

The end of the Cold War: Towards the establishment of a new partnership (1989–2011)

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The late 20th century was a time of major geopolitical upheaval in [Eastern Europe](#). With the [fall of the Berlin Wall](#), the collapse of the communist bloc and the implosion of the USSR in 1991, the bipolar system of the Cold War came to an end. In this changing world, relations between France and Germany also had to be re-examined, since the issues facing the countries were becoming increasingly multilateral rather than bilateral.

When the Berlin Wall came down on 9 November 1989, reactions in France were [mixed](#). There were fears that a [huge reunified Germany](#) would dominate its partners and could turn towards the USSR. French President [François Mitterrand](#) (1981–1995) would have preferred that the country remain divided. Federal Chancellor [Helmut Kohl](#) (1982–1998) was keen to [reassure](#) his partners, affirming that ‘the German house must be built under a European roof’. German unity could only safely be achieved within the framework of European unity. Germany’s main partners, starting with France, shared this view, prompting the [proposal](#) by Mitterrand and Kohl, on 19 April 1990, to hold an [intergovernmental conference](#) on political union in order to strengthen the Community institutions and above all to define and implement a common foreign and security policy (CFSP). Although views differed widely among the Member States, Mitterrand and Kohl published a [letter](#) on 6 December setting forth their vision of future political union, with tangible, coherent measures to achieve that goal. The signing of the Maastricht [Treaty on European Union](#) on 7 February 1992 was the culmination of this diplomatic process.

But [implementation](#) of the Maastricht Treaty ran into difficulties, and the confidence of Maastricht soon began to fade. In a context aggravated by the economic downturn, rising unemployment and [public concern](#) about the process and ultimate goals of European integration, governments gave priority to national interests within the larger framework of the European Union. The divergences between France and Germany were such that the two countries were only intermittently able to act as a [driving force](#) in the European integration process.

When Jacques Chirac became President of France in 1995 (1995–2007), despite good intentions from Paris and Berlin, [Franco-German relations](#) seemed to run out of steam. Views particularly [differed](#) on [the single currency](#), [the stability and growth pact](#) and Chirac’s decision to resume nuclear tests. As a result, during the [negotiations](#) leading to the [Treaty of Amsterdam](#) in 1997, Franco-German cooperation began to seize up. The national interests of the two countries no longer coincided.

In 1998, the arrival of [Gerhard Schröder](#) (1998–2005) as German Chancellor raised hopes of a revival for the Franco-German duo. But the divergent views of the two countries soon became apparent. At the [Berlin European Council](#) in March 1999, [Chirac](#) and Schröder clashed on issues relating to the Community budget and the [common agricultural policy \(CAP\)](#). With the prospect of EU enlargement to incorporate the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, discussions at the [Nice Council](#) in December 2000 revealed sharp [tensions](#) between Berlin and Paris, particularly on the weighting of votes in the Council, the composition of the Commission and the European Parliament and a Europe of defence. The outcome was the [Nice Treaty](#), the result of a laborious compromise that further complicated the decision-making process rather than streamlining it.

At this point Chirac and Schröder realised how important the [Franco-German ‘engine’](#) was for the European integration process, and they decided to review their working methods. They met on a regular basis, and their [summits](#) once again became efficient working tools. Franco-German ministerial meetings were also instituted. They reached agreement on several points: Chirac and Schröder both condemned the US intervention in Iraq, they set aside their differences on the common agricultural policy and they submitted [joint proposals](#) to the Convention on the Future of Europe. But

the [failure of the referendums](#) to ratify the [Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe](#) held in France and the Netherlands in spring 2005 threw the EU into a [serious crisis](#).

The arrival of Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) in November 2005 and President [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) in May 2007 saw the emergence of a new Franco-German duo, known in the press as ‘[Merkozy](#)’. Over and above their differing views on some European issues, in particular Nicolas Sarkozy’s plan to establish a [Union for the Mediterranean](#), what separated the two was their markedly different [leadership styles](#). But the consequences of the global [economic and financial crisis](#) in 2008 forced the [Franco-German duo](#) to tighten their relations once again.