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THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY, 1989-1990

Richard A. Leiby

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Front cover photo: A demonstrator pounds away at the Berlin Wall. REUTERS/CORBIS-BETTMANN.

Back cover photo: The mass exodus from the GDR began in the summer of 1989. Courtesy of German Information Center.



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were generally the first to leave, lured by the prospects of a better (and more profitable) life in the West. Unskilled workers, who now felt the enticement of the capitalist system following their visits to the Federal Republic, followed closely behind. Suddenly, there were labor shortages in practically every sector of the economy. As more and more workers left, an already terrible economic situation became much worse. According to one estimate, East German industry was losing about 80 million Deutschmarks each day.¹⁵ One official quipped that all Germany would someday be reunited—in the West. Given the steady stream of workers leaving the GDR for West Germany, the joke was not far from the truth.

Getting Unification Started

In the Federal Republic, reactions to the imminent collapse of East Germany were mixed. While most people welcomed the opening of the borders and the liberalization of the GDR government, the unification question was more contentious. Conservatives, especially Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the CDU, saw unification as the opportunity of a lifetime and resolved not to let the chance slip away. The opposition party was more cautious. While agreeing to the idea of unification in principle, the SPD did not want the effort to translate into higher taxes for West Germans. Party ideology aside, everyone agreed that unification—if accomplished at all—would take years of negotiation and compromise. Both Kohl and Modrow devised unification plans that reflected that assumption. Modrow's plan called for a federation of separate states with a gradual integration of the two societies. Chancellor Kohl's Ten-Point Program anticipated four years of negotiations aimed at eventual unity. In February, Kohl created a Bundestag committee to investigate the possibilities of unification.

The upcoming March elections in the GDR became a referendum on unification as the traditional political parties (now linked and receiving support from their counterparts in West Germany) and the various civic action groups mobilized voters in an effort to increase their electoral strengths. As the polling date approached, most pundits expected an SPD victory. Assuming that the electorate would be eager to preserve the social net that had once existed under communism, the "experts" figured that the SPD's traditional sensitivity to social issues should make it the most favorable choice of voters. Furthermore, the SPD was also publicly pro-unification, even though its leadership privately preferred a slow pace of negotiation and compromise. The CDU, on the other hand, enjoyed a more developed organization in East Germany and benefited from its relationship to the ruling West German CDU, the backing of its astute leadership, and the efforts of Chancellor

Kohl. These advantages were apparent during Chancellor Kohl's campaign stop in Dresden on December 19–20 in support of East German CDU candidates. During his speech, Chancellor Kohl peered out over the large gathering at the multitude of banners calling for immediate unification, not the lengthy drawn-out process most politicians envisaged. Evidently, he was duly impressed. Gambling on his ability to sense the popular will, Kohl abandoned the ill-received Ten-Point Program and committed his party to rapid unification under Article 23 (accession to the Federal Republic's Basic Law). In February 1990, he forged a new political entente called "Alliance for Germany," consisting of the western and eastern CDU parties, their Bavarian and Saxon allies (the CSU and DSU), and the civic action group Democratic Awakening. In the March elections, the Alliance scored a stunning triumph, drawing almost half of the East German vote (see Table 1).

Table 1

Results of All-German Elections: May 18, 1990

	Percent of Vote
Christian Democratic Union (CDU)	40.9
Social Democratic Party (SPD)	21.8
Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS)	16.3
German Social Union (DSU)	6.3
Alliance of Free Democrats	5.3
Alliance 90 (New Forum, Democracy Now! et al.)	2.9
Greens	2.0
Democratic Awakening	0.9
Other	3.6

Source: D. Philipsen, *We Were the People* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 401.

The victory elevated Lothar de Maizière, the East German CDU chairman, to the position of East Germany's first (and, as history would have it, last) freely elected chancellor. Surprising as the conservative victory was, the poor showing of the civic action groups is even more revealing. Their inability to draw votes may have been the result of poor organization or insufficient funding. Regardless, their defeat killed any last hopes to revive the socialist state. The two states were now on the fast track to unity.

The Unification Process

Now that the issue of method had been decided, the task at hand was to remove the obstacles hindering East German accession to the Basic Law. By

necessity, economic matters received immediate attention since East Germany's economy was eroding more and more each day under the weight of absenteeism, unemployment, and inflation. The need for an economic solution was just as great across the border, as the Federal Republic's ability to see to the needs of East German refugees was rapidly becoming overtaxed. To stabilize the East German economy, Kohl suggested that the two countries form an economic union with the Deutschmark (DM) as its official currency. Despite the fears of economists, the currency exchange went well. East Germans could trade in their worthless East German Ostmarks (OMs) for DMs at the rate of one-to-one for savings up to 400 DMs. Wages and salaries were also converted at one-to-one, but debts were exchanged at the rate of two-to-one. For its part, the de Maizière government enacted legislation to introduce capitalism to the former communist state. The long and arduous negotiations ended with the signing of a treaty establishing monetary, economic, and social union on May 18. On July 1, the Deutschmark became the legal currency of both halves of Germany.

The final obstacle to political unification was beyond the direct control of the two Germanys; the international community had yet to agree. Unification was a diplomatic problem on any number of levels. Germany's neighbors, many of which had fallen victim to Nazi aggression, feared that a restored Germany might again become expansionist. Poland was particularly sensitive to this issue, since a unified Germany might lay claim to the Oder-Neisse territories ceded to Poland after World War II. The security of the Soviet Union also had to be addressed. Gorbachev's insistence that a new Germany be neutral—that is, a member of neither NATO nor the Warsaw Pact—seemed the best the Soviets could offer. After all, the Soviet Union could ill afford further NATO encroachment on its borders. Would the West accept his reasoning? Would Germany rearm? Might it possess nuclear weapons?

Official negotiations on these vexing questions began on May 5, 1990, in Bonn. The so-called Two-plus-Four talks brought together a cadre of highly skilled foreign ministers. Representing the two German states were Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Lothar de Maizière. The four wartime powers were represented by James A. Baker (US), Roland Dumas (FR), Douglas Hurd (GB), and Eduard Shevardnadze (USSR). The Polish border issue demanded immediate attention, if only to allay the Polish government's rapidly growing fear of German intentions. Resolution came fairly quickly. Kohl and de Maizière introduced identical resolutions to their respective parliaments promising that the German states and Poland would "respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity without restriction."¹⁶ Kohl

assured that an all-German parliament would ratify the resolutions by treaty following unification. Although the compromise was not the complete abrogation of Germany's claim on the Oder-Neisse territories that it wanted, the Polish government acquiesced.

The issue of NATO membership was much more disruptive. A united Germany, still in NATO, would have been perceived by many Soviets as a blow to the security of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the West did not intend to allow Germany to be neutral and therefore free to pursue its own foreign policy path without the mitigation of other nations. Fearing that this issue might scuttle unification just as the object came into sight, Kohl flew to Moscow to meet with Gorbachev in person. It turned out to be Germany's most significant state visit in recent history. At his summer retreat in the Caucasus, Gorbachev told Kohl that the USSR would no longer insist on neutrality. Undoubtedly, Gorbachev's change of heart was in part a ploy to woo German economic support. However, it was also a positive gesture toward NATO's pledge to revise its mission in Europe to emphasize political, not military, goals.

The Two-plus-Four negotiations produced a carefully worded treaty designed to remove all the diplomatic obstacles to German unity. By the terms of the document, the Soviet Union, the United States, France, and Great Britain divested themselves of their postwar authority over the German nation. Although the final product was more a Soviet concession than a compromise, the treaty did embody both Soviet and Western interests. Germany would be free to join whichever alliance(s) it wanted, even though everyone understood that it would join NATO. In deference to the Soviet Union, the treaty restricted NATO from stationing troops on former GDR territory until all Soviet troops left. In addition, the agreement limited the size of the future German military and prohibited the possession of atomic, biological, and chemical weapons.

With the international aspects settled, only the inter-German treaty of union remained. On August 31, 1990, the Unification Treaty established agreements and compromises on a wide range of issues from constitutional law and internal justice to sports, culture, and education. Having thus chosen a common infrastructure, the two Germanys had little left to do but unite. The GDR People's Chamber chose October 3, 1990, as the day it would officially accede to the Basic Law and vote itself out of existence. As that day approached, Germans looked back on the previous twelve months with a mixture of amazement and trepidation. Forty years of division had ended in only nine remarkable months. In the early evening on October 2, Unity Day celebrations took place all over East and West Germany. Many communities

opted for low-key observances, while others favored fireworks and political speeches. In Berlin, the Philharmonic played Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* under the direction of Kurt Masur, the hero of the Leipzig demonstrations the year before. Chancellor Kohl's address that evening proclaimed that the new Germany would work toward "a common peaceful future in trustful cooperation with all countries and peoples."¹⁷ Those were comforting words, designed to soften the transition as Germany and Europe entered a new era. Germany's position within the European Union and its role in world diplomacy would need to be redefined. As of 1990, those and other problems still lay ahead.

NOTES

1. Article 146, 1961 translation.
2. Quoted, inter alia, in H. A. Turner, *Germany from Partition to Reunification* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 223.
3. A discussion of *Torschlusspanik* (gate-closing panic) and the fear that East Germans would forever be captive to an unchanging society can be found in the article "Das droht die DDR zu vernichten," *Der Spiegel* 33 (August 14, 1989): 19. See also Turner, *Germany*, 225.
4. As of 1989, over 4 million East Germans had changed their citizenship. See Bundesministerium des Innern, Übersiedler report, August 6, 1990, German Subject Collection, Box 96, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford, CA.
5. Manfred Görtemaker, *Unifying Germany, 1989–1990* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 62.
6. *Ibid.*, 64.
7. Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 42.
8. The German text, as published in the East German print media, reads: "Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben."
9. "Ich hörte nur noch Schreie," *Der Spiegel* 42 (October 16, 1989): 22 (translated by the author).
10. *Ibid.*
11. Guards physically abused prisoners with truncheons, often striking individuals in the legs or head. See Hannes Bahrmann and Christoph Links, *Wir Sind das Volk* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1990), 7–15.
12. Neues Forum Leipzig, *Jetzt oder nie—Demokratie* (Munich: C. Bertlesmann, 1990), 306.
13. In the end, only two of them saw action in the city that night (*ibid.*, 92–93).
14. The actual German text of the announcement, which was printed in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on October 6, 1989, is quoted in the following: Hans-Jürgen Sievers, *Stundenbuch einer deutschen Revolution* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1990), 65–66; Jörg Swoboda, *Die Revolution der Kerzen:*

Christen in den Umwälzungen der DDR (Wuppertal: Onckenverlag, 1990), 22–23; and Bahrmann and Links, *Wir Sind das Volk*, 16 (translated by the author).

15. Mike Dennis, "Perfecting the Imperfect," in Gert-Joachim Glaessner and Ian Wallace, *The German Revolution of 1989: Causes and Consequences* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 72.

16. Resolution on the German-Polish Frontier, *The Unification of Germany in 1990* (Bonn: Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 1991), 61.

17. Message from Chancellor Kohl to the Governments of the World, *ibid.*, 163–65.

kept quiet when we should have spoken" (translation by author). See Henkys, "Die Kirchen im Umbruch der DDR," 180.

19. Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1994), 169.

20. Sandford, "Peace Movement and Church," 141.

21. "Churches Uneasy Over Reunification," *Christianity Today* 34 (November 5, 1990): 65-66.

22. William E. Downey, "For German Pastors a Bitter Taste," *Christian Century* 107 (October 31, 1990): 988-89.

23. "Germany Unites After 45 Years of Division," *Facts on File* 50 (October 5, 1990): 733.

4

Four-Power Diplomacy and German Unification

Germany's rush to unity raised some troubling diplomatic issues and created potentially dangerous international problems. While most of Germany's neighbors welcomed the opening of the wall and the eventual liberalization of the GDR, the drive toward unification was another matter. Suddenly, wartime fears of German expansionism resurfaced. Would a unification of Germany lead to claims on Pomerania, East Prussia, and the other territories lost to Poland after World War II? Even if a new German government renounced its irredentist claims, there would still be a need to readjust existing European security arrangements. Should a new Germany belong to NATO or the Warsaw Pact? Both? Neither?

These questions would be difficult enough to answer even in the easiest of diplomatic circumstances. However, these negotiations would be further complicated by the fact that the wartime alliance between the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France still had controlling rights over any united German state. Forty-five years had passed since the end of World War II, but there was no more agreement on how to solve the "German Question" in 1990 than there had been in 1945. Each nation had developed its own set of assumptions regarding German unification and was willing to defend those interests in the international arena. Considering that four very different approaches to the problem had to be reconciled, it is amazing that any diplomatic solution could be reached at all. Nevertheless, in only two months, the four powers had forged an agreement on the unification of the two German states. How was it possible? It was due to equal parts of diplomatic skill, bribery, and luck.

This chapter is a study of multinational decision making at its best. First, French, British, American, and Soviet reactions to the fall of German communism and to the unification drive are discussed. Then, the chapter continues with an account of the Two-plus-Four diplomacy that led to the treaty that settled the disposition of Germany. The startling conclusion is that the four powers did *not* define the emerging Germany in light of their national interests. Instead, they were forced to redefine their national interests in light of the reemergence of Germany.

REACTIONS TO THE GERMAN COLLAPSE

The French Stance

The French government reacted to the events in the two Germanys with a mixture of support and suspicion. Since the end of World War II, France and West Germany had been partners in creating a new Europe. Their cooperation in such historic ventures as the European Coal and Steel Community and the Common Market bore evidence of the friendship begun by Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle. The two nations, in many ways, neatly complemented each other. Germany was the more powerful country economically, but as a defeated and divided nation it had never been a postwar political powerhouse. France, while economically weaker, did well to maintain what was left of its prewar political prestige with its United Nations Security Council seat and its status as an atomic power. An enlarged Germany might upset this delicate balance and shift the diplomatic and economic center of the European Community (EC) away from the Atlantic toward central Europe. Thus, France was caught between two conflicting desires. How might France support German self-determination without jeopardizing France's extremely fragile position as a major player in European and world politics?

The first diplomatic exchanges proved fairly cordial. At the 54th Franco-German summit on November 3, 1989, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President François Mitterand seemed to reach an agreement on the "German Question." As Egon Krenz's socialist government was collapsing, Mitterand confided in Kohl his worst fear—namely, that the future course of German events would lead Kohl to forsake the drive toward European unity for Germany unity. Kohl did what he could to reassure his friend that Germany's problems could be solved in a European framework and implied that Germany's days of playing off the West against the East were over. Despite such reassurances, Mitterand's policy remained cautious. In the concluding press conference, Mitterand asserted that he was "not afraid of German unifica-

tion."¹ Privately, he tried to make sure that the rapid pace of German events did not overtake French interests.

The camaraderie ended abruptly on the 28th of that month, when Chancellor Kohl announced his Ten-Point Program. Mitterand, angry and publicly critical of the plan, had neither been informed nor consulted. His negative reaction was understandable since the announcement invoked images of past German governments that acted first and sought consensus later. In the hopes of restraining this "loose cannon," Mitterand responded to journalists that he considered German unification "a legal and political impossibility."² In private conversation, he lectured German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher that Europe would not tolerate another unbridled Germany. There was even talk in unofficial circles of rapprochement with the Soviet Union (much like the old Franco-Russian entente before World War I) to keep the Germans from isolating France.³

Mitterand then embarked upon a number of scheduled personal visits over the next few weeks that would enable him to see if others shared his opinions. His first stop was to the GDR on December 20, 1989; but in a carefully considered quid pro quo, he did not inform Chancellor Kohl of his departure date. In East Berlin, Mitterand told an audience that the German people should decide their own future, provided the decision maintained European peace and recognized existing borders. His presence there sent a clear message to Bonn not to ignore French interests. Nevertheless, Mitterand, always the consummate politician, was careful not to embarrass Kohl. He understood that their working relationship would have to continue long after the unification issue ended. His next stop took him to Moscow to meet with Gorbachev, where the two men agreed that the existence of two separate Germanys was a "stabilizing influence" and that unification was not on the agenda.⁴

As the new year approached, Kohl and Mitterand worked to reform their friendship. In early January, Kohl met with Mitterand at Gascogne in southern France for what would be the first of many such meetings throughout the year. During the conference, the two men set forth their fears and aspirations regarding a possible German unification. Kohl purposely "stroked" the French, by telling the press that he believed that only France could legitimize German unity. In more private conversations, Kohl reaffirmed his commitment to work toward unity within the framework of the EC, and said that the process would not alter Germany's long-standing partnership with France. The ever-cautious Mitterand answered coolly, "I shall adhere to that."⁵

At best, Mitterand's tactics might slow the pace of unification, but he realized that he could not stop it completely. By February, Mitterand had refash-

ioned his foreign policy toward Germany in order to salvage as much as he could of the French agenda. Since an enlarged Germany would most certainly further reduce France's role as an international leader, Mitterand devoted most of his attentions to forging a consensus on German unity within the EC. Thereafter and entering the Two-plus-Four negotiations, French diplomats downplayed their concerns about keeping Germany linked to the EC and committed to European unity. Roland Dumas, the French foreign minister, summed up his government's position in an article published in the *New York Times* on March 13, 1990. He wrote:

I always believed that the arbitrary division of Germany was senseless. Since no one can permanently divide a nation, a people, a country, German unity will put an end to one of history's anomalies. And it is up to the Germans themselves to determine the pace and internal coalitions of this unification. But the situation inherited from the war cannot be improved without the participation of countries other than the two Germanys.

Everything revolves around a simple idea: German unification must be accompanied by a strengthening of European stability. . . . A unified Germany will have to be part of this strengthening of the community.⁶

On the eve of the Two-plus-Four negotiations, Germany and France had largely mended their differences. However, even as late as September, President Mitterand still could not bring himself to be positive about German unification, which was now only days away. In his speech following the Franco-German summit conference in Munich, Mitterand implied that there were still many unresolved "conflicts, rivalries, and misunderstandings." Harmony was still a long way off.

Great Britain

British reactions to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the drive toward unification were predictably similar to the French reactions. Although popular opinion in both countries favored unification, older generations remembered the wartime hardships brought on by German aggression and could not help being more than a little suspicious. For Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet, themselves members of the latter generation, the reemergence of the "German problem" in 1989 would pose a number of difficult foreign policy paradoxes. Her government feared that the rapidly changing political scene in central Europe might upset stability and alter the status quo—to Great Britain's detriment.

Even though Britain had always supported the idea of German self-determination, the rapidity of the East German collapse caught many policy makers off guard. Thatcher, who grew up during the wartime hatreds of Nazism and anything German, seemed ill-disposed to deal with the issue. It was no great secret that she did not hold Germans in high regard and that she particularly had no love for Chancellor Kohl.⁷ Much of England's conservative press picked up on her dislikes. Anti-unification articles, such as those arguing that there might be a "Fourth Reich"⁸ and that the "only thing worse than a bad German is a good German,"⁹ frequently appeared on English newsstands. Nevertheless, as news of the breaching of the Berlin Wall reached London, the official reaction expressed optimism and hope for the future. The prime minister welcomed the events of November 9, proclaiming that day to be "a great day for freedom, a great day for liberty."¹⁰

Such exuberance quickly faded once German unification had become a distinct possibility. Several potentially severe consequences for England were evident. A union of the Germanys would most certainly produce an economic colossus and possibly upset or disrupt established market relationships within the EC. Still worse, such a powerhouse might command increased diplomatic respect abroad and threaten Great Britain's status as intermediary between the United States and Europe, a position it had enjoyed ever since 1945. Finally, and perhaps most important, was the question of Germany's role in Europe's existing security arrangements. Great Britain did not want to see Germany neutralized. The best way to hold a reunited Germany in check would be to adopt the French suggestion and submerge German institutions into those of the EC. Such a solution, however, would require an ever-wider integration among the EC member states. Given that Thatcher vehemently opposed surrendering any more British sovereignty to the EC, this proposal did not seem tantalizing either.

Consequently, Great Britain's policy makers were caught between two conflicting goals: the desire to see Gorbachev's reform movement succeed and the need to watch over and contain Germany. The dilemma proved so difficult that during the initial discussions on the possibility of unification in January 1990, the best policy the prime minister could devise was to delay. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, Thatcher accepted the eventuality of a single Germany but said that unification "must come at a rate which takes account of other obligations and which gives us time to work things out."¹¹ This was a polite way of saying that she preferred German unification to take place in conjunction with a more general democratization of Eastern Europe, a process that she privately hoped might take ten to fifteen years.¹²

Thatcher never got the chance to try out her ideas, for the March elections in the GDR rendered her dilatory strategy obsolete and forced yet another change in policy. Faced with the new reality of a rapidly unifying Germany, Thatcher convened a meeting of experts at the prime minister's country estate, Chequers, to discuss Germany and their expectations for its future. The four prominent history professors and two political commentators in attendance characterized the Germans by reeling off a litany of negative personality traits that stereotyped Germans as insensitive and self-absorbed people. Although most of the group thought that Europe need not fear the Germans, there remained a minority who thought that the lessons of past aggression should not be lost upon the present. The Chequers Memorandum,¹³ as the notes of the meeting came to be known, might never have seen the light of day had it not been for the debate over the comments of Nicholas Ridley, the Cabinet Secretary of Industry. In an interview with *The Spectator*, Ridley blasted the proposed German monetary union as "a racket designed to take over the whole of Europe."¹⁴ The British public did not share Ridley's contentions. Nevertheless, the parliamentary debate on the affair and the subsequent leak of the Chequers Memorandum led many citizens to question Thatcher's policy toward Europe. Britain's relations with Germany suffered accordingly.

It was under this dark cloud of controversy that the Thatcher government had to prepare for the Two-plus-Four negotiations. As far as Great Britain was concerned, unification should be accomplished gradually, within an all-European context, and only upon the successful conclusion of the four powers' rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis Germany. Further, Great Britain could accept East German participation in the EC provided that such participation did not destabilize the EC. Finally, the new Germany would have to be a member of NATO.¹⁵ This final insistence put British policy on a collision course with the interests of the Soviet Union.

United States

The United States had a long history of supporting the idea of unification. As early as the middle of 1989, State Department bureaucrats saw that unification was finally within the realm of possibility and worked to formulate policy. As the East German government began to destabilize, many in the Bush administration thought that the United States should come out quickly in support of unification and thereby win favor from Germany. However, the West German government in Bonn still had not clarified its own position on unification, and thus the State Department did not rush to formulate a policy

for fear of appearing "more German than the Germans." Consequently, as the East German revolution gained momentum in October, the policy of the United States was still in flux. The general strategy was to support Chancellor Kohl and pay lip-service to the idea of unification, but to do nothing to speed it along.¹⁶

While the rest of the world responded joyously to the opening of the Berlin Wall, President George Bush was busy deflecting criticism that he did not seem very happy about the events in East Germany. Bush's response was more measured than it was unemotional. He, like his Secretary of State James A. Baker, had to temper his personal euphoria over communism's troubles with his role as diplomat. Neither of them wanted to give the impression that they were taking political advantage of the misfortunes of others.¹⁷ Further, the situation was still far from stable. It would have been unwise to send the impression that the United States would come to the demonstrators' aid should a military crackdown (à la Tiananmen Square) ensue. The rapidity of the East German collapse soon forced a more deliberate plan of action. Kohl's Ten-Point Program received a mixture of cautious optimism and disapproval at not being consulted. State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutweiler announced that the United States was sympathetic to Germany's drive to unify, but her announcement stopped short of endorsing the plan. In private conversations, President Bush told Foreign Minister Genscher that although unification was a matter for the Germans to decide, the United States would insist on certain conditions including, among others, that Germany retain membership in both NATO and the EC. In addition, Germany's borders and other security arrangements would have to be settled by international agreement before the United States would agree to relinquish its postwar responsibilities toward Germany.

By December, it was clear that the United States had taken a more positive approach to German unification than had France and Britain. In February, Chancellor Kohl and his wife came to Camp David for a weekend visit, during which the issues of unification received attention. Kohl and Bush agreed on almost every issue, including German membership in NATO. One bit of friction occurred when Kohl refused to renounce publicly German claims to the Oder-Neisse territories and guarantee Poland's borders. President Bush was not pleased, but he refused to press the issue either. Apparently, the Bush administration took seriously Henry Kissinger's comment that "if the Germans see us as obstructing their aspirations, we'll pay a price later on."¹⁸ Clearly, the United States did not want to risk alienating Kohl and thereby jeopardizing the American-German partnership.

Soviet Union

Of the four postwar powers interested in the fate of Germany, the Soviet Union had the most at stake. Soviet leaders had invested much effort into turning their World War II "prize" into the cornerstone of Soviet ideology in central Europe. East Germany was a symbol of communist achievement—a bastion of Marxist ideology bravely confronting a capitalist enemy to the west. In the previous decades, such a confrontational paradigm had meaning. But by 1989, Gorbachev's reform movement held out the promise for change. *Glasnost* and *perestroika* might have liberalized East Germany and kept it allied to the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, Erich Honecker's intransigence and Egon Krenz's failures pushed East Germany beyond reform into revolution. The Soviet Union now had to face its worst nightmare. East Germany was now on track for unification with West Germany. Was unification compatible with Soviet interests?

Gorbachev did not think so. In 1987, two years before unification became a possibility, the general secretary remarked that there would be "serious consequences"¹⁹ for any movement seeking to alter the status quo in Germany. During a state visit by Chancellor Kohl in October 1988, Gorbachev bluntly remarked that "the current situation is a result of history. Attempts at overturning what has been created by it or to force things by an unrealistic policy are an incalculable and even dangerous endeavor."²⁰ However, by the next spring, Soviet officials were singing a different tune, hinting that their government might support a unification of Germany. In October, Soviet spokesperson Yevgeny Primakov told the *New York Times* that there was "no formidable obstacle to reunification."²¹ In a speech before the United Nations in December and again to the Communist Party Central Committee in February, Gorbachev conceded that all peoples have the right to choose their social and political systems freely. In each speech, he implied that governments must be responsive to the wishes of citizens. The Brezhnev Doctrine, which retained for the Soviet Union the right to interfere in the internal affairs of communist nations, had died a sudden death. What caused such a dramatic *volte-face*?

The relatively sudden turn in the Soviet Union's German policy was based on the old formula that a united and *neutral* Germany might not necessarily be detrimental to Soviet interests. Gorbachev had to find a common ground between two opposite approaches to the German problem. On the one hand, the German issue would test his image as a champion of liberty. Any attempt to limit the East Germany's right to self-determination would bring into question his own commitment to *glasnost* and *perestroika*. On the other hand, Gorbachev still had to answer his enemies back home who were

highly critical of any plan to surrender territory to the West. When Chancellor Kohl's Ten-Point Program forced a reckoning with the issue, Gorbachev reacted duplicitously. Publicly, he accepted the possibility of unification and asserted that the Germans themselves must decide their own fate but stressed, however, that unification was not of "urgent international importance."²² At the same time, his message to the communist faithful back home was that East Germany's future as a member of the Soviet bloc was secure.

Evidently, it would be left to his foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, to reconcile these apparent contradictions publicly and define the Soviet Union's stance on unification. In a speech to the political committee of the European Parliament in February 1990, Shevardnadze reiterated that the Soviet Union accepted the principle of German self-determination, provided it was accompanied with assurances against the buildup of hostile military power and future aggression. In other venues, Shevardnadze also demanded a recognition of existing borders, and a satisfactory resolution to the question of Germany's place in the defensive structure of Europe. However, he reserved his strongest language for the official communist publications. In articles published in *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, he reiterated that the USSR had "very important and legitimate rights" in respect to Germany that were won by "twenty-six million dead (and) many thousand destroyed cities and towns."²³

Shevardnadze's words gave the impression that the Soviets could never accept a reunited Germany in NATO. Indeed, Gorbachev had no desire to move on this issue, since he still had hopes that the socialist reform movement inside the GDR would be successful. But as Egon Krenz's resignation signaled socialism's irrevocable failure, Gorbachev slowly came to accept the reality of the situation. During Hans Modrow's state visit to Moscow, Gorbachev let it be known that the Soviet Union would not oppose German unification provided Soviet interests were not jeopardized. The two men then discussed how this might take place. The resultant "Plan for Germany Unity," although officially credited to Modrow, clearly bore both men's hopes to preserve at least some of the GDR. The plan called for a confederation between the GDR and West Germany, one that would be a member of neither NATO nor the Warsaw Pact. Although this was an acceptable solution for the Soviet Union, this latter provision made it patently unacceptable to the other three powers.²⁴

The March GDR elections and its call for unification could not have come at a worse time for Mikhail Gorbachev. Four years into the process, *perestroika* had not fared well. The promised economic prosperity still had not materialized and the long lines and food shortages that were customary

under the communist economic structure still governed the marketplace. As the economic situation continued to deteriorate, Gorbachev's leadership came under attack from the right wing of the Communist Party, which also viewed the changes in eastern Europe as a retreat and defeat. In the midst of these personal and political difficulties, Gorbachev came to realize that a unification of Germany might actually be a blessing in disguise. A withdrawal of troops from East German soil would ease a terrible financial burden. In addition, Gorbachev might be able to exchange Soviet consent to unification for hard currency or credits, both of which Gorbachev desperately needed to prop up his ailing economy. Suddenly, Gorbachev saw in unification a means to silence his critics and simultaneously secure his political base at home.

Such a grand coup would never be possible unless Gorbachev could persuade his military and political opponents that the Soviet Union's security and economic interests were best served by surrendering control of East Germany. Given the British and American insistence that a new Germany remain in NATO, that prospect seemed remote. That spring, the Soviet Union suggested various plans for German involvement in European security. Shevardnadze proposed neutrality, joint membership in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and a complete revamping of both alliances to form a single pro-European security arrangement. All suggestions fell upon deaf ears. NATO membership remained the stumbling block that prevented an agreement. As the Two-plus-Four negotiations approached, Mikhail Gorbachev faced a difficult choice. He either had to agree to concede to Germany's membership in NATO and withdraw from East Germany at the risk of his own political future or submit to the pressure of his political opponents and hold fast in opposition to unification, thereby alienating potential sources of economic and foreign diplomatic support.

FINDING SOLUTIONS: THE TWO-PLUS-FOUR TALKS

The idea for multiparty diplomatic discussions emerged in the middle of January 1990, shortly after the GDR's collapse. James Baker and his State Department aides are generally credited with the idea, which was subsequently dubbed the Two-plus-Four talks. The other three powers agreed to the talks after the Ottawa "Open Skies" Conference in February 1990.²⁵ The Two-plus-Four meetings would prove little more than a formality. The critical issues of Polish border guarantees, NATO membership, and Soviet security concerns would be settled in private, face-to-face negotiations.

Everyone agreed that a unified Germany was impossible without a renunciation of all claims to Polish territory. Kohl understood this well himself but had to worry about his own domestic political position. Many of Chancellor Kohl's closest supporters were refugees from Polish territory and, given the upcoming selections, Kohl did not wish to alienate a major part of his electoral base by renouncing the territory outright. Instead, Kohl insisted that only an all-German parliament could give up such claims, a position that engendered open disagreement with President Bush at the Camp David meeting. Although there was precedent for such an argument, Kohl realized that unification would go nowhere without some sort of guarantee of Poland's borders. As a possible compromise, Kohl decided to seek joint resolutions from the Bundestag and the Volkskammer that renounced all territorial claims. Further, he promised that once unification was accomplished, he would present those resolutions to the first all-German parliament for ratification. Taking Kohl at his word, the Two-plus-Four powers agreed, as did the Polish government.

The NATO membership question was not as easily solved. The Soviets had repeatedly resisted the West's insistence that Germany remain in NATO, since communist hard-liners back home would interpret such a concession as "caving-in" to the enemy. An unlikely hero in the search for diplomatic answers was Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the Federal Republic's foreign minister. Until now, Genscher (FDP [Free Democratic Party]) had figured only marginally in the diplomatic negotiations since his boss, Chancellor Kohl, preferred to do most of the work himself.²⁶ Nevertheless, Genscher set to work to find a compromise on the divisive issue of NATO membership and, on January 31, 1990, presented a possible solution. His plan stipulated that a united Germany should remain in NATO but that no NATO forces would be permitted in the former GDR. This would have created a demilitarized zone that might assuage Soviet fears of further NATO encroachment. In addition, Genscher suggested that NATO eschew its historical military mission in favor of more political goals. Genscher's proposal had obvious advantages for Mikhail Gorbachev. It would allow him to agree to German membership in NATO and to save face, or even perhaps to claim a victory. If nothing else, it could serve as the starting point for discussion.

The United States picked up Genscher's proposals and elaborated on them during a high-level conference in Moscow in early February. In the meeting, Secretary Baker presented his Soviet colleagues with a list of concessions that the United States could give in return for Soviet acceptance of unification. These included border guarantees, a ban on German possession of nuclear weapons, and changes in NATO. During Gorbachev's visit to

Washington in May and June, Baker reiterated these "nine assurances." In one startling White House session, Gorbachev seemed willing to concede that the Germans themselves could choose to be a member of whichever alliance they wished. Bush and Baker realized that, if Gorbachev was serious, this formulation was the key to Soviet acceptance of unification. In more relaxed conversations during games of horseshoes at Camp David, Bush and Gorbachev reached an understanding of each other's position. By the end of the visit, the United States had gained Soviet acceptance that the Germans themselves should decide which alliance they preferred.²⁷ In return, Gorbachev had a much-needed trade agreement in his pocket. Upon his return to Moscow, Gorbachev announced the arrangement and wondered when his opponents' wrath would descend upon him. Surprisingly, when the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) met three weeks later, it reelected Gorbachev as general secretary, effectively silencing his critics. It appeared that *perestroika* would survive another day.

Why did the CPSU acquiesce so easily? Perhaps the decisions of the NATO London summit, taking place concurrently with the CPSU conference, had an impact. In what may have been the most important international compromise of the entire year, NATO officials agreed to de-emphasize the military aspects of the Atlantic alliance and reshape the treaty into one of political cooperation. The West agreed to reduce traditional troop strengths in Europe and shift its nuclear strategy away from flexible response options popular in the 1960s and 1970s to one of "last resort."²⁸ As part of the deal, Germany agreed to limit the size of its army and abjure atomic, biological, and chemical weaponry. By any measure, this would enhance Soviet security, and suddenly the loss of East Germany seemed a fair swap.

The final Soviet agreement came two weeks later. Having just survived his CPSU meeting and enlivened by the London NATO declarations, Gorbachev felt secure enough to invite Kohl to Moscow and his home in the Caucasus for face-to-face discussions. On July 14, the most important German-Soviet negotiations since 1939 began. In the next few days, Gorbachev agreed to unification in principle and to the new German borders. He then conceded that the Soviet Union would allow Germany to join whichever alliance it wished, with the understanding that it would choose NATO. Bundeswehr troops, in their role as part of NATO, could be stationed on former GDR territory once Soviet troops left. In return, Kohl offered Gorbachev over three billion dollars in financial support for the beleaguered Soviet economy and money to pay for the maintenance of Soviet troops still in East Germany.

The final Two-plus-Four document paved the way for unification and, remarkably, all sides came out reasonably satisfied. The end result is sufficient to claim that the process was a success. Yet, it is clear that the actual Two-plus-Four sessions were mostly a formality. The real decisions were made the old-fashioned way, in direct one-to-one negotiations. Thus, it is ironic that German unification was made not in Berlin or Bonn but in the Soviet Caucasus and at Camp David in the United States. There is nothing new about this bilateral decision-making approach. What was novel, however, was the degree that each of the four nations had to subordinate or alter its own national interests to accommodate a new political reality. Soviet foreign policy underwent the greatest change, for Soviet troops now had to withdraw from eastern Europe. Similarly, the transformation of NATO signalled a distinct change in U.S. foreign policy that would ultimately lead to a diminution of the American military presence in central Europe. Although Britain and France played negligible roles in affecting the outcome, they were most directly affected. Neither one would occupy the same position within the EC again, once a united Germany entered the market. Perhaps, their marginal participation in the process symbolized this transformation already at work. Germany's rising status as an international power was already making the postwar notions of an Anglo-French-dominated Europe obsolete.

Professor Karl Kaiser once called the diplomacy of German unification "a fortunate case of statecraft." Indeed, the Germans may well marvel at how lucky they were. The twelve months beginning with October 1989 produced a remarkable confluence of events. Had it not been for Mikhail Gorbachev and *perestroika*, East German communism would not have collapsed. Similarly, had it not been for the economic difficulties in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev would not have been as willing to allow Germany to retain NATO membership. Negotiations might have broken down at many critical junctures. However, it would be foolish to attribute the success of Two-plus-Four to good luck alone. Even the most fortuitous events would have been wasted had it not been for the talented diplomats, including Genscher, Shevardnadze, and Baker, who knew how to exploit the events properly. These men made solving the age-old German problem look quite easy. Forging a single community out of the two cultures would prove much more difficult.

NOTES

1. Renata Fritsch-Bournazel, *Europe and German Unification* (New York: Berg, 1992), 172. Mitterand repeated the comment in his interview with the *Wall Street Journal*. See Karen Elliott House and E. S. Browning, "Mitterand Sees Europe at the Crossroads," *Wall Street Journal*, November 22, 1989, p. A6.

2. Manfred Görtemaker, *Unifying Germany, 1989-1990* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 155.
3. For more on diplomatic French fears vis-à-vis the collapse of East Germany and unification, see D. Yost, "France in the New Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 69 (Winter 1990-91).
4. Martin McCauley, "Gorbachev, the GDR and Germany," in Gert-Joachim Glaessner and Ian Wallace, eds., *German Revolution of 1989* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 180.
5. Görtemaker, *Unifying Germany, 1989-1990*, 157.
6. Harold James and Marla Stone, eds., *When the Wall Came Down: Reactions to German Unification* (New York: Routledge, Chapman, Hall, 1992), 253-54.
7. Richard Davy, "Grossbritannien und die Deutsche Frage," *Europa-Archiv* 4 (1990): 141.
8. See Connor Cruise O'Brien, "Beware, the Reich Is Reviving," *London Times*, October 31, 1989, and reprinted in James and Stone, eds., *When the Wall Came Down*, 221-23.
9. Peregrine Worsthorne, *Sunday Telegraph*, May 7, 1989. Quoted in Davy, "Grossbritannien," 141.
10. Sheila Rule, "A Sense of Delight, Tempered by Pleas for Caution," *New York Times*, November 11, 1989.
11. "Thatcher Sees East European Progress As More Urgent Than Germans' Unity," *Wall Street Journal*, January 26, 1990, p. A12.
12. Stephen F. Szabo, *The Diplomacy of German Unification* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 47.
13. The Chequers Memorandum can be found in James and Stone, eds., *When the Wall Came Down*, 233-39, as can the comments of Timothy Garton Ash, who was a participant in the meeting (242-46). The memorandum also has been published in Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, *Uniting Germany* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1994), 129-31.
14. Ridley's extremely unflattering comments eventually cost him his job. See "Saying the Unsayable about the Germans," *The Spectator*, July 14, 1990.
15. Karl Kaiser, "Germany's Unification," *Foreign Affairs* 70 (1990-91): 179.
16. Szabo, *Diplomacy of German Unification*, 13.
17. See the firsthand account in James A. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 164-65.
18. Kissinger's comments were made at a White House dinner on November 13, 1989. See Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels* (Boston: Little Brown, 1993), 138.
19. Peter H. Merkl, *German Unification in the European Context* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 308.

20. See Hannes Adomeit, "Gorbachev and German Unification: Revision of Thinking, Realignment of Power," *Problems of Communism* 39 (July-August 1990): 4.
21. Robert Pear, "War Powers Curb on Kremlin Seen," *New York Times*, October 28, 1989.
22. Szabo, *Diplomacy of German Unification*, 45.
23. See Hans-Peter Riese, "Die Geschichte hat sich ans Werk gemacht: Der Wandel der sowjetischen Position zur Deutsche Frage," *Europa-Archiv* 4 (1990): 125-26 (translated by the author).
24. The plan can be found in Jarausch and Gransow, *Uniting Germany*, 105-6.
25. Douglas Hurd, foreign minister of Great Britain, and his French counterpart Roland Dumas both expressed preference for a four-plus-zero formula that would have excluded the Germans entirely. See Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 185; See also Szabo, *Diplomacy of German Unification*, 61.
26. Given the two men's antipathy toward each other both politically and personally, it is understandable that Kohl wanted to minimize Genscher's involvement.
27. For a more in-depth account of the Washington meeting and the Camp David session, see Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 215-28; see also Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany United and Europe Transformed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 277-83.
28. Britain and France insisted that the nuclear option be kept available, otherwise nuclear disarmament might have been considered as an option.