

'The New Europe faces the challenges' from Le Monde (23 November 1990)

Caption: On 23 November 1990, commenting on the conclusions of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Summit held in Paris from 19 to 21 November, the French daily newspaper Le Monde speculates on the challenges awaiting the new Europe born of the end of East–West confrontation.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Fontaine, André. 23.11.1990, n° 14.253; 47e année. Paris: Le Monde. "L'Europe nouvelle face aux défis", p. 1.

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The New Europe faces the challenges

From the chandeliers of the Élysée to the galleries of Versailles, the Cold War was buried this week with lavish pomp. Europe, largely reconciled, is burying a half-century of free-flowing blood and tears. Germany is reunited, its neighbours have thrown off the shackles of Communism, and, from the Atlantic to the Urals, the long-stockpiled instruments of death are ready to be destroyed in their thousands. These 'new times' for the Old Continent gave the 34 leaders meeting at the CSCE Summit some cause to be cheerful.

Yet the atmosphere was more sombre than euphoric. To quote François Mitterrand, tomorrow's Europe will be neither 'a bed of roses' nor 'Paradise Regained'. 'Sometimes pessimism is a good thing,' the Head of State commented on Wednesday. Indeed: in the case in point, excessive optimism, like the newly rejected ideology, can only be 'reason asleep'. Even before the Paris meeting, Vaclav Havel, the Czechoslovak philosopher-turned-president, had set the tone by reflecting with some concern on 'the poisons of demagoguery, selfishness and political and racial intolerance'.

For the challenges facing the new Europe are manifold. It augurs well, to be sure, that the Paris Charter, solemnly signed on Wednesday, goes into detail on the procedures and mechanisms to be employed in order to guarantee permanent security. But peace is a delicate flower, a species constantly under threat. The enormous uncertainty hanging over the Soviet empire as it dismantles and the re-emergence of old national tensions could create large gaps in the security of this common European home, whose architecture is as yet so undecided. The establishment of a conflict prevention centre in Vienna shows that European leaders are aware of the risk.

The biggest threat is elsewhere, though. It involves the worsening of the economic and technological gulf between rich and poor, between modern and backward European States or regions. There is a great danger, as Mr Mitterrand emphasised on Wednesday, that we will see the development of a 'two-speed Europe', with a widening gap between the Europe of the 'haves' and that of the 'have-nots'. He was preceded by Hungary's Prime Minister, who spoke of his fear that a new 'wall of money' would divide the continent.

Western Europe's magnetic attraction for Central and Eastern Europeans is already leading to new migratory flows; if the Soviet Union's borders spring wide open tomorrow, they will become hard to control and will somewhat destabilise the already fragile economies. The CSCE bodies will not be enough to 'structure the hopes' post-Cold War. Ongoing political will is essential.