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GERMAN UNIFICATION: BETWEEN OFFICIAL HISTORY, ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP, AND POLITICAL MEMOIRS*

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ABSTRACT. *Ten years after German unification, this historiographical review discusses how the cascade of published material reflects on two questions vital for contemporary history on this subject: first, why and how did unification happen, and second, what kind of sources and evidence are used by authors to justify their particular interpretation of events? In answering these questions, this review will not only give an overview of published accounts – official, scholarly, and autobiographical – but go beyond the immediate confines of the 1990s to shed light on the question of why Chancellor Helmut Kohl was able to win a prize that had eluded all of his predecessors since Konrad Adenauer.*

The re-establishment of Germany's unity in 1990 after four decades of division, and in particular the negotiations that settled the international aspects, constituted a part of the endgame of the Cold War. The magnitude of this issue for modern history is obvious and as a result it has opened a lively debate among scholars in Germany as well as abroad. Few events in recent history have received such intensive scrutiny from so many different angles as German unification. The last decade has brought a cascade of published material – documents, memoirs, books, and articles, by active participants and outside observers alike – presenting a range of competing explanations for how and why chancellor Helmut Kohl was so swiftly and successfully able to obtain a prize which had eluded others since 1945. Although I shall glance at social history at the end, this review focuses on the international aspects of the German unification process. Any

* It is worth noting the significance of referring to 'unification' rather than 'reunification'. The terms 'unification' (*Vereinigung*) and 'reunification' (*Wiedervereinigung*) were used almost indistinguishably in 1989 to refer to the re-establishment of a unified German state. But 'reunification' suggests that the German state that had existed before the Second World War and was divided after 1945 was being brought back together. Yet in 1990 it was not an issue of reconstituting pre-war Germany, as it was clear that the eastern territories (Pomerania, Silesia, East and West Prussia) would remain part of Poland and the then USSR. Thus, the German government officially used the phrase 're-establishing Germany's unity' (*Wiederherstellung der deutschen Einheit*) or 'German unification' in order to point out clearly the difference between pre-war Germany and the smaller post-Cold War Germany.

In this review the following terms and abbreviations are used. The Four Powers are the post-Second World War victor powers, USA, USSR, Britain, and France; the Two plus Four talks comprised those four plus the two Germanies; FRG stands for the western Federal Republic of Germany and GDR for the eastern Democratic Republic of Germany; CDU for the Christlich-DEMOKRATISCHE UNION Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany); SPD for the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany); CPSU for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; and NSC for the National Security Council of the USA.

examination of the issue must come to grips with two vital questions. Why and how did unification actually happen? What kind of sources and evidence are used by each author to justify his or her particular interpretation of events?

German unification took place at a time of extraordinary, mostly peaceful, turmoil in Eastern Europe. The USSR had started to loosen its grip; people power had toppled communist regimes and the Berlin wall had come down in autumn 1989. Only a year later on 12 September 1990 the 'Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany' was signed in Moscow and thus Germany's unity and full sovereignty re-established. West Germany's policymakers had followed and welcomed the East German popular unification movement which evolved at a staggering speed, and managed to seize the leadership of the political process of unification on their own terms.

I

Nearly all the main political actors who were involved in the re-establishment of a sovereign, unified Germany, have published their versions of events. The result is a huge amount of historical information and personal interpretation.¹ Due to the extremely limited archival material available, the early literature on German unification, i.e. the 'first draft' of the history of unification, has mainly been based on such memoirs as well as the press, official documentation, and interviews; in general, it focuses on supplying a coherent account of events as well as trying to capture the atmosphere of the revolutionary events just past. The following books are particularly valuable: Karl Kaiser's collection of the most important official documents on the international aspects of German unification;² Elizabeth Pond's journalistic story of the revolutionary events in East Germany (mainly based on interviews with American and German political actors), in which she vividly describes East German 'civil courage', the breathtaking speed of events, the subsequent continuous pressure on politicians to take decisions, and

¹ Jacques Attali, *Verbatim. Tome III. Chronique des années 1988–1991* (Paris, 1995); James A. Baker, *The politics of diplomacy: revolution, war, and peace, 1989–1992* (New York, 1995); George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A world transformed: a study in statecraft* (New York, 1998); Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1995); Valentin Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen* (Munich, 1993); Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (London, 1995), and note the longer German version: idem, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1995); idem, *Wie es wirklich war: die deutsche Wiedervereinigung* (Berlin, 1999); Robert L. Hutchings, *American diplomacy and the end of the Cold War: an insider's account of US policy in Europe, 1989–1992* (Baltimore, 1998); Richard Kiessler and Frank Elbe, *Ein runder Tisch mit scharfen Ecken: der diplomatische Weg zur deutschen Einheit* (Baden-Baden, 1993); Helmut Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit* (Berlin, 1996); Egon Krenz, *Wenn Mauern fallen: die friedliche Revolution: Vorgeschichte, Ablauf, Auswirkungen* (Vienna, 1990); Julij A. Kwitzinskij, *Vor dem Sturm: Erinnerungen eines Diplomaten* (Berlin, 1993); Francois Mitterrand, *Über Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M., 1996); Hans Modrow, *Ich wollte ein neues Deutschland* (Berlin, 1998); Wolfgang Schäuble, *Der Vertrag: Wie ich über die deutsche Einheit verhandelte* (Stuttgart, 1991); Eduard Shevardnadze (trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick), *The future belongs to freedom* (London, 1991); Horst Teltschik, *329 Tage: Innenansichten der Einigung* (Berlin, 1993); Richard von Weizsäcker, *Vier Zeiten: Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1998); Vernon Walters (trans. Helmut Ettinger), *Die Vereinigung war voraussehbar: Hinter den Kulissen eines entscheidenden Jahres: die Aufzeichnungen des amerikanischen Botschafters* (Berlin, 1994); Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany unified and Europe transformed: a study in statecraft* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

² Karl Kaiser, *Deutschlands Vereinigung: die internationalen Aspekte* (Bergisch-Gladbach, 1993 edn). A shorter version in English excluding the documents is idem, 'Germany's unification', *Foreign Affairs*, 70 (1990/1), pp. 179–205.

the close US–German partnership;³ Stephen Szabo's 'first draft of history' on the diplomacy of German unification, a good complement to Pond's book because it includes additional evidence based on interviews with Soviet political actors;⁴ and the volume by Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott in which they describe the German unification process in the context of US–Soviet relations, mainly based on interviews with US and Soviet officials.⁵

Yet, the 'second draft' of the history of German unification will require more detailed historical analysis and explanation which can only come from the evaluation of archival evidence. The first unified German government took an extraordinary decision when it abandoned the usual thirty-year restriction period for virtually all East German archival documents, a large amount of which have since been printed.⁶ Yet, the GDR's foreign ministry files were excluded from this declassification process, as they were appropriated by the new united Germany's foreign office, where they will remain classified for another twenty years, along with the corresponding West German files. The availability of East German files combined with the gradually increasing access to material from the Soviet archives, after the disintegration of the USSR, has meant that most of the more recent scholarly debate has centred around the collapse of communism in the GDR and that state's subsequent dissolution, and on the Soviet perspective on the German unification process. Three outstanding studies in particular contribute to the historiography of the German unification process. Hannes Adomeit uses a great deal of Soviet and East German archival evidence to focus on Soviet–East German relations from Stalin to Gorbachev as well as on developments within East Germany and describes the German unification process in the analytical framework of this historical study.⁷ Rafael Biermann's published doctoral thesis, though solely based on East German archival material, is the first detailed analysis of Soviet decision-making to cover the various *deutschlandpolitische Schulen* and Soviet policies with regard to German unification.⁸ Charles Maier's brilliant historico-political analysis of the economic decline of the GDR, its collapse, and the ensuing process of German unification rests on a vast amount of East German archival documents.⁹

A few authors have been able to obtain privileged access to Western archival material, and offer dramatically different perspectives on the international aspects of

³ Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the wall: Germany's road to unification* (Washington, 1993).

⁴ Stephen F. Szabo, *The diplomacy of German unification* (New York, 1992).

⁵ Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the highest levels: the inside story of the end of the Cold War* (New York, 1993); cf. Don Oberdorfer, *The turn -- how the Cold War came to an end: the United States and the Soviet Union, 1983–1990* (London, 1992).

⁶ Daniel Küchenmeister, ed., *Honecker-Gorbatschow: Vieraugengespräche* (Berlin, 1993); Detlef Nakath and Gerd-R. Stephan, eds., *Countdown zur deutschen Einheit: eine dokumentierte Geschichte der deutsch-deutschen Beziehungen 1987–1990* (Berlin, 1996); idem and Gero Neugebauer, eds., *Im Kreml brennt noch Licht: die Spitzenkontakte zwischen SED/PDS und KPDSU 1989–1991* (Berlin, 1998); Gerd-R. Stephan, ed., 'Vorwärts immer, rückwärts nimmer!': *Interne Dokumente zum Zerfall von SED und DDR 1988/1989* (Berlin, 1994).

⁷ Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial overstretch: Germany in Soviet policy from Stalin to Gorbachev -- an analysis based on new archival evidence, memoirs, and interviews* (Baden-Baden, 1998). See also idem, 'Gorbachev, German unification and the collapse of empire', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 10 (1994), pp. 197–230.

⁸ Rafael Biermann, *Zwischen Kreml und Kanzleramt: wie Moskau mit der deutschen Einheit rang* (Paderborn, 1997); cf. Angela E. Stent, *Russia and Germany reborn: unification, the Soviet collapse, and the new Europe* (Princeton, 1999).

⁹ Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: the crisis of communism and the end of East Germany* (Princeton, 1997).

German unification. Particularly notable is Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice's study *Germany unified and Europe transformed: a study in statecraft*.¹⁰ Both its authors are academics who participated in the diplomacy of unification as members of the American National Security Council during the Bush administration. Their scholarly book draws on still classified US sources, as well as German and Soviet documents and extensive interviews with key political actors. It is the first study to offer such a highly detailed and documented account of the negotiations which settled the international aspects of German unification. In fact, Zelikow and Rice's particular perspective might have provided a good starting point for an explanation of the events they describe, but they fail to offer one. Not only do they emphasize the role of the NSC over the state department throughout,¹¹ but stick to the simple goal of providing a 'first draft' of history. They state openly that their intention was to 'tell the story of this extraordinary episode in modern diplomacy' (from their perspective).¹² Zelikow and Rice skirt the questions 'why' and 'how' and simply relate 'what exactly happened'.

II

Two recent German publications have now remarkably amended the state of research on the political processes which produced German unification, in particular by shedding light on West Germany's unification policies. The first book is a special publication of documents from the Federal chancellery's files (*Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989/90*) as part of the series *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, published by the *Bundesministerium des Inneren* with the participation of the *Bundesarchiv*.¹³ The second is political scientist Werner Weidenfeld's *Außenpolitik für die Deutsche Einheit*, volume iv of the edition *Geschichte der deutschen Einheit*. It is an official history on the international aspects of German unification in 1989–90 commissioned by the German chancellery and based among others especially on the above-mentioned documents.¹⁴

In fact, for the first time since the founding of the German Reich in 1871, a German government has declassified and printed confidential, even secret, files on such a recent and central period of their work. Federal chancellor Helmut Kohl personally took the initiative¹⁵ for the declassification of 430 documents from the West German chancellery, which are all printed in the collection of documents. The printed sources give insight into the decision-making process and the negotiations for the re-establishment of German unity from the Western and more specifically West German side. Documents include: transcripts of telephone conversations, summaries of conversations and

¹⁰ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*.

¹¹ Cf. Baker, *The politics*.

¹² Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, p. xii.

¹³ Bundesministerium des Inneren unter Mitwirkung des Bundesarchivs, ed., *Deutsche Einheit: Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989/90*. [Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik] (Munich, 1998).

¹⁴ *Geschichte der deutschen Einheit: in vier Bänden* (Stuttgart, 1998) by Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Deutschlandpolitik in Helmut Kohls Kanzlerschaft*, I; Dieter Grosser, *Das Wagnis der Währungs-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialunion*, II; Wolfgang Jäger, *Die Überwindung der Teilung*, III; Werner Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik für die Deutsche Einheit: die Entscheidungsjahre 1989/90*, IV.

¹⁵ There was speculation whether the publicity of the chancellor's initiatives in summer 1998 was a tactical move by Kohl to enhance his chances in the autumn 1998 Federal elections, by reminding the people of his services to the country's unification. See Gunter Hoffman, 'Ein Kanzler schreibt Geschichte', *Die Zeit*, 4 June 1998, p. 1.

discussions, notes, memoranda, and strategy papers. Less than a decade after German unification, scholars now have the unique possibility to be able to assess more precisely the West German chancellery's unification policies in 1989–90. Unfortunately, it is difficult to use the document-edition and Weidenfeld's study in combination, as Weidenfeld does not make reference to the printed version of documents, but to the archive repositories and their numbering. For this reason, I will refer in my footnotes to both books.

Werner Weidenfeld's official history of the foreign political aspects of German unification is extraordinary and one of the finest of its kind. In parallel to the making of the collection of documents, his research team was granted access not only to those sources to be printed in the special edition but also to various other classified material in the following government institutions: the Federal ministry for intra-German relations, the Federal ministry for domestic affairs, the West German permanent representation in East Berlin, and West CDU's and East SPD's committees. Central contents of the sessions of the Federal cabinet between autumn 1989 and late 1990 were also made available. As no other historian will have the chance to see all the documents Weidenfeld was able to evaluate until the files' official declassification in 2020,¹⁶ this monograph will set the terms for new scholarly debate. It is an excellent and historically detailed account of the international aspects of the German unification process; unification which, he concludes, was successfully achieved thanks to 'favourable conditions, statecraft and quite a bit of luck'.¹⁷ Weidenfeld's study should be read in conjunction with Zelikow and Rice's work, as they are similar in style as well as in their conclusions. However, Weidenfeld is more analytical in his approach and with the aid of the West German documents he is able to provide additional answers to various questions. These include, in particular, the genesis of Kohl's Ten Point Programme (publicly presented on 28 November 1989) and its international implications, the complications in Franco-German relations, the struggles around the Polish border recognition issue, and the impact of West German financial aid for the USSR on Gorbachev's political decisions.

Weidenfeld's official history consolidates the picture that scholars have so far gained of the early stages of the German unification process. When the Berlin wall came down on 9 November 1989, the number of East Germans crossing the border to West Berlin exploded. The East Germans began to demand the unity of German people at mass demonstrations, catching everyone by surprise: the GDR's leadership, which had only intended to liberalize the travel law; the West German government, whose chancellor was on an official state visit in Poland and who interrupted his visit for an appearance in Berlin; the Four Powers, which *de iure* were in charge of any matter concerning Germany and Berlin as a whole and theoretically were even in charge of the border checkpoints in Berlin.¹⁸

We know now that the nineteen days following the fall of the Berlin wall were decisive for the process of German unification and especially for the development of a West German policy programme as to how unification could happen. Weidenfeld makes it unmistakably clear that initially the Kohl government had no strategic concept to deal with the East German people's demand for unification. The preparation of a *Deutschland-*

¹⁶ See Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, p. 645.

¹⁷ The idea of statecraft has in fact been put forward already in earlier works. See Kaiser, *Deutschlands Vereinigung*, pp. 21–6; Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, p. ix.

¹⁸ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 9–32.

political move was an improvised, yet crucial affair, as is reflected in the titles of the three large chapters Weidenfeld devotes to the issue: (1) Improvisation as statecraft (*Improvisation als Staatskunst*), (2) Looking for a new concept (*Auf der Suche nach einer neuen Konzeption*) and (3) An idea becomes a programme (*Eine Idee wird Programm*).¹⁹ When, on 28 November 1989, Helmut Kohl presented a Ten Point Programme for achieving German unity to the Bundestag, he took the world by surprise, and opened the road to unification by putting the issue on the agenda of international politics.²⁰ Weidenfeld cannot entirely uncover who exactly was the first to think of initiating a unification policy and what was the original motivation: was it the chancellor's adviser Horst Teltschik, inspired by his encounter with Nikolaj Portugalov (consultant on international affairs of the CPSU's central committee) who presented him Soviet thoughts on the possibility of unification, or Kohl, under the pressure of the revolutionary circumstances to take a leadership role? However, the narrative tends to give Teltschik the credit as the mastermind behind the public political scene.²¹

In his attempt to put the Ten Point Programme in an analytical perspective, Weidenfeld asserts that it turned unification rhetoric into an operative (or concrete) policy.²² Yet later he states that the Ten Point Programme had only been a means to avoid the cementing of the existence of two German states²³ and that due to the lack of any time-frame, the programme was not a unification *plan*, but rather a *concept* or *programme* with the final goal of German unification.²⁴ In his study's conclusion, however, Weidenfeld again refers to the Ten Point Programme as the starting point for unification policies in an operative sense.²⁵ Weidenfeld bases his argument on Teltschik's and Kohl's memoir accounts, in which Teltschik – who, as discussed above, seems the initiator and creator of the ten points – implicitly acknowledges the fact that the ten points were indeed a unification *plan*,²⁶ whereas Kohl simply refers to the official term Ten Point Programme.²⁷ None of them makes a theoretical distinction about the criteria for the terms *plan* or *programme*.

The use of terminology is very important, however, since in historical perspective the assessment of the historical value and importance of the ten points depends on whether they were a definite plan implying steps to be taken on the road to unification or simply a general concept with the possibility of unification as the final goal. By referring to studies of pre-1989 West German *Deutschlandpolitik*, unification rhetoric and operative unification policies of the 1950s, this confusion can be clarified. First of all, how can an operative unification policy be defined and, secondly, could the Ten Point Programme be considered as a unification *plan*? An 'operative unification policy' entails the creation of concrete plans which have as their aim Germany's *staatliche* unification and which are closely adhered to by the government. In this light, one has also clearly to differentiate between an 'operative unification policy' and *Deutschlandpolitik*, which were West German policies as they were conducted towards the GDR in intra-German matters. Theoretically the former is a specific instance of the latter; in fact, these terms are neither mutually exclusive nor fully interchangeable.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 21–134. ²⁰ Ibid., pp. 109–10, 117–34. ²¹ Ibid., pp. 81–2, 97–102.

²² Ibid., pp. 95, 109.

²³ Ibid., p. 126.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 110. The italics introduced here are mine. Kohl himself wrote later that he believed at the time that it would take three to four years to achieve unification, while Teltschik wrote that Kohl believed in a time-span of five to ten years. Cf. Kohl, *Ich wollte*, p. 167; Teltschik, *329 Tage*, p. 52.

²⁵ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, p. 640.

²⁶ Teltschik, *Innenansichten*, p. 50.

²⁷ Kohl, *Ich wollte*, pp. 159–75.

From Weidenfeld's study we know now that in autumn 1989 the West German government had no blueprint for German unification in their desk drawers²⁸ and, in fact, that this had been the case since the early 1960s. With the Ten Point Programme Kohl started to bridge the deep rift between the FRG's abstract desire for unification – as it had existed since the end of operative unification policies in 1960 – and the active accomplishment of the goal, the possibility of which had seemed unrealistic since the building of the Berlin wall in 1961.²⁹ Borrowing traditional Social Democratic *Ostpolitik* rhetoric about the 'all-European process' and the 'peace order' while simultaneously returning to the idea of 'change through strength' that was characteristic of Adenauer's policies, Kohl's speech proved his bipartisan credentials. The programme's novelty, as well as its impact, lay in the way these ideas were presented: namely, as a *plan* for the achievement of German unity in several stages of development, yet without a time-frame. It is the achievement of a goal by stages which makes the ten point concept a *plan*.

Indeed, from the ten points one could infer that the chancellor's focus was on practical operative unification policies as part of the intra-German convergence. Kohl's immediate political targets seemed to be: direct negotiations with the GDR, free and democratic elections in the GDR, and a German economic and monetary union.³⁰ Yet, when he would begin these policies depended on the dynamism of the unification process and on Kohl's improvisation. Weidenfeld correctly establishes that, with Kohl's address, the East German people could see that the idea of unification had become a real possibility, something they could demand. It provided a focal point and a Western leader to the emerging East German public mood.³¹ Unfortunately, Weidenfeld fails to analyse and explain the crucial significance of what he widely describes, namely that the Ten Point Programme gave justification 'from above' to the unification process 'from below'.

With this explanation in mind, Kohl's reasons for secrecy before announcing the ten points and the subsequent domestic and international reactions to his presentation become much clearer. Teltschik and Kohl feared that after the East Germans' demand for unification, Federal foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher or former chancellor Willy Brandt could take the initiative,³² and so it had been decided to create the plan in absolute secrecy. As Weidenfeld discusses, it had to accomplish four goals. First, it should fuel the interest in, and expectations of, unification that were just beginning to catch fire in the East German demonstration movements.³³ Second, the programme should instantly differentiate Kohl politically from his more cautious opponents, better positioning the unpopular chancellor for the West German Federal elections the following year. Third, Kohl wanted to steer both the dynamic developments in the GDR and the East Germans' still ambivalent opinion on unification towards his goal of

²⁸ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, p. 97. See also Kiessler and Elbe, *Ein runder Tisch*, p. 45.

²⁹ See n. 107.

³⁰ See Ten Point Programme, especially points 1–3, and Kohl's comments in *Ich wollte*, pp. 160–7.

³¹ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 94–110.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 102.

³³ Cf. Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, p. 119. Elizabeth Pond originally argued that Kohl saw the oncoming public clamour for unification within East Germany and was trying to slow it down to a manageable pace. She subsequently and correctly abandoned this argument, but her original position was cited approvingly by James McAdams, who also saw Kohl's move as an effort to slow the pace of change. Cf. A. James McAdams, *Germany divided: from the wall to reunification* (Princeton, 1993), p. 205; Pond, 'A wall destroyed. The dynamics of German unification in the GDR', *International Security*, 15 (1990), p. 57, and *idem*, *Beyond the wall*, p. 137.

Germany's *staatliche Einheit*. In fact, he aimed to counter the East German prime minister Hans Modrow's treaty community (*Vertragsgemeinschaft*) idea by overwhelming it before an international consensus could build up around it and back the chancellor into a corner. Fourth, Kohl wanted to take the offensive against any possible veto positions³⁴ by European neighbours, especially the two Western European allies, France and Britain. He feared that they might attempt to stabilize the GDR in the pursuit of a two-state solution instead of supporting his unification policies. Moreover, he intended to point out the German interests in view of the Soviet–US summit in Malta in early December.³⁵

The failure to consult or inform domestic and international partners conveyed the impression that the West German chancellor was now determined to speed up the movement towards unification and reinforced the concern abroad that unified Germany would be prone to act unilaterally. Particularly abroad the ten point speech was considered as a move towards an operative unification policy, and it was precisely this factor which worried Germany's neighbours.³⁶

The Four Powers had to react to Kohl's surprising offensive. After all, the Allies' reserved rights still overlay Germany's sovereignty, and issues linked to them, such as the question of Germany's relinquishment of the eastern territories and the *de iure* recognition of the Oder–Neiße border, had to be finally resolved between the two German states and the Four Powers. Weidenfeld underlines what Zelikow and Rice already revealed in their study, that the US and in particular president George Bush, despite Kohl's secrecy, fully trusted the chancellor and hence unquestionably backed his move towards an operative unification policy, making the US the most important ally for Kohl throughout the unification process. Weidenfeld documents that Kohl had arranged for a long letter including an explanation of the Ten Point Programme to be sent to Bush, before his speech, although his good intentions were thwarted by technical problems.³⁷

In contrast to the very supportive American *Deutschlandpolitik*, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, as is well known, objected vehemently to German unification and refused for a long time to even consider the issue.³⁸ In contrast, French attitudes were much less clear cut, and it is in particular the excellent and unprecedented analysis of French policies which sets Weidenfeld's study apart. He extensively redraws French policy on the German issue. While Biermann has alluded to a conspicuous convergence of interests between France and the USSR during November–December 1989³⁹ and Adomeit has revealed detailed documentary evidence of the meeting between Mitterrand and Gorbachev on 6 December 1989 in Kiev, which shows that Mitterrand's aim was to create a Franco-Soviet veto coalition against German unification,⁴⁰ Weidenfeld is now able not only to describe precisely this Franco-Soviet episode but to explain the many different layers of French foreign political moves aiming to slow down unification, if not to prevent it altogether.

During autumn 1989, Mitterrand was very suspicious of the political changes in Eastern Europe and especially the GDR. In keeping with the traditions of French

³⁴ Cf. *Sonderedition*, document 94b, pp. 546–8.

³⁵ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 94–5, 109–10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–34; esp. p. 126 and p. 119 n. 44. Cf. *Sonderedition*, document 102, pp. 574–7.

³⁷ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 126–9. See also, Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, pp. 122–3 esp. n. 56.

³⁸ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 131–3.

³⁹ Biermann, *Kreml*, p. 352.

⁴⁰ Adomeit, *Imperial overstretch*, pp. 459–60.

diplomacy, he turned towards the USSR which he considered as a potential ally against a unifying Germany. Mitterrand did not necessarily believe unification could be avoided altogether, but he wanted the process at least to be slowed down. Influenced by his experience of two world wars, he played with the idea of a 'return to 1913' and a triple alliance of France, Britain, and Russia. He did not believe the USSR would permit German unification to take place.⁴¹ The real surprise in Weidenfeld's reconstruction of the Mitterrand–Gorbachev meeting of 6 December 1989 is the change of roles between the two statesmen. It was Mitterrand who, as if to test Soviet intentions, took the initiative and made specific suggestions, going as far as to offer to meet Gorbachev in East Berlin during the French president's state visit to the GDR scheduled for 20 December. Both considered Kohl's Ten Point Programme a *diktat* and a concrete plan⁴² and wanted the all-European process to overtake the German unification process. However, Gorbachev held on to his idea of the 'right of self-determination' and was generally evasive towards Mitterrand's moves.⁴³ In this context, Weidenfeld reveals another episode: a meeting following the Gorbachev–Mitterrand consultation between Mitterrand's adviser Jacques Attali and Gorbachev's adviser on European affairs, Vadim Sagladin, when Attali pointed out that Russia was France's traditional ally. Since both countries had suffered under German aggression, together they should try to avoid any historical repetition.⁴⁴

It never came to a renewal of a French–Soviet alliance, but the German government could not conceal their impression that France had tried 'to play the Russian card'.⁴⁵ Although Weidenfeld does not directly answer the question of why this veto coalition failed, one can confidently argue that France simply could not suddenly deny being Germany's partner in the Western alliances (EU and NATO) and the various implicit legal commitments to unification expressed in the *Deutschlandverträge* of 1954 and the Harmel report of 1967, nor could Mitterrand risk destroying his friendship with Kohl. But Mitterrand, suddenly obsessed with geopolitical thinking, did see France's status endangered by the German unification process and intended to safeguard France's national interest by underlining the territorial status quo. His visit to the GDR from 20 to 22 December 1989 revealed his strong intention to delay unification and was intended as a demonstration of the sovereignty of the East German state. It is in this light that the signing of the long-term economic treaties have to be seen. It was not the economic interests that were decisive, but the political treatment of the GDR as a sovereign entity.

All the same, comparing it to the French Revolution, Mitterrand did not deny that in East Germany, a people's struggle for democracy, freedom, and German unity was going on.⁴⁶ Weidenfeld makes clear that Mitterrand realized, earlier than Thatcher with whom he had also contemplated anti-unification policies, that absolute denial of German unification would deprive him of any influence in that process.⁴⁷ He calculated that he could only achieve his European political goal to deepen the European community by an economic and monetary union with Kohl's support, and not with Thatcher's.

Kohl's main interest however was European political union. Weidenfeld demonstrates how European political strategies became linked to the German unification issue

⁴¹ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 153–8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 126. See also, Adomeit, *Imperial overstretch*, pp. 459–60.

⁴³ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 153–6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 156–7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 159–63.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

and that, in fact, France and West Germany made a kind of 'deal'.⁴⁸ As publicly announced by Kohl in the Ten Point Programme as well as at the Strasbourg summit of the EU on 8–9 December 1989, German unification had to be embedded in the European integration process; his frequent statement that 'German unification and European integration were two sides of the same coin' mirrored indeed his deepest belief.⁴⁹ Simultaneously he used European politics – his ideas for political union – and his concessions to a European economic and monetary union vis-à-vis Mitterrand, as a means to overcome French opposition to unification. Kohl knew that, although Germany's right to unity, which the Western powers had reiterated over decades and to which they consented in theory, was well established, he would not be able to achieve it without a service in return. Mitterrand, from his point of view, achieved the assurance that Germany would be controlled through its commitment to the economic union and would thus remain embedded in an ever closer union.⁵⁰ Indeed, Kohl had already committed West Germany in the Delors report of spring 1989 to European Monetary Union (EMU). However, in November 1989 he was wavering before the Franco-German deal finally bound Germany to EMU. Weidenfeld ultimately concludes that the German unification process indeed became a catalyst for the European integration process.⁵¹

It was only in mid-April 1990, after the launching of a Franco-German initiative for a European political union, that Mitterrand gave up most of his negative views on unification.⁵² Yet, until early summer he still remained obsessed with France's future status in Europe and the territorial status quo. He continued to point to France's Four Power rights as well as advocating the Polish case of *de iure* recognition of the Oder–Neiße border.⁵³ In fact, France encouraged Poland's demand of participation as the fifth 'Ally' in the Two plus Four talks and even invited the head of state, Wojciech Jaruzelski, and prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki to Paris on 9 March 1990, only one day after Kohl had presented a coalition agreement on the border issue offering the Poles a joint declaration by Bundestag and Volkskammer confirming current borders soon after the Volkskammer election on 18 March.⁵⁴ Since a unified Germany would certainly recognize the Oder–Neiße border *de iure*, Poland's demands did not produce severe consequences for the German unification process itself. In the end Poland played a secondary role, for it could not push through its demand to participate in the Two plus Four talks. Yet the Polish border issue put Kohl under heavy pressure internationally and thus caused quite a stir. London and Paris could hide their anti-unification policies

⁴⁸ Previously this has only been vaguely hinted at in an essay by Joachim Bitterlich, one of Kohl's foreign policy advisers. See Joachim Bitterlich, 'In memoriam Werner Rouget. Frankreichs (und Europas) Weg nach Maastricht im Jahr der Deutschen Einheit', in idem and Ernst Weisenfeld, eds., *Schwierige Nachbarschaft am Rhein* (Bonn, 1998), pp. 112–23; idem, 'Die deutsche Einheit hat die Geburt des Euro beschleunigt', *Die Zeit*, 7 May 1998, p. 4. See also Klaus Wirtgen, 'Weg ohne Wiederkehr. Hinter der Fassade ihrer deutsch-französischen Freundschaft haben Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand erbittert um Einheit und Euro gerungen, wie jetzt neue Dokumente aus dem Kanzleramt zeigen. War die Aufgabe der D-Mark der Preis für die Wiedervereinigung?', *Der Spiegel*, 10 (1998), pp. 25–8.

⁴⁹ See Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 150–1 and nn. 38, 39; for the quote see representative speech, 15 Mar. 1984, reprinted in *Europa Archiv*, 20 (1984), p. D 591.

⁵⁰ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 136–52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 620–3, 640.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁵³ See *Sonderedition*, document 203, pp. 909–12; document 216, pp. 937–41.

⁵⁴ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 486, 489–90.

behind it and the extreme differences between Kohl's and Genscher's standpoints became publicly visible.⁵⁵

Weidenfeld's analysis of the Kohl–Genscher tandem in the unification process is particularly valuable, though sadly his comments are scattered among accounts of specific events and it is only at the very end of his 620 page narrative that he offers a four page general analytical summary of the pair.⁵⁶ This makes it difficult to follow precisely the development of Kohl's and Genscher's policies and relations. We read that the two surely followed the same aim: German unification and *Westbindung*.⁵⁷ Yet during the unification process Kohl and his advisers were focused more on US policies than Genscher and his diplomats, who were trying particularly to sound out the Soviets on the issue of possible NATO-jurisdiction expansion to GDR territory. Weidenfeld describes how at Camp David in late February 1990 Kohl publicly and without hesitation argued for a unified Germany's full NATO membership and was not to change his position. Eventually he secured Gorbachev's approval in Moscow and the Caucasus in mid-July 1990. At the same time Genscher continued to think aloud about variations, alternatives, and parallel perspectives, such as an all-European security architecture, until early summer 1990.⁵⁸

As Weidenfeld explains, these different political approaches derive from their politico-ideological background: Genscher (originally from Halle) was deeply attached to *Ostpolitik* and an all-European *modus vivendi*, while Kohl (a *Rheinland-Pfälzer*) was a deep admirer of Adenauer's policies and held on to the legal remnants of the Cold War following the CDU's traditions. Moreover, Weidenfeld sees the roots of various clashes in the internal and institutional competition within the coalition during the period before the elections. Kohl and his party, the CDU, had to take into account their electorate which included the *Vertriebene* (refugees) from the eastern territories.⁵⁹ In this context, the Polish western border was a particularly hot topic in West Germany's domestic and foreign policy in 1989–90. Whereas Genscher had acknowledged and publicly asserted several times that the Oder–Neiße border must be recognized as a unified Germany's eastern border, Kohl postponed making any binding statement on the legal recognition of the Oder–Neiße border and with this the final *de iure* relinquishment of the eastern territories. It was only after serious coalition debates in Bonn and Genscher's heavy pressure on Kohl in public that the chancellor agreed to a compromise on 8 March 1990, that a joint declaration on the border question would be issued which however was conditional on Poland renouncing its illegal claims of reparations.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, Weidenfeld does not really elaborate the differences between chancellor and foreign minister and does not comment on their personal relationship. He explains that the power relations between Kohl and Genscher changed in spring 1990 in favour of Kohl, who decided to deal with certain foreign political issues as a *Chefsache* – e.g. contacts with the US and arranging the billion-credits (DM) for the USSR – without the involvement of his foreign minister, which of course undercut Genscher's political role.⁶¹ But Weidenfeld gives no further details about possible

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 479–509.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 629–33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 635.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 264–71, 435–9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 436–8, 458, 634–9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 481–9; cf. *Sonderedition*, document 206, pp. 915–16; document 222, pp. 955–6.

⁶¹ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, p. 458. For a very speculative explanation, other than personality clash or a question of power and influence, cf. Gernot Facius, 'Hinweise auf Top-Spion an der Seite

subsequent personal clashes, and simply refers to the pair as a 'winning team' who divided their jobs well: on the one side, Kohl, who not only worked out the negotiation positions but also communicated trustworthiness and optimism and looked after relations with the US; on the other side, Genscher, who calmed the French and the Soviets through his good relations with his diplomatic counterparts and whom Weidenfeld describes as a master of creating and phrasing multifaceted policies.⁶²

With regard to the institutional relations between foreign office and chancellery, Weidenfeld points out the important role of the foreign office's civil service especially in the decision-making process of the Two plus Four talks. Yet, the chancellery was none the less predominant. One reason for this might be Kohl's style of governmental rule, as indeed the chancellery had taken up many foreign political channels itself and bypassed the foreign office.⁶³ A second reason might be the unvariegated source material. The continued classification of most materials in the chancellery and other ministries leaves the current picture of West Germany's policies selective, fragmented, and incomplete, and Weidenfeld's study clearly reveals the problems of such partial, official history. As his book is based on uniquely privileged access to files opened by the chancellor himself, one wonders what secrets might still be found in the unpublished files both of the chancellery and of the foreign office. If the foreign office and in particular Genscher played such a minor role in the important decisions, there would be no reason to keep foreign office files classified.

A final crucial issue on which Weidenfeld has tried to shed light is how the West German government influenced Gorbachev to accept German unification and to consent to a unified Germany's membership in NATO. As Biermann and Adomeit did in their earlier studies, Weidenfeld describes how during 1989 Gorbachev's advisers were playing with various ideas to renew Soviet *Deutschlandpolitik*, but also notes how Gorbachev clung to the post-war realities of the existence of two Germanies and the status quo on European borders.⁶⁴ This demonstrates a general weakness in Moscow's foreign policy which became obvious later in the negotiations over Germany's NATO membership. During the entire unification process, the Soviets seemed to lack concepts for political initiatives and co-ordination between the different departments. They continued to hold on to status quo policies even when political circumstances had changed. The Kremlin then changed its political course against any internal protests whenever outside pressure of new circumstances demanded a change in the political direction. Weidenfeld underlines in his description of Soviet policies that the two key elements which made Gorbachev take a positive standpoint towards Germany's unity were the idea of a nation's right to self-determination and Kohl's promised financial aid. The latter was particularly important for a Soviet Union that was facing a deepening domestic economic crisis.⁶⁵ How far Kohl's 'chequebook diplomacy' was ultimately decisive in securing unification and NATO membership is not entirely clear. Weidenfeld

Genschers. Generalbundesanwalt läßt Stasi-Akten prüfen', *Die Welt*, 21 June 1999, <http://www.welt.de/daten/21/06/21/0621hb118485.htm>.

⁶² Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 629–33, esp. p. 631.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 638. A very elaborate and detailed study of Kohl's governing system and style (1982–9) is in fact volume 1 of the official history edition *Deutsche Einheit* by Karl Rudolf Korte. See Korte, *Deutschlandpolitik*.

⁶⁴ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 117–26, 192–200. See also, Adomeit, *Imperial overstretch*, pp. 441–57; Biermann, *Kreml*, pp. 320–84.

⁶⁵ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 225–33, 237–47. See also, Biermann, *Kreml*, pp. 416–19.

tries to water down any impression that Kohl bought Gorbachev's consent⁶⁶ (a thesis put forward by Stefan Bierling in his doctoral dissertation in 1998).⁶⁷ Yet he writes in great detail about the German chancellor's aid packages and financial efforts following which, at the German–Soviet summits in Moscow on 9 February and in the Caucasus on 15–16 July 1990, Gorbachev first consented to German unification in general and finally on unified Germany's NATO membership.⁶⁸

Although Weidenfeld spends nearly thirty pages describing Gorbachev's extraordinary decision on Germany's NATO membership during the Caucasus meeting emphasizing how much it was based on the moral concept of Germany's national self-determination,⁶⁹ he is not able to explain why Gorbachev changed his mind so swiftly nor how, if the outcome of the summit was so unpredictable,⁷⁰ it could have been arranged as such a media theatre.⁷¹ Indeed, Bierling in his analysis calls the Caucasus summit *das vorbereitete Wunder*.⁷² In this context it is surprising that Weidenfeld describes extensively the importance of the nine assurances the US government presented to Gorbachev in early May 1990, but then fails to examine their obvious impact on the Soviet–American summit in late May 1990. Indeed, on 31 May 1990 in Washington, Gorbachev silently consented to Germany's membership in NATO by accepting Bush's proposal that Germany's right to self-determination should include its right to choose its alliance.⁷³ Further, Weidenfeld says nothing about Kohl's reaction to this. Zelikow and Rice, however, reveal that Bush informed Kohl about this incident on 1 June 1990, but that the latter apparently did not listen carefully enough to Bush's words, concentrating instead on the issue of US economic aid to the USSR, and thus initially overlooked the groundbreaking importance of the wording.⁷⁴

Taking the printed documents and Weidenfeld's research into account, a detailed picture of the German unification process from a new angle emerges: the West German perspective.⁷⁵ Yet, the problem with this newly available official history is that the view is fragmented and partial, and that events are not yet situated in the larger historical perspective. Moreover, many questions remain unanswered. Only when further documents become declassified, can historians embark on a more objective evaluation and analysis of the unification process and place it in the broader context of the end of the Cold War.

⁶⁶ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, p. 559.

⁶⁷ Stefan G. Bierling, *Wirtschaftshilfe für Moskau: Motive und Strategien der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der USA 1990–1996* (Paderborn, 1998), esp. pp. 71–95. See also Randall E. Newnham, 'The price of German unity: the role of economic aid in the German–Soviet negotiations', *German Studies Review*, 3 (1999), pp. 425–8.

⁶⁸ On the Caucasus summit, see Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 529–35; Biermann, *Kreml*, pp. 641–50; cf. *Sonderedition*, document 350, pp. 1340–8; document 352, pp. 1352–5; document 353, pp. 1355–67. ⁶⁹ Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 535–66. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 529, 547.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

⁷² Bierling, *Wirtschaftshilfe*, p. 92.

⁷³ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, pp. 271–85; cf. Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, pp. 454, 469.

⁷⁴ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, p. 280 esp. n. 52; cf. *Sonderedition*, document 299, pp. 1178–80.

⁷⁵ Two studies on the constitutional issues of German unification, by Christoph-M. Brand and by Peter Quint, can be read as valuable correctives to the volumes on the unification process, which do not explain in such detail the implications of the legal and constitutional issues which required international settlement. See Christoph-Matthias Brand, *Souveränität für Deutschland: Grundlagen, Entstehungsgeschichte und Bedeutung des Zwei-plus-Vier-Vertrages vom 12. September 1990* (Cologne, 1993); Peter E. Quint, *The imperfect union: constitutional structures of German unification* (Princeton, 1997).

III

What has the increasing availability of unpublished and published archival documents and the simultaneous increase in scholarly studies meant for the credibility and value of memoirs in telling the story of German unification and the end of the Cold War?⁷⁶ The answer is that memoirs are and will remain particularly important because so much of the diplomacy was conducted informally on a personal level. They therefore include information which otherwise could not be gathered together or which does not exist anywhere else in writing. Of course there are many pitfalls in this kind of source material, especially when memoirs are published so soon after an event and most actors are still alive, or even still involved in politics. Their inherent subjectivity and one-sidedness are exacerbated by the politician's urge to present his actions in the most positive light possible and those of a political adversary more negatively.

On the West German side, chancellor Helmut Kohl's account of the events in 1989–90 published six years after unification includes important insights into the German leader's personal conversations with his international counterparts and his personal political motives, thoughts, and viewpoints on the unification process. But, he prefers to omit some unpleasant episodes and problematical policy details and keeps silent about the actual content of discussions with colleagues in the government, especially the details of his differences with his coalition partner and foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Nothing is said about the Genscher–Stoltenberg⁷⁷ dispute over the extension of NATO to the former territory of the GDR nor about Kohl's reversal of his position the following week during his meeting with Bush at Camp David on 24 February 1990. Kohl is also very cryptic when he refers to what we now know were several difficult exchanges with Genscher about the Polish border question, the NATO position and the question of de-coupling internal and external aspects of unification. Often he does no more than describe his own position.

Kohl and Genscher both avoid any discussion of serious personal clashes. In his memoirs Genscher claims to remember *enge Verbundenheit, voller sachlicher Übereinstimmung und laufender Meinungs austausch*.⁷⁸ Competition is openly acknowledged only once by both sides, namely when Kohl wanted to be ahead of Genscher in taking political leadership in the unification process by keeping secret his preparations for the announcement of the ten points.⁷⁹ Genscher in his account points out that with the programme Kohl was already lagging behind the real situation and had omitted the important eleventh point on the recognition of the Polish–German border.⁸⁰ Interestingly, both politicians refrain from making any negative or damaging comment on Mitterrand and his deeply ambivalent, even hostile *Deutschlandpolitik*. On the contrary, Genscher writes that Mitterrand throughout the years and in particular during the unification process proved a reliable friend of the Germans, one who did not want to create any barriers to unification.⁸¹ Kohl is not quite as positive, remarking that Mitterrand had two hearts beating, one for the German people and one for France's status. Moreover Kohl very much disliked the revival of French–Polish geopolitical co-operation.⁸²

Both Genscher and Kohl have clearly written their books with an eye to securing

⁷⁶ See n. 1 for a list of all key memoirs related to German unification.

⁷⁷ Gerhard Stoltenberg (CDU) was the West German defence minister during the unification process.

⁷⁸ Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, p. 754.

⁷⁹ Kohl, *Ich wollte*, p. 167.

⁸⁰ Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 671–3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 679.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 198, 324.

themselves a place in history, describing their respective leading roles in the unification process as well as referring to their long-term convictions of achieving German unity. For this reason Kohl spends the entire first chapter describing his and his party's vision about unification through *Westpolitik*, showing how deeply ingrained were the convictions he had formed as a young supporter of West Germany's first chancellor Konrad Adenauer.⁸³ In contrast, we learn in Genscher's account a great deal about his convictions on the national question based on the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act, his belief in *Ostpolitik*, and the idea of the creation of an all-European security structure (but still including Germany's alignment with the West).⁸⁴ Unfortunately, his book is full of ambiguous policy phrases such as 'cooperative security structures *between* the Alliances' or 'unified Germany's membership in NATO, but with a different status of the GDR's territory' which then as minister, but especially now as memoirist, he used and interpreted according to the preferred meaning of the moment.⁸⁵

In addition to personal competition, Kohl's and Genscher's memoirs reveal implicitly the institutional rivalry between the chancellery and the *Auswärtiges Amt*. This is further underlined by Horst Teltschik's very detailed diary account from the chancellery's perspective and Frank Elbe and Richard Kiessler's book on the foreign office's work, particularly during the Two plus Four talks, based largely on public documentation as well as on the two diplomats' experiences.⁸⁶ Kohl generally avoids personal comments on Genscher and his policies but, Teltschik's memoirs contain frequent snipes against the foreign minister,⁸⁷ which the latter returns.⁸⁸ To a certain extent, Teltschik conducted his own unification policy for Kohl from the chancellery and hence was a rival to the foreign minister. This became particularly obvious in the secret planning in the chancellery of the Ten Point Programme.⁸⁹ Zelikow and Rice's account reveals other internal clashes, for instance, over how Genscher, without consulting the chancellery, spoke publicly in Tutzing on 31 January 1990 about Germany's membership in NATO and the East German territory's special status (the Tutzing formula), and over how Genscher suggested the idea of proposing to Gorbachev a limitation of the future size of the German army.⁹⁰ According to Zelikow and Rice, bureaucratic infighting in Bonn was actually much more extensive than the unusually cohesive decision-making process in Washington at the time, as a result of which disputes over the Polish border or NATO extension, which originated in Bonn between the foreign office and the chancellery, were sometimes stilled in Washington.⁹¹

This institutional rivalry was mirrored in international affairs through trans-governmental coalition building. The Bush–Kohl/NSC–chancellery coalitions and the Baker–Genscher/state department–*Auswärtiges Amt* coalitions became visible in the debates over whether the German chancellor would accept the opening of the Two plus Four talks during the Open Skies conference in Ottawa, and when Genscher only found out from Baker about Kohl's invitation to Moscow in February 1990 and was deliberately excluded from the Kohl–Bush consultations in Camp David.⁹² While they

⁸³ Kohl, *Ich wollte*, pp. 9–33.

⁸⁴ See Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 671–5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 712–15.

⁸⁶ Kiessler and Elbe, *Runder Tisch*.

⁸⁷ See Teltschik, *329 Tage*, pp. 49, 226.

⁸⁸ See Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 670, 781.

⁸⁹ Teltschik, *329 Tage*, pp. 44–54.

⁹⁰ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, pp. 252–3, 274.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 223, 253–4.

⁹² For varying accounts, see Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, p. 726; Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, pp. 177–8, 212; Bush and Scowcroft, *A world*, pp. 243–4; Teltschik, *329 Tage*, pp. 145–6; Kohl, *Ich wollte*, p. 298; Kiessler and Elbe, *Runder Tisch*, pp. 97–9.

could be divisive, these transnational coalitions provided close ties and trust between politicians in action. The Kohl government and the Bush administration were in harmony over ends, although they temporarily disagreed over the means. This was most obvious on the issue of the extension of NATO jurisdiction to the territory of the former GDR.⁹³

The US not only fully backed West German unification policies, but also provided the USSR in bilateral discussion with an environment for superpower negotiations. Zelikow and Rice's account sometimes exaggerates the American role and underestimates both Soviet and German influences. The Kiessler and Elbe volume counterbalances this picture to some extent. There is a friendly rivalry between the American and German accounts over who was more responsible for altering Western NATO policies toward the USSR. The 'Message from Turnberry of 8 June 1990' – drafted by a senior official from the West German government – is emphasized more in the accounts by Kiessler and Elbe and Genscher,⁹⁴ while Zelikow and Rice play it down as unremarkable.⁹⁵ In contrast, the outcome of the NATO summit is only mentioned in passing in both German accounts whereas the Americans call it the 'final offer for settlement of the German question'.⁹⁶

The latest of the US accounts to be published is Bush's and Scowcroft's double memoir on German unification. It offers no real surprises, but the chosen form of juxtaposing each politician's version of a certain episode is very rewarding. For instance, we learn that until December 1989, Scowcroft was much more hesitant about German unity than Bush. Nevertheless, Scowcroft forwarded his staff's analyses to the president, even if his own advice differed from them. Bush emphasizes the firmness and importance of his personal judgements about German unification and his very good relations with chancellor Kohl. Another essential American memoir is of course that by US secretary of state James Baker. He is very selective in what he covers, and German unification is one issue among many others in international politics; yet he gives a good insight into the decision-making process behind policy in the state department, especially in the case of the Two plus Four talks. Baker also highlights the importance given to terminology in the context of the German question. Should one talk about Two plus Four *negotiations* or *talks*, or about a peace *treaty* or *settlement* or a *treaty on final settlement*? Baker points out the meaning and implications of the Two plus Four talks: they were not supposed to be post-war peace treaty *negotiations*, but rather the *framework* for a juridical settlement of the external aspects of German unification.⁹⁷

Gorbachev's memoirs are useful only in so far as they contain excerpts from the original records of his meetings and present a clear account of his political thinking. German unification as a whole is only briefly discussed in the 1,200 page volume and on merely one episode, the US–Soviet summit in late May 1990, does Gorbachev offer interesting new information. Unfortunately, Gorbachev's new volume of memoirs on German unification particularly are similarly empty of any groundbreaking news. Comparing Gorbachev's accounts of his consent to Germany's NATO membership on 31 May 1990 to those of Zelikow and Rice and of Bush and Scowcroft, one notices that the Soviet leader, by omitting some details, seeks to give the impression that *he* took the initiative for letting Germany choose its alliance whereas the Americans clearly describe

⁹³ See Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, pp. 176, 211, 214–15.

⁹⁴ Kiessler and Elbe, *Runder Tisch*, pp. 144–6; Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 802–3.

⁹⁵ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, p. 307.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁹⁷ The italics are mine. On terminology, see Baker, *Politics*, pp. 195–200, 210–11, 215–16.

it as Bush's verbal initiative.⁹⁸ Just like Gorbachev's memoirs, Eduard Shevardnadze's book is mainly aimed at justifying his political thinking. On Germany, he describes the sharp domestic opposition in Moscow against his policies, and into his participation in the Two plus Four talks which he refers to as 'the meetings of the Six'.⁹⁹

Margaret Thatcher is the most direct and blunt about her dislike of German unification and her obsession with Europe's power balance. She openly blames Mitterrand for having chosen the wrong policy when he refused to revive an anti-German Anglo-French axis.¹⁰⁰ Mitterrand, on the other hand, conceals his attempts to slow down unification and clearly tries to refute the reproach that he aimed at hindering the re-establishment of Germany's unity, a reproach which archival evidence has now established as justified. Until Weidenfeld's study the only other source which revealed French fears and discomfort over German unification was Jacques Attali's diaries, which reflect his selective recall or distillation of events. The diaries' publication caused an upheaval and Mitterrand publicly distanced himself from some of the very blunt anti-German (unification) comments which Attali ascribed to him. Yet, where evidence exists to cross-check specific assertions of fact, as in Mitterrand's meeting with Gorbachev in Kiev or his talks with Bush or Kohl, Attali's notes appear to be substantially accurate.¹⁰¹

The memoir literature by former East German leaders must be consulted with care. Since West Germany took the lead in the unification process, the GDR's leaders were not only suffering from the dissolution of the state and the declining credibility of their policies, they increasingly lost political power and importance, especially in the context of the Two plus Four talks. Yet, some of the volumes give interesting insights: Egon Krenz tries to justify his policies as general secretary; Günter Schabowski seems more self-critical and describes rather well the final years of the Honecker politbüro; Hans Modrow uses a few pages to counter Kohl's arrogant comments on his weak performance at their meeting in Dresden in November 1990; Ulrich Albrecht writes a very detailed account of the GDR's position in the Two plus Four process, which had no influence on the main political decisions.¹⁰²

Memoirs from the US side embed the issue of German unification in the endgame of the Cold War and thus tend to include the German question in a broader portrait of American policy towards Europe and the USSR which shows that the Americans, although strong supporters of German unity, very much treated unification as part of a larger political framework. This means that US-Soviet relations and the development of the superpowers' correlation of forces had their own impact on American policy towards Germany's unification. Baker's choice of title for a key-chapter: 'Spring of tumult: German unification, Lithuanian independence, and Soviet upheaval' shows this.¹⁰³ The Baltic independence struggle became an important issue between the two superpowers and clearly influenced their positions when discussing German unification. By contrast, German memoirs neglect the issue of the nationalities of the Soviet empire, especially the Lithuanian crisis in early 1990, although the *Sonderedition aus den Akten des*

⁹⁸ Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 721-3; idem, *Deutsche Wiedervereinigung*, pp. 136-8; Zelikow and Rice, *Germany unified*, pp. 275-83; Bush and Scowcroft, *A world*, pp. 179-86.

⁹⁹ Shevardnadze, *The future*, pp. 136-7. ¹⁰⁰ Thatcher, *Downing Street*, pp. 789-99.

¹⁰¹ Attali, *Verbatim*, pp. 358-67, 406, 541.

¹⁰² Krenz, *Wenn Mauern fallen*; Modrow, *Ich wollte*, pp. 391-2; Ulrich Albrecht, *Die Abwicklung der DDR: die "2+4 Verhandlungen": ein Insiderbericht* (Opladen, 1992); Günter Schabowski, *Der Absturz* (Berlin, 1991).

¹⁰³ Baker, *Politics*, p. 198.

Bundeskanzleramtes 1989–1990 includes enough documents on the Baltic states to demonstrate that the Baltic crisis was a real problem for the development of the German unification talks. German as well as Soviet politicians focus heavily in their memoirs on the ‘groundbreaking’ German–Soviet summit in the Caucasus when the Soviets accepted a unified Germany’s NATO membership. Some accounts concentrate exclusively on this story.¹⁰⁴ Key American actors point instead to the US–Soviet summit in late May as the central event in Gorbachev’s reversal on the NATO issue.

As the memoirs show there was a crucial personal element in the German unification process. Personal contacts and communication were dominant factors in policy-making as German unification unfolded rapidly. Often there was no time to prepare detailed papers; and, as Weidenfeld reveals, documents sometimes underwent personal influence. For instance, Genscher asked a note-taker to describe his harsh encounter with Gorbachev in December 1989 in a milder light, while Kohl asked for certain personal hand-written comments to be eliminated before papers were filed away.¹⁰⁵ In the particular case of German unification, therefore, the value of memoir literature should not be easily dismissed in the future.

IV

Taking official history, scholarly studies, and memoir literature together, what can be concluded about the process of German unification? The author’s own research into placing German unification into the wider historical context and embracing various archival sources has led to the following analysis. When Kohl announced the Ten Point Programme on 28 November 1989, he moved towards a completely new operative unification policy which gave ‘unification from below’ justification ‘from above’. The East Germans’ demand for first democracy and then unification on the basis of the people’s right to self-determination – as revealed in the mass demonstrations and their mass-migration movement to West Germany during summer and autumn 1989 – was a revolt from below which started off a dynamic unification process that continued to evolve. In as much as unification came from below as a popular movement, it remains in many ways a question of social history.¹⁰⁶ Unification was not started by the managed decisions of political elites as had been envisaged in unification plans of the 1950s. Neither West Germany nor the Four Powers were prepared for the reappearance of German unification on the international agenda following the sudden fall of the Berlin

¹⁰⁴ See Hans Klein, *Es begann im Kaukaskus* (Frankfurt a. M., 1991).

¹⁰⁵ See Weidenfeld, *Außenpolitik*, p. 646.

¹⁰⁶ There is a massive social dimension to this story of German unification ‘from below’ in 1989/90. Until the moment when the West German government tried to get ahead of the people’s movement, the statesmen were simply surfing a political tidal wave, moving in a direction they could not control. Only with the Ten Point Programme did the political goal of unification become defined, although the path track for its achievement remained open for improvisation. The following literature focuses on the social dimension of German unification, but see especially vol. III of the series ‘Geschichte der deutschen Einheit’: Wolfgang Jäger, *Die Überwindung der Teilung: der innerdeutsche Prozeß der Vereinigung* (Stuttgart, 1998). See also Maier, *Dissolution*; Gert-J. Glaessner, *The unification process in Germany: from dictatorship to democracy* (London, 1992); Konrad H. Jarausch, *Die unverhoffte Einheit 1989–1990* (Frankfurt a. M., 1995); idem and Martin Sabrow, eds. *Weg in des Untergang: der innere Zerfall der JDR* (Göttingen, 1999); Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR* (Munich, 1999).

wall on 9 November 1989. There existed no contemporary plans, for operative unification policies and the making of unification plans had stopped in 1960.¹⁰⁷

The problem with Kohl's Ten Point Programme was that its step-by-step approach already lagged behind the real dynamism of the unification process triggered by the East Germans at the time it was announced. As a consequence, the Kohl government's operative unification policy was initially mostly improvisation in reaction to the peoples' strong desire for unification: the West German government followed the accelerating unification process. Yet Kohl's measures were increasingly shaping the developments as, over the next months, he began to exert control and lead the unification process. In fact, he began to push for rapid unification in view of the coming Federal elections, which he wanted to win and so gain a place in history as the 'chancellor of unity'.

Nevertheless, the Germans could not rely uniquely on their right to self-determination and simply push for unification themselves. The Four Power rights still overlay Germany's sovereignty and issues linked to the reserved rights had to be resolved in accord with the Four Powers. Furthermore, historic fears about an enlarged, united Germany dominating the geographic centre of Europe reappeared, as geopolitics dominated the thoughts of politicians all over Europe. It was only after initial co-ordination problems among the Four Powers – Mitterrand's attempt to establish a historic Franco-Soviet anti-Germany coalition vis-à-vis the strong pro-unification US–FRG axis failed – that the Two plus Four talks finally started in May 1990. In fact, the tight US–FRG partnership dominated the entire negotiation period in a way that was only possible as a result of the change in the superpower balance in favour of the West. Parallel to the inner German unification process, the Two plus Four talks were to shape the external aspects of unification, so that the remaining legal issues from the 1940s could be settled by a treaty giving a unified Germany full sovereignty. Unification was finally gained within a year in a way that nobody had ever imagined. Having started as part of the Eastern European transformation process, unification became an independent process which itself generated the alteration of NATO and accelerated the European integration. German unification was the result of a window of opportunity

¹⁰⁷ This follows from the author's own research in the *Politisches Archiv* of the German foreign office in Bonn. See following files, Grundprobleme der Wiedervereinigung. Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Völker. PolArch Abt.7/Ref.700-80.00/Bd.3 (1959–61); Regierungserklärungen zur Wiedervereinigung. PolArch Abt.7/Ref.700-80.01/1-80.01/2/Bd.5 (1957–61); Stellungnahmen zur Wiedervereinigung. PolArch Abt.7/Ref.700-80.05/1/Bd.11 (1956–61); Noten und Memoranden zur Frage der Wiedervereinigung. PolArch Abt.7/Ref.700-80.03/Bd.15 (1952–6); Vorschläge zur Lösung der Deutschlandfrage. PolArch Abt.7/Ref.700-80.05-80.05/1/Bd.22 (1957–61); Vorschläge zur Lösung der Deutschlandfrage. Offizielle und inoffizielle Vorschläge. PolArch Abt.7/Ref.700-80.05/0/Bd.23a (1955–8); Vorschläge zur Lösung der Deutschlandfrage. PolArch Abt.7/Ref.700-80.06/Bd.24 (1959–61); Wiedervereinigung. PolArch B 038/Ref.IIA1-80.00/Bd.2 (1961–3); Wiedervereinigung. PolArch B 038/Ref. IIA1-80.00/Bd.3 (1964); Nichtanerkennungspolitik. PolArch B 038/Ref.IIA1-83.01/0/Bd.33 (1960–4); Nichtanerkennungspolitik. PolArch B 038/Ref.IIA1-83.01/0/Bd.34 (1963–4); Kontakte zwischen der Bundesrepublik und der SBZ. PolArch B 038/Ref.IIA1-83.10/Bd.37 (1962–4); Außenpolitische Fragen in Verbindung mit Berlin. PolArch B 038/Ref.IIA1-84.00/Bd.41 (1962); Wiedervereinigung 1962, Dienstinstruktionen 1962–66. PolArch B 038/Ref.IIA1-80.01/4-80.04/Bd.78 (1962–6); Weißbuch, Prof. Vali, Innerdeutsche Kontakte, Harmel Studien, Alleinvertretungsanspruch. PolArch B 038/Ref.IIA1/Bd.681 (1967); Verhältnis BRD-DDR; Bezeichnung BRD, DDR, Auslandsvertretungen, Ostpolitik RE: 10.10.67–8, Briefmarken. PolArch B 038/Ref. IIA1-83.00-83.01/Bd.694 (1967). See also n. 28.

opening up on the international scene, politicians' adherence to similar values including the peoples' right to self-determination, statecraft, close personal relations, good communication, bribery, friendly persuasion, and sheer luck.

Although shelves of books have been written on the German unification process, various details in the descriptive chronology of events remain unexplored. Analytical explanation is only in its infancy. It is still unclear who really was the originator of the Ten Point Programme, Kohl or Teltschik, and who was the originator of the Two plus Four concept. Why did Kohl refrain for nearly half a year from making a binding statement on the legitimacy of the Oder–Neiße? Was it his adherence to legal terms and his party's line or election tactics? The personal factor in these questions may make it impossible to ever know. Further, the importance of cheque book diplomacy and economic aid policy as it was conducted by Kohl, especially towards Gorbachev, remains a puzzle in view of Soviet consent to German unification and later NATO membership. What ultimately really made Gorbachev change his mind on the German unification question from a hardline position to consent? Was it a shift in the Soviet leader's outlook on European politics and part of his 'new thinking' or was it the result of successful US–Soviet summits? Was it perhaps the outcome of closer bilateral West German–Soviet relations? It also remains unresolved how important the American–Soviet summit of late May 1990 for Germany's NATO membership was and whether Gorbachev's agreement with the statement on unified Germany's self-determination to choose its alliance was the crucial factor.

Very rarely have scholars so far made an attempt to put their descriptive accounts into an analytical framework and place German unification in a wider historical context, by discussing the German unification process in the larger framework of European or superpower politics. This should be the task for the 'second draft' of this history. As most literature on German unification is very Germany centred, it is thus far mainly American and Soviet memoir literature or American studies of US–Soviet relations at the end of the Cold War which place the unification process in a wider political and also historical framework.

Indeed, the story of German unification belongs in the scholarly debate on how the Cold War ended. How far did the decline of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet empire in economic, social, territorial, and military terms influence the German unification process? How far can the East Germans' revolt from below be compared to the Estonians', Latvians', and Lithuanians' struggle for freedom and democracy? (The Baltic case and its impact on unification policies is almost entirely omitted in all German studies on unification, although the document collection includes quite a few papers on the Baltic independence struggle.)

The next wave of writers on the 'German question' will have to analyse the 1989–90 events by asking: Which strategies led to unification: *West-* or *Ostpolitik*? Which strategies ended the Cold War: peace through strength or *Wandel durch Annäherung*? Finally and perhaps most importantly, how are the forty-five years of German division to be situated in history: was this just an episode or an epoch? In other words, was German unification a key factor of the ending of the Cold War or a step along the continuous path of European integration since the Second World War?