

Chapter 10

The International Community's Role in the Process of German Unification

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The first half of the 20th century was dominated by two world wars with more than 100 million deaths—soldiers and civilians. As a result, from 1945 on Europe was divided. Germany and its capital Berlin lost their sovereignty. Germany was run by the four victorious powers: the United States, France, Great Britain and the Soviet Union. The political and military dividing line between the three Western powers and the Soviet Union ran through the middle of Germany and Berlin.

The world was divided into a bipolar order between the nuclear superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, with their respective alliance systems NATO and Warsaw Pact. The latter was ruled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) with its ideological monopoly.

In 1945, two militarily devastating world wars were followed by five decades of Cold War. The nuclear arsenals led to a military balance between West and East. The policy of mutual nuclear deterrence did not prevent dangerous political crises—such as the Soviet Berlin Blockade from June 1948 until May 1949, Nikita Khrushchev's 1958 Berlin Ultimatum and the 1962 Cuba Crisis—which brought both sides to the brink of another world war.

In Berlin, fully armed American and Soviet tanks directly faced each other at Checkpoint Charlie. In Cuba, Soviet missiles threatened to attack the United States.

Cold War tensions were compounded by Moscow's bloody military interventions to crush uprisings against its rule in 1953 in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), in 1956 in Hungary, and 1968 in Prague. In 1983 Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov threatened World War III if NATO deployed U.S. medium range missiles in Europe.

At the peak of the Cold War—the Cuba Crisis in October 1962—the United States decided to change its strategic approach towards the Soviet Union, which also affected NATO policy. On June 10, 1963, in a speech at American University, President John F. Kennedy announced his “Strategy of Peace.” Against the suggestions of most of his advisors, Kennedy entered into personal direct disarmament negotiations with Nikita Khrushchev. On November 28, 1962 they agreed to remove medium-range missiles aimed at each other. The Soviets removed their missiles from Cuba and the United States removed their missiles from Turkey and Italy. Kennedy’s lone decision was driven by his realization that “all we have built...would be destroyed in the first 24 hours...Both the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies, have a mutually deep interest in a just and genuine peace and in halting the arms race.” The Soviet press published his entire speech without any changes.

Kennedy’s “Strategy of Peace” profoundly influenced NATO and inspired Willy Brandt’s policy of *détente*. In December 1967, the 15 NATO members agreed on the Harmel Report that stated “NATO and a policy of *détente* are not alternatives which exclude each other.” Security and *détente* were two sides of the same coin.

In the spring of 1969, half a year after the Soviets had crushed the Prague uprising, Foreign Minister Willy Brandt took up an old initiative by Nikita Khrushchev and initiated a European security conference. He did not want to leave the idea to the Soviets. This turned into the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). In parallel, the Brandt/Scheel-government negotiated bilateral treaties in 1970 with Moscow, Warsaw, and Prague as well as several treaties with the GDR.

In 1971-72 they added a Four-Power-Agreement about Berlin. The policy of *détente* reached its zenith with the signing of the CSCE Final Act on September 1, 1975 in Helsinki.

Nevertheless, the Atlantic Alliance had to learn an important lesson. In spite of the policy of *détente* and the signing of the CSCE Final Act, Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev started stationing new medium-range nuclear missiles (SS-20). Because of their range, they were not aimed at Soviet Union’s main opponent, the United States but

rather at Europeans—such as Willy Brandt—who had most strongly pushed for a policy of *détente*.

In December 1979, NATO responded with its double-track decision, initiated by Brandt's successor, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt: either the Soviet Union would remove its medium-range missiles or NATO would station U.S. medium-range missiles in Western Europe. U.S.-Soviet arms control talks in Geneva failed.

In 1983 and against massive public protests, the Kohl-Genscher government began stationing American missiles. In January 1983, French President François Mitterrand, a Socialist, gave a speech in the German Bundestag and supported NATO's decision. Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov threatened World War III.

The Cold War had returned and reached a new peak. President Ronald Reagan publicly called the Soviet Union an "evil empire." In 1983, he announced his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and thereby appeared to further fuel the conflict. Mikhail Gorbachev, who later became President of the Soviet Union, admitted that both decisions—the stationing of medium-range missiles in Europe and SDI—forced the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to change its ways. The CPSU leadership knew they could not afford a new arms race. They also did not have the necessary technologies to create their own missile defense program.

On October 1, 1982, Helmut Kohl was elected Chancellor of Germany. His foreign policy strategy rested on two main pillars: a strong Atlantic Alliance and close partnership with the United States; and a European Community (EC), which would further integrate, and close friendship with France.

The more stable this foundation, the more leeway the Federal Government would have to conduct a proactive policy of *détente* towards the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

Even though East-West tensions were running high, Chancellor Kohl, who had only been in office for a few weeks, announced in a letter to Soviet General Secretary Andropov his interest in improving relations with Moscow. In July 1983, Kohl met Andropov in Moscow. The General Secretary was already severely and visibly ill. The same was true for his successor Konstantin Chernenko, whom Kohl had a

chance to meet and talk to extensively at Andropov's funeral. From 1983 until 1984, negotiations between the two superpowers had almost come to standstill.

This lack of communications was the reason Chancellor Helmut Kohl travelled to Washington in November 1984 right after President Ronald Reagan had been reelected. He was successful in convincing the President to use all means to restart summit diplomacy as well as disarmament and arms control negotiations with the Soviet leadership. Helmut Kohl was quite satisfied that the President was willing to put this in a joint communiqué. The German Chancellor demonstrated that he was willing to use his influence with Moscow as well as Washington.

In parallel, the Kohl-Genscher government had a core interest in giving political and economic support to reform movements within Warsaw Pact countries. Since 1983, Germany had been giving significant political, economic and financial support to Hungary. In 1989, Hungary started first steps to open its borders. Tens of thousands of GDR refugees had the opportunity to leave Hungary through Austria to West Germany. When Helmut Kohl gave a speech at the Hungarian parliament in December 1989, he expressed his gratitude to the Hungarians for “knocking the first stone out of the Wall” by finally opening their borders on September 10, 1989.

At the same time, the still formally Communist government and its Prime Minister Miklós Németh put Hungary on the path to democratization. In October 1989, Hungary declared itself a Republic and aimed to become a constitutional democracy with a multi-party system. The communist government announced free elections, knowing quite well that they would lose—a historically unique decision.

The German government also secretly supported the banned Polish trade union movement *Solidarność*. In 1989, I started negotiating with Poland's last communist government about a “Comprehensive Treaty” as a basis for future relations between the two countries. As Chancellor Kohl's personal envoy, I successfully finished these negotiations on August 24, 1989 with Poland's first democratically elected government under Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

For the German government, these talks and negotiations with Hungary and Poland were of decisive importance. We were supporting and experiencing first hand successful transformations of communist systems into democratic governments and societies. We also learned an important lesson: Soviet Secretary General Gorbachev kept his word. Already in 1985 he had promised at a Warsaw Pact summit that the Soviet Union would not interfere any more into the internal affairs of other members. He added that each country would be responsible for its own progress. At this point, there were still Soviet troops stationed in Poland and Hungary that could have stopped any democratic transformation. But for now, they stayed in their barracks. This put an end to the Brezhnev Doctrine, which Moscow bloodily enforced in Prague in 1968 to maintain the communist system.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Helmut Kohl drew confidence from this experience with Hungary and Poland that Soviet troops in the GDR would also remain in their barracks. At all times, they would have been able to shut down the border between East and West Germany.

The German government was also talking to Bulgaria's President Todor Zhivkov and the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Ladislav Adamec. We were mostly talking about financial aid, but those talks ended without results. Neither was willing to initiate reforms.

In 1983, Chancellor Helmut Kohl had invited Erich Honecker General Secretary of the East German communist party, to Bonn for an official visit. Moscow vetoed the meeting because of the NATO double-track decision.

Most importantly, we wanted to intensify discussions with the GDR leadership on various levels with one clear aim: to reconnect as many Germans from both sides of the Wall as possible; to prevent a further drifting apart; and to achieve improvements for the people in the GDR. Primarily, we wanted the GDR government to lower the age for GDR citizens to travel to West Germany. So far, this was only possible for retirees. The West German government increased its payments to the GDR to allow political prisoners to emigrate to the West. A 2 billion Deutschmark loan to the GDR was quite controversial. Critics called it survival aid for the GDR regime. With this loan, we achieved the

removal of trip-wired directional antipersonnel mines from the GDR border fence.

Thankfully, in March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary of the CPSU. In contrast to his predecessors, he was young, healthy and energetic. In the same year, summit talks between President Reagan and Gorbachev and disarmament negotiations between the superpowers resumed and achieved quick results. In 1987, the INF treaty was signed, which eliminated all ground-based nuclear weapons with a range of 500 to 5,000 km.

In June 1989, Gorbachev visited West Germany for several days. Kohl and Gorbachev signed a joint statement, in which the Soviet leadership for the first time recognized the right of self-determination of all peoples. During long and intense talks, Chancellor Kohl offered as much support as possible for Gorbachev's reform agenda of glasnost and perestroika. Gorbachev soon took him up on that offer.

At the same time, a wave of refugees was leaving the GDR through Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. At the beginning of September, Budapest finally opened its borders.

Simultaneously, mass demonstrations began in almost all GDR cities. On November 9, 1989, the Wall fell and everybody was surprised. Nobody was prepared for that.

On that fateful day, Chancellor Helmut Kohl was in Warsaw. After his return, he called the heads of state or government of the Four Powers. All four responded more or less in the same way: 'We should remain calm and reasonable and prevent chaos.' Nobody had a plan or some kind of strategy. Everybody was surprised by the fall of the Wall.

Chancellor Kohl used the opportunity to announce his objective in an unambiguous keynote address in the Bundestag: to reunite Germany as a federation. At the same time, he outlined his strategy in ten points. Unification was to happen in agreement with the Four Powers and embedded in the European unification process. The Chancellor avoided mentioning a time line.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl did not inform the Four Powers or his own government before the speech. We did not expect the Soviet leadership to support the plan at this point. Nevertheless, several CPSU members

publicly talked about possible developments in the GDR and did not rule out reunification. Gorbachev's first reaction followed quickly. He called the Ten Point Plan a "diktat" that he could not accept.

The three Western powers probably would have pushed the Chancellor to discuss strategy before he could go public. This could have led the German government to miss an important, historic chance. In hindsight, all participants should admit that Chancellor Kohl took advantage of the chance for reunification just at the right moment.

One question remains: how did Germany get agreement from all Four Powers? From the very beginning, President George H.W. Bush supported Chancellor Kohl without reservation. In May 1989 in his speech at Mainz, Bush offered Germany "partnership in leadership." During his tenure, he put this into practice.

At the same time, Bush gave a promise to the Soviet leadership: "let the Soviets know that our goal is not to undermine their legitimate security interests." President Bush understood that security was a core Russian interest and responded accordingly. He treated Gorbachev as a partner and equal and never gloated about winning the Cold War. Bush and Kohl agreed early on that this would be important.

From the very beginning, Bush and Kohl also agreed that a united Germany should be a member of NATO and that European borders should remain unchanged. Nobody ever questioned the finality of the Oder-Neisse border with Poland.

George Bush's involvement was particularly useful in getting British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's agreement to unification and Britain's participation in the 2 + 4 negotiations between the two German states and the Four Power governments. Margaret Thatcher had great fear that unification could destroy Europe's stable postwar system without knowing what a new European order should look like. She was focused on a united, bigger and stronger Germany as a potential danger for Europe. Therefore, she also insisted on an united Germany that had to be a NATO member.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl was most disappointed about French President Mitterand's initially hesitant support. At a joint press conference in Bonn a few days after the fall of the Wall, Mitterand had spoken quite positively about the German right of self-determination. The

French President was quite worried that a united Germany—larger and economically stronger than France—would not be quite as interested in close bilateral cooperation with France and as the engine of European integration as before.

Helmut Kohl immediately responded. In December 1989, he wrote a letter to Mitterrand and proposed a new joint initiative to deepen European integration by pursuing the goal of a Political Union. Mitterrand agreed at once. In April 1990, the European Community (EC) supported this German-French initiative at the Dublin Summit.

In parallel, common preparations for a European Economic and Monetary Union were going on, which had been agreed on in June 1989 at the EC-Summit in Hanover/Germany—long before anyone had even thought of German unification.

One key question remained: what should or must the Federal Government do to get consent from the Soviet leadership? It was quite clear that no single measure would be enough to get over Gorbachev's No. There was only one path to Yes. We had to offer as large a package deal as possible with proposals to support Gorbachev's reform agenda and to improve future cooperation between the two countries as well as between East and West.

In the winter 1989-90, the Soviet Union was experiencing a severe supply crisis. In January 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev reminded Helmut Kohl of his promises to support his reforms and asked for shipments of food and other supplies. The Chancellor and his government immediately came to his help. In 1990, 22 treaties and agreements were signed with the USSR.

Additionally, the German Chancellor used every opportunity at talks with every EC and NATO member as well as summit meetings—including the World Economic Summit—to promote economic and financial support for Gorbachev's reform agenda. In May 1990, the urgency of this aid became apparent. The Soviet government confidentially asked Chancellor Helmut Kohl for a \$5 billion loan to safeguard the USSR's ability to meet financial obligations. Otherwise, the superpower Soviet Union would have been bankrupt in the summer of 1990.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl achieved the final breakthrough in the negotiations with Moscow after an April 1990 proposal. He offered to

negotiate a treaty under international law between a united Germany and the USSR. It was to be negotiated before unification and would be signed and ratified afterwards. The key offer was unequivocal German security guarantees vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Mikhail Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze responded almost euphorically. In November 1990 after unification, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Mikhail Gorbachev signed this "Major Treaty."

German security guarantees were flanked and supported by a NATO Special Summit in July 1990 in London. In the London Declaration, all NATO member states reinforced a message given days earlier stating that NATO no longer saw the Warsaw Pact countries as enemies and extended a "hand of friendship" to Eastern European nations. Since Mikhail Gorbachev was facing a CPSU Party Congress in July 1990, this was very helpful to him—as he later confirmed.

Common security has always been the key issue in finding agreement and cooperating with the Soviet Union and now with Russia. In 1989/90 the German government, the U.S. government and their European partners cooperated very closely at the highest levels, at the 2 + 4 negotiations and within multinational organizations such as NATO, EC and the World Economic Summit.

Nevertheless, in 1990, a number of uncertainties and risks could have derailed the process of German unification. In early January 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev surprised everyone with a press statement cancelling all meetings with his Western counterparts. Chancellor Helmut Kohl was also affected. He was waiting for his first personal conversation with Gorbachev after the opening of the Wall. According to Soviet Foreign Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze, there were intense struggles within the Soviet leadership about whether to use Soviet troops in the GDR. Gorbachev and Kohl personally met for the first time on February 10, 1990. Almost immediately, Gorbachev agreed that it was 'a matter for the two German states to decide if, when and how they were to unite.'

All the same, Mikhail Gorbachev was facing tough arguments within the CPSU. In July 1990, he was the first Secretary General to face more than 1,000 dissenting votes in the Central Committee—a historic precedent. At this point, he could have been overthrown, but he managed to remove his main opponent, Yegor Ligachev, from the Politburo. When

Gorbachev met Kohl a few days later in the Caucasus, he was visibly relieved to have successfully weathered the Party Congress.

In addition, other flash points could have interfered with or even slowed down the process of German unification. On August 2, 1990, the Iraqi army annexed Kuwait. From this point on, the U.S. administration was focusing almost entirely on this new crisis.

Fortunately, the most important decisions concerning German unification had already been taken. When Secretary of State Jim Baker visited Chancellor Helmut Kohl on September 15, 1990 in his private home in Ludwigshafen, they almost entirely talked about Germany's contributions to the war against Saddam Hussein and the development of the region. Jim Baker was very satisfied with Germany's overall contribution of about 3.3 billion Deutschmark. This was more than his government had asked.

The second crisis in the summer of 1990 was brewing in the Balkans. The multiethnic state of Yugoslavia was beginning to break up. From 1991 until 1999, this led to a series of military conflicts. In the final phase of German unification that summer 1990 and considering the run-up to the first Iraq war, nobody saw any urgency in dealing with the rising tensions between the different ethnicities in Yugoslavia. It became clear that administrations have a hard time managing several conflicts at once. In 1991, the first shots were fired in Slovenia and Croatia.

Fortunately, we finished the process of German unification successfully and peacefully on October 3, 1990.

Today, almost 30 years later, the member states of NATO and the European Union (EU) should recall what was changed peacefully and mutually agreed between 1989 and 1991:

In 1989-90, the Soviet Union did not intervene militarily anymore when Warsaw Pact countries such as Poland, Hungary, the GDR, and Czechoslovakia opened the Iron Curtain and started the process of democratization.

Germany was united in agreement with all Four Powers in just 329 days. The Soviet leadership gave up Stalin's most important price from World War II—the GDR and East Berlin—without firing a shot.

The Soviet Union accepted that a united Germany would remain a member of NATO and the EU.

The USSR peacefully withdrew 500,000 troops and their weapon systems from Central Europe—Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, including 370,000 from the GDR alone.

From 1988 until 1992 the most far-reaching disarmament and arms control agreements were signed, limiting or eliminating conventional, nuclear and chemical weapons. Eighty percent of all nuclear weapons were eliminated.

In July 1991 the Soviet military alliance, the Warsaw Pact, peacefully and quietly dissolved.

In December 1991 the Soviet Union peacefully disbanded into 15 independent republics.

Every one of those events could have triggered an internal or external military conflict as briefly demonstrated by the coup attempt against President Gorbachev in August 1991 in Moscow. All of these sensational events happened peacefully and with mutual agreement. Did the West ever realize this?

Let me summarize the reasons for success:

There was mutual trust between all decision-makers. Agreements were kept. Mikhail Gorbachev once said everything could have been different if he had not trusted Helmut Kohl and George Bush.

The Federal Republic and its Western partners were willing to support Gorbachev's reforms economically and financially.

The West took into account Soviet security interests. Washington and Moscow signed far-reaching disarmament and arms control agreements (INF/START/Chemical and Biological Weapons Ban/NRRC Agreement). NATO offered friendship and cooperation to the Warsaw Pact countries. Germany and the USSR signed the Major Treaty with security guarantees.

The culmination of events was the signing of the "Charter of Paris for a New Europe" in November 1990 by all 34 Presidents and Prime Ministers of the CSCE. Its goal was a pan-European framework for peace and security from Vancouver to Vladivostok—the "Common

European House,” which Mikhail Gorbachev had envisioned with the same level of security for everyone. What a vision! What a dream!

On May 9, 1991, French President Mitterrand said in Aachen, “For a long time, Europe did not have as many reasons for hope.”

Today, everyone in East and West should ask the question: what have we done with this vision?