

## Address given by François Mitterrand to the CSCE Summit (Paris, 19 November 1990)

**Caption:** On 19 November 1990, François Mitterrand, President of France, delivers the opening address and outlines the implications of the Summit held in Paris, from 19 to 21 November, attended by the 34 Heads of State or Government of the countries taking part in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

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Ladies and Gentleman, I formally declare open the Paris Meeting of Heads of State or Government of the participating States of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. We shall take up agenda item 1, which provides for an address by the Head of State of the host country immediately after the opening, and I shall now therefore deliver that address.

At this exceptional time, and for an exceptional Summit, France is happy to greet you, and through me to wish you welcome. In advance of the end of the century and of the millennium, our meeting today marks the end of an epoch and thereby a beginning. Like all beginnings it is rich in hope and its sequel will depend on our skill in conceiving together peace, progress and the methods which will lead us there and the structures which will underly them.

It is the first time in history that we witness a change in depth of the European landscape which is not the outcome of a war or a bloody revolution.

In this connection, some have referred to the Congress of Vienna, but in Vienna in 1815 the victorious powers reshaped the map of Europe without concern for the peoples and their aspirations.

The Paris Conference, I hope, will be an anti-Congress of Vienna, since round this table we have neither victors nor vanquished, but 34 countries equal in dignity, since there are not States on one side and peoples on the other, but countries which have endowed themselves, or which will inevitably endow themselves, with institutions and leaders chosen freely in the framework of States respectful of the rule of law.

Finally, this Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe is also very different from those that preceded it. Formerly, it was a question of adjusting the balance of power; henceforth, we will have to base solidarity on shared values.

The combination of positive factors which has made this development possible did not come about by chance. It follows from the initiative taken in Helsinki fifteen years ago and repeated in 1989: an initiative consisting in setting dates for meetings where Europe, the United States of America and Canada would attempt, by their concerted efforts, to reduce little by little the antagonisms arising out of the opposition of ideologies and ways of life, aggravated by the arms race.

Let us note that in spite of failures, setbacks and diplomatic and political marking-time, the undertaking has succeeded or has at least already succeeded in bringing us together around one and the same project. This was only possible through the commitment of the United States of America and of the Soviet Union to stop trying to get the better of one another, and through the action of these who – and some of them are present in this room – made a text initially dismissed as a mere scrap of paper into the banner of their liberation... may due homage be paid to them.

The events that have shaken and convulsed Central and Eastern Europe did the rest. Throughout that period, the CSCE remained the only place, during the years of the cold war, where dialogue among all could be initiated and pursued. As a result it has become a rallying point, the centre of a debate which bears within itself the future of Europe and to a large extent the future of peace. I wish to assure you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that my country deeply appreciates the honour of having been chosen for the solemn consecration of this new departure.

But what exactly is the so-called “CSCE process”? It consists of principles and a method. The principles are those laid down in the Final Act of Helsinki and whose purpose is to guide relations between participating States. They remain entirely valid. The method is that of dialogue among the countries involved on the European stage. It is also the right of all to a voice, in preference to a *tête-à-tête* among a select few. Well, the method has proved its worth. Let us keep it. The principles remain, let us apply them.

For forty years we have had stability without freedom in Europe. Henceforth, we want freedom with

stability. By overcoming the bloc mentality and by reintroducing the neutral and non-aligned countries as fully-fledged actors, the CSCE has brought into being a school for openness, for exchange and, I would even add, a school for freedom, which now appears as it really is: the other term of an alternative which, until then, had offered the world only confrontation and war.

At a time when everything seemed to be frozen the CSCE partners believed in change, and change occurred, but with a sudden acceleration whose magnitude and speed will continue to astonish the historians of tomorrow, just as they have astonished and delighted our contemporaries.

But what is the state of this Europe now awakening to itself? Let us not deceive ourselves. The conventional military threat has substantially diminished; it has not disappeared. The despotic regimes have been overthrown; the democracy which is rising on their ruins is still fragile. Freedom is proclaimed everywhere; old habits of thought remain. The peaceful course of the revolutions should not conceal the long path which remains to be travelled.

New risks are in fact appearing. If economic and technological decoupling were to replace ideological division, what will we have gained? Everywhere politics has evolved more rapidly than the economy and this gap generates frustrations and social tensions in places where, moreover, the environment has been devastated. This gap can only be bridged by a collective effort of solidarity to support collapsing economies and help them back into world trade.

Likewise, have we overcome the division of Europe into two blocs only to see it disintegrate, as a result of aspirations which had been too long stifled by force?

In any event, it is clear that even before the Summit opened it had produced its first results in advance. First, we have just signed the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces, which is unparalleled on account of the number of countries concerned, the scale of the reductions which it provides for and the system of verification which it introduces. Next, by a solemn declaration, the member States of the Atlantic Alliance and of the Warsaw Pact proclaim that they are no longer adversaries.

Lastly, we shall record in our final document the Moscow Treaty on the settlement of the German question. This essential question has been resolved in an exemplary way in all its aspects, including frontiers. It was on this basis that the German-Polish Treaty was signed last week.

Would we have advanced so rapidly without the prospect of our meeting today, the initiative for which belongs to Mr. Gorbachev, whom I wish to thank?

I hope that the impetus given to the negotiations on disarmament will not slacken. The United States of America and the Soviet Union hope to sign shortly a first agreement for the reduction of their strategic nuclear arms, the first stage in a much larger movement, which should also lead to the elimination of chemical and biological weapons.

After the stage completed this morning it still remains to eliminate on European soil much military materiel, to make further reductions in manpower and to broaden the discussion to include countries not belonging to the Alliances. The creation in Vienna of a Conflict Prevention Centre, which will be responsible initially for the application of confidence-building measures, will underpin this process.

Any procedure which makes it possible to prevent situations of instability from degenerating into open crisis will be welcome. It is for this purpose that France proposed in Vienna that disputes be settled peacefully through conciliation, a way of proceeding which I think meets the expectations expressed by many of us.

Considerable progress has been made in the field of human rights. The achievements, which are still precarious, can be made irreversible by transforming proclaimed rights into guaranteed rights. Machinery for observation and enquiry have a useful part to play. That a State could be called to account is not in itself shocking if our aim is to create a legal space and the same standard is to apply to everyone everywhere,

which is the absolute prerequisite for overcoming long-standing divisions. There will be no true stability in Europe as long as some areas remain outside the rule of law.

We are going to endow the CSCE with the structures which will ensure the continuity of its work; greater regularity of our meetings and those of our ministers, permanent technical bodies – including a secretariat located in Prague – and an assembly of parliamentarians of our countries.

In other fields covered in the final document, whether economic co-operation, the environment or culture, let us leave to the CSCE its role as a catalyst, without overloading it with tasks which it is less well equipped than others to deal with. As far as institutions are concerned, Europe is not a blank page. The European Economic Community, with its twelve members, and its single market, and which aspires to tighten its economic and political links, has already initiated co-operation with its neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, along with other international institutions, will as of next year have an immense field of action before it. The role of the Council of Europe will increase with the accession of other countries. The work of all these bodies must be made to converge on a common objective: the achievement of a democratic, peaceful and prosperous Europe, which will one day, I hope, confederate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we represent here more than a billion people, but I am not forgetting the rest of the world, which is today looking towards Paris and listening to us. And I say to it: You have the same rights to co-operation, you have the same rights to security and, I would add, you have the same right to development. It is for that reason that the rule of law must be established throughout the world.

Current events, and I am thinking principally of the Gulf crisis, bring us back to these realities: wars which threaten or drag on, violations of international law and, in very many places in the southern hemisphere, poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. Why should the CSCE method, which has produced such conclusive results, not also be applied to other regions of the world?

Let our intentions be clear to the countries of the South, and in particular our Mediterranean neighbours. The end of confrontation in the North opens up new prospects for co-operation, and not the opposite.

Ladies and Gentlemen, European consciousness does not date from today. But there has scarcely been any reflection in political terms of what has been perceptible for centuries in the intellectual, artistic and spiritual fields. More specifically, the myth of European unity has only ever been embodied in brutal attempts to establish hegemony. If we choose, yesterday's Utopia may begin to become a reality. Let us ensure that each of the States present here enjoys a special quality of relationship based on equality of rights, security and solidarity. If we accomplish this tour de force, what an example this will set for all those, in all four corners of the world, who do not give way to resignation and despair. We must give substance to this great promise, whose name is Europe.