

## François Mitterrand, Of Germany and France

**Caption:** In his memoirs, François Mitterrand, former President of the French Republic, outlines the establishment, in 1990, of the 'Two Plus Four' (2 + 4) Conference, attended by the two Germanys and the four Allied Powers signatory to the 1945 Potsdam Agreement, with a view to settling the international issue of German reunification.

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In the early days of 1990, I asked Roland Dumas to organise a meeting for ‘common reflection’ between the Elysée and the Quai d’Orsay in order to determine the method that we should follow regarding the issues raised by German unification, which was then imminent. Both groups concluded that the West German rulers should be asked about their intentions as a matter of urgency, without waiting for the elections of 18 March, taking the view that there would be more disadvantages in doing nothing before that date than in talking in clear terms straight away. Immediate negotiations were vital. Roland Dumas sent me a note in which he said that such discussions or negotiations could not be requested publicly by France without provoking the indignation of the German public, and a flare-up of nationalism which would make further action even more difficult. However, it would be different if a senior German figure were to give the Four Powers a helping hand. Having been informed by James Baker, the US Secretary of State, that the latter agreed with this view, he sounded out Hans-Dietrich Genscher in order to find out whether he was ready, in the interests of Europe, to support the idea of discussions between Germany and the Four Powers. France and its three partners would then return the ball and propose a timetable. Mr Genscher accepted the invitation and, on 10 February, from Moscow, where he had just been having a meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev, he expressed the hope that a conference would bring together the Four Powers France, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union and the Governments of the two Germanies to discuss unification, adding that such a conference would precede the CSCE Summit and would give a pan-European framework to the process of German reunification. In so doing, Hans-Dietrich Genscher was thinking more about the fate of NATO than about the Polish border. In fact, some Germans were campaigning to ensure that Germany, once it was reunified, should relinquish its political and military orientations. Others were arguing in favour of its entry into NATO as a single unit, which would have meant extending the limits of the Atlantic Alliance as far as the Oder-Neisse Line. Mr Genscher suggested a third solution, namely that Soviet troops would withdraw from the GDR, that the latter would leave the Warsaw Pact and that a unified Germany would remain a member of NATO, but that within that Germany the territory formerly constituting the GDR would be demilitarised so that the entire NATO apparatus would still remain at a distance from the Soviet borders. In the meantime, the holding of a Two plus Four Conference would respond to the wishes of Mikhail Gorbachev who had said to me, in a letter dated 2 February, ‘I believe that it is in our joint interests to monitor together, with all necessary care and attention, developments in matters involving the two Germanies in order to avoid any upheaval which would inevitably affect Europe.’ Three weeks earlier, a message from Eduard Shevardnadze to Roland Dumas had already hinted that Moscow was anxious to tackle the entire German problem, and not just the status of Berlin.

There was no longer any reason to wait. In Ottawa, where a conference of thirty-five powers was being held on an air-traffic inspection project known as ‘Open Skies’, a statement by the six Foreign Ministers directly involved announced that the various external aspects of German unification, including issues concerning the security of neighbouring States, would be considered at meetings which would be taking place shortly. That was the start of what were initially known as the ‘Four plus Two’ conferences (a name which was immediately corrected by the Germans to ‘Two plus Four’). The first of these conferences was held in Bonn on 5 May, the second in East Berlin on 22 June and the third in Paris on 17 July, and they led to the signing, on 12 September in Moscow, of the ‘Treaty on the Final Settlement With Respect to Germany’.

Helmut Kohl, who did not want a conference or a treaty or the Polish presence that the Warsaw leaders were demanding, gave in, albeit reluctantly. However, he continued to show extreme irritability, fearing that the allies would take the place of the German free arbiter. There was a risk that European equilibrium would be greatly shaken by unification, and I know that Mr Kohl was aware of this. It was therefore necessary to draw a distinction between the two sets of negotiations while conducting them side-by-side. In an interview that I gave on 14 February to eight French regional newspapers, I had the opportunity to say this, in the following words, ‘From a simple contractual community to the absorption of the GDR by the Federal Republic, via a confederation or federation, there are many possibilities. Who could fail to understand the aspirations towards unity of a nation which has been divided for so long? My fellow Frenchmen, I was involved in fighting for the Resistance when France was occupied and divided by the might of Germany. It would be

unfair to hold the present generation responsible for a past which is half a century old, particularly when France and Germany, now reconciled, have, since then, built up a firm friendship. I want the Germans to know that I, like the majority of French people, sincerely hope that things will turn out happily for them. However, unification, whatever form it takes, will bring with it consequences in which France has a direct interest, such as the substance of the peace settlement, the fixing of borders, integration into the European Community, the stationing of armed forces and the state of the various alliances. It is my duty to safeguard the security and the fundamental interests of France.' It was from that angle, and inspired by those principles, that our diplomats approached the Two plus Four Conference.

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