Anglo-German Relations and German Reunification

edited by
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ICBH Witness Seminar Programme

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Anglo-German Relations and German Reunification

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Chaired by Lord Wright of Richmond
Seminar edited by Gillian Staerck and Michael D. Kandiah
with translations by Arne Hofmann

Institute of Contemporary British History

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Citation Guidance

References to this and other witness seminars should take the following form:

> **Witness name, in 'Witness Seminar Title', held [date of seminar], (Institute of Contemporary British History, [date of publication], [full internet address of seminar]), page number of reference [use the number given in the header at the top of the page referenced].**

For example, Baron von Richthofen's comments on Mrs Thatcher's 'Bruges' speech should be footnoted as follows:

> **Baron von Richthofen, in 'Anglo-German Relations and German Reunification', seminar held 18 October 2000, (Institute of Contemporary British History, 2003, http://www.icbh.ac.uk/icbh/witness/germanreun/), p.31.**

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http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/about/citation/general.html

Chronology

1945-49		Four Power (USA, UK, France and USSR) partition and occupation of Germany.
1947	JAN	Creation of Bizonia, formed by merging the British and American zones of West Germany, and the establishment of vestigial local and regional governmental organisations.
1949	MAY	Establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG: West Germany), founded on the Basic Law defining her constitution. The Occupation Statute reserved to the occupying powers control of foreign policy and defence.
1949	AUG	Creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) which established the transformation of the Allied occupation forces into a common defence organisation.
1949	OCT	Establishment of the German Democratic Republic (GDR: East Germany).
1954		East Germany granted sovereignty by the Soviet Union.
1955	MAY	West Germany joined the Western European Union (WEU) and achieved full sovereignty. She also joined NATO and was permitted limited rearmament. The British army of occupation became the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR).
1956	JAN	East Germany joined Warsaw Pact (formed May 1955).
1961	AUG	The Berlin Wall erected.
1971		Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin.
1989	Spring/Summer	Anglo-German dispute over the modernisation of short-range nuclear missiles.
1989	JUN	Soviet Premier Gorbachev's enthusiastic reception in West Germany.
1989	16 OCT	US Secretary of State James Baker outlined the importance of European integration as a framework for German self-determination.
1989	17 OCT	Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, called for the speeding up of European integration in consequence of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.
1989	25 OCT	French President François Mitterand addressed the European Parliament at Strasbourg. He argued that events in Eastern Europe made it imperative that further integration be implemented. He called for the renegotiation of the European Community Treaty not only to introduce economic and monetary union but also to multiply the powers of the EC institutions.

1989	3 NOV	West German German Chancellor Kohl and Mitterand entered into talks. The French President stated that he was not afraid of a unified Germany. Both leaders stated: 'It is clear for us that developments in Germany and in the other part of Germany make it urgently necessary … that we push the process of European unity forward.'
1989	9 NOV	Fall of the Berlin Wall. The frontiers of East and West Germany were opened.
1989	10 NOV	British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd's statement in The Hague about the prospect of German reunification: 'I think the crucial point at the moment is that what the crowds are calling for is not actually reunification but reform. That is their objective and that is something there can be no doubt about. That is something we all fervently hope they will succeed in achieving.'
1989	12 NOV	European Commission met to discuss events in East Germany and the impact of a united Germany: 'There is no doubt about one thing. The Commission as a whole is now agreed on the need to accelerate economic and monetary union.'
1989	15 NOV	UK Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd met German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher in Bonn to discuss events in East Germany and its implications for the EU. Genscher indicated that the rapid disintegration of the Eastern bloc was a spur to further economic and political union of the EC. Hurd indicated, by contrast, that 'There is no point in making grand future undertakings, without finishing what you have already said you would do.'
1989	18 NOV	Extraordinary heads of government dinner in Paris followed an announcement of an improved programme of aid to Poland and Hungary. British Prime Minister Mrs Margaret Thatcher stated: 'The question of borders was not on the agenda. They should stay as they are and military matters should continue to be conducted through NATO and the Warsaw Pact.'
1989	23 NOV	A joint statement to the European Parliament by the leaders of France and West Germany. Chancellor Kohl stressed that reunification could only occur 'under a European roof'. President Mitterand commented: 'The [European] Community's role is to realise that it is the only attractive force on this continent.'
1989	24 NOV	Mrs Thatcher at Camp David for talks with US President George Bush. The US government made it clear that it wished to further anchor West Germany to the EC and that there should be no slowing down of European integration.
1989	28 NOV	Chancellor Kohl's Ten Point Plan that aimed to construct 'confederate structures' between West and East Germany.
1989	3 DEC	President Bush told Kohl that Mrs Thatcher was hostile to his Ten Point Plan.

1989	4 DEC	President Bush at NATO council meeting in Brussels. He stressed that the Western allies had supported the idea of German unity 'for decades'.
1989	8-9 DEC	European Council in Strasbourg decided that German reunification must be embedded in a larger European unity framework: 'We seek the establishment of a state of peace in Europe in which the German people will regain its unity through free self-determination. This process should take place peacefully and democratically in full respect of the relevant agreements and treaties and on the basis of all the principles defined in the Helsinki Final Act in a context of dialogue and East-West co-operation. It should be placed in the perspective of Community integration.'
1990	6 FEB	Mrs Thatcher announced in the House of Commons that German reunification was a possibility.
1990	7 FEB	West German government created 'unity committee'. Chancellor Kohl proposed currency union between the two Germanies.
1990	12 FEB	Mrs Thatcher while in Torquay stated: reunification of the two Germanies was only possible after 'massive consultation' with other countries. 'All the changes in Germany must be done in conjunction with the other obligations for which we are all signed up', referring to NATO.
1990	13 FEB	Ottawa meeting of NATO and Warsaw Pact foreign ministers. 'Two-Plus-Four' solution was announced.
1990	14 FEB	Foreign ministers of USA, France, UK, the Soviet Union and the two Germanies agreed to begin formal talks to reach international agreement on reunification.
1990	22 FEB	Extensive House of Commons debate on Germany. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said that he was 'glad that the years of painful division are coming to an end' and that reunification was likely 'sooner rather than later'.
1990	24-25 FEB	Camp David Meeting of Kohl and Bush. The US government indicated that it supported German moves to reunification and believed the British stance to be obstructive.
1990	24 MAR	Prime Minister Thatcher convened a Chequers meeting with expert historians to discuss the 'German question'. Minutes of this meeting were leaked to the *Independent on Sunday*. The Chequers' Memorandum claimed that German traits included 'angst, aggressiveness, assertiveness, bullying, egotism, inferiority complex, sentimentality' but concluded that 'We should be nice to the Germans'.
1990	26 MAR	Mrs Thatcher stated in an interview with German magazine *Spiegel* that Chancellor Kohl had said, regarding the future of Poland's borders, 'No, I guarantee nothing, I do not recognise the present borders'. This statement was quickly repudiated by the German government.
1990	24 APR	Kohl and East German Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière agreed to a target date of 1 July 1990 for economic unification of the two Germanies.

1990	5 MAY	First official 'Two-Plus-Four' meeting in Bonn.
1990	18 MAY	Treaty establishing monetary, economic and social union was concluded between West and East Germany and was signed in Bonn, to become effective 1 July 1990
1990	11 JUN	Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd reiterated that the EC and NATO would be the main pillars of UK foreign policy: 'NATO, with a united Germany in it, will remain the guarantee of Europe's safety and one of the main means of binding the United States and Canada to Europe'.
1990	18 JUN	Mrs Thatcher gave an interview to BBC radio in which she stated that she believed that many people were 'a little bit apprehensive' about German reunification. This was, she said, 'because of the history of this century which we cannot ignore'.
1990	1 JUL	The deutschmark replaced the ostmark as the legal currency in East Germany
1990	Early JUL	The British magazine *Spectator* published an interview with Nicholas Ridley, Secretary of State for Industry, entitled 'Saying the Unsayable about the Germans'. Ridley suggested that Kohl was following in Hitler's footsteps: 'He'll soon be coming here and trying to say that this is what we should do on the banking front and this is what our taxes should be. I mean, he'll soon be trying to take over everything.' This was followed by a furore in the House of Commons with attacks being led by Neil Kinnock, Labour leader, Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats and some Conservative backbench MPs. Mrs Thatcher stated that Ridley's views did 'not represent the Government's view or indeed my view'. Despite the backing of the Prime Minister, Ridley was forced to resign his ministerial post. German official reaction was muted: 'We consider our bilateral relations with Britain to be very good'. West German newspapers were of the opinion that Britain was undergoing an identity crisis (*Frankfurter Rundschau*) and 'was having trouble coming to terms with its own past' (*Die Welt*). However, according to Rainer Oschmann, deputy editor of East German *Nues Deutschland*: 'The new Germany will undoubtedly be an economic colossus, and that gives cause for concern here, too. I'm not sure that generalisations about national characteristics should be taken too seriously, but the underlying fears should not be dismissed'.
1990	16 JUL	Soviet Premier Gorbachev indicated approval for a united Germany's membership of NATO.
1990	21 AUG	Jacques Delors challenged the UK's EU position with regard to economic and monetary union and the establishment of a central bank and a single currency. Delors was also seeking special powers to enforce full EC law in the territory of East Germany following reunification.
1990	11 SEP	The UK insisted on NATO manoeuvres in East Germany following

		withdrawal of the Red Army. US solution was that the German government should itself define 'deployment'.
1990	12 SEP	'Two-Plus-Four' Treaty signed.
1990	18 SEP	Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown criticised the attitude of the Government. He urged the Government to use the EU 'in a way which ties Germany in and can contain the changes which are coming'.
1990	1 OCT	New York Declaration granted sovereignty to a united Germany
1990	2 OCT	Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd stated: 'We rejoice with our German friends that the years of their division are over'.
1990	3 OCT	GDR ceased to exist.
1990	23 OCT	House of Commons debates on Europe brought about by a perceived mismanagement of the issue of German reunification. This debate was preceded by a by-election defeat for the Conservatives at Eastbourne.
1990	2 DEC	All German election. Kohl elected as Chancellor of united Germany.

Questions for Consideration

Michael D. Kandiah and Gillian Staerck

The pace of German reunification was rapid and occurred in a period when the world was undergoing a massive political realignment. The Berlin Wall, the symbol of the postwar political division of Europe, was dismantled in November 1989. Regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed and the cold war came to an end.

Britain was cautious because she felt that events were moving too fast, and she feared undermining Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (at a time of unrest in the Soviet Union) and thus undermining European security. (*The Times*, 2 February 1990)

British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd was reported as being cautious and emphasising the need for 'a reasonable period of transition' – in contrast to West German leader Helmut Kohl, who was reported to be opening negotiations for reunification 'imminently'. (*The Times,* 7 February 1990)

Q. What were the characteristics of the Anglo-German relationship prior to this period?
Q. The British government seemed particularly unprepared for events and the developments that followed. Did this shape government policy towards German reunification?
Q. During 1989-90 what was the British Government's greater fear: destabilisation of global security resulting from Soviet and East European unrest, the weakness of Gorbachev's position, with German reunification as a catalyst; or a reunified and resurgent Germany dominating Europe?

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was consistently seen to be hindering the process of German reunification.

Mrs Thatcher felt that 'a united Germany is bound to destroy the balance of power in Europe and is, therefore, bad for Britain'. (Lothar Kettenacker, 'Britain and German Unification, 1989/90' in Klaus Larres and Elizabeth Meehan (eds.) *Uneasy Allies, British-German Relations and European Integration Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000) p.100).

Therefore she thought 'massive consultation would be needed with other countries first'. (*The Times*, 12 February 1990)

Q. Did her stance hinder the conduct of Anglo-German relations during this period?
Q. Was it resented by the Germans?

The interview given by Nicholas Ridley to the *Spectator* and the leaked Chequers memorandum to the *Independent on Sunday* revealed some deep-seated fears with regard to a reunited Germany. Similar expressions were also aired in the House of Commons.

Q. Did such expressions handicap diplomatic relations between the two countries?
And, if so, how far do they consider that belief informed and guided British policy towards German reunification in 1990?
Q. Did it cause a rift in relations between the two countries during this period?

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office took a historical view of German reunification. They did not object to the principle of German reunification (Kettenacker, p.102) and restoration of national unity; however, this should not assume that the Foreign Office welcomed it (Kettenacker, p.103)

The Foreign Office felt that 'The modus of German unification is more important than its essence'. (Kettenacker, p.101).

Q. Given the foregoing, was there a tension between Mrs Thatcher and her advisers on the one hand and Foreign Office view on the other?
If so, did this tension confuse policymaking and policy implementation?
Q. And how far were German politicians and diplomats aware of any tension?

'Was Britain's real position the same as its publicly stated one of support for [*Ostpolitik*]? Or was there a hidden agenda, to confirm the division of Germany?' Colin Munro, 'Britain and German *Ostpolitik*' in eds. Adolf M. Birke and Hermann Wentker, *Germany and Russia in British Policy towards Europe since 1815,* (London: K. G. Saur, 1994).

Q. Notwithstanding the foregoing, did the German politicians and diplomats believe that Britain had a hidden agenda to confirm the division of Germany?
Q. Did this view influence their responses to Britain's arguments in the Two plus Four discussions?

France was able to seize on German reunification and harness it to fulfil her long-term foreign policy aims. Britain's long-term policy aims, however, could not be fulfilled by reunification.

Mrs Thatcher was accused by Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown of 'clinging to the apron strings of the Atlantic relationship and missing the opportunities in Europe'. (*The Times*, 1 February 1990)

Q. Did this reveal a basic flaw in Britain's foreign policy?
Q. Given that the UK differed with both the Americans and the French on the issue of the desirability and then the pace of German reunification, why did she pursue this line?

East European revolutions and German reunification sparked fears of destabilising the progress of the European Union towards the 1992 Single Market and the momentum to European integration.

Q. Notwithstanding Mrs Thatcher's fears about a resurgent, reunited Germany, did German Reunification realistically offer a postponement of the Single European Act in 1992?

The UK's hostility to German reunification was a symptom of a country 'having trouble coming to terms with its own past' (West German, *Die Welt*).

'The new Germany will undoubtedly be an economic colossus, and that gives cause for concern here, too. I'm not sure that generalisations about national characteristics should be taken too seriously, but the underlying fears should not be dismissed'. (East German: *Nues Deutschland*).

Q. Was there a difference between the West Germans and the East Germans in their perception of the 'British problem'?

Hans-Dietrich Genscher suggested demilitarising East Germany. But he also stated that 'a unified Germany must stay in NATO'. (*The Times*, 1 February 1990). How was the prospect of German reunification perceived in NATO?

Q. What was NATO's view of the suggestion to demilitarise East Germany?
Q. How did SACEUR think this would affect NATO's military Shield?
Q. Was NATO alarmed by the East German people's preference for more disarmament?

Principal sources:

Newspapers: *The Independent; The Times.*
Lothar Kettenacker, Britain and German Unification, 1989/90 in Klaus Larres and Elizabeth Meehan (eds.) *Uneasy Allies, British-German Relations and European Integration Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000)
Colin Munro, 'Britain and German *Ostpolitik*' in eds. Adolf M. Birke and Hermann Wentker, *Germany and Russia in British Policy towards Europe since 1815,* (London: K. G. Saur, 1994).

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This witness seminar, organised by Dr M. D. Kandiah, Institute of Contemporary British History, London, was held on 18 October 2000, at the German Historical Institute, Bloomsbury Square, London. It was chaired by Lord Wright of Richmond and the witnesses were Sir Michael Alexander, Sir Rodric Braithwaite, Sir Michael Burton, Sir Christopher Mallaby, Dr Marcus Meckel, Colin Munro, Laurence O'Keeffe and Dr Hermann Frhr von Richthofen, with contributions from Professor Donald Cameron Watt.

LORD WRIGHT OF RICHMOND

A warm welcome to all of you and particularly to those of you who have come here today from Germany. A particular welcome to Baron Hermann von Richthofen, who is known to most, if not all, of us from his distinguished period as German Ambassador to London from 1988 to 1993. Also to Dr Marcus Meckel, who is the only person at this seminar who represented the GDR at the Two plus Four Conference* and therefore has a very particular contribution to make. Can I now suggest that we quickly go round the table from left to right and that we introduce ourselves very briefly, explaining our relevance to the subject of this seminar.

For details of the Two Plus Four Conference see chronology.

I will start with myself. My name is Lord Wright of Richmond. As Sir Patrick Wright, I was Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from June 1986 until June 1991.

SIR RODRIC BRAITHWAITE

I was in London before I went to Moscow in September 1988 as Ambassador and I stayed there until May 1992, so covering the period of our seminar. I then came back to London and served as Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister, John Major,* until the end of 1994.

John Major, Conservative politician. Prime Minister, 1990-7.

SIR MICHAEL ALEXANDER

I was Ambassador at NATO* between September 1986 and January 1992. I had been Margaret Thatcher's* Private Secretary from 1979 to the end of 1981, and I remained in correspondence with her until she left office.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, formed in 1949 based on the Treaty of Brussels (1948) by Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Greece and Turkey joined 1952, the Federal Republic of Germany 1955, Spain in 1982, and the united Germany in 1990.

SIR MICHAEL BURTON I was the senior British diplomat in Berlin from 1985 to the end of 1992, wearing three different hats during that period. Firstly, I was Minister and Deputy Commandant in the British Military Government from 1985 to 1990, then there was a short period when the Military Government became the British Mission in Berlin, which I headed. After German reunification I was the head of the British Embassy Berlin office, whose job it was to develop our relationship with the new *Bundesländer** in the East, and I did that until the end of 1992.

Margaret Thatcher (Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven), Conservative politician. Prime Minister 1979-90.

Bundesländer refers to one of the federal states comprising the Federal Republic of Germany.

SIR CHRISTOPHER MALLABY I was Ambassador in Germany from March 1988 to December 1992 and then subsequently in Paris.

DR MARCUS MECKEL I was a member of the East German Parliament and now I am [a] member of the German Bundestag. In 1990 I was Foreign Minister of the GDR.

BARON VON RICHTHOFEN I was Ambassador to the Court of St James* from December 1988 to May 1993.

The Court of St James's is the official title of the British court, to which foreign countries' ambassadors are accredited.

COLIN MUNRO I was Deputy Head of Mission in East Berlin from mid-1987 until May 1990. Earlier, from 1983 to 1987, I had been in the Western European Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, latterly as its Deputy Head. After East Berlin I went to Frankfurt as Consul General.

LAURENCE O'KEEFFE I was Ambassador in Prague from the beginning of 1989 to July 1991 and therefore was a witness to the Velvet Revolution* and, indeed, to the incidents at the Federal German Embassy when the East Germans occupied the Federal Republic's Embassy. Before that I was at the Vienna meeting of the CSCE,* which was quite cardinal in that period, because it was at that conference that the mechanisms were set in place for bringing down the Berlin Wall.*

The Velvet Revolution refers to the relatively smooth transition from Communism to a Western-style democracy in Czechoslovakia at the end of 1989.

WRIGHT Thank you very much. I think we might start by perhaps asking our panellists to express some thoughts about the British perception of the Anglo-German relationship.

I should apologise to any non-English British participants here, but I am afraid it isn't actually very easy to talk about British-German relations – for some reason 'Anglo-German' relations trips more happily off the tongue. But I thought first we might have a British perception of the Anglo-German relationship immediately preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification.

Was the British government unprepared for what happened? When the events of 1989 and 1990 happened, what was the British government's greater fear – was it destabilisation of global security and

Meetings at Helsinki and later Geneva and Madrid, attended by leaders of 35 nations, the entire membership of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact and the non-aligned countries, at which the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was launched in 1975. The conference produced the Helsinki Final Act, a list of agreements concerning political freedom, mutual co-operation, and human rights.

The Berlin Wall, built in 1961 by the GDR government as a physical boundary between East and West Berlin, was dismantled in Nov. 1989.

of Gorbachev's* position, or the perception of a growing German domination?

Before inviting any comments, I wonder if I can just try briefly to attempt a personal analysis of Mrs Thatcher's attitude. I don't want this subject to dominate the discussion this afternoon, but I do think it is something that we might perhaps consider quite early on. I would merely make the following points. First of all, the Foreign Office* in London were already considering in October 1987 an analysis of the future Soviet attitude to German reunification, and I think the impact on the position of Gorbachev, with whom Mrs Thatcher had already established a businesslike relationship, was relevant here, but, Rodric [Braithwaite], you may want to comment on that in a moment. At that time Mrs Thatcher was reported to be very worried about Franco-German defence co-operation and about WEU,* both of which she thought could undermine NATO and lead to further reduction in the United States' forces in Germany and pressure to remove British nuclear weapons from German soil.

Her personal relationship with Helmut Kohl* was never easy. They were very different personalities. I doubt whether she ever initiated their telephone calls – perhaps a reflection of what I would describe as generational Germanophobia? One of her senior Cabinet colleagues, who *had* fought in the war, once commented to me that he found it extremely strange that this degree of Germanophobia should come from someone who had not, of course, been old enough to fight in the war. On the other hand, I might quote a very senior German official who once said to me privately that if he were a 65-year-old Briton he thought he would probably have had much the same hang-ups: an exaggerated fear of what Mrs Thatcher saw as German 'domination' of Europe, which incidentally also affected her attitude towards enlargement to include Austria. She is said to have described television pictures of Germans singing *Deutschland über Alles** in the *Bundestag* as the Berlin Wall came down as 'a dagger in my heart'. She feared that reunification would lead to closer integration within the European Union* and resented American public statements of support for this.*

Finally, a reflection on her attitude towards liberals in her own country. It certainly influenced her relationship with Hans-Dietrich Genscher* – note her dismissive reference to European liberals in the House of Commons in 1988. I throw that in as my own, and possibly my last, contribution to this aspect of the discussion and I now open it to the panel.

MALLABY

The first question that we have been asked to consider was: what were the characteristics of the British-German relationship before unification? I think the answer is: better than most people think.

The two countries were the great champions of free trade in the European Union, the strongest Atlanticists among the European members of NATO, and of course both of them were fully inte-

Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet statesman. General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR 1985-91 and President 1988-91.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, usually referred to as the Foreign Office.

Western European Union (WEU) was formed in 1955 by the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the Federal Republic of Germany to co-ordinate defence policy and to promote co-operation in other spheres. It succeeded the European Defence Community (formed in 1952) and collaborates closely with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Portugal and Spain joined in 1988 and the former East Germany was included when Germany reunited (1990).

Helmut Kohl, German statesman. Chancellor of West Germany (1982-90) and of Germany (1990-98).

Trans.: 'Germany beyond everything' or 'Germany before everything'. The German national anthem from 1922 until 1945. Reinstated in 1950 with the third verse (*'Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit'*, 'Unity and Right and Freedom') replacing the first with its controversial reference to *'über Alles'*.

European Union is the name by which the European Community is now commonly described.

See chronology.

Hans-Dietrich Genscher, German statesman. German Foreign Minister, 1974-92.

grated members of the Alliance. There was a particular British role at that time, which was our continued responsibility, with the other powers, in Berlin and in relation to Germany as a whole. That was an unusual kind of special bond that existed, of course, between Germany and three countries,* and, in the British case, it was an additional plus in the relationship.

The others being Britain, the USA and France.

The other thing I would mention in that context is easy communication. I always found that a British team coming to Bonn to discuss any subject, probably people who never dealt with Germany directly, would simply launch into the substance and comfortably and easily be able to talk about it. They would sit down together and, without any beating about the bush or careful searching for the wavelength, be able to talk directly and relaxedly. That, I think, is something which the British and the French don't have and – I am sure I am right in saying that even the French and the Germans don't have, although they have tremendous strength in their relationship. They do have to beat about the bush before they address the bush itself in conversation.

The British government, was it particularly unprepared for unification? The answer is that everyone was unprepared, and the British not more than others. The influences on British policy during unification were some of those mentioned at the end of Patrick Wright's remarks. It certainly is true that Mrs Thatcher had a kind of generational distrust of Germans, shared by many of that generation but not all. She was 19 at the end of the war. I don't think that the British government was fearful of destabilisation of global security resulting from unrest in, or liberalisation in, Central and Eastern Europe. But there was a concern (and I hope we will cover this in detail later) that the Soviet forces in East Germany might get embroiled in public events, in demonstrations or whatever, in East Germany and that that could be a spark for a real East-West crisis. I can tell you at first hand that the Russians themselves were extremely concerned about the risk of demonstrations in the GDR and the fear that their soldiers would come into danger from that.

The other point is the one about Gorbachev's position. I think it is a fact that all of us thought that Gorbachev was not really stable in his saddle. We did not think that liberalisation in the Soviet Union was necessarily irreversible and there was a fear that rapid movement towards German unification could endanger Gorbachev's position. He could find himself in a position where he could not defend domestically in Moscow some of the things that were going on in Central Europe. So I think that the substantive element in British fears was this one about Gorbachev. The subjective one was that some older people remembered the past more than they thought about the future.

For what we were actually looking at was not only a change in Germany: we were looking at potentially the end of the Cold War, indeed a victory, a peaceful victory, in the Cold War. We were looking at the possibility that the Red Army* would leave Central Europe and that the Soviet threat, which had been *the* threat to the

Commonly used name for the Soviet Union's Army, 1918-91.

security of this country since 1948 or so, would be lifted. So while a few people were thinking about the past and the German threat 50 years before, others were thinking about the present and the end of the threat that had existed since the end of the German threat.

BRAITHWAITE On the question of attitude, I was always struck in the 1970s and early 1980s by the firm belief, amongst a surprisingly wide number of people, that East Germany was a real country. If you remember it was in the 1970s that *The Economist* produced the amazing non-fact that East Germany had overtaken this country economically. This myth arose not only from East German official figures, but also from a belief that some kind of East German patriotism was emerging, and a feeling that one had to deal with this country as a real country. That was also true of the German Foreign Office which agreed that one had to treat the East German government and the East German state as if they were a real state. And for many years, there were indeed two Germanies. I am not sure whether it was what Patrick [Wright] was referring to, but in 1987 or 1988 the Foreign Office planning staff produced a paper on what the British government's policy should be when Germany was reunited. They said it was going to happen, so we might as well start preparing for the consequences. It was written by somebody who knew Germany very well and it was a very good paper. It was solemnly debated by Patrick [Wright]'s planning committee, consisting of wise old men, the Deputy Under-Secretaries at the Foreign Office. Their view was that this was a very interesting paper, but the overwhelming majority took the view was that this was a subject that would only become relevant in the distant future. This was in either 1987 or 1988.

MUNRO 1987.

BRAITHWAITE So, in 1987 the Planning staff certainly had a think about it and the senior policy levels of the Foreign Office thought it was going to be a subject to address in the future. I thought it would probably become a subject in due course: but I agreed with the majority that there wasn't anything to be done about it in 1987. The proposition was: how do we cope with our security arrangements since a united Germany would probably choose to be neutral between the United States and the USSR? The interesting thing about this extremely intelligent and perceptive paper was that it didn't say that any of this was going to happen quickly; it said (I can't remember the timeframe) 'not for at least ten years and possibly quite a bit longer'.

I think that, picking up the question of how the Americans developed NATO, several people here today were at a meeting, a Heads of Mission Conference, that took place on 9 October 1989, when we all got together to discuss the future of NATO and the future of European security in general. And one of the interesting things

about that conference was that we were told right at the beginning that the Prime Minister did not wish us to consider the consequences of a possible reunification of Germany, because, at the beginning of October 1989, it was not a reasonable use of our time to do that. Needless to say, we acquiesced. We were worried that, if Germany were reunited and the Russians withdrew, it would be possible that NATO would go. That was really, I think, the first clear indication that I had that Mrs Thatcher wasn't in touch with reality. There were serious concerns both in Bonn and in Paris, but also in Washington, that she was taking herself out of the discussion by the views that she was taking.

I could go into a certain amount of detail about discussions that that led to in Moscow. At the beginning of November 1989 I was talking to Gorbachev's people on her [i.e. Mrs Thatcher's] instructions, worrying about Germany, and the view in London at that time was that we were jolly lucky to have not only NATO, but also the Warsaw Pact.* Both institutions were a force for stability in a situation that could become unstable. What was also clear at that time was that, if we were baffled about what to do next, the Russians were at least as baffled, of course, and they had no idea what to do with the situation as it was developing. Then the Wall came down and we started exchanging messages between Mrs Thatcher and Gorbachev. Mrs Thatcher, as she noted interestingly in her memoirs,* was hoping for a sort of alliance between her and Gorbachev and Mitterrand* in order somehow or other to stop something or other – it was of course very much a tentative idea, but it is quite interesting in her memoirs. By about January 1990, she had come to the conclusion that Mitterrand was virtually a traitor. She says in her memoirs that he betrayed not only his allies but also the French people.* Strong stuff. By January 1990 the Russians had more or less given up on Mrs Thatcher and were telling us – me – that we weren't to think that the Russians were going to pull our chestnuts out of the fire.

The Warsaw Pact (Warsaw Treaty Organisation) was a military treaty signed in 1955 by the Soviet Union, Albania (until 1968), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. It was disbanded in 1991.

Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: HarperCollins, 1993).

François Mitterand, French statesman (1916-96). President 1981-95.

Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, pp.796-9

BRAITHWAITE

There is still a question, which is very important, about how long Mrs Thatcher persisted in these attitudes. I was told in January 1990 that she already in fact recognised reality. By the summer of 1990, of course, she had finally accepted reality. In September the treaty was signed, in a bit of a flurry, as Britain delayed until the question of NATO forces in East Germany was sorted out.

Going back to the question of Russian attitudes, I think the fear that Gorbachev could be overthrown, his position seriously destabilised, was a real one which British people shared. They were afraid of that. The Soviet army, for example, deeply resented the humiliation of being seen to surrender: the shame of defeat without a shot being fired. The Soviet army was also legitimately worried by the huge logistical problem of withdrawing their forces from East Germany and finding somewhere for them to go. The Soviets were,

of course, worried about potential incidents, which could easily have happened.

WRIGHT I think I will interrupt you now and ask Michael Alexander if we can have particularly the NATO security aspect.

ALEXANDER The answer to the first question, of course, is that there was not a monolithic position either in London or, come to that, in Bonn.

When we talk about the Anglo-German relationship, it had all sorts of components. From my point of view, for instance, it is perfectly clear, firstly, that the working relationship between British and German officials was absolutely crucial and central to the organisation of security; and that relationship remained excellent throughout. But secondly, we had a problem with Genscher. We, as officials working in NATO, found Genscher very difficult. For instance, throughout 1988 we made absolutely no progress with an initiative known as the 'comprehensive concept' [of arms control and disarmament], which we, the Americans and Germans had started in 1987 at German behest and to which, because Genscher had his own agenda, there was no German input at all throughout 1988. The reason was that Genscher wanted to use the concept to get rid of short range nuclear weapons (SNF) and had decided that he would make more progress with this agenda by preventing NATO from putting together multilaterally agreed documents or statements. It was only in March 1989, when the UK got out a completely new draft, defining the contents of the concept, that we finally got to grips with issues. Although accepted by the US and France, this text was initially rejected by Genscher. It is now completely forgotten that the NATO summit in May 1989 was preceded by a huge Anglo-German-American row about these things. It was described by the media at the time as the worst crisis that NATO had ever faced. Of course it now seems bizarre that we were so preoccupied with such matters. But it was a sort of Anglo-Saxon versus German crisis, and it involved, of course, all-night negotiations, if I remember correctly on 29 May 1989. Although the UK text was eventually agreed, as part of a broader package, it was not at all clear at the time that this *would* be so. That was the Genscher problem: a kind of Anglo-Saxon/German problem that influenced these events for many months.

Then, finally, there was the Thatcher problem – and the Thatcher problem was the real one. As Patrick [Wright] has already said, it went back a long way. To quote one example: I had organised a tea party between Mrs Thatcher and [Helmut] Kohl in the Austrian Alps in August 1984 when Mrs Thatcher was holidaying in Austria. It was an opportunity for a totally relaxed, altogether informal, discussion. Unfortunately it was not, at a human level, a great success. Both leaders were utterly professional politicians, for whom politics were an obsession. They were unable to do much more than talk about their work, whether at the street corner or on the world

stage. There was no meeting of minds at all about the role of Germany in Europe. Mrs Thatcher was, and remained, profoundly concerned about and suspicious of German intentions. That problem became, perhaps we will talk about it later, of great significance in the period between September/October 1989 and early June 1990.

Events in the autumn of 1989 moved very rapidly and, in the absence of time for reflection and argument, the Prime Minister's prejudices became very important. I sent her an informal memo. at the end of October 1989 urging her not to overreact to the drama of German unification that was evidently about to come to a head. The trigger for this letter was not, in fact, that I had anticipated the actual fall of the Berlin Wall a few days later. It was partly that I had just paid a visit to East Berlin; and partly that I had encountered David Howell,* who had been a prominent member of the UK government and remained a prominent Tory politician, at a seminar in Bath where he was quite openly arguing that it would be preferable if the results of the events then beginning were to be three or four Germanys rather than one or two. I told the Prime Minister in my rather angry letter how very damaging it would be if this line of argument were to be attributed to HMG.

David Howell (Lord Howell of Guildford), Conservative politician. Member of Parliament and Chairman, House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs (1987-97)

The third question was: what was the British government's greatest fear? Governments don't categorise or they prioritise their fears. We were worried about a variety of things. We were worried about the risk of unbalancing global security. I was worried about the possibility of serious unrest in Eastern Europe. We were worried about Gorbachev's position in Russia. I myself wasn't in the least worried about the threat of the Germans dominating Europe. But I was extremely worried about – I remember talking about it with Geoffrey Howe* at that time – the prospect that 15 years out (i.e., about now), Germany and Berlin would matter even more to the UK than Russia and Moscow. That made it pretty foolish to run the risk of alienating the German Government in their history since the end of the Second World War, i.e. unification. For us to alienate them by trying to stop it struck me as mad – and I said so.

Geoffrey Howe (Lord Howe of Aberavon), Conservative politician. Foreign Secretary, 1983-9 and Deputy Prime Minister, 1989-90.

Finally, I was worried about alienating the German people. For the UK to get in a position where its government was seen by ordinary Germans as trying to stop them getting together with their relatives would have been extraordinarily unfortunate. So we were worried – or at least I was -about all of these things.

WRIGHT

I think we will turn to you next Baron [von Richthofen], both to give your perception as seen by the German Ambassador in London at the time, but also perhaps to start off on the German perception of all this at the time.

RICHTHOFEN

First of all I share Christopher Mallaby's view that German/British relations, as complex as they were, were very close and solid.

However, Michael Alexander rightly reminded us of the difficulties

we had in 1988/89 in NATO on the internationalisation of LANCE,* a problem which I would not like to identify with Mr Genscher, because there was a strong public opposition in Germany against this concept. We also had differing views in the European Economic Community at the time. Mrs Thatcher's Bruges speech in October 1988* wasn't very well received in Germany. Nevertheless, we struggled on and bilateral relations were good. I tried to contribute to get these relations even closer. There were very few real complications, until the Berlin wall came down in November 1989.

LANCE missile, a medium range tactical rocket, was deployed with US Army forces 1972 to 1991, largely in West Germany. It had a range of 3 to 78 miles and could carry either a conventional or a nuclear warhead.

Speech on 20 Sept. 1988 in which Prime Minster Thatcher outlined her vision of a wider and decentralised Europe, and was antipathetic to the growth of supranationalism and the moves towards political European federalism. This speech galvanised Eurosceptism in Britain.

After the Berlin wall came down, I recall from my conversation with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that her greatest fear was that of a kind of dominance of a united Germany in the process of European integration. She found that a united Germany would be hard to control. She would have liked to stop at the Single European Act and not to go on with European integration, in which a united Germany would have too high a political and economic weight.

Nobody foresaw that the Wall would come down in November 1989. Nor did anyone of us foresee that this would entail dramatic natural forces which had been suppressed for a long time: the call first for liberty and then for unification. The only thing politicians can do in such a situation is to put the change in the right channels. That is what we did. We were well prepared for the Two plus Four negotiations. We had done our homework on the rights and the responsibilities of the Four Powers with respect to Germany and Berlin in the quadripartite negotiations in 1969/70/71 on Berlin, as well as in 1973 for the United Nations' Quadripartite Declaration.*

See chronology for an explantion of the terms of the United Nation's Quadripartite Declaration.

We had all the instruments at hand in 1990 to find the right procedures for bringing those quadripartite rights and responsibilities to an end with German reunification. It was very important for Germany not to have another peace treaty negotiation with no end, but to find the right way and method to end the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers without a Peace Treaty. However, we had to find the right method to establish the united Germany in NATO and to maintain the European integration model without any kind of special role for Germany. Moreover, we achieved an orderly withdrawal of the Soviet forces from the territory of the former GDR. This was achieved even before the date which had been agreed with Moscow (in the summer of 1994). We give the Russians all the credit for the orderly withdrawal, because it was really very well done.

The relationship between Helmut Kohl and Margaret Thatcher *was* difficult, but it also had positive elements. When I was posted as an Ambassador to London, Chancellor Kohl asked me to try to improve their relationship. That was possible for a short time in 1989, but later, when the wall came down, it deteriorated under the pressing events. I was a witness at the famous Königswinter conference in March 1989 in Cambridge, where Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl were at loggerheads.

WRIGHT

Sir [J.] Oliver Wright, British diplomatist. Served in Berlin 1954-6, Private Secretary to Prime Ministers Sir Alec Douglas Home and Harold Wilson 1964-6 and HM Ambassador to Federal Republic of Germany 1975-81.

I think that dinner at St Catharine's College was the most unhappy experience my namesake Sir Oliver Wright* has ever had. He was sitting between Mrs Thatcher and Chancellor Kohl!

MALLABY

For me it was a great advantage. I was sitting the other side of Chancellor Kohl and I had him to myself throughout!

RICHTHOFEN

Kohl's Ten Point Plan aimed to construct 'confederate structures' between West and East Germany.

There were two instances which were really very difficult. One concerns the famous ten points, the statement of Chancellor Kohl on 28 November [1989],* of which he had not informed Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher beforehand. She was confronted with the news during Question Time in the Commons and got very angry about it. Foreign Minister Genscher was sent to London the next day and he clarified the situation with her. She was afraid, and rightly so, that things would go too fast. May I say we too were very interested at the time in maintaining stability and not to allow any kind of destabilising acts against the Soviets. I think the Prime Minister was reassured on that, but the events were moving very fast and were straining relations in the following months.*

See chronology.

WRIGHT

Can I just ask you, in advance of the Two plus Four talks how much difference of opinion was there, I mean in the German administration, about the need to consult allies and friends about the external implications of the situation? I think there was some perception here that there was a degree of difference of opinion.

RICHTHOFEN

Not in principle. What the Germans wanted was the Two plus Four and not the Four plus Two. We were just too aware that we had to bring the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers with respect to Germany and Berlin to a proper end, and what we did not want was to negotiate a Peace Treaty.

WRIGHT

Dr Meckel can I ask you now to add whichever comments you like on this range of subjects, but could I first ask you, going back to 1987-1988 the same question that we have asked our panel: how much forecasting was there, if any, however tiny, in East Germany, in the GDR, about the possibility that the Wall might come down or that there might be reunification.

MECKEL

Ich komme gleich auf diese Frage zurück. In dieser Runde bin ich natürlich so ein bunter Vogel, weil klar ist, daß hier lauter Personen sitzen, die über Jahrzehnte bis in die jetzige Zeit und noch ein paar Jahre länger die deutsch-britischen Verhältnisse geprägt haben, wobei ich mit „deutsch-britische" nur meine: Bundesrepublik-britisch. Auch das ist ja noch eine spezifische Perspektive – meine ist eine andere: Ich komme aus Ostdeutschland. Das heißt, ich habe

das Verhältnis, das Sie miteinander über Jahrzehnte geprägt haben, immer nur von außen und nur über die *Tagesschau* und den *Spiegel*, wenn wir ihn mal bekam, wahrgenommen. Meine Perspektive war die eines Bürgers in der DDR; und deshalb stolpere ich hier schon über manche Begrifflichkeit. Zum Beispiel: Wer hat den Kalten Krieg beendet? Wer hat hier gewonnen? Ich behaupte, dies war der Sieg der Menschen in der DDR und im Ostblock, die sich für Freiheit, für die Demokratie eingesetzt haben. Wer gewonnen hat, sind die Werte, die sie gemeinsam vertreten, aber nicht der Westen. Das ist die falsche Ebene. Diese These hat viele Implikationen auch über die deutsche Vereinigung selbst. Wir erleben es ja in Deutschland, haben es jetzt zum 3. Oktober erlebt, Sie haben es in den Zeitungen vielleicht wahrgenommen, den Streit über die deutsche Einheit. Wir haben in Deutschland bisher keine gemeinsame Perspektive über diese Ereignisse vor zehn Jahren. Sehen Sie sich einmal die verschiedenen Reden der letzten zehn Jahre an, die zum 3. Oktober gehalten wurden. Als Akteur zuerst genannt wird Helmut Kohl als „Kanzler der Einheit". Dann die Nummer zwei. An dieser Stelle stand erst Gorbatschow, dann George Bush – Gorbatschow rückte auf Nr. 3. Dann wiederum, je nach Person die redet, wird Genscher überhaupt noch erwähnt oder nicht. Und dann, pauschal gedankt wird den hunderttausend Menschen in der DDR, die auf die Straße gegangen sind, und ein Schild hochgehoben haben, am Anfang: „Wir sind das Volk", und im zweiten Teil ab November dann „Wir sind ein Volk". Das sind die Akteure – nach den Reden. So war der historische Ablauf aber nicht. Schon die innerdeutsche Perspektive ist interessant. Diese Reden klingen so, als hätte nach dem 9. November die DDR abgedankt und Helmut Kohl die Macht übernommen. Die freie Wahl in der DDR, die Rolle der freigewählten Regierung und des Parlaments im deutschen Einigungsprozeß wird nicht wahrgenommen. Ich behaupte, entgegen dieser Darstellung, der Weg in die deutsche Einheit war ein Weg der Selbstbestimmung der Ostdeutschen. Honnecker ist nicht im Westen oder vom Westen gestürzt worden, weder vom CIA noch vom BND noch von irgendjemand anders, sondern in der DDR. Dann kam der Runde Tisch. Der Runde Tisch, ein Übergang zur parlamentarischen Demokratie. Hier ging es um ein Agreement zum Wahlverfahren, zum Wahlgesetz bis zur freien Wahl. Dann haben wir eine frei gewählte Regierung der DDR, ein frei gewähltes Parlament, das, also die Regierung, die dann die notwendigen Verträge aushandelte, und dann eine frei gewählte Volkskammer, die die deutsche Einheit beschloß. Niemand anders in dieser Welt, weder der Deutsche Bundestag noch die damalige Bundesregierung noch Briten, Amerikaner, Russen oder wer auch immer konnte über die deutsche Einheit entscheiden, nur die frei gewählte Volkskammer in der DDR, indem sie den Beitritt beschlossen hat. Das Problem ist, natürlich wollten wir die Zustimmung der Alliierten – deshalb der ganze Prozeß, über den wir reden. Aber ich sage Ihnen, und ich habe dies gleich am Anfang, als ich Minister wurde, Herrn Schewardnadse gesagt, wenn ihr den

Prozeß der deutschen Einheit aufhalten wollt, werdet ihr scheitern. Ihr könnt nur versuchen, ihn zu gestalten, aber nicht ihn aufhalten. Es wird schneller gehen, als ihr denkt, es ging schneller, als ich dachte, auch das stimmt. Es war klar, der Prozeß läuft, die Menschen wollen die deutsche Einheit, und deshalb werden sie sie durchsetzen. Nehmen Sie die Situation am 17. Juni 1990 in der frei gewählten Volkskammer in Berlin. Das wird normalerweise gar nicht wahrgenommen, aber das macht deutlich, welcher Prozeß das war. Da hat der konservative Teil der Volkskammer, die sogenannte DSU, Deutsche Soziale Union, ein Ableger der CSU, und Teile von Bündnis 90 aus der Bürgerbewegung – eine ganz komische Konstellation – die haben jeweils einen Antrag eingebracht, sofort den Beitritt zu beschließen. Dies haben wir mit vielen.

Geschäftsordnungstricks verhindert. Hintergrund dafür war für uns die internationale Lage: wir wollten erst den Zwei+Vier-Prozeß zu Ende bringen. Dann stand natürlich auch die Frage, „was machen wir, wenn plötzlich 380 000 russische Soldaten auf dem Gebiet der NATO stehen?[“] Denn wir hätten nur diesem Antrag zustimmen müssen, vom gleichen Tage an hätte die DDR aufgehört zu existieren, wäre die Bundesregierung zuständig gewesen für alles, und niemand hätte etwas dagegen tun können. Niemand wollte das, jedenfalls weder die Bundesregierung noch wir – aber es wäre passiert, es wäre Realität gewesen. Und wenn irgendjemand, zum Beispiel im Deutschen Bundestag vor kurzem behauptet hat, ohne Helmut Kohl wäre die deutsche Einheit nicht gekommen, dann kann ich nur sagen: absoluter Quatsch! Absoluter Quatsch. Auch Helmut Kohl war am Anfang ein Gejagter, er hat dann die Situation erfaßt für sich und genutzt, natürlich auch wahlstrategisch genutzt. Der gesamte innerdeutsche Prozeß der deutschen Einheit ist überhaupt nicht verständlich ohne die anschließende Bundestagswahl. Kohl hat in meinen Augen ein ganz wichtiges Verdienst hat: die Integration in die Europäische Gemeinschaft damals – ohne extra Verhandlungen. Da haben er und Herr Delors eine ganz wesentliche Rolle gespielt, und allen ist zu danken, die dabei mitgemacht haben, natürlich auch der britischen Regierung und der Premierministerin. Alle mußten dem ja zustimmen. Das war, wie ich finde, außenpolitisch eine zentrale Entscheidung. Aber der innerdeutsche Prozeß, der ist durch den Druck der Menschen geschaffen worden, und diese Perspektive, die ich jetzt darstelle, sag ich gleich, ist eine, die auch in Deutschland nicht wirklich bewußt ist in der politischen Klasse, schon gar nicht bei unseren Partnern in Europa oder in Übersee. Und ich glaube deshalb, das solche Veranstaltungen ungeheuer wichtig sind, um sich überhaupt einmal zu vergegenwärtigen, was eigentlich damals passiert ist.

Und ein letztes Wort zu Großbritannien aus meiner Perspektive. Wir haben heute unheimlich viel zu besprechen, und wir haben große Defizite zum Beispiel in Bezug auf die Frage der menschlichen Kontakte Ostdeutscher in Großbritannien. Hier sollten wir sehr viel mehr tun. Während der deutschen Vereinigung spielte Großbritannien nur eine sehr marginale Rolle. Für uns war klar,

den Briten bleibt gar nichts übrig als Ja zu sagen. Im Endeffekt werden sie Ja sagen, denn sie können es sich gar nicht leisten in dem Kontext des Westens nicht zuzustimmen. Und, das sag' ich jetzt als Ostdeutscher: sie konnten es sich auch gar nicht leisten im Bezug auf ihre Werteorientierung von Freiheit und Demokratie! Nachdem wir in der DDR Freiheit und Demokratie durchgesetzt haben, eine repräsentative Demokratie, wenn die klare Mehrheit dieses Volkes sagt, wir wollen die deutsche Einheit, konnte Großbritannien sich dem nicht entgegenstellen! Aber auch_auf Grund der Verträge, wie sie innerhalb des Westens ja dann auch schon unterschrieben waren. Insofern, sage ich, war unser Eindruck: Wichtig sind insbesondere die Sowjets, weil wir da viel zu klären hatten (Natofrage), wichtig auch die Polen, weil wir auch dort viel zu klären hatten in der Grenzfrage.

MECKEL*

translation of above contribution

I will return to that question in a moment. I am, of course, something of an odd bird in this circle, because it is clear that the people sitting here have shaped Anglo-German relations for decades and more than that until the present time. (When I say Anglo-German all I mean is: Federal Republic-British.) That makes for a specific perspective – and mine is different: I am from Eastern Germany. That is to say that I have only ever perceived those relations, which you have shaped over decades, from the outside and only via the *Tagesschau* and *Der Spiegel** (whenever we could get it). My perspective was that of a citizen in the GDR; and therefore I am even puzzled by some of the terminology. For example: Who has ended the Cold War? Who has won here? I maintain that this was the victory of the people in the GDR and the Eastern *bloc*, who actively supported freedom and democracy. The winner was the values that they supported together, but not the West. That is the wrong level. This thesis has many implications, also for the German unification itself. In Germany – you may have noticed it in the newspapers – we are seeing (and recently have seen it around 3 October) a controversy about German unity. So far we do not have a common perspective in Germany on these events of ten years ago. Have a look at the various speeches that have been delivered in the last ten years on the occasion of 3 October. The first crucial person to be named is Helmut Kohl as the 'Chancellor of Unity'. Then number two: at first Gorbachev occupied this position, then George Bush, and Gorbachev moved down to no. 3. Then, depending on the person to speak, Genscher would either still be mentioned or not. And then a wholesale thanks to the hundred thousand people in the GDR who took to the streets and held up a sign reading, at first: 'We are the people', and then, in the second phase from November onwards: 'We are *one* people'. Those are the historical agents – according to the speeches. However, that is not what the historical course of events was like. The inner-German perspective alone is interesting. Those speeches sound as if the GDR had abdicated after 9 November and Helmut Kohl had taken over power.

A major German newsweekly with a printed edition of more than one million.

Erich Honecker (1912-94), East German statesman. First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, i.e., Head of State and Party Leader (1971-89).

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was established in 1947, by authority of the American Congress, to co-ordinate and analyse foreign intelligence reports for the US President and US policy formulators. The director of the CIA usually also served as chairman of the National Security Council. The first director was Allen Dulles (1953-62) and under Dulles the CIA also became responsible for covert operations.

Bundesnachtrichtendienst (BND), the Federal Intelligence Service.

Eduard Shevardnadze, Soviet statesman. Minister for Foreign Affairs (1985-90, 1991).

The free elections in the GDR, the role of the freely-elected government and the parliament in the process of German unification is not considered. I maintain, contrary to this view, that the path to German unity was a path of self-determination of the East Germans. Honecker* has not been overthrown in or by the West, neither by the CIA* nor the BND* or anyone else – but in the GDR. Then came the Round Table – the Round Table, a transition towards parliamentary democracy. This was about an agreement on the electoral procedure, about the electoral law up until the free elections. Then we had got a freely-elected government of the GDR, which negotiated the necessary treaties, and a freely-elected parliament, the *Volkskammer*, which decided on German unity. No one else in this world, neither the [West] German *Bundestag* nor the then Federal Government, nor the British, Americans, Russians or whoever could decide about German unity; only the freely elected *Volkskammer* in the GDR could do this by resolving to accede to the Federal Republic. The problem is that, of course, we wanted the consent of the Allies – therefore the entire process we are talking about. But I am telling you, and I told this to Mr Shevardnadze* right at the beginning, when I became Foreign Minister: if you want to halt the process of German unity, you will fail. You can only try to form it, but not to halt it. It will go faster than you think, and it did even go faster than I thought – that also is true. It was clear that the process was running, the people wanted German unity, and therefore they would assert it. Take the situation on 17 June 1990 in the freely-elected *Volkskammer* in Berlin, a situation which is usually not taken into account at all, but which makes clear what kind of process that was. On that occasion, the conservative part of the *Volkskammer*, i.e. the so-called DSU (*Deutsche Soziale Union*, an offshoot of the CSU) and parts of *Bündnis 90* of the dissidents' movement – a most curious constellation – each tabled a motion to resolve to accede to the FRG immediately. We prevented this with many procedural tricks. Our background was the international situation: we first wanted to complete the Two plus Four process, and there also was the question 'what do we do if 380,000 Russian soldiers suddenly stand on NATO territory?' For all we had to do was to pass this motion, and from that day on the GDR would have ceased to exist and the Federal Government would have been in charge of everything, and nobody could have done something against it. Nobody wanted that, at least neither the Federal Government nor we – but it would have happened, it would have been reality. And if anyone maintains, like for instance recently in the German *Bundestag*, that without Helmut Kohl German unity would not have come about, then all I can say is: absolute rubbish! *(Laughter)* Absolute rubbish. Helmut Kohl, too, was driven in the beginning. He then grasped the situation and used it for himself, also in terms of electoral strategy. The entire inner-German process of German unity cannot be understood without the subsequent federal elections. In my view, Kohl has a very important merit: the integration into the European Community without extra negotia-

Jacques Delors, French politician. President of European Commission, 1985-94.

tions. He and Mr Delors* played a very crucial part in this, and everyone who went along with this ought to be thanked, including, of course, the British government and the prime minister – because all had to agree to this. This, I believe, was a crucial foreign policy decision. The inner-German process, however, that was created by the pressure of the people – and this perspective as I am presenting it now is, I should add, one not even the political class in Germany is really aware of, not to mention our partners in Europe or overseas. And it is therefore that I believe that events like today are enormously important to recall what actually happened at that time in the first place.

A last word about Great Britain from my perspective: today we have an incredible lot to talk over, and we have great deficits, e.g. concerning the question of personal contacts of East Germans in Great Britain. This is an area where we should do much more. During the German unification, [however,] Great Britain played only a very marginal role. It was clear to us that the British had no choice but to say, 'Yes'. Ultimately they would say, 'Yes', because in the context of the West they could not afford to disagree. And – I am saying this as an East German now – they also could not afford it with respect to their values of freedom and democracy! After we had asserted freedom and democracy in the GDR and with a clear majority of the people saying we want German unity, Great Britain could not oppose this! Also because of the treaties as they had already been signed within the West by that time. It is in this respect that I am saying our impression was: particularly important are the Soviets, because there we had a lot to settle (NATO question); and the Polish were also important, because there too we had much to settle regarding the border question.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much. May I ask Colin Munro, from his view from East Berlin, if he has any comments or indeed questions that he wants to put?

MUNRO

On Lady Thatcher I would say only that she was in favour of German unification as long as it was not a realistic prospect. For example, in 1984, at an Anglo-German summit at Chequers, she did put her name to a joint declaration with Chancellor Kohl stating: 'Real and permanent stability will be difficult to achieve in Europe so long as the German people remained divided against its will'. This was our updating of Article VII of the Bonn-Paris Conventions that Baron von Richthofen mentioned.

Soviet Leader Leonid Brezhnev (1906-82), who was president of the Soviet Union from 1977 to 1982 believed in a policy of *détente* with the West while insisting on the right to intervene in the affairs of other Warsaw Pact countries if the future of communism there appeared to be at risk. This is often referred to as the Brezhnev doctrine.

The Russian role was absolutely crucial. It was the ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine.* The Soviet Union had taken the key to unification out of its back pocket and put in the lock. They might even be willing to turn the key and open the door. I also agree with everything that Marcus Meckel has said about the decisive contribution of the people in East Germany.

I should mention that the crucial moment was not actually when

the Wall came down in November, but when the Hungarians decided finally on 10 September 1989 that they would denounce their bilateral treaty with the GDR. This treaty was in conflict with CSCE principles, in that it prevented people who had the status of GDR citizens proceeding from Hungary, one of the main destinations for East German holiday makers, to the West. The Wall had been built in 1961 to keep the people in and thus prevent the East German state from collapsing. The Hungarians dismantled the Wall and thus the East German State. They had their own very good reasons for this. They were themselves already in the process of transition. I remember arguing in September 1989, when I was *chargé d'affaires* in East Berlin, that we should dust off our dossiers on the German question, because the GDR might not have a future as a state. This was not a welcome message in London.

Later, in November, we were actually asked by London to desist from reporting the developments that we were observing, for example the calls for unity in the street demonstrations that started in Leipzig but spread to other cities. The street demonstrators basically acted as a sort of Greek chorus to the political developments – the fall of Honecker, the arrival of Krenz,* the establishment of the New Forum* and so on. If the politicians new or old in East Berlin decided on one course of action, be it liberalisation of the media or freer travel, or whatever, the chorus would say, 'Not just that, we want more faster'. The crucial slogans were, *'Wir sind ein Volk'* (We are one people), and, 'If the Westmark does not come to us we are going to go to it'. The dynamic was a constant exodus if the aspiration for unification was not satisfied.

Egon Krenz, East German politician. Honnecker's second in command then his successor in 1989.

New Forum (*Neues Forum*) was one of the most well-known and most influential of the civil rights groups that came to play such a prominent role in the revolution in the GDR in 1989.

The new East German political forces too were playing catch-up. The ideals which inspired *Neues Forum* and others who sought to turn the GDR into a sort of German Sweden carried conviction for one month, from late September/early October, culminating in a 14 million-strong demonstration in East Berlin on 4 November, until the Wall fell down a week later, then it was unification all the way. Chancellor Kohl's ten-point plan, produced in late November, only just kept pace with events. And as you said Dr Meckel, it was the pro-unification parties that won the first and only democratic election to the *Volkskammer* on 18 March 1990.

One word on what we thought we were doing in East Berlin before these momentous events. Our priorities were to promote peaceful evolutionary change in accordance with CSCE principles. Frontiers in Europe should become more permeable. We subscribed to the CSCE principle, which was that frontiers in Europe should not be changed by force, and we did not expect them to be changed peacefully and by agreement. Peaceful change was the fundamental concession that the Soviet Union had made in 1975 in relation to the German question, because, of course, they assumed that they would never have to agree to such peaceful change. It is to Gorbachev's eternal credit that when the circumstances arose he honoured these CSCE principles, as did the Hungarians and then later the Czechs.

My personal regret in relation to Lady Thatcher is that, in all those years before 1989, it was in fact the United Kingdom (with our treaty commitments) which had a consistent, logical approach to the German question. That is, we were in favour of reunification if the right circumstances should arise. When others, such as the Greeks or Italians, made statements to the contrary, it was usually the British Foreign Secretary (I can remember Geoffrey Howe doing this on several occasions) who was the first to telephone Herr Genscher and assure him that the UK stood by its treaty commitment in Article VII. So in 1989-90 the UK became a rather marginal player at an historic moment in Europe. Lady Thatcher was right about the need to settle the external aspects of unification. Lord Hurd* did a great job in restoring realism to UK policy. But the damage was done between November 1989 and February 1990.

Douglas Hurd (Lord Hurd of Westwell), Conservative politician. Foreign Secretary 1989-95.

RICHTHOFEN I have omitted to say that the recognition, the definite recognition, by the reunited Germany of the Oder-Neisse border with Poland had predominance for Britain, one of the issues in which I had the greatest difficulty to explain the British position to Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

MECKEL Me too.

RICHTHOFEN I sent an urgent message from London after my colleagues at the Foreign Office, but also Members of the House, in particular the then Father of the House Bernard Braine,* as well as Members of the House of Lords and other leading politicians had asked me to urge Bonn to make a very clear statement on this issue. Chancellor Helmut Kohl later explained to me that he wanted to do this at the right time in the unification process for internal reasons. He wanted to show the German people that unification and the recognition of its borders came at the same time. For him it was a matter of tactics and timing rather than a matter of substance, but it was very difficult to bring this point over here to our British friends, and this was my greatest difficulty.

Sir Bernard Braine (Lord Braine of Wheatley, 1914-2000), Conservative politician. MP, 1950-92. As the sitting MP who had served the most years in the House of Commons he was referred to as Father of the House.

WRIGHT Can I just ask you, were you conscious of any pressure from others on this subject? Were the Americans pressing or the French pressing?

RICHTHOFEN I was here, but I know that the French were also pressing.

WRIGHT But the Polish community in France is much bigger than the Polish community in Britain.

MALLABY Can I come in on some of the things that Dr Meckel said. I completely agree that the role of the East German people and the

emerging East German democracy in this whole story was critically important. One way of illustrating that is to say that the debate in Bonn about what was actually going on until about November 1989 was a debate on the question whether we were looking at reform and emerging democracy in East Germany, or whether we were looking at a movement which would become a movement for unification. And there were of course voices in West Germany,* although some of them have recently on the tenth anniversary been denying it, that were saying that it would be better not to have reunification, because the example of Germany between 1871 and 1945 was not encouraging for that concept.

The Federal Republic of Germany.

That debate was halted when it became clear that public opinion in East Germany wanted unification. As someone has already quoted, *'Wir sind ein Volk'* – that was the slogan which made it clear that we were going to go towards unification. How fast did not really become clear I think until about February 1990. Certainly Helmut Kohl told me with bated breath, and in deep confidence, on 25 January 1990 that he thought we *were* going towards unification and he reckoned it might be as soon as 1 January 1995!

WRIGHT

Can I just interrupt you. The chronology does quote Douglas Hurd, speaking in The Hague on 10 November 1989, as having said, and I must say I had forgotten, 'I believe the crucial point at the moment is that what the crowds are calling for is not actually reunification, but reform'. To what extent, do you remember, was that drafted with British hesitations about unification in mind, or was it a genuine reflection of what we in London thought the East Germans wanted?

MALLABY

It was a true statement on that date of what was happening. I was certain that reform was taking place. British policy was to welcome reform and to look for an act of self-determination in East Germany, rather than assuming automatically at that early stage that we had to aim for unification. There was a preference in London for not moving too fast and for clear certainty about the wishes of the East Germans.

A second comment about Dr Meckel's remarks, if I may. There were two sorts of determination really in this period. There was self-determination, expressed through the *Volkskammer* elections and demonstrations and other means in East Germany, and there was joint determination, which was Two plus Four. It was the joint determination by the two German states and the Four Powers of what would happen in the external aspects of unification. This division between joint determination and self-determination was the distinction that I was using in reporting out of Bonn from November onwards. The main external questions were: will East Germany become part of the European Union quickly, and how, and who will pay? And secondly, the terribly difficult issue about NATO – were we going to ask Gorbachev, given the doubts about his stabil-

ity in power, not only to allow East Germany to leave the Warsaw Pact, but also to allow it to go right across to the other side and join NATO? Were we going to see not only the collapse of the Soviet security system in Central Europe since 1945, but actually the extension of the Western security system into Central Europe itself? That was a very tall order and, in my view, the great merit in taking a strong, clear but highly ambitious position by insisting that the GDR move into NATO, lay originally with Jim Baker,* who saw that as an eventual requirement.

James A. Baker, American politician. Secretary of State, 1989-92, Chief of Staff and Senior Counsellor to President 1992-3. Mr Baker is said to have insisted on the Treaty 'cooking gently'.

On the issue of the Polish frontier which has just been discussed, I would note that Kohl had told me in November 1989 that he would not quickly concede the finality of the frontier, for the reasons that Hermann von Richthofen mentioned, that there were people in the CDU* and especially the CSU* who were not ready to accept that. Therefore, he would let the subject ride for some months until it was clear to everyone, including the right wing of his own party, that the finality of the frontier was an automatic price that had to be paid for German unification and that then Kohl would win a vote for it in the CDU/CSU. I reported that and, when she gave her interview in *Der Spiegel*, Mrs Thatcher knew that that was Helmut Kohl's intention.

West German political party. *Christlich-Demokratische Union*: Christian Democratic Union, CDU.

West German political party. *Christlich-Soziale Union*: Christian Social Union, CSU.

Another aspect of that was the famous Article 23, I say famous knowing that some have forgotten it now, in the constitutional law, the *Grundgesetz*,* which implied that other parts of Germany wishing to join the West German Federation could do so. And of course that was the method by which East Germany eventually did join and unification was effected. But that article might have been held to mean that other bits of Central Europe that once were part of the German Reich could also join the German Federation. That was the legal meaning of it, although the political meaning of course was non-existent. So that article was removed after the Allies asked the Federal Government to do this, as part of the discussion of matters for joint determination.

Grundgesetz: the translation is 'Basic Law', but the meaning is 'constitution'. The reason why the German constitution is called 'Basic Law' is that the legislators in the Parliamentary Council, which drafted the constitution, wanted to make it clear that this was only supposed to be a provisional arrangement until reunification. However, when unification finally did occur, the Kohl government decided to keep the 'Basic Law' rather than to use the constitutional article thus allowing to replace it with a new constitution.

Then there was the question of Allied rights and their extinction on the completion of German unity, and there I want to comment on Dr Meckel's remark that the British were marginal. The reason why that is the public perception is that there were three or four public interviews by Margaret Thatcher at the time, and later her memoirs. No British account has been published of the inside story of that negotiation, whereas there are several American accounts, and several German ones. The British in fact were helpful in the negotiations in getting the result that was achieved and in persuading the Soviet Union to accept it. I will give one example. How do you allow for the risk that, between signature of the treaty terminating Allied rights and unifying Germany and the ratification of it in the Supreme Soviet, there might be a change of policy in Moscow? Might the Soviet Union, perhaps under new leadership, decide then that it would not give up its reserved rights regarding Germany? A British Foreign Office legal adviser working in the Embassy in Bonn invented the idea, a precedent I think in international law,

that you could suspend the Allied rights on signature and therefore they would not be in place in the period until ratification. This of course was not an absolute guarantee that the Soviet Union, had it been so minded, would not have tried to make use of its reserved rights in relation to Germany, but it would have been much harder for the Soviet Union to reinstate suspended rights. That is an example of a difficult point which was solved with a British suggestion.
Finally a last point in response to Dr Meckel. Yes, it was a victory at this stage in the Cold War, for values, for the East German people, for the people of Central Europe as a whole, and when I referred to victory in the Cold War I meant just that. It is the end of the Soviet threat, the end of the Soviet occupation and the extension of democracy through, quite largely and most importantly, the will of the people themselves.

WRIGHT Dr Meckel wants to add a point about the security, which is very important.

MECKEL Ja, dieser Punkt ist mir wichtig. Wir hatten unmittelbar nach der Wahl, mit der Konstituierung der frei gewählten Volkskammer einen Beschluß gefaßt, der deutlich machte: Wir stehen in der Verantwortung der Deutschen, die aus unserer Geschichte erwächst, eine Verantwortung, die die kommunistische SED immer abgelehnt hat. Zu dieser Verantwortung gehörte die dauerhafte Anerkennung der Sicherheit der polnischen Grenze. Unsere Überlegung war, daß es wichtig wäre, daß die Deutschen in freier Souveränität diese Grenze anerkennen und daß niemand, auch keine Alliierten, uns erst sagen müssen, wo Deutschland liegt und wo unsere Verantwortung in Deutschland liegt. Das war unser Ansatz für die Anerkennung der Grenze, und deshalb haben wir am Anfang vorgeschlagen, daß man trilaterale Gespräche macht, die beiden deutschen Staaten und Polen, um dieses zu klären. Danach wollten wir die Alliierten über diese Einigung zwischen den Deutschen und den Polen informieren. Diese Lösung hat Helmut Kohl ab[ge]lehnt. Am Anfang konnte er nicht voll dagegen sein, aber er hat die Gespräche dann auslaufen lassen. Ich unterstelle ihm auch nicht, daß er geglaubt hätte, daß die Grenze eine andere hätte sein können, aber der politische Ansatz ist mir doch wichtig. Das was Helmut Kohl und andere in dieser Zeit immer gesagt haben in vielen Reden: die Anerkennung dieser Grenze, das heißt der Verlust der alten deutschen Ostgebiete, ist der Preis der Wiedervereinigung. Das muß man sich mal auf der Zunge zergehen lassen. Das heißt, er ist nicht eine Folge der Verbrechen Hitlers, die wir anerkennen müssen, das war unsere Perspektive, sondern ein Preis der deutschen Vereinigung. Diese Argumentation mußte manche Ängste verstärken bei unseren Nachbarn in Bezug auf das vereinigte große Deutschland im Zentrum Europas. Dessen mußte man sich ja bewußt sein. Diese Angst gab es bei Polen, die gab es bei Briten, bei Niederländern, bei Italienern und manchen anderen

Personen und vielen andern in Europa auch. Gerade aus diesem Horizont war uns wichtig, daß wir die Anerkennung der polnischen Westgrenze als freie, souveräne deutsche Entscheidung fällen [sic, should be: „treffen"] – und daß hier nicht von einem "Preis" geredet wird, denn was macht man mit einem Preis, den man unter Druck zahlt, wenn man ihn plötzlich erlangt hat [sic, the implied meaning is: when what the price has been paid *for* has been achieved]. Dann kann alles wieder ganz anders aussehen. Versailles war so etwas, wo man etwas hatte und dann nachher sagte, es paßt nicht, weil wir eigentlich was anderes wollten. Wir waren der Meinung, die Rede vom „Preis" war falsch.

MECKEL*
translation of above contribution

The SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) was the Socialist Unit Party of Germany, which was formed in 1946 by an enforced combination of the German Communist Party (KPD) with the Social Democrat Party (SPD). In 1946 the Soviet Union was still occupying East Germany following the end of the Second World War.

Yes, this point is important to me. When, immediately after the election, the freely elected *Volkskammer* assembled, we passed a resolution that made clear: we stand in the responsibility of the Germans, which grows out of our history – a responsibility which the communist SED* had always rejected. A part of this responsibility is the permanent recognition of the security of the Polish border. Our consideration was that it would be important that the Germans should recognise this border in free sovereignty and that nobody, including the Allies, would have to tell us first, where Germany is and what our responsibility in Germany is. That was our approach to the recognition of the border, and we therefore suggested in the beginning to arrange trilateral talks, the two German states and the Polish, to settle this. Afterwards we wanted to inform the Allies about this agreement between the Germans and the Polish. Helmut Kohl has rejected this solution. In the beginning he could not flatly oppose it, but then he let the talks peter out. I am not insinuating that he had believed that the border could have been any different, but the political approach matters to me. In many speeches at that time Helmut Kohl and others said over and over again: the recognition of the border, i.e. the loss of the old German eastern territories, is the price of German unity. You have to roll that around the tongue: this means that this was not a consequence of Hitler's crimes, which we have to accept – that was our perspective –, but a price for Germany unity. This argumentation was bound to intensify some of our neighbours' anxieties regarding the big unified Germany in the centre of Europe. One had to be aware of this after all; these anxieties existed in Poland, they existed in Britain, the Netherlands, Italy and were also shared by many other people in Europe. Exactly against this background it was important to us to make the decision to recognise Poland's western border as a free, sovereign German decision – and that there should be no talk of a 'price'. For what do you do with a price that was paid under pressure once you have suddenly achieved what you wanted? Then things might, once again, look quite different. [The Treaty of] Versailles was such a case, where one had something and then afterwards claimed that it did not fit because one really wanted something else. Our opinion was: the talk of a 'price' was wrong.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much. I want very soon to return to the question of the external relations of the process that went on in German unification, that is to say the external perception of the process in the Alliance and in Moscow and in Prague. But before we do, Michael [Burton], can I just ask you for comments from the perspective of being in West Berlin.

BURTON

Well, we have ranged pretty widely over the original questions, but I should like to focus for a moment on Berlin in the run-up to the events, because it was not unimportant. It was an important part of the overall British relations with Germany, and it also of course was the place that was to precipitate the change of November 1989. In the second half of the 1980s there were two small things worth mentioning. Firstly, in 1986 there was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the construction of the Wall and it was noticeable that Germans did not call for the Wall to be removed. Two people who saw most clearly that the Wall should be removed were President Reagan* and – guess who? – Mrs Thatcher, so at that stage she was not lining up for 'no change in Germany'. Then the following year, 1987, was the 750th anniversary of Berlin and a lot of things took place, including visits by all three Allied heads of state. The Queen made a very good forward-looking speech and President Reagan made what turned out to be a prescient speech, standing in front of the Brandenburg Gate* and saying, 'Mr Gorbachev, open up this gate and Mr Gorbachev, bring down this wall'. He also called for the air corridor system to Berlin to be liberalised, so that services could run to the East. This started out as the Reagan Initiative, it then became called the Allied Initiative. The Russians would never agree to talk about it until the Wall had opened, and then they said, 'Oh, we want to talk about the Allied Initiative'. This was a way of getting us to agree to a Four Power meeting at a moment when, in their view, the authority of the Four Powers was in danger of becoming obsolete. This actually took place in December 1989, much to the disgust of the Germans, who saw the four Powers gathered together in the Allied Control Authority building as in the post-war years, seemingly, in their view, deciding things German.

Ronald Reagan, American politician. President, 1980-8.

The Brandenburg Gate is a symbol of the city of Berlin and a ceremonial gateway.

My main point is that the quadripartite agreement that has been referred to by Hermann von Richthofen did not change from 1971 until the day the Wall opened, and indeed until the day of German reunification. It was still there in all its aspects. I won't go into all those aspects you will be glad to hear, but they included the access routes to Berlin, the fact that the Allies were responsible for the security of the city and had authority over West Berlin's police force, and the fact that it was one city under the authority of the Four Powers, not a divided city. We did not acknowledge the authority of the East German government in East Berlin. Some of these points became of great importance when the Wall actually opened. For example, the next day the Soviet minister, who was my opposite number in East Berlin, was on my doorstep at 10 o'clock,

saying we had got to do something, since it was an extremely dangerous situation. And the same message was going from President Gorbachev to all the heads of the Western governments. There was actually one thing that we could and did do, and I think it made a material difference. And that was that, according to the legal status of Berlin, the Wall itself was set back about twenty yards from the sector boundary, and that margin between the Wall and the Soviet sector boundary was known as the *Unterbauebiet*.* There had been an amazing business about six months earlier in the Lenné triangle, when backpackers and people who had come for the fun holed up there, because no legal authority ran in that area. So what we were able to do was to instruct the West Berlin police, although we had no legal authority to do so because it was the Soviet sector. Nevertheless, we said to the West Berlin police, 'It is your duty to take up post in front of the Wall at the Brandenburg Gate [which was in the British sector] and to prevent there being an incident which could lead to a flare-up'. Bear in mind that the East German police was standing on the Wall at the time and it was a potentially explosive situation that could have had unpredictable consequences. So the insertion of the West Berlin police as a stablising factor, at the instigation of the Allies, was an important development.

The Berlin Wall itself was set back about 20 yards from thesector boundary, and that margin between the Wall and the Soviet sector boundary was known as the *Unterbauebiet*.

The other thing in the immediate aftermath of the Wall opening was that there was an astonishing weekend in West Berlin. Thousands and thousands of East Germans from East Berlin came over to shop: they were given DM100 *Begrüssungsgeld** and they shopped as far as they could with that money. But just walking along the *Kurfürstendam** we could tell that the money didn't go very far and that this was probably what was going to drive the whole political process: that they wanted, and would demand to have, the *Deutschmark* as soon as possible – if they didn't get it, they would have found another way, such as decamping to the West *en masse*.

Begrüssungsgeld or 'welcome money' was a sum of money (DM100.-) that was given as a 'welcome' to all the East Germans who, for the first time, could come to West Berlin and West Germany after the Wall had come down. It was a symbolic gesture, but was practical insofar as it enabled the visitors to do some shopping or eating in the West, considering that their East German money was of little value.

Kurfürstendam was the main shopping street in West Berlin. It symbolised Western prosperity and consumerism in West Berlin, while the city was divided.

British forces welcomed visitors with tea and buns and the mascot of the Royal Welsh regiment, a goat.

So it was our perception in West Berlin immediately after that weekend, and it was my view, that the GDR was likely to implode and that this was likely to happen quite quickly. The best thing Britain could do would be to welcome the process of the opening of the Wall and not to sound at all grudging about it. It was therefore disappointing when the Foreign Secretary came to Berlin a few days later – he was the first international leader to do so – that he brought the message, 'Unification is not on the agenda'. That was not how we were seeing it on the ground.* Although no-one at that stage could put a time-table on re-unification, it was my view that, as far as the long decades of the Allied presence in Berlin were concerned, we were into the end-game.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much. Now let's turn to external perception. Laurence [O'Keeffe], is there anything you can say about how this was all viewed – and please remember that the first subject of this seminar is Anglo-German relations.

O'KEEFFE

I just wish to make two points about the whole CSCE (Helsinki) process. I believe the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has suggested there should be a whole seminar on that subject, and I would love to speak at that. But just two points.

The first concerns what precisely happened when the Hungarians opened the frontier for the East Germans. We had insisted at the Vienna meeting,* out of which the whole thing developed, that one of the new provisions of Helsinki should be the inclusion into the Treaty of an aspect of the universal declaration of human rights concerning the right for anyone to leave any country and return to his own. In other words, you don't have the right to immigrate into somebody else's country, but all other freedom of movement is recognised under the terms of the Treaty. The way the Russians accepted that was very curious. They sent two of their heavies, including the KGB* representative, to meet two members of the western delegation, one of whom was British and the other American. They met in the *Burggarten* in Vienna, under the trees, like something from Le Carré.* They sat on a bench, and one of them said, 'Well, what do you think? People should come and go, you know. What would the Soviet Union get in return? The usual thing?' They would decide whether it was done. A lot was decided in the conference hall and a lot was decided at meetings of delegations. I am afraid that we thought this was just a product of their tiny, dictatorial minds. But, in fact, I think the Russians were not easy themselves about accepting this clause. It didn't really apply to them, because they were in Eastern Europe to make it a *cordon sanitaire* for the Soviet Union. But it really applied to East Germany and Czechoslovakia. I think the Russians were trying, as it were, to finesse their own side by conceding this before the others [in Eastern Europe] actually found out what was happening. It was precisely this sort of appeal to Treaty rights that was cited by the Hungarians when they allowed the East Germans out across the Hungarian/East German frontier. The East Germans came along and said, 'What about the Treaty of Friendship?' And the Hungarians said, 'Well, we have just agreed a document in Vienna which settles this issue, and this takes precedence over the Treaty of Friendship'. It was this Agreement which precipitated the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the frontiers and Iron Curtain. We should have recognised this. The Hungarians actually anticipated the end of Communism, because virtually every Hungarian in creation celebrated their Hungarian National Day, *across* the frontier doing their Christmas shopping, before we actually finalised the Act. So what they were doing was celebrating their inclusion under the terms of the Treaty. And we couldn't get any work done, because the whole of Vienna was clogged up by the number of Hungarians.

The second point is that the Czechs sought to help out the East Germans by closing the frontier with Hungary, and that is why all the tourists then made their way through Kohl's Federal German Embassy in Prague. Just as an illustration, Honecker made a terrible mistake at this point. It would have been perfectly easy for the East

Fourth Follow-up/Review meeting of Helsinki process, Vienna, 1986-9.

KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti – Committee for State Security) was the Soviet secret police concerned with internal security and intelligence.

John Le Carré (John David Cornwell), British espionage novelist. Notable works include: *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974), and *Smiley's People* (1980).

Germans to close their frontier with Czechoslovakia, and to move all the thousands of tourists directly into the Federal Republic. But Honecker insisted on bringing trains down to Prague, putting all these tourists on the trains to go back through East Germany, so they could be formally expelled. This would enable him to confiscate their property and thus would actually be a deterrent to other people. And it was exactly these endless trains coming down through Leipzig and so on, which exacerbated the demonstrations which were already taking place. People would fall in front of the trains and try to get on these empty trains in Vienna, and this was a very significant factor in the final result.

On the situation in Czechoslovakia itself, I think the Czechoslovaks were just as confused as everybody else about what to do. You have to remember that they had a new government that was having to deal with the revolt that was taking place. In fact on 17 November, when the Velvet Revolution began in Prague, we actually had dinner with the main groups of dissidents. The conversation at that dinner was of the probability of the Gorbachevian communists taking over from the Brezhnevian communists.* No one at that point gave the slightest thought that Czechoslovakia could re-enter the western world: it was on nobody's agenda. And this is why when Dienstbier* became [Czechoslovakian] Foreign Minister there was a period when he really didn't know what to do. The first idea was to abolish NATO. He said, 'We are to abolish the Warsaw Pact. NATO is thought to be the West's equivalent of the Warsaw Pact, so you have got to abolish NATO.' He called all the ambassadors to the [Czechoslovakian] Foreign Ministry and suggested this. And I had to point out that, in fact, NATO was to us not only a guarantee of our security, but a guarantee of security for Europe as a whole. He then came up with the follow-up: that there was nothing wrong with NATO, only that Czechoslovakia wasn't in it, you may recall. He also had various suggestions of ways in which we could co-operate to build up new relationships. But the problem with that was that he wanted to do it as Dienstbier with these ambassadors in Prague. But the only place it could possibly be done was within the CSCE process. If he had ideas for improving co-operation with the West, they should be put through the CSCE process and be treated along with everything else. And I think that is what we eventually did.

I just think that, like everybody else, the Czechoslovaks had not the slightest idea what to do. It all sorted itself out in the end, by Czechoslovakia joining NATO, but for a period there was great uncertainty. In fact Dienstbier actually said to me, 'Look, when we were a Soviet satellite, we at least had security, but the moral price was too high. Now the Soviet power is being withdrawn, we are in a complete vacuum'. And I think the Czechoslovaks were also unnerved by the fact that, when they went to Moscow with extreme demands for the removal of the Soviet forces, the Russians had said, 'Done'. I had to tell them I thought it was far better to work through liberal processes which had already begun. But no, they

Gorbachev had repudiated the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Jiri Dienstbier, Czechoslovak statesman. A former dissident, journalist and Charter 77 activist, he was Czechoslovakia's first foreign minister after the collapse of communism. He held this post, which he combined with the Deputy Prime Ministership, from 1989 to 1992.

went along with their own personal demands. All very important. 'You move by such and such a date.' They actually had a fall-back position, but they were never obliged to invoke it, so to say. Their demands were accepted immediately. The Russians said, 'Alright. You want us to move out. We'll move out.' I suppose the answer is that they had God knows how many troops in East Germany that were destined to return to the Soviet Union, so those in Czechoslovakia were a marginal problem. But the Russians agreed straightaway, and off they went.

WRIGHT Thank you very much. I wonder if we could just return to one point which I think Rodric Braithwaite referred to, and that was the *Economist* article saying that, I am paraphrasing now, the GDR was certainly catching up with the West in economic terms and might even overtake several West European countries by the end of the century. This theory, as we now see, was a massive distortion. Why did we interpret it like that? If I can turn to you Hermann [Richthofen], why did you interpret it like this? Given the personal exchanges between the two halves of Germany, it is astonishing that we all failed, and as far as I know all our intelligence machines failed, to realise there was actually a complete disaster in the East German infrastructure.

RICHTHOFEN We were blinded by the statistics. We did not know how corroded the industrial basis already was.

ALEXANDER For GDR read USSR. It is exactly the same: we saw what we wanted to. That is a very big question.

BRAITHWAITE It isn't a very interesting question. It was perfectly clear in the mid-1960s what was happening in the Soviet economy. We travelled around and could see for ourselves that the economy was underperforming, that there were shortages of important resources and that Russia lacked behind the West in technological innovation. But the myth persisted of Soviet industrial competence.
The CIA attempted to construct their own statistics for the Soviet economy, but these too were mistaken. Why did we believe not what we saw, but what had been written by the Soviet camp? Khrushchev was trying to fool us in the 1960s, and it worked. It is an interesting kind of psychological comment on the way we were brainwashed by the myth of Soviet industrial competence that we didn't notice.

WRIGHT But Rodric [Braithwaite] there is one 'excuse' for our misjudging the Soviet competence ...

ALEXANDER Not really.

WRIGHT No please, they had sent somebody to the moon.

BRAITHWAITE They hadn't actually. That is one thing they didn't do. They failed to send anybody to the moon.

WRIGHT But they built the spaceships, and technologically many people in this country assumed that their expertise ...

BRAITHWAITE Patrick [Wright] – on the moon – there was a joke currently going around in Russia: A cosmonaut comes back to his old mother in central Russia, and she says, 'What is it like in space?' So he says, 'You go round and round and you can see absolutely everything on earth and in Russia, right down to the smallest detail.' She says, 'You mean that, about the smallest detail?' And he says, 'Yes.' She says that she has run out of kerosene, so can he tell her where to buy it.

MUNRO One quick remark about getting the economy wrong. With other countries of the Soviet *bloc* the West did have a range of joint ventures. So we did see inside at least some of their factories. In the case of the GDR there were no such joint ventures, because that would have meant joint ventures with West German firms and West Germans crawling all decrepit East German factories Instead, there was licensed production. And when a factory broke down, as it did often, the East Germans got on the telephone, assuming the line was working, to their West German partners and said, 'We need so-and-so and so-and-so very quickly'. The parts would arrive quickly. So the factory would get going again. The breakdowns were not as bad as in Romania, where I served time in 1981-2. I saw quite a few Romanian factories, all decrepit. But the only ones I ever saw in East Germany were the ones that they wanted Westerners to see. Paradoxically, we did actually know less about GDR industry than about Polish or Czech industry.

RICHTHOFEN We kept the GDR alive, while at the same time we eroded it from the inside – that was the policy. Therefore, if Gorbachev would not have said he would no longer implement the Brezhnev Doctrine, it could have gone on for years, and therefore it was very hard to judge.

WRIGHT Can we come back to external perceptions on Anglo-German relations and unification. Rodric [Braithwaite] and Michael Alexander, do you want to add to what you said earlier in the light of what has been said?

ALEXANDER I will add a couple of things. First of all, just to finish what we were talking about a moment ago, I think it is one of the great unwritten stories. I had a very personal view on it, having spent some time

touring Eastern Europe in my Rolls Royce after I had been appointed Ambassador in Vienna early in 1982.

WRIGHT The best way to see Eastern Europe!

ALEXANDER I got a crowd wherever I stopped, and people to talk to! But the serious point is that I wrote a long letter to Margaret Thatcher in May 1983, saying quite bluntly that, 'This whole system is completely rotten and it is going to collapse; it will collapse very suddenly and in the foreseeable future' and gave chapter and verse. If I could see this after a few hundred miles driving in Eastern Europe, of course having served in Moscow with Rodric [Braithwaite], our system should certainly have been able to pick it up. As I say, it is a great unwritten story: why we were so blind to the total failure of the system in Eastern Europe.

WRIGHT Were any others less blind?

ALEXANDER No. After all we had an enormous machine in this country focussing on these issues. But it had a vested interest – unconscious, not deliberate – in the perpetuation of a whole set of analyses and perceptions. The intelligence community, the military community, to some extent the political community, the industrial community – all reasons for exaggerating the performance of COMECON* and the Warsaw Pact and, therefore, the threat from them. Apart from anything else, it was more important to avoid being wrong than to be right. Some day somebody ought to be able to write what would be a fascinating work of analysis of this. What is the mote in our eye today? Or perhaps I should say the beam in our eye.

The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance or COMECON was an association of Communist countries established in 1949 to improve trade between the Soviet Union and the East European satellite states.

Anyway, to pick up as quickly as I can on various points.

Dr Meckel and the role of the citizens of East Germany: of course he is right. I would like to say that there were plenty of us who were perfectly well aware of this. I wrote, again, a piece at the very end of 1989 in which I said, in effect:

"Within twelve months, a formal link of some kind between the two Germanys will be in place or in immediate prospect. Whether or not this in fact turns out to be right, the Alliance must accept that it may be right, and that it is the citizens of the GDR, not governments and politicians elsewhere, who will decide."

We knew it and people *were* aware of this.

On the whole question of the timing of all this, in the letter to the Prime Minister in October 1989 that I have already mentioned, I argued that we could not *[reading from a manuscript letter]*

" … deny the Germans the right of self-determination, a cause that we urge upon everyone else. Nor can we now try to impede the prospects of unification, which rest on governments' acceptance, in innumerable public statements over the last generation, of the rights of Germans …"

and more the same. It was quite obvious, and we were saying in

October that unification was likely to be with us shortly. Patrick [Wright] knows, because I copied one or two letters to him, that I had spoken to the White House at the time and we did suffer real damage, as a result of the Prime Minister's attitude on German unification, in our relations with the United States. Our credibility throughout that winter was severely weakened by what they, the Americans, called 'the Thatcher problem'.

WRIGHT If I can just add a personal note on that. I am afraid this is a misconception which still persists in the circles of Eurosceptics. They think that a sceptical attitude towards Europe helps our relationship with the United States and that *per contra* Europhilia actually damages the 'special relationship'.

ALEXANDER Absolutely. There is a vast amount of nonsense there, but it is not for today.

WRIGHT Sorry, can I again interrupt. On external relations, at a point when Margaret Thatcher's attitude to unification was becoming painfully obvious and there was lots of criticism of it in the British press and comments on it in the British press, I was told by a very senior French official at the time that, in his view, the French would have been more in the doghouse than the British. Now whether that was said to calm my nerves I don't know.

BURTON Mitterrand made a state visit to East Germany in December 1989 and it went down extremely badly in the German press.

ALEXANDER We can spend all day talking about Margaret Thatcher and regularly do!

There is a slight risk, particularly in Dr Meckel's intervention, and to some extent I suppose in my own, that we conclude that the activities of diplomats are largely irrelevant to the course of history and that we might as well not waste time on them because the East Germans were going to decide on this course anyway. I do think that is a bit superficial.

One specific and rather large issue, is the fact that NATO remained unified and presented a united front throughout these events. There were NATO summits, we shouldn't forget, in 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991, dealing with these issues in a series of meetings unique in the Organisation's history. All of them agreed communiqués and declarations and statements and every other damn thing. Long since consigned to the ash can of history, but the important thing about them was that they pursued a consistent approach to East/West relations, on the need to maintain a credible defensive structure and so on. This had one enormous consequence: the whole business of German neutrality was a non-issue. It might easily have been otherwise. For a united Germany in some circum-

stances, if NATO had been in a state of disarray or particularly if the Four had been in a state of disarray, it is not at all clear to me that neutrality might not have been an option. And then we would be living in a very, very different Europe and not necessarily a better Europe.

Coming back to the specifics of how we thought about German unification in NATO in that winter, of course we were worried about it. We were absolutely clear, as I have already said, that for NATO German neutrality would have been a decisive blow. It would, for instance, have had a huge impact on the question of the US and the US military presence in Europe. It was equally clear to us that winter that we had to continue to insist on our full rights in Germany, so exercises had to happen. At the same time, it was obvious that, if we pressed then, in the winter, about this, if we pressed immediately for the frontiers to be moved eastwards, we might well have brought Gorbachev down. And therefore we didn't do that either. Our position in January 1990 was that, fundamentally, the frontier should stay where it was, that we should see where we got to on unification and that we should recognise that any solution other than the complete integration of the resulting entity in NATO was going to lead to some completely nightmarish problems. You know – could we have exercises in the western half of an integrated Germany? This would have led to complete nonsense. Was it wise to start talking about exercises in eastern Germany? Because that was an option too. So what we did, to be perfectly honest, was consciously to keep our heads down, while recognising that this was the major issue facing Europe and NATO at that period, and giving it a great deal of attention.

BRAITHWAITE

There are just one or two points about popular attitudes in Russia, which were actually as important as they were in Germany. It was always a dictum, as far as Poland was concerned, that Poland could not in the end finally regain the status it had before the war unless there had been a reform in Russia first. And I think it is generally forgotten that the first genuine elections producing genuine political change anywhere in the East were the elections in March 1989 in Russia, not in Eastern Europe. The attitude of Russians to this whole business, of ordinary Russians – in so far as one could talk to them, which was usually not very far, most of my view of ordinary Russians was gained by talking to my two KGB chauffeurs – was that most of them took the view that they had had enough of the Central European empire. They didn't at all mind giving up East Germany, they resented – and they still resent – the way in which the Russian forces were bundled out of Central Europe, the hardships which people suffered, but they didn't mind giving up the empire. Although we were warned all the time that there might be a public backlash, I don't think that was ever true. The backlash could have come. And I think Gorbachev, and perhaps particularly Shevardnadze, showed a quite remarkable amount of political cour-

age in pushing the process the way they did. He could have failed, and it is a tribute to his political ability that he didn't.

MALLABY

I think key Russians certainly did consider the possibility of keeping a neutral Germany in the Two plus Four talks and, if you look back at what Shevardnadze said at the first Two plus Four meeting, there are clear signs of that. They did not pursue it and the main reason for that was that the Americans told them that that was not on the cards at all, with the Germans saying the same thing.

On France, perhaps I could comment on the French attitude to all this. The French were very bothered at the prospect of German unification. The whole concept of the 1963 Elysée Treaty* and the special relationship across the Rhine since Adenauer* and De Gaulle* had, from a French point of view, been a completely new way of managing a historical rivalry. Putting it a bit crudely, it was the best way of ensuring against risking a repeat of the military defeats that happened in 1870 and 1940.

Franco-German Treaty of Friendship, 1963 formalising rapprochment between the two states and their common interest in promoting the status of the European Common Market.

Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967), German statesman. The first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1946-63.

Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), French general and statesman. President, 1958-69.

So friendship with and influence over Germany was very important part of French foreign policy and a very successful one. The French influence on Germany between the signature of the Elysée Treaty and unification of Germany was disproportionate to the respective power of the two countries. But when Germany became bigger and stronger and a larger feature in Europe in 1990, France wasn't sure that her disproportionate influence could be maintained. And there was a period of about a year from then when the French were quite uncertain about what to do. Earlier of course Mitterrand, during the beginning of the period of change in Germany, had been to East Berlin, and unlike Mrs Thatcher he actually went and talked to Krenz. And when German unification took place the minutes of those talks of course fell in the hands of the German Foreign Office. That was an attempt by Mitterrand to avoid or delay unification at the beginning. But he saw what was going to happen. He understood that there was no point in that kind of policy and he then went quiet. That was clever, because when he saw with realism what would happen, it was better to keep quiet than to criticise what was happening.

But the French after unification – about a year later – understood, and found a way of rebalancing their relationship with Germany. Although I think their influence on Germany has diminished relative to the previous period and with other changes – like the advent of Chancellor Schröder* – I still think that relationship is working reasonably well and gives France very great benefit.

Gerhard Schröder, German statesman. Chancellor since 1998.

From the British point of view, I have already mentioned earlier the end of the Soviet threat, which was very, very important. There is another British advantage too – just to touch on another great debate – which is that the breakdown of the 'Ice Age' in Central Europe opened up the possibility of eastern enlargement of the European Union. This, for the British, had an attraction because a larger Community, bringing in new democracies and helping them

consolidate their democracy, accorded very well with the British views about liberalisation and freedom in Europe and also with the idea that centralisation of the European Union in a federation wouldn't come to the fore.

WRIGHT

Perhaps I could just add a note on the handling of Anglo-German relations. It won't come as any surprise to any of you in this room that there was a certain tension between officialdom, as represented by the British round this table, and Number 10 in the handling and the exposition of the Prime Minister's views on Anglo-German relations. But I would add one other thing, and that is that it surprised me at the time, and it still does, that Mrs Thatcher, who was extremely close, should not only have shown the naivety of expressing her views, but even more of thinking that she could make private comments about Germany to Gorbachev and to Mitterrand and not realise that these would certainly go straight back to Helmut Kohl. As I said at the beginning I don't want this seminar, I think is hasn't, to concentrate unduly on Mrs Thatcher's personal views, but they were of course of major importance in the handling of Anglo-American relations.

BRAITHWAITE

Just to add a footnote, by then she had lost her political skills. Five years earlier she would have handled the situation with more finesse, but because she had this belief in her mission, in the power of her will, she thought she could walk on water by then and there is no doubt that she couldn't. It would have been different if she had indicated that she was capable of reconsideration of her fixed ideas.

WRIGHT

Can I ask our two German colleagues if they have anything to add?

MECKEL

Drei kurze Punkte, einmal zur Frage der Wirtschaft. Wir im Osten selber hatten keinen vernünftigen Überblick, sondern es gehörte zu den geheimen Dingen, wie die wirtschaftliche Lage wirklich war, so daß wir unsere Einschätzung über den Westen erhielten, gepaart mit eigenen, immer punktuellen Erfahrungen – alle punktuellen Erfahrungen waren katastrophal. Die Infrastruktur, die überall immer mehr kaputt ging. Wir lebten von der Substanz. Wir hatten keinen wirklichen Überblick, wir sahen nur, es geht immer mehr den Berg runter, und wir lebten von der Substanz, und in dem Aufruf zur Gründung der Sozialdemokratischen Partei, da haben wir gesagt, wenn wir eine Zukunft habe wollen, müssen wir jetzt was ändern. Das zum einen. Zum zweiten: Ich glaube, es ist nur logisch, daß jeder aus seiner Perspektive auf diese Ereignisse blickte. Wir fragten uns, wie lange kann die DDR noch so weiter machen oder überhaupt Stabilität haben unter der Herrschaft der SED? Nach dem Sturz Honneckers kam Krenz. Wir, die die Sozialdemokratische Partei gegründet hatten, wir hatten, sagten, Krenz muß weg, der ist illegitim, denn der ist nicht gewählt, wir brauchen

eine freie Wahl. Wir wußten nicht, was wir heute wissen, daß Helmut Kohl zur gleichen Zeit mit ihm ein Telefongespräch führte und sagte, ich will dir nichts tun, um nicht zu destabilisieren. Natürlich konnte Kohl nicht so reagieren wie wir. Das ist mir auch klar. Aber ich glaube, aus heutiger Perspektive ist es auch falsch, zu sagen, er hat immer schon gewußt, daß die deutsche Einheit ein halbes Jahr später kam. Also allein dieses Dokument macht dies sehr deutlich, daß auch er natürlich auf Reformen in der DDR setzte und versuchte, die DDR-Regierung in diese Richtung zu drücken. Aber er, anders als wir, wollte nicht von einem System los. Für uns war Mitte Oktober nach der illegalen Gründung der Sozialdemokratichen Partei klar: das System muß weg. Das heißt ja nicht automatisch: der Staat muß weg. Aber für uns war wiederum nach dem 9. Oktober auch klar: die Mauer ist nicht mehr das Problem, denn nach dem 9. Oktober war klar: wir werden es mit der Demokratie in der DDR schaffen. Die schießen nicht, also schaffen wir's. Und dann ist klar: Zwischen zwei demokratischen Staaten gibt's keine Mauer. Wir dachten, wir würden aber erstmal die Demokratie organisieren, und dann können wir so die Mauer beseitigen, alles auf Einmal geht nicht. Insofern gab es in diesen Wochen des Herbstes völlig unterschiedliche Perspektiven, wie man an diesem Beispiel klarmachen kann. Dritter Punkt: die ungeheure Bedeutung der KSZE nicht nur für uns, sondern für den gesamten Ost*blo*k. Das gilt insbesondere für den „3. Korb". Der ist von den Europäern hineinverhandelt worden als eine Dimension, die vorher nicht im Blick war. Die Helsinki-Gruppen, in Moskau und anderswo, die waren für uns in der DDR ein ganz wichtiger Punkt der Durchlässigkeit der Grenzen. In dieser Zeit gab es dann Kontakte, die waren für uns unheimlich wichtig, wie auch die Frage der Berichterstattung von Journalisten darüber. Wir waren ja in der DDR privilegiert. Wir hatten das westliche Fernsehen und Radio. Die Länder aus Ost-Mitteleuropa hatten dies nicht. Das KSZE-Dokument, die haben wir als Texte so nie in der DDR, nicht einmal im *Neuen Deutschland* wurden sie veröffentlicht. Und ich habe ständig erlebt als Pfarrer in der DDR, daß Leute kamen und sagten, haben Sie den Text? Wenn sie einen Antrag schreiben wollten, einen Ausreiseantrag oder einen Antrag auf Familienzusammenführung, so daß also dieser Text eine ungeheure Rolle spielte bei der Ausreise. Bis hin in diese letzten Phasen hinein läßt sich die Bedeutung der KSZE gesellschaftlich, aber auch auf der diplomatischen Ebene verfolgen. Ein letztes Wort: Die Osterweiterung, die vor uns liegt, ist wirklich eine zentrale Aufgabe, die wir in diesem Bereich noch zu tun haben. Ich sage gleichzeitig: Ein erfolgreicher Abschluß in Nizza ist die Voraussetzung, um genau diesen Handlungsweg zu gehen, und ich kann nur hoffen, daß unser aller Regierungen das dann auch schaffen und daß jeder von uns seinen Teil dazu beiträgt. Vielen Dank.

MECKEL*

translation of above contribution

Three brief points.

Firstly on the question of the economy. We in the East ourselves did not have a reasonable overview; on the contrary, what the economic situation was really like was amongst the secrets. Consequently we got our assessment via the West, together with our own, always isolated, experiences – and all these isolated experiences were disastrous. The infrastructure – which broke down more and more everywhere – we were living off our reserves. We did not have a real overview, we only saw that things were going more and more downhill and that we were living off the reserves. In the appeal to found the Social Democratic Party we therefore said that, if we wanted to have a future, we now had to change something. That was the first point.

Secondly, I believe it is only logical that everyone looked at these events from his own perspective. We asked ourselves how long the GDR could continue like this or even have stability at all under the rule of the SED. After the fall of Honecker came Krenz. We, who had founded the Social Democratic Party, said: 'Krenz must go. He is illegitimate since he is not elected. We need free elections.' We did not know what we know today, that at the same time Helmut Kohl made a phone-call with him and said, 'I don't want to do anything to you, in order not to destabilise.' Of course Kohl could not react like we did, I am aware of that. However, I think that, from today's point of view, it is also wrong to say he always knew that German unity would come half a year later. This document alone makes very clear that he, too, counted on reforms in the GDR and tried to pressure the GDR-government in that direction. But he, unlike us, did not want to depart from a system. By mid-October, after the illegal foundation of the Social Democratic Party, we were convinced: the system must go. Which after all does not automatically mean: the state must go. After 9 October we were on the other hand also aware that the Wall was no longer the problem, because after 9 October it had become clear that we would succeed with democracy in the GDR. They aren't shooting, therefore we will succeed. And then it is clear that there won't be a wall between two democratic states. We thought we would organise democracy first, and then we could remove the Wall, that way – you cannot do everything at once. In this respect, there were totally different perspectives in these autumn weeks, as can be shown with this example.

The third point: the immense significance of the CSCE not only for us, but for the entire Eastern *bloc*. This goes particularly for the 'third basket', which had been negotiated by the Europeans as a dimension that had previously not been part of the picture. The Helsinki groups, in Moscow and elsewhere, were a very important point for us in the GDR with regard to the permeability of the borders. There were contacts at that time, which – like the reporting by journalists about it – were incredibly important for us. After all we were privileged in the GDR: we had Western television and radio. The countries in Eastern-Central Europe did not have that. We

never got the CSCE documents as texts in the GDR, they were not even published in *Neues Deutschland*. As a pastor in the GDR, it constantly happened to me that people would come and say, 'Do you have the text'? If they wanted to write an application – an application to leave the country or an application for the re-uniting of families – this text played an immense role when it came to leaving the country. Up until the last phases, the significance of the CSCE can be traced in society, but also on the diplomatic level.
One last word: the Eastern enlargement [of the EU], which now lies ahead of us, really is a central task that we still have to do in this field. At the same time, I say, a successful conclusion in Nice is the precondition to follow that path of action. And I can only hope that all our governments will succeed at this and that each of us will do his bit. Thank you very much.

WRIGHT Hermann [Richthofen] I will give you the last word.

RICHTHOFEN I would just like to remind you of how very important it was for them to get out and to have a view of the western world.

Commentary

Professor Donald Cameron Watt

Formerly Stevenson Professor of International History, LSE

Though not a direct participant in the events that have been discussed today I would like to speak as a close witness to them. There are three points I should like to make.

The first is to supply something which has been lacking to the statements that have been made by the participating witnesses, that is, to emphasise the atmosphere of those days in 1989-90. Without this, what was done and not done still may be difficult to comprehend by those that read the record of what has been said today. I can best describe the atmosphere, at least at the beginning, as one of almost unbearable apprehension. What loomed on the horizon, even though fog and mist shrouded the outlines, was the end of the Cold War. The destruction of the Berlin Wall, the coming together of the two Germanies and the liberation of Eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Hungary from their compulsory membership of the Soviet *bloc*. It was true that the soviet system seemed to be showing signs of moving towards a less oppressive, more 'liberal' atmosphere. But it could always reel backwards towards a Stalinism, for which most of the necessary institutions still seemed to be in place. Memories of the events of 1953 in Berlin, of 1956 in Budapest, and of 1968 in Czechoslovakia were all too real for us who had lived through them; especially the memories of 1968 before the promulgation of the Brezhnev doctrine. There seemed no reason why the East German military should not turn on the demonstrators; that Gorbachev should make such action impossible and get away with it in his own country seemed impossible until it had actually happened. In 1968 most people had thought a repetition of 1956 impossible; but it happened. We saw it. We welcomed those who escaped. With the greatest reluctance we accepted that the leopard had not, after all, changed its spots. To believe that it was no longer a leopard seemed the height of irresponsibility. That this did not paralyse the reactions of those in positions of responsibility is to their credit. But the fear that things would move too fast, that a momentum of events would be generated which would overstep what Soviet security anxieties would find acceptable died hard and by degrees only.

The second point is that, although the evidence of the breakdown of the Soviet and East European economies was confirmed by every defector, it was, all the same, difficult to believe how far it had gone, or that the reality of it would paralyse the managerial elites in the Soviet Union. The greatest factor in any historical revolution is the loss of nerve on the part of those whom it threatens. No-one I know or heard speak dared estimate how far it had actually gone by 1989. Once again, those whose ability to see below the Soviet surface had made them prophesy that this would occur, were handicapped by their fear of being disappointed. And no-one had any model on which to judge how fast it would happen or what form it would take.

The third point has to do with the phenomenon of Mrs Thatcher's hang-ups on Germany and the degree to which these have now sunk so shamingly into British popular attitudes. I am two years younger than she; I was an adolescent during the period of Britain's siege by Nazi Germany; I too grew up in the provinces, and suffered little directly. In 1964 I was asked to write a book about British perspectives of Germany since 1945, to be published to coincide with the visit of Her Majesty the Queen to Germany. I had already written something for *Europeaarchiv* on the new generation entering the Labour party contrasting their recognition of the establishment of parliamentary democracy in Western Germany with the reportage of the *Daily Express* and the Beaverbrook press and the frequently voiced opinions of [Labour minister] Mr Richard Crossman, which the German press were apt to take as characteristic of Britain. Little if anything of the

Thatcherite attitude towards Germany could be found in this generation of which I wrote.

The Queen's visit was to be followed by a decade and a half in which the Labour party held office for all but four years in Britain. In Germany it was matched first by the *Grosse Koalition* and then by the German Socialist leaders, Willi Brandt and Helmut Schmidt. The Heath government of 1970-74, uncharacteristically for post-war Toryism, was European rather than American in its orientation; though it has already been said that it is only in London (and, at least publicly, in Paris) that opinion is capable of seeing a European and an Atlantic and orientation as mutually exclusive. The Heath government was in any case Butskellite in its domestic policies. When Mrs Thatcher was elected in 1979, the Butskellite tradition was totally discredited, as was state interventionism, nationalisation, government-trades union co-operation to manage the economy, and the whole establishment that had accepted this. The Thatcher government involved the movement into positions of political power of representatives of the lower middle class entrepreneurial and professional provincial social groups that had been most hit by the growth in trades union power, felt most threatened by big unions, big industry and big government. A new generation of so-called Tory intellectuals gave them a set of arguments and beliefs, of an almost ideological character. Like all new entrants into an existing power structure which they disliked and against which they were in revolt, these lower middle class representatives were provincial in outlook and hostile to any form of supra-nationalism, regarding it as a form of un-British activity. Within the Tory party one could feel their strength first in the marginalisation of Mr Heath's supporters, and second in the disappearance into the back benches of the land-owning element, the squirearchy.

This group, the Essex men of the Tory party, were like Mrs Thatcher herself, untouched by any direct realisation of the changes in Germany. They no longer took their ideas from the Beaverbrook press; but they still preached a debased form of AJP Taylor's historic views of Germany. Not all the so-called 'intellectuals' shared their views. Their fate rather was to follow their intellects into criticism of aspects of Mrs Thatcher's quasi-ideology. Nigel Lawson's fate is a good example of this. Others fell in the twists of Mrs Thatcher's fate: Carrington and Francis Pym from the landed interest over the Falklands; John Nott who shared Mrs Thatcher's obsession with the Soviet enemy also over the Falklands. Neither Essex man, nor Lady Essex, had any time for Europe; they had even less for Germany. Like Taylor, Mrs Thatcher regarded Germany as a perpetual threat to European stability, and to Britain. Her extraordinary and notorious seminar with selected British and American historians of Germany revealed how solid was her assumption that Taylor spoke for the English-speaking historical profession. It is a pity that Herr Kohl fell only too easily into the current pattern of the European community's leaders, neither understanding nor responding to any opinion below that of the Brussels bureaucracy and its national analogues. Since Willi Brandt, no European political leader has figured as a hero in a British national press that loves finding foreigners who fulfil British images of friends abroad. And none who could evoke the enthusiastic applause that Willi Brandt did on his visit to Britain, (or Franz Joseph Strauss did most skilfully at a time when half of the British press were demonising him). Kohl had all the possibilities with his successful handling of the reunion of the two Germanies, something which desperately needed selling in London if only for the capital needs of industry in east Germany. But one is left with the feeling that rousing the emotions of any audience, let alone a British one, was something which was not part of his universe. A pity.