

François Mitterrand, Of Germany and France

Caption: In 1996, François Mitterrand, President of France from 1981 to 1995, recalls the attitudes of the various European countries towards German reunification on the eve of the Strasbourg European Council of 8 and 9 December 1989.

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A week before the Strasbourg Council meeting, I received a summary report from Roland Dumas on the attitudes of various European countries towards German reunification. I was informed that, in Eastern Europe, people were seriously worried. This was true not only in the Soviet Union but also in Poland, where people were alarmed about the Oder-Neisse Line, and in Czechoslovakia, where the *Rudé Právo*, the official newspaper, took the view that Helmut Kohl's proposals were 'at odds with reality'. Hungary, adopting a more measured tone, admitted that 'German reunification stemmed from a natural desire' but thought that 'the conditions for it could not be created quickly'. Most Western governments remained cautious. In the Netherlands, the Foreign Minister, Hans van den Broek, observed that 'reunification was not an end in itself' but would go hand-in-hand with developments in the rapprochement between East and West. As far as Felipe González was concerned, there was no need 'to alter the current political status quo but rather to move towards more flexible communication arrangements between the two Germanies'. Giulio Andreotti, the Italian Prime Minister, was in the process of signing a joint declaration with Mikhail Gorbachev which stated that 'the two parties were convinced that the equilibrium on which the security of the European Continent was based should be preserved'. In Lisbon and Athens, there was concern of a different kind. Quite simply, they had no desire to foot the bill for any 'diversion' of Community aid to the German Democratic Republic and other countries of Eastern Europe. Reactions in the Scandinavian capitals expressed similar concern, namely that relations between the European Community and the European Free Trade Association should not suffer as a result of any Community 'slide' towards Eastern Europe. Finally, as usual, Margaret Thatcher signalled her disagreement and repeated, to anyone who was willing to listen, that reunification 'was not a current problem'. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, a permanent fixture as Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, on a visit to London, was unable to get anything more out of her.

While all this was going on, I sent a letter, on 5 December, to the Heads of State or Government, setting out the agenda for the Council meeting. On the one hand, I planned that the discussion should relate to the application of the Single Act, Economic and Monetary Union, the Social Charter, and economic aid to the countries of Eastern Europe, and on the other hand I, sketched out a draft of the conclusions, which would include references to:

1. the satisfaction, on the part of the Europe of Twelve, at the changes signalled by the end of the division of Europe between the two predominating systems;
2. the Community's support for countries embracing democracy;
3. the role of the Twelve as a reference point and a beacon for future European unity.

This document, which I had forwarded to my partners, came up against two reservations, one on the part of the British, who ruled out any reference to European union, and the other on the part of the Germans, who requested the inclusion of an explicit form of words supporting German unity. The policy directors working with the Foreign Ministers, who were used to comparing notes before the opening of the summits, found it difficult to refer to reunification without taking up a position with regard to Poland's western borders.

The conference opened on 7 December in an atmosphere of tension. Chancellor Kohl, however cautious his language may have been, was anxious, as he had told me in his letter of two days previously, that there should be explicit confirmation that Germany was destined to be united. Margaret Thatcher was insistent in not wanting to set the train of events in motion, and she increased the number of conditions to be attached to anything which might look like a commitment. Roland Dumas and I stuck to our willingness to link the prospect of unification to the formal recognition of Germany's external borders. The general agreement on the concordance between German unity and European unity was somewhat easier. The formula prepared by the representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany was the subject of fierce discussion and was finally amended. The final version of the paragraph in question referred to several conditions including observance of the Treaties and of all the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act.

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