

The international question of German reunification

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_international_question_of_german_reunification-en-9dbfo263-d91c-4f7d-9f05-f36fibfa09e7.html

Last updated: 06/07/2016



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The collapse of the [communist bloc](#) in the late 1980s led not only to the emancipation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe but also to the reunification of Germany, which had been divided for almost half a century. In November 1989, the [fall of the Berlin Wall](#) brought an end to the Cold War and the divisions left over from the Second World War.

During the swift process of [German reunification](#) in 1990, the Chancellor of the FRG, [Helmut Kohl](#), was to play a key role, both at [inter-German level](#), with the incorporation of the GDR into the FRG, and at international level, securing the agreement of the four former Second World War Allies and assuaging the [anxieties](#) of neighbouring countries.

In May 1990, the Western powers confirmed that their objective was to see a reunified Germany with democratic institutions [integrated into the European Community](#). But the debates in Germany on reunification caused anxiety among its European neighbours, who feared the strength of a unified German State and the renaissance of [pan-Germanism](#). They would have preferred the two German States merely to develop good relations, at most in the form of a confederation. The French were acutely afraid that [Gorbachev's](#) policy of glasnost would persuade the Germans to accept neutralisation as the price of reunification.

Reunification was not merely an intra-German affair. The status of Germany, and, in particular, that of Berlin, could be amended only with the agreement of the Four Powers who had forced Germany's unconditional surrender in 1945. These countries might well be anxious about the formation at the centre of Europe of a state of 80 million inhabitants whose political, economic and financial importance was likely to upset the balance of power and threaten the stability that the division of Germany had helped to establish.

Consequently, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his Foreign Minister, [Hans-Dietrich Genscher](#), worked hard to reassure them. In his [programme](#) for reunification of 28 November 1989, the Chancellor confirmed that German unity would take place in the context of the European Community. He then promised that a united Germany would remain part of [NATO](#) and that reunification would be undertaken in close consultation with the Allies. The [Strasbourg European Council](#) (8–9 December) gave this plan formal acknowledgement: it approved the unification of Germany on condition that the country was run in a democratic fashion, 'in full respect of the relevant agreements and treaties and of all the principles defined by the Helsinki Final Act, in a context of dialogue and East–West cooperation ... [and] in the perspective of European integration'.

However, despite these statements of principle, divergent attitudes set [France and the United Kingdom](#), which were not in any great hurry to see reunification take place, against the United States, which was pushing for it to happen, and the Soviet Union, which was resigned to it happening in return for certain guarantees.

[Hesitations](#) arose in France that a unified Germany might turn towards the USSR, despite the difference in political regimes, as had been the case with the German–Soviet treaties of 1922 (Rapallo) and 1939 (Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact). President Mitterrand would initially have preferred Germany to remain divided. He told Mikhail Gorbachev this in [Kiev](#) on 6 December. On 22 November, he announced a visit to the GDR, which took place on 20–22 December when reunification was a virtual certainty. Mitterrand had to accept it, but he subordinated German unity to European unification and to the strengthening of the Community institutions. Helmut Kohl responded to François Mitterrand's uncertainty by confirming that [German unity and European unity](#) were two sides of the same coin.

Mitterrand and Kohl agreed that a Franco-German alliance would boost the idea of political union in Europe. On 18 April 1990, believing that the moment had come to ‘transform relations as a whole among the Member States into a European Union and to give it the necessary means of action’, François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl made a [joint statement](#) to the President of the European Council in which they proposed launching the preparatory work for an intergovernmental conference on political union, alongside the work under way to prepare for the intergovernmental conference on Economic and Monetary Union. Finally, on 6 December 1990, [François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl](#) provided a more detailed explanation of their joint statement of 18 April 1990 by proposing an extension of the Union’s powers and responsibilities, increased powers for Parliament, a strengthening of the role of the European Council and identification of the areas to be covered by a common foreign and security policy (CFSP).

In short, in order to integrate a reunified Germany successfully into Europe, it was vital to strengthen the European Community by establishing a European Union which would include an [Economic and Monetary Union \(EMU\)](#) and a [political union](#). This would be the objective of the [Maastricht Treaty](#) of 7 February 1992, which was widely supported by the French President and the German Chancellor.