand*, 50.

²⁸ Interviews with Roland Dumas, August 2000.

²⁹ Indeed, the French authorities demanded a public statement from the chancellor, *before* the unification, as regard the inviolability of the Oder-Neisse border. A statement that, from the French perspective, did not come easily.

³⁰ Chancellor Kohl agreed in March with the adoption of a resolution on this issue in the Bundestag. In April, substantial discussions began on the Oder-Neisse problem during the Two Plus Four negotiations. For a complete chronology on this point, see Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War*, 222–33; Sarotte, 135–38.

³¹ On the Oder–Neisse issue and the French attitude, see Caroline de Margerie, “La Frontière Oder Neisse,” 27 August 1991, in Archives nationales, 5AG4, CDM (34). On the French–Polish talks on this issue, see Archives nationales, 5AG4 CD (358), CDM (34, 43).

- threats to the budgetary and political balance within the EEC;
- questions about how to apply the *acquis communautaire* (the body of EEC laws) to the ex-GDR territories and how quickly;
- how to ensure that the goal of a single market or the EMU was not delayed by the unification process.

In addition, the French government soon decided that the FRG should not be left alone to support the burden of unification, but that the EEC should play a role in the process. This would “Europeanize” the unification. Élisabeth Guigou, advisor to the French president on European matters, wrote several memos in February–March 1990 on the subject of Europeanization.³² She emphasized the necessity of linking the process of unification with an acceleration of European integration. According to her, this acceleration would not only allow immediate issues to be settled, it would also launch a new phase of integration. She believed that such acceleration could only occur if initiated by France and Germany, an initiative she therefore encouraged. This would stand as a test for Germany’s involvement in the Community. Its involvement had to be ambitious and not confined merely to the EMU. She called for a true European union and deeper political integration, something that the German chancellor had already claimed to desire.

This process, it is now acknowledged, began as early as March 1990, with its first concrete outcome being the sending on 18 April of the first Franco-German letter. This introduced a series of similar communiqués that were sent throughout the negotiations toward the Maastricht Treaty. On the German side, the intent of this initiative was to provide a clear signal for Germany’s commitment to the European Community. On the French side, the Mitterrand-Kohl communication addressed the EMU, but also the desire to build a genuine political union between the Community’s member states. Notably, this was to be achieved by working out a common foreign policy. This political initiative was confirmed by the close Franco-German cooperation at the European Councils of Dublin I and II in April and June 1990. Moreover, prior to the entry of ex-GDR territories into the EEC, the French proposals were to be applied: no Community projects were to be delayed, and the Community would play an active role in the unification process by means of its traditional intervention tools, such as structural funds. However, the *acquis communautaire* was not discussed on this occasion.

Thus, despite the repeated demands of France in the Two Plus Four process, the Franco-German couple managed to meet a joint agreement on the European re-launch. It was this second step—which was a priority for Paris, as has been mentioned above—that undoubtedly enabled political détente to be maintained. During this period of doubts and major upheavals, this was an absolute necessity.

In July 1990 there were again a few ups and downs before the Two Plus Four negotiations could be concluded. Before the finalization, the FRG had to be per-

³² On the European issues mentioned above, see Archives nationales, 5AG4, EG (212–214); interviews.

sueded to commit itself to a number of points—for example, the renouncement of ABC weapons and the acceptance of the Oder–Neisse border—as written conditions prior to unification. However, a compromise was found for each of these points on the basis of French propositions. There were also last minute hesitations on the side of the Soviets. Here again, the French delegation acted as a catalyst, and one might say that the friendly relations between Roland Dumas and Hans Dietrich Genscher helped.³³

Toward a new European balance?

The various treaties leading to German unification were signed and came into effect in the autumn of 1990. Paris considered its diplomacy to have been a success. Indeed, the issues of the Oder–Neisse border and ABC weapons were settled, and German unification had been linked to a European development process.

It must be emphasized that nothing in the treaties obstructed a future European defense policy. This point is of some significance and echoes the French global strategy regarding the future organization of the European continent. We shall look at this in some detail below in the conclusion.

In this period, which today all analysts see as having been historically momentous, Mitterrand was, as is usual in such circumstances, of two minds. As a political leader, he voiced his enthusiasm for the return of freedom in Eastern Europe and his hopes for the end of the Cold War. But as the president of the French Republic, he was primarily concerned with protecting French interests in a period that, in his view, was full of dangers. He stated this clearly to his close circle and during private talks: Europe was in the same situation as it had been in 1913. He was fully aware that the collapse of the Eastern bloc heralded the return of many disparate nations, a fact that was linked to many potential risks. As he underlined in his farewell speech before the European Parliament in 1994, to him “nationalism means war.”³⁴

In this matter, the German Question was of course highly significant. A unified Germany would lie at the heart of the future Europe. But in the end, it was only ancillary. What mattered more was to quickly reach a new European balance,

³³ Bertrand Dufourcq has stated that in September 1990, in the last days of the Two Plus Four negotiations, the discussions could have failed over the question of the possibility, or not, of NATO forces training on the territories of the former GDR. Following final negotiations in plenary, Roland Dumas, who presided, and Hans-Dietrich Genscher then made a common plea for a solution that could finally be adopted even by the Soviets. On the final talks, see Dufourcq, “2+4 ou la négociation atypique”; interviews.

³⁴ “Discours prononcé par Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République, à l’occasion de la présentation du programme de la présidence française de l’Union européenne au Parlement européen. Strasbourg,” 17 January 1995, in Archives IFM, fonds service de presse.

based on democracy on one hand, but also on institutional organizations of cooperation and solidarity between the old nations of the continent.

This is why the importance bestowed on the Oder–Neisse border issue by the French president—as well as his entire diplomatic staff—was significant. Freezing this border stopped a Pandora’s Box of European minorities from being opened. One might recall that the problem of the Oder–Neisse border was long a concern for Mitterrand: the fact that it would be an important factor in a unification process was publicly voiced by Mitterrand as early as 1969.³⁵

This is why the European Community was so important: It was to stabilize the future of Europe. However, to Mitterrand’s mind, the European Community, as well as the planned union, was not quite ready to expand to the Eastern European countries, insofar as they were not in a position to enforce the *acquis communautaire*. Thus, on 31 December 1989 Mitterrand suggested that a European confederation be set up that would provide a formal framework for the relations between Eastern and Western states and ease their coming closer.³⁶

This desire to stabilize the continent can also be seen in the relations between France and the Soviet Union becoming closer. It was of utmost importance at the Élysée that these events should, on no occasion, be presented as a victory of the West over the East. On the contrary: the Soviet Union—whose evolution under Gorbachev’s leadership was expected—should not feel threatened by the new European balance in the least. This was the reason for a series of comforting gestures towards Moscow during this period. These were then finalized by the conclusion of a new Franco-Soviet treaty of cooperation in late October 1990.³⁷

To support the Soviet Union, it was crucial to break its isolation. In this, the French and the Germans finally acted together. As a matter of fact, Moscow held many keys to the situation, both for European organization as well as for German unification. Thus, from the summer of 1990, Paris and Bonn cooperated to provide significant financial support to the Soviet Union. In Bonn, this was done by providing payments and loans. For Paris, the primary goal was to demonstrate that the German unification process was basically a European process—as seen by the Community’s support—and not opposed to Soviet interests. It was for this reason that, during the 1990 Houston G7 Summit, Kohl and Mitterrand attempted to get support for the Soviet Union from the Western world as a whole. And in order to prevent a destabilization of the Kremlin at a crucial moment in these

³⁵ See for example his statement when he led the Convention des institutions républicaines, in Archives IFM, FM-001 (75); interviews.

³⁶ On the European confederation project, see Frédéric Bozo, “The Failure of a Grand Design: Mitterrand’s European Confederation, 1989–1991,” *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 3 (2008): 391–412.

³⁷ On the French policy toward the USSR during that period, see Marie Pierre Rey, “Gorbachev et la Maison commune européenne, une opportunité manquée?” *La Lettre de l’Institut François Mitterrand*, no. 19 (2007): 12–17. See also idem, “Europe is our Common Home: A Study of Gorbachev’s Diplomatic Concept,” *Cold War History* 4, no. 2 (2004): 33–66.

negotiations, Paris and Bonn worked together to calm down the national independence movement in Lithuania. In April 1990, a joint letter was sent to Vytautas Landsbergis, the movement's leader.

This desire to give a formal framework to future cooperation at a European level also influenced the French insistence on summoning a major Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) meeting. Here again, the idea—as in the case of the European confederation—was to create appropriate structures of cooperation necessary for the common security in the post-Cold War era. Paris had been working on this project since November 1989. At the start, this meant finding an institutional framework that was able to manage the unification process. But once the Two Plus Four conference was convened, the idea was to get the CSCE to agree on a genuine decree that would end the Cold War. This was to be the Paris Charter, which was adopted by the CSCE's 35 members in November 1990. The objective of the Charter was, on one hand, to consecrate the democratic model as the only model of government and, on the other hand, to create a formal institution in the field of security that would render conflict impossible. In other words, the Paris Charter was to be a “détente” treaty paving the way for disarmament in a unified Europe.

One more aspect must be considered, namely France's view³⁸ of the future of NATO. One must recall that at this time, relations were excellent between Mitterrand and George H.W. Bush.³⁹ Several meetings took place at the end of 1989 and in early 1990. This does not mean, however, that there were no political differences.

To understand these differences, one must consider various factors. At first, Paris deemed the continuity of NATO necessary in this period of great transition in Europe. It was also thought that a unified Germany should set up a defense policy in a wider framework. Insofar as a general European defense strategy was only a plan at this stage, it was thought that Germany should remain part of NATO. Later Paris believed that the ending of the Cold War would lead the United States to distancing itself from Europe, which in turn would lead to the end of the guarantee offered by the alliance. The role of NATO could only evolve. In fact, the evolution of NATO was a key element in the negotiations of 1990. It was thought that the Soviet Union would be more willing to accept the changes occurring in the East, as well as German unification and the integration of Western Europe, if at the same time the Atlantic alliance were to change its outlook.

The Bush administration let Paris know as early as spring 1990 that they were looking for a new thrust for NATO and asked Paris for advice. Very soon it appeared that the US project was, in fact, a plan aimed at extending the NATO missions beyond their traditional field of competency. This was something that

³⁸ On the issue of NATO, see Frédéric Bozo, “‘Winners’ and ‘Losers’: France, the United States, and the End of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 5 (2009): 927–56.

³⁹ See, for example, their private talks in late 1989, in Archives nationales, 5AG4, CD (74, 266).

French diplomacy had always opposed. Paris was thus confronted with a problem: it was opposed to this US project, but at the same time was in favor of a revitalization of NATO. In fact, the French ambition was to introduce a reference to a future European defense structure within the formal framework of the alliance. Although, as mentioned above, the German unification treaties did not contain any clauses hindering such a structure in the future, in 1990 it was too early for this. The Quai d'Orsay saw that its other European partners were against any plans of this sort. Thus, this became an indecisive period with regard to NATO, in spite of a few aborted attempts at negotiation and the attempt at reinforcing the European defense, e.g. the talks for the Maastricht treaty.

To conclude, Mitterrand's policies to deal with the revolutions of 1989 followed a clear line, a line that unified and linked his various projects. He sought a unified Europe as well as a Europe that was self-supporting and based on international institutions. But above all, he sought a Europe that was democratic and peaceful.

