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OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS AND BIG POLITICS IN THE REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY¹

When Mikhail Gorbachev arrived for the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the GDR on 6 October 1989, there was already some discord between the East German SED leadership under Erich Honecker and the Soviet leader. Honecker had criticized Gorbachev's approach to perestroika, the clearest expression of this being the GDR's ban in November 1988 on sales of the magazine *Sputnik*, a journal published by the Soviet news agency Novosti for foreign countries. But it was clear that the SED could not observe the state's anniversary without the Soviet leader; if he were absent at such a celebration it would have been a political scandal. After landing at Schönefeld Airport, Gorbachev's delegation was driven into the city in a car, encountering people shouting "Gorby, Gorby!" and holding up pro-Gorbachev signs. Only one man, a single person, was holding up a different sign which read "Keep it up, Erich." Gorbachev turned to his comrades: "There must be something we haven't noticed."²

Actually, with the intelligence apparatus of both the GDR and the Soviet Union, as well as the developments threatening in Poland, Hungary and above all the Baltic states,³ it seems hardly possible that Moscow was unaware of the profound significance of the opposition and the change of attitude in the population, both in those places and in the GDR. The number of *Ausreiser*, the GDR refugees

¹ This chapter is based on my book *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands—ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2009), which has also appeared in Russian and is planned to be published in English. During the last ten years, some of the state chancelleries and foreign ministries in different countries have published selections of their records concerning the reunification of Germany, as was already done by the German State Chancellery and Foreign Ministry. Publications of documents from British and French governmental institutions and the Gorbachev Foundation have followed. The most important statements of governments from the other involved countries have already appeared in these publications. These volumes of documents have essentially confirmed the picture as drawn in my book, which is based mainly on the records of the East and West German governments, the archives of the Gorbachev Foundation, as well as on interviews with politicians in East and West. Concerning the dissidents and oppositional movements, see e.g., Alexander von Plato and Tomas Vilimek with Piotr Filipkowski and Joanna Wawrzyniak (eds.), *Opposition als Lebensform. Lebensgeschichten von Dissidenten in der DDR, der ČSSR und in Polen* (Münster: Lit, 2012).

² On these events, cf. Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 52–63.

³ The "Baltic Chain of Freedom and Independence" occurred on 23 August. On the revolution in the Baltic states, see Karsten Brüggemann, "'One Day We Will Win Anyway': The 'Singing Revolution' in the Soviet Baltic Republics," in this volume, 221–46.

taking refuge in West German embassies, had grown to such proportions that the Federal Republic's missions in East Berlin (8 August 1989), Budapest (14 August), Prague (23 August) and later in Warsaw (19 September) had to be closed because of sheer overcrowding. As had happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and 1971 and Poland in the 1970s and 80s, the communist party in the GDR—the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, Socialist Unity Party of Germany)—had also seen large parts of the society distancing themselves from the party. During the 1980s, contacts, networks and structures had emerged that went far beyond those that had formed in the 1960s and 70s, both within the Lutheran Church, which had become a refuge for dissent, and without. Just a month before the forty-year jubilee, the opposition movement New Forum (*Neues Forum*) had been established. In the group's inaugural proclamation of 10 September 1989,⁴ a new direction was unmistakable: They wanted to emerge from the refuge of the church and its small opposition groups, and move into the mainstream of society—and with this, to fight for the legalization of free debate. This was one of the New Forum's greatest achievements. Within a few weeks, over 100,000 people had signed its proclamation, and by late 1989, a few months later, it had become a million, as has been asserted by one of the founders, Rolf Henrich,⁵ although the number of supporters had become so many, he could no longer count them. He burned the lists, as he was still concerned for the signatories' safety. Soon after the New Forum was founded, a number of other groups, such as the Democratic Awakening (*Demokratischer Aufbruch*), were also formally established. Gorbachev himself had become a beacon of hope to which one could appeal.

While these new developments were probably known to the CPSU's general secretary, until then it did not appear they would shake the GDR to its foundations. At the anniversary celebrations, Erich Honecker did everything he could to present the GDR as a haven of political and economic stability.

But during the evening festivities on 7 October, when the GDR's official youth organization, the Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*, FDJ), conducted a torchlight parade past the tribune of the guests of honor, shouts of "Gorby, Gorby" could be heard from the FDJ columns, as well as calls of "perestroika." In his memoirs, Gorbachev recalled that Mieczysław Rakowski, Polish prime minister, even translated the words "Gorbachev, save us!" to him. Regarding these rows of FDJ members, Rakowski emphasized: "These are party activists. This is the end."⁶ After Honecker's rather hostile reception, Gorbachev might well have been pleased to have become an inspiration to many people, but he was deeply troubled.

It is possible to conclude from these reactions that the oppositional streams, which had even reached the party youth, alarmed those in power in the East deeply; they began to sense what could threaten their rule. This was the case,

⁴ The original document is in the collection of the Haus der Geschichte Bonn, 1990/6/104.

⁵ Interview Alexander von Plato with Rolf Henrich, 9 August 2007.

⁶ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 524.

despite the fact that they didn't even know about the protests being held in Berlin and other cities in the GDR, or the fact that they were being repressed.

Gorbachev's concern grew "when, after Honecker was replaced, a real picture of the situation came to light."⁷ The newly installed SED leader, Egon Krenz, took a trip to Moscow on 31 October 1989—three weeks after the jubilee and two weeks after Honecker had been removed from office—carrying a quite blunt account of the economic and political situation in the GDR in his luggage. The concern was even greater since the Soviet Union had extreme economic difficulties: A crisis-ridden GDR would become a millstone around the Soviet neck, both financially and politically.⁸ Gorbachev sent Krenz back to Berlin with this advice: He should become more internationally involved with the Soviet Union, since this will "help your political relations with the FRG." A little later, one of Gorbachev's key policies became the "Soviet Union, East and West Germany triangle."⁹ Krenz left knowing that no economic aid could be expected from the Soviet big brother.

What is more, Krenz had asked the general secretary whether the Soviet Union still stood by its "paternity" relationship with the GDR. After all, the GDR was a child of the Soviet Union and, as it reads in the Soviet protocol of the meeting, "decent people support their children; they certainly allow them to carry the father's name. (Lively)."¹⁰ Gorbachev is said to have replied:

How can you even ask a question like that? Actually, I don't know any reasonable politician who wants German unity, including Chancellor Helmut Kohl [...] You must know that all serious politicians, including Thatcher and Mitterrand, Andreotti and Jaruzelski, even the Americans, although new shades are visible in their position—no one wants a reunification.¹¹

When interviewed, Krenz offered a different version of the discussion. According to him, Gorbachev remained silent after being asked about the Soviet paternity, spoke quietly with his interpreter, and then quoted a Russian proverb: "Even a very long thread has an end."¹² Thus, even Krenz became aware of what lay ahead.

⁷ In a letter he wrote to me dated 6 March 2001.

⁸ Gorbachev's shock is also clear in the German transcript of his conversation with Krenz, where it reads: "Is it really that bad?" and "I didn't think the situation was that precarious." Conversation Krenz with Gorbachev, East German protocol, 1 November 1989, in Bundesarchiv (BA), SAPMO, DY 30/IV 2/2.039/319, 128–69, here 142.

⁹ Only two days after the meeting with Krenz, Gorbachev used this expression. Politburo protocol, 3 November 1989, in A. Chernyaev, V. Medvedev, G. Shakhnazarov, eds., *V Politbyuro TsK KPSS... Po zapisam Anatoliya Chernyaeva, Vadima Medvedeva, Georgiya Shakhnazarova (1985–1991)* (Moscow: Alpina Bizness Buks, 2006), 448–51, 451. Later Gorbachev mentioned this triangle repeatedly.

¹⁰ Conversation Gorbachev with Krenz, Soviet protocol, 1 November 1989, in Gorbachev Foundation (GF), 89NOV01. The word "lively" is also recorded.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² As based on an interview of Hans-Christoph Blumenberg with Egon Krenz 1999 as well as some of my interviews with international politicians. These interviews were made for Blumen-

The existence of two German states, as Gorbachev declared in his talk with Krenz and then repeated again and again in the following months, was the result and a condition “of our successful politics.” Reunification was not on the agenda.

On 3 November 1989, shortly after Krenz’s visit, the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee held a session. There, Gorbachev declared that “The GDR is living beyond its means by up to a third,” and intelligence chief Vladimir Kryuchkov announced that the next day, 4 November 1989, one million protesters would go onto the streets in Berlin.¹³ Foreign Minister Shevardnadze remarked: “It would be better if they [the Germans] got rid of the ‘Wall’ themselves.” Per-spiciously, Gorbachev said: “They will sell out down to their guts. [...] And when they step out onto the world market, their standard of living will drop immediately.”

All this reveals the pressure that the Soviet leadership felt from the opposition (and from the economic decline). And this was not only felt by the Soviet government, but also by all the other governments involved in the process. Up to and including November 1989—and this is my first basic thesis—the key players in the rush of events were the opposition movements.

International politics until December 1989

But international political protagonists, who until autumn 1989 had seemed only to be following the oppositional movements, were also active.

In March 1989, George H.W. Bush, the US president, who at that time was relatively fresh in office, urged that a new policy be followed by NATO and its member states in response to Gorbachev’s compelling motto “Common European Home.” The national security advisor at the time, General Brent Scowcroft, together with his assistant Philip Zelikow, was significantly involved in drafting the new policy.

In the so-called Scowcroft Memorandum, which was also written by Zelikow, it reads:

Today, the top priority for American foreign policy in Europe should be the fate of the Federal Republic of Germany. [...] Even if we make strides in overcoming the division of Europe through greater openness and pluralism, we cannot have a vision for Europe’s future that does not include an approach to the “German question.”¹⁴

berg’s TV documentary *Deutschlandspiel*, on German reunification. First broadcast on Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen on 29 September 2000.

¹³ Politburo protocol, 3 November 1989, 589ff, GF. Gorbachev’s remark on the deficit of the GDR is not mentioned in the published version and the following remark by Kryuchkov is reduced to 500,000. Chernyaev, Medvedev, Shakhnazarov, *V Politbyuro*, 450.

¹⁴ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 28.

As explained later by Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, the aim of this statement, which was controversial even among American strategists, was to put the “German question” back onto the agenda, even if it was contrary to Gorbachev’s line.¹⁵ Shortly after the fortieth anniversary celebration of NATO in Brussels, in May, Bush visited West Germany and gave a speech at the Rheingold Hall in Mainz:

[L]et Europe be whole and free. To the founders of the Alliance, this aspiration was a distant dream, and now it’s the new mission of NATO. [...] The Cold War began with the division of Europe. It can only end when Europe is whole. [...] there cannot be a common European home until all within it are free to move from room to room. [...] We seek self-determination for all of Germany and all of Eastern Europe. [...] Let Berlin be next.¹⁶

According to Scowcroft, this speech was actually supposed to have been even more direct, but they did not want to compromise Chancellor Kohl.¹⁷

West Germany was now to become, because of the needed unification policy, a “partner in leadership”—a role that until then had been held by Great Britain.¹⁸ Horst Teltschik, the official responsible for foreign and security policy in the West German chancellery, does not believe that the Americans were the actual inaugurators of the new unification policy in Europe, but confirms that the German response to the US invitation in the direction of their being a “partner in leadership” should have been clearer.¹⁹

Central to this policy was the role of NATO. As stated by Condoleezza Rice:

It is true that the United States had really only one concern—and that was that German unification not destroy NATO. Because NATO was the force for peace in Germany, it was America’s anchor in Europe. And so the one concern was that German unification not destroy NATO. But there was absolutely no concern that somehow, by allowing Germany to unify—and the Americans, by the way, insisted that it unify with no new constraints on its power—that somehow this was going to be a bad thing for Europe, this simply wasn’t in the American psyche.²⁰

The United States, together with the Federal Republic of Germany, maintained this policy through the entire process. The policy met US and (West) German

¹⁵ Scowcroft stated: “I think, fundamentally it was Gorbachev, who was speaking some wonderful words. But thus far in early ’89 the words were not matched by actions, and the structures of the Cold War in Central and Eastern Europe were still in place. So what we wanted to see were actions which would start to dismantle those structures. And, of course, crucial to it all was Berlin and German reunification. That would be a clear signal that the Cold War was over.” Interview Alexander von Plato with Brent Scowcroft, 14 September 1999.

¹⁶ For extracts from Bush’s speech at the Rheingold-Halle, see Zelikow and Rice, *Germany*, 31.

¹⁷ Interview Alexander von Plato with Brent Scowcroft, 14 September 1999.

¹⁸ This formulation caused Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher “a bit of unintended disquiet [...]. Thatcher took this as a challenge to the special relationship between the United States and Britain. In truth, she need not have worried.” George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 83–84.

¹⁹ Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 21.

²⁰ Interview Alexander von Plato with Condoleezza Rice, Stanford University, 17 September 1999.

interests, and these determined further diplomacy,²¹ especially Helmut Kohl's Ten-Point Plan of 28 November 1989. Much of this plan was written by Teltschik after being visited by members of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee²² and, just a day later, being presented Bush's "four principles." A week later, on 4 December 1989, the president repeated these principles at the NATO summit in Brussels: self-determination; commitment to NATO; "peaceful and gradual reunification"; and confirmation "of the existing borders in Europe."²³

From the end of November 1989—and this is my second basic thesis—the US State Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic took the reins into their own hands, supported only in part by the GDR opposition. Although not always consistent, the opposition in the East did not initially support reunification and even less, it being under NATO's umbrella.

For the United States, this American-German policy was to become its most successful program in Europe since the Marshall Plan of 1947.

On military non-interference

Under General Secretary Gorbachev, Soviet troops had already been brought back from the war in Afghanistan between May 1988 and February 1989. From then on, the Soviet Union basically followed a policy of military non-intervention, also with regard to the Soviet satellite states. On 7 and 8 July 1989, after quite a long prologue, a doctrine that had never formally existed was officially carried to the grave in Bucharest: the Brezhnev Doctrine.²⁴ This doctrine had been understood as granting the option of interference and military intervention in other Warsaw Pact member states, as had been put into practice in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The significance for Germany's reunification of this shift to military non-intervention cannot be overestimated. Gorbachev's policies also aimed at disarmament

²¹ As nice as it is, there is little I can agree with in Norman Naimark's picture of the Bush administration sitting on its hands and oversleeping with regard to the situation: the Bush administration was surely one of the most proactive in eliminating the division of Europe and Germany, especially during the initial period in 1989. Cf. Norman M. Naimark, "The Superpowers and 1989 in Eastern Europe," in this volume, 249–70.

²² See my interviews with Horst Teltschik, 27 September 1999; and Nikolai Portugalov, 1 November 1999. Cf. Horst Teltschik, *329 Tage. Innenansichten der Einigung* (Berlin: Siedler, 1991), 44; Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 113–19.

²³ Concerning Bush's four principles, see Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 145; Zelikow and Rice, *Germany*, 223.

²⁴ The declaration of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact of 7 July 1989 stressed the principle of non-interference in internal affairs as well as each state's right to self-determination and to choose its own path of social and political development. *Tagung des Politischen Beratenden Ausschusses der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages* (Berlin: Dietz, 1989), 14–26.

ment and reconciliation with the West, since defense costs were strangling the Soviet Union and the “military-industrial complex” dominated its politics.²⁵ The deeper political meaning of Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost can only be found if they are seen against the background of this head-on challenge, although from today’s perspective, the theory and its details do not seem especially revolutionary.

It is particularly surprising that Gorbachev’s generals did not intervene in the GDR during the entire year of 1989, although according to Heinz Kessler, the GDR’s minister of defense, there was “not a single Soviet general” in the GDR who supported Gorbachev’s policies.²⁶

Kessler’s deputy, army general Fritz Streletz, even reports that General Boris Snetkov, the supreme commander of the Soviet troops, gave him the following “offer”: “Comrade Streletz, I stress again that if the National People’s Army [of the GDR] needs help or support, the group [of Soviet Forces in Germany] is ready to give any kind of assistance to their brothers-in-arms, the NPA.”²⁷ But the Soviet troops stayed in their barracks.

Gorbachev’s vacillating reactions

In early December 1989, a strategy emerged in Washington and Bonn: reunification under the umbrella of NATO. What remained unclear, however, was the question of time: How long was reunification expected to take? At that time, the government leaders Kohl and Bush also believed that reunification would be a long process taking years, if not decades. But the events developed their own dynamics, and these pushed for faster solutions.

How did Gorbachev’s government in Moscow respond to the subsequent actions of the United States and West Germany?

At first, Gorbachev and his foreign minister Shevardnadze were outraged. During his visit in early December 1989 to Moscow, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the West German foreign minister, was given a taste of this indignation: It was thought that Kohl wanted to exploit the plight of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The Germans should remember where, in the past, a policy without rhyme or reason had led. And, according to the Soviet protocol of the meeting, Shevardnadze added: “Not even Hitler would have allowed such a thing.”²⁸

²⁵ This expression was used within the closest circle of advisors. Georgi Schachnasarow, *Preis der Freiheit. Eine Bilanz von Gorbatschows Berater* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1996). This is confirmed by Aleksandr Yakovlev, who was also one of Gorbachev’s advisors. Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 206.

²⁶ Interview Hans-Christoph Blumenberg with Heinz Keßler, 1999. Cf. Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 70.

²⁷ Interview Hans-Christoph Blumenberg with Fritz Streletz, 1999. Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁸ Conversation Gorbachev with Genscher, Soviet protocol, 5 December 1989, in GF, 89DEC05. In his memoirs, Genscher does not mention this sentence or other pointed remarks. This is understandable, since at the time this defused the situation. But why he still does not mention it,

Next, Gorbachev stressed the need of two German states for peace in Europe, with the GDR a guarantor of this peace, just as the two alliances, the Warsaw Pact and NATO, were needed. He repeated this view through all of December 1989 and until the end of January 1990, regardless of whether he was speaking to Bush, the Warsaw Pact, or at the 4 December 1989 meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact in Moscow.

This strategy was championed even during Mitterrand's visit to Gorbachev in Kiev on 6 December 1989, despite the fact that the French president hinted at a different strategy of his own. Mitterrand stated while there:

The German question should not determine the European process, but vice versa. And: In the first place—I repeat—must stand European integration, East European development, the pan-European process, and the creation of a European peace order. If the United States participates, that would give us additional guarantees.²⁹

This is one of the few moments in which Mitterrand's early hopes of a new European security system can be seen. Gorbachev did not respond and Mitterrand was disappointed.³⁰

The Soviet leadership continued to stress that the existence of the GDR guaranteed peace in Europe. Then, from December until the end of January 1990, they began to advocate a neutral Germany, as the advisor to Gorbachev and Politburo member Aleksandr Yakovlev did at an important meeting on 25 January, at which the Soviet leadership decided, in principle, to agree to German reunification.³¹ Nobody opposed. A few days later, this neutrality strategy was presented to the new East German prime minister, Hans Modrow, who had himself developed a similar strategy.³²

US secretary of state Baker, during a visit to Moscow in early February 1990, tried to convince Gorbachev that Russia and the Soviet Union, after being subjected to Germany during two world wars, could not possibly be interested in leaving a united Germany neutral. He even guaranteed that NATO would not stretch "an inch" eastward.³³ This guarantee lasted only a day, whereupon it was revoked by the US president. But the Soviet leadership did not know this, and ten years later, Russian protagonists called it a pledge not kept. Baker, however, does not mention this "guarantee" in his memoirs.

even years after reunification, is difficult to understand. It is possibly out of personal consideration for Gorbachev and Shevardnadze.

²⁹ Conversation Gorbachev with Mitterrand, Soviet protocol, 6 December 1989, in GF, 89DEC06.

³⁰ Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 138.

³¹ See the extended extracts of this meeting in Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 187–99. However, in my opinion it was not precisely declared that the Soviet Union would accept German unification. Nonetheless it was discussed.

³² Conversation Gorbachev with Modrow, Soviet protocol, 30 January 1990, in GF, 90JAN30.

³³ Conversation Gorbachev with Baker, Soviet protocol, 9 February 1990, in GF, 90Feb9b. Cf. Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 240.

In February 1990, Gorbachev argued for the two Germanys to be members in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. And then he sounded out the idea, from March 1990, of a new structure for security in Europe, whereby NATO and the Warsaw Pact would be dissolved. The first time this idea turned up on the Soviet side was after Mitterrand's visit to Kiev on 6 December 1989, as Teltschik mentioned on 22 February 1990 in a paper for Chancellor Kohl before his meeting with President Bush: Gorbachev and Shevardnadze would "try to use the German question as a lever for an all-European security system."³⁴ Teltschik also reported a conversation on 28 March 1990 he had with Nikolai Portugalov, a member of the International Department of the Central Committee, during which Teltschik was given the impression that the Soviet leadership had already held this position even earlier.³⁵ This idea was again discussed during the first visit of the newly elected GDR prime minister Lothar de Maizière to Gorbachev on 28 April 1990,³⁶ again at a visit by Teltschik and German bankers to Moscow in mid-May 1990,³⁷ and during a conversation between Gorbachev and Mitterrand on 25 May 1990.³⁸ According to this new European security structure, the Warsaw Pact and NATO were to be dissolved in favor of a new European security system that included the United States and the Soviet Union.

After all this strategic maneuvering, it is all the more surprising that at the end of the Soviet-American summit in Washington in late May and early June, Gorbachev then agreed to the reunified Germany having a free choice of which alliance it would join. After the reunification this was to mean unified Germany

³⁴ "Vorlage des Ministerialdirektors Teltschik an Bundeskanzler Kohl, Bonn 22. Februar 1990," in Hanns Jürgen Küsters and Daniel Hoffmann, eds., *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit: Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1998), 857–59.

³⁵ "Gespräch des Ministerialdirigenten Teltschik mit dem Berater der Abteilung für internationale Beziehungen des Zentralkomitees der KPdSU, Portugalov, Bonn, 28. März 1990," *ibid.*, 981–83. This would mean that Portugalov still met Teltschik for talks, although at the conference in Vienna at which the present text was presented, a former member of the International Department of the Central Committee told me that Portugalov had been "withdrawn" after his appearance on 21 November 1989 in Bonn, and that he then was no longer allowed to participate in international meetings, and thus also not on 28 March 1990. But this does not seem correct; at least it does not match the protocol of the meeting. In addition, in his conversations with me Chernyaev confirmed the visit of Portugalov: The visits were arranged with his assent.

³⁶ Conversation de Maizière with Gorbachev, Soviet protocol, 29 April 1990, in GF, 90APR29. Cf. my interview with de Maizière, 1 November 2000, and Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 315.

³⁷ On 14 May 1990, Teltschik and two important German bankers held negotiations in Moscow with nearly the entire Soviet leadership, mainly about German loans. Soviet protocol, in GF, 90May14; Teltschik, *329 Tage*, 230; Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 337. Teltschik tried to tie up a deal that was to include the loans as well as the membership of the future united Germany in NATO. Interview Alexander von Plato with Horst Teltschik, 27 September 2000. By then, Gorbachev preferred a new security architecture in Europe that included both the United States and the Soviet Union.

³⁸ Conversation Gorbachev with Mitterrand, Soviet protocol, 25 May 1990, in GF, 90May25.

being a member of NATO. Accordingly, this was acted upon at the Two Plus Four negotiations, which had begun on 11 February 1990.

With regard to Gorbachev's approval, I have an open question and an unsatisfactory thesis. Was he still caught up in the belief that if given the choice of alliance, this could mean either NATO or a new security alliance in Europe, despite the fact that there was no talk of the latter in Washington? Leaving the option of the continued existence of the GDR and the Warsaw Pact open, and thus also the option of the future unified Germany joining the Warsaw Treaty Organization, would have been entirely unrealistic. It is more probable—and this is my unsatisfactory thesis—that Gorbachev realized the plan of a European security system had been tossed into the negotiations too late and that, in fact, probably the only way to control this new united Germany had become its membership in NATO. But the question remains why the Soviet leaders were so late in introducing a new European alliance system into their strategic considerations.

Some European reactions to the reunification support

The British government under Margaret Thatcher responded by rejecting the possibility of reunification sharply, arguing that Gorbachev's position would be jeopardized. The stance of French president Mitterrand was different: He feared, as mentioned, that the reunification of Germany would interfere with the process of European integration, and therefore desired an agreement that included at least a monetary union. Kohl agreed to this, despite the fact that economically, he considered it unfavorable for Germany.

At the first meeting of the Open Skies conference on 11 February 1990 in Ottawa, Baker and Genscher presented the international conditions for reunification that had been worked out at the Two Plus Four negotiations. The fact that other Europeans were excluded from these negotiations angered especially the Italian and Dutch foreign ministers: The decisions being made did not only involve the four victorious powers of World War II (including France) and the two German states, but involved all Europeans. Uncharacteristically, Genscher's response was startlingly sharp, and even quite arrogant: "You are out of the game!"³⁹ Strangely enough, this power statement had its effect; the Two Plus Four negotiations clarifying the international framework of German reunification were conducted more or less without the involvement of other European governments. The Two Plus Four Treaty was signed on 12 September 1990.

The role of Lithuania and the other Baltic states in this process has, for the most part, been underestimated. Lithuania's declaration of independence on 11

³⁹ Interviews Alexander von Plato with James Baker, Houston, 19 September 1999, and with Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Lüdenscheid, 25 April 2001.

March 1990 elicited startled reactions, not only in Moscow, but also from the Western powers. It was feared that Gorbachev's position could be destabilized.

On 29 June, the French government under Mitterrand and the German government under Kohl convinced the Lithuanian government to temporarily rescind their declaration of independence,⁴⁰ whereupon Gorbachev lifted the embargo against Lithuania that had been instated on 17 April 1990 and discontinued his military threats.⁴¹ Here, the Western governments acted against the interests of this Baltic government, although its objective, self-determination, was similar to what West Germany was claiming with regard to German unification. But at that time, the Baltic states were republics of the Soviet Union; the Gorbachev government and its military felt more threatened by their political independence than by the developments in the GDR, since their independence involved the constitutional existence of the Soviet Union. In the accessible Politburo protocols, the Baltic or the Lithuanian Question was on the agenda more often than the GDR or the issue of German reunification. And for their part, Kohl and Mitterrand were worried that if the Baltic states were to push through their independence "too early," Gorbachev's position in the Soviet Union would be weakened and the unification of Germany derailed.

A word needs to be said about the Oder–Neisse issue. Kohl vehemently opposed the Oder–Neisse line being fixed as the border prior to the possibility of an all-German parliament implementing this decision.⁴² A long passage in the Soviet protocol of Kohl's meeting with Gorbachev on 10 February 1990 clearly shows his strong reservations about the Oder–Neisse line being recognized as the Polish–German border too soon.⁴³ In the West German protocol of Horst Teltschik, there is only one sentence: "The chancellor explained his position on the Oder–Neisse line."⁴⁴ Kohl maintained these reservations also later. The Polish government was concerned that the GDR would adopt its own declaration in the Volkskammer. The US government considered Kohl's attitude a "medium-sized PR disaster."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Protocol of the meeting between the prime minister of Lithuania, Kazimira Prunskiene, and Chancellor Kohl, 11 May 1990, in Küsters and Hoffmann, *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit*, 1103–5. The letter of Kohl and Mitterrand to President Landsbergis of 26 April 1990 is published in Tilo Schabert, "France and the Baltic States during the Presidency of Francois Mitterrand," *Baltic Worlds* 4, no. 2 (2011): 8–14 and <http://balticworlds.com/during-the-presidency-of-francois-mitterrand> (accessed 26 December 2012).

⁴¹ Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 308–11 and 351–52.

⁴² Werner Weidenfeld, with Peter Wagner and Elke Bruck, *Außenpolitik für die deutsche Einheit: Die Entscheidungsjahre 1989/90*, Geschichte der deutschen Einheit 4 (Stuttgart: DVA, 1998), 496ff; Plato, *Die Vereinigung*, 362ff.

⁴³ Soviet protocol, in GF, 90FEB10A and B. As one reason for his attitude, Kohl mentioned his considerations regarding the associations of persons who had been expelled from the former German territories following World War II.

⁴⁴ Küsters and Hoffmann, *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit*, 795–811.

⁴⁵ Interview Alexander von Plato with Condoleezza Rice, Stanford, 17 September 1999.

A few open questions

Despite the many descriptions of the German reunification, there are a number of questions that have not yet been answered. The first has been prompted by the research I have done: Why did Gorbachev wait so long to introduce a plan to his governing councils about a possible new European security structure that dissolved NATO and the Warsaw Pact but included the Soviet Union and the United States? And why, only a week after his talk with Mitterrand on the subject, did he agree in Washington to letting united Germany freely choose its alliance—an agreement that meant reunification under the umbrella of NATO?⁴⁶

For historians, questions that begin with “What if” are all but taboo, but nevertheless they can be found in varying contexts, if only implicitly. What would have happened if the response of the Gorbachev government to the clear strategy of the US and West German governments—“reunification under the umbrella of NATO”—had been different than the fluctuations described above? What would have happened if the response had not been neutrality for the united Germany, but “reunification yes, but under the umbrella of a new European security system and the dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact”? If Gorbachev had done this in December 1989 or January 1990, and not in March or April 1990 when he no longer had anything to negotiate—the Warsaw Pact, in effect, no longer existed and the GDR was on the road to reunification—it would have given the entire international negotiations a new angle to their deliberations and created new alignments.

I believe it is evident that Secretary of State Baker, in his conversation with Gorbachev in early February 1990, brought a guarantee into play, but this “guarantee” was not binding by international law and, moreover, was repealed by Bush a day later. Contrary to Baker’s statement of intent, today NATO has expanded to the borders of Belarus and Russia, which has been and is perceived by them as a threat. Why did NATO expand so rapidly?⁴⁷ A superficial answer might be because this extension lay in the interests of the former Western Cold War adversaries. But on second glance, it is not so simple, because it would be more in the interests of at least the European Western powers to integrate. Also they were not interested in alienating Moscow. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany, almost all Central European countries wanted to protect themselves against Russia as well as against Germany. And only NATO or the CSCE / OSCE with expanded competencies seemed able to do this. NATO was

⁴⁶ On Soviet policy in Germany’s reunification, cf. Wolfgang Mueller, “The USSR and the Reunification of Germany, 1989–90,” in this volume, 321–53.

⁴⁷ In 2012, the former Canadian minister of foreign affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, noted that in the 1990s he was afraid that this extension of NATO could cause “a smaller Cold War again” and argued against it or any of its forms. He could, however, not assert himself against Prime Minister Jean Chrétien because of the mood in the country among its Eastern European immigrants. Interview Alexander von Plato with Lloyd Axworthy, 2 November 2012.

quite successful politically and became the alliance of choice; it also remained the main anchor of the United States in Europe, although Mitterrand, for instance, had hoped that the process of European integration would reduce the influence in Europe of the United States and Russia, especially in military questions. Moreover, for some Central European governments, the United States seems to have been a major guarantor of security.

In this context, another issue needs to be clarified. Did the Oder–Neisse question or Kohl and Mitterrand’s intrusion into the Lithuanian move toward independence fuel a distrust of Western Europe? Might this be a reason for the positive attitude of these Central and Eastern European governments toward the United States (even after the Iraq war)?

From the US and (West) German perspective, German reunification was an extraordinary political success: East Germany gained self-determination, freedom from Soviet and communist domination, Western-style democracy and a functioning economy. This was done while preserving the structures of NATO and the EC, maintaining peace in Europe, and creating a working relationship with the USSR. Also the fears of Germany’s eastern neighbors were taken into account. European integration was boosted by the creation of the Euro, although the currency lacked, and still lacks in 2013, a universal economic and financial policy. From the Soviet perspective, the loss of its satellite GDR in its outer empire was often criticized, although not all of this criticism was entirely negative. And the alternative to Germany’s remaining in NATO, namely, a new European security system including, with limited powers, North America and the Soviet Union (respectively Russia) that Gorbachev and Mitterrand temporarily considered, came up too late to then be realized in 1990.

