

*Russian Social Science Review*, vol. 40, no. 3, May–June 1999, pp. 50–65.  
© 1999 M.E. Sharpe, Inc. All rights reserved.  
ISSN 1061–1428/1999 \$9.50 + 0.00.

ANATOLII CHERNIAEV

## **The Unification of Germany**

### **Political Mechanisms and Psychological Stereotypes**

The impact of German unification and its consequences will be long felt in international development and in world politics and economics. Whether we realize this sufficiently is another question.

Attitudes toward unification have not yet stabilized either in our country or in Germany, although in Germany the question of “whether to turn back” is closed once and for all—even for those who have suffered materially and politically.

In Russia, at the level of vulgar politicking the conclusion is elementary: “Without a struggle, Gorbachev gave away what had been gained at the cost of millions of lives.” Intellectuals, among others, express this view, forgetting to whom they owe their capacity for public expression of such (indeed, of any) sentiments. However, even for such people “the call to ‘return to the past’ is not quite *comme il faut*; it is better to be bold and insult Gorbachev outright.” I quote in this connection a rejoinder made by Aleksandr Avrekh in response to L. Smoliakov’s intentionally nasty article (see “NG-Stsenarii,” 16 January and 10 April 1997).

I have returned to this topic for two reasons.

---

English translation © 1998, 1999 by M.E. Sharpe, Inc. Translated from the Russian text © 1997 by “Svobodnaia mysl’.” “Ob’edinenie Germanii. Politicheskie mekhanizmy i psikhologicheskie stereotipy,” *Svobodnaia mysl’*, 1997, no. 8, pp. 25–34.

Anatolii Sergeevich Cherniaev is a candidate of history.

The first is to recall "what actually happened" (the expression is L[eopold von] Ranke's) and to show on the basis of facts the political and historical inevitability of unification at that very moment, and that it basically had to happen as it did in the context of international and German realities. For me, the occasion is the appearance of yet another book by V. Falin (V. Falin, *Konflikte im Kreml: Zur Vorgeschichte der deutschen Einheit und Auflösung der Sowjetunion* [Conflict in the Kremlin: On the Prehistory of German Unification and the Disintegration of the Soviet Union] [Munich, 1997]). Falin adds nothing to his overall conception in this book. But intellectual revanchists in our country—and, which is particularly strange (although understandable), in Germany as well—have seized on that view once more.

Second, I would like to invite people to ponder how much more significant, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the effect of German unification on Europe, the world, and our country in particular would have been if the USSR had not disappeared from the scene.

The "Moscow-Berlin axis," in fact already a "subtext" in the discussions between Gorbachev and Kohl, would have become a determining factor in the actual European process. And it would not have been transformed, as it has now been, into a process of NATO expansion. Germany, which has long understood that NATO existed not only to "restrain the Kremlin" but to "keep Germany itself contained," would hardly have agreed so readily to this American venture if it had been able to count another superpower "among its friends."

Economic support for perestroika would not have been limited to "moments of German gratitude," but would have become a mutually advantageous collaboration on a broad scale, the significance of which it would be gauche to compare with what the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are offering.

For Russia today, unified Germany is likewise an economic partner of major importance. But it is nothing like the one it could have been. For it is not to Russia that the entire West is obliged for the elimination of the threat of nuclear war, and it is not Russia that deserves credit for the unification of Germany. The truth is that the country that could have demanded, and might have received, appropriate compensation for both no longer exists.

The politics of the new thinking, so productive and significant for Germany, would have received powerful and lasting support from it. The temptation to return to "tried and true" methods for protecting

one's "national interests" in the international arena would not have become as widespread as it is today.

Nor would it have been so easy to devalue the most precious and most promising development of international practice under Gorbachev—namely, *trust*. The mighty tandem of the two strongest European powers, demonstrating the effectiveness of this principle, would have provided solid support for a confident movement of international cooperation toward the new world order.

And now to our topic.

What did the "German question" look like at the moment of Gorbachev's advent to power? How did we then perceive the Germans?

First, the word "German" reminded the politicized stratum of society as well as the people of, above all, the war.

Besides the severe trauma the war left in our memories, there was the theme of victory, which we cultivated for strictly ideological purposes. The memory of World War II formed the core of patriotic propaganda. In fact, this was the only aspect of the decrepit official ideology that continued to provoke a response among the people. That fact could not be ignored.

Second, East Germans and West Germans represented different concepts for us. People from the GDR [German Democratic Republic; East Germany] were "our" people—we had long since reconciled with them, and blame for 1941 was not extended to them in everyday perceptions.

As for the term "Germany," in everyday usage it meant politically—and, strange as it may seem, geographically—West Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG].

No one took Walter Ulbricht's notion of the "two German nations" seriously—although, of course, Soviet authors did refer to the history of the United States and the transformation of the former colonies of the British Empire. But, whenever people could speak without consideration of propaganda and diplomacy, they treated the ideological purpose of this concept as something beyond question. People would jokingly wonder: Where then did Goethe, Beethoven, Hegel, and so on belong? According to this logic, Kant would have had to be considered Russian; for a time, during his Königsburg period, he was a subject of the Empress Catherine.

Third, the GDR was not simply an ally but an economically advanced "socialist comrade-in-arms," a model for others. It was (after

the USSR) the strongest military power in the Warsaw Pact. It was the most technically developed economic and trading partner among the "brother nations."

Yet the FRG, even though we placed a disproportionate share of the blame for the war on it, was the most advantageous Western country for us in terms of economic relations (and in some respects irreplaceable).

There was another constant as well. Both among the Soviet leadership and in Soviet society existed the conviction (if not thoroughly formulated and substantiated in detail) that West Germany—whether we or its own allies in NATO liked it or not—was of great significance in the balance of world forces, and that its role in world politics would inevitably grow.

But the "German question," as the Germans envisioned it since Adenauer's time, did not exist for us in the USSR before perestroika. We did not officially acknowledge it, for we well understood its ultimate meaning.

However, we did want to improve relations with West Germany. Hence the Kremlin responded to the call of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Moreover, we assumed that somehow we would be able to neutralize its ultimate meaning, which we understood, as did all Germans (right-wing, left-wing, and even many people in the GDR), as *unification*.

I was present at a discussion between Brezhnev and Gromyko in 1972. At the time, Brezhnev declared himself ready to support Brandt publicly against the CDU [Christian Democratic Union] opposition, which was steadily making headway and was counting on victory in the parliamentary elections.

There was another important aspect. Improved relations with the FRG occurred in the context of detente—that is, the alleviation of international tension—with which Brezhnev was associated. (This is a special topic, albeit one that has been little studied.)

The main spokesperson in favor of improving relations with the FRG was V.M. Falin, then an ambassador. He performed as no one else could have in his position: intelligently, energetically, competently, flexibly, and with conviction. The result was the Moscow Treaty—not only a watershed in relations between the FRG and the USSR but also a landmark of the final days of the postwar period in our relations with the Germans, and a very important event for the world as a whole.

All the credit for this historical affair belongs, I repeat, to Falin, as well as to Brandt, Genscher, and Bahr. As for Falin's position on German unification when it was time to say "B" (if the Moscow Treaty was "A"), I have already discussed this point elsewhere (in the greatest detail in *Svobodnaia mysl'*, 1994, no. 2–3, pp. 19–29).

The international political capital that had been accumulated on the basis of the Moscow Treaty began to wane rapidly by the end of 1970, as the cold war resumed in earnest. Interparty rivalries in the FRG, as well as Moscow's suspicions regarding Honecker and company, compounded the problem. As the crisis in the GDR deepened, Honecker and his entourage became increasingly inclined to do business with West Germany without consulting the Soviet leadership. To put it simply, the GDR leaders tricked us, deceived us. Our ambassador—and, of course, Moscow—knew this.

Understandably, the Soviet leadership tried in every way to counteract the growing dependence of our ally, the GDR, on the FRG, a NATO member.

All this is merely further confirmation of the fact that by the mid-1980s the USSR was not at all ready to tackle the "German question."

Nor did the West Germans at that time put much stock in this matter. Indeed, they were the last of the great powers to see Gorbachev's advent to power as a chance to alter the European and international situation. The scandalous comparison of Gorbachev and Goebbels, which the chancellor allowed himself to make publicly a year and a half after the beginning of perestroika, was no incidental verbal slip.

It has long since become a commonplace to explain why Gorbachev had to stop the arms race, and why, once he began to implement a new foreign policy, he concerned himself first with Soviet–American relations. However, Gorbachev never underestimated the European context of his task, and not only for tactical reasons of influencing the Americans *through* their allies, especially as the Europeans felt the "Soviet threat" much more directly than the United States (to what extent this fear was justified is unimportant).

Gorbachev also had a more important task in mind. He understood that changes in the USSR were impossible without changing Western attitudes toward our country. It is no accident that Gorbachev's book on perestroika (published in October 1987) began with the words: "We want to be understood!" He counted on receiving such understanding primarily from Western Europe. Nor was he mistaken: one need only

recall Thatcher, who was the first to grasp subtly and farsightedly that a "different period" was beginning in the USSR.

Two important conclusions were mentioned in the discussion of the results of Thatcher's visit to the Politburo:

—Gorbachev noted that the fear of the "Soviet threat" was a reality, and that it was time to stop deceiving ourselves that "all of progressive humanity" considered us a bulwark of peace; and

—the decision was made to create an Institute of Europe in the Academy of Sciences with the task of providing scientific substantiation for the European orientation of our new foreign policy.

In May 1987 the question of relations with the FRG was discussed in the Politburo in connection with the imminent visit of President Richard von Weizsacker. It was noted that, within the context of a "common European home" (which had already been proclaimed), West Germany was the most important element, so that it was necessary to revive the implicit potential of the Moscow Treaty.

This theme was present in the meeting with Weizsacker. Words concerning a "new page" in relations were uttered. However, the USSR's position on the question of most importance for the Germans—namely, the "German question"—remained for the time being "Gromyko-like" (politically), as I would put it. Still, there was a certain perspective (on the "philosophical level"): "Let history judge!"

What lay behind this formula?

First, there was the understanding, which not only Gorbachev but any human being not blinded by fanaticism and a sense of revenge shared, that the forcible division of a great nation was not normal and that an entire people could not be condemned to perpetual punishment for the past crimes of its rulers.

Second, there was the desire of the new Kremlin policy makers to give *hope* to a player whom we needed very much in the new great "game" in the international arena. Without such hope, there could be no real improvement in relations (and especially in mutual understanding) with the part of Germany that was not dependent on us.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl's entry into this game (at the time it was still a "game") provided the impetus for rapprochement. He himself showed initiative and perseverance and, of course, encountered similar aspirations in Gorbachev.

I recorded my impressions of their first meeting in Moscow (Octo-

ber 1988) in my diary at the time, and later I expressed them in my book *Six Years of Gorbachev* [Shest' let s Gorbachevym] (Moscow, 1993). The most important were:

- the understanding both had of the significance of this meeting for their countries and for themselves as statesmen;

- the quick and even somewhat unexpected emergence of sympathetic feelings; they liked each other and saw that they could get along with one another;

- their willingness to overcome prejudices and the heavy burden of memory of the war, at both the public and the private levels;

- the unconditional rejection of war by both, their revulsion for war on both the human and the political plane (the Germans and the Russians had had their fill of fighting, and were not about to engage in it once again), which signaled the then still tacit recognition that neither regarded their nations as potential military adversaries, although they belonged to hostile blocs;

- their implicit, and sometimes explicit (“you’re the general secretary of the Communist Party, and I’m the leader of a Christian party”), *capacity* not to invoke ideology in relations between the two countries and the two peoples; and

- their willingness to raise these relations to a new level of mutual advantage based on trust.

There was no talk of the unification of Germany in this first meeting. Both men were quite discreet. But they understood (and the chancellor would later say more than once) that personal friendship, however close it might be, did not replace or rescind state interests and state objectives.

Kohl’s ultimate objective was more than concrete. Gorbachev’s ultimate objective went far beyond Germany’s borders: he needed good relations with the FRG above all to stop the cold war and to put an end to the arms race.

The atmosphere at the meeting surprised and pleased me. Two extraordinary men had made contact; each was his own person, each knew his measure of responsibility, and both made *common sense* the cornerstone of the development of relations between them.

I was present when the “current” of personal trust—one of the most important elements in the “new thinking” in foreign policy—was “switched on” (the term is from electrical engineering).

Though the “process” was not yet “under way,” it had at least shown much promise as it left port.

There is one more point. I became acquainted with Horst Telschik, the chancellor's adviser on foreign policy, at this meeting. He "pleasantly disillusioned" me. He turned out to be not at all the person whom our propaganda had described: the chancellor's evil genius in regard to us. He was quite the opposite, a person with a great mind, a broad vision, political experience, and sophistication. I understood that at Kohl's side stood an irreplaceable person in the important tasks that we had to accomplish together.

Gorbachev's meeting with Kohl took place in late October 1988. The meeting with Richard von Weizsacker was in July 1987. But this does not mean that there was no movement regarding the "German question" between March 1985 and these meetings. In these two years, Gorbachev met Rau and had a number of meetings with Honecker, Spath, Bangemann, Genscher, Bahr, Schmidt, Mies, and Augstein, the editor of *Der Spiegel*.

Gorbachev began to feel at home with the German theme. He never had so many meetings within such a short period with the representatives of any other country. I have often been asked whether the experts and specialists from academic institutions, the reports and memoranda from the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Section of the Central Committee, the coded messages from ambassadors, and resident and other intelligence agents played any role in Gorbachev's handling of the German question, and if so what role. Of course, they did, especially the coded messages, which were invested with the "magic" of secrecy, which did not, of course, always mean that the analysis and recommendations were reliable. Among the various scholarly sources of "information" Gorbachev received on German affairs (and in regard to the "socialist camp" as well), I should like especially to mention the analytic memoranda of Viacheslav Ivanovich Dashichev. His assessments of what was happening in Germany and his recommendations were quite accurate. They suggested ideas that were later confirmed.

Nonetheless, Gorbachev's own communications with German politicians, and then directly with the German public in the FRG and the GDR, played the main role in preparing him to tackle the "German question." This fit his nature, for among the public he sensed the "call of the times."

That is why I think Gorbachev's visit to West Germany in June 1989 was the most important stage in preparing him to resolve (for



himself) the "German question." The critical element was not the conversations (of substance), not the documents (important and necessary), not even the formulations he used publicly and behind the closed doors of meeting rooms—although all these were, of course, important.

The most significant factor was the reception Gorbachev had from the Germans, by the masses of Germans of different types, and his own perceptions of them as he traveled about. This was not the country or the people whose image we had created for ourselves under the influence of 1941–45 and the cold war. Gorbachev saw then and there that he had a chance to revive the process of rapprochement and interaction between these two great nations of Europe that had been interrupted in the twentieth century.

From then on, the German aspect of Kremlin foreign policy was geared to West Germany. This was understood everywhere. And—this is especially important—thus it was understood in the GDR, in our government, in the Party, and among the people at large.

Events soon began to unfold with incredible rapidity.

It would not be entirely correct to say that Gorbachev's visit to the FRG triggered these events. In the GDR the desire to reunify the nation had deep and old roots as well. However, its surge to the surface in precisely that year, in the summer and autumn of 1989, was undoubtedly linked to the fundamental change in relations between the USSR and the FRG.

Gorbachev and I were often asked precisely when (almost, indeed, on what date) Gorbachev agreed to the unification of Germany.

No such date exists in nature. Here too, we gradually became accustomed to the problem on the foundation of the principles of the new thinking, specifically:

- the attempt not to permit German enthusiasm for unity to delay the process of ending the cold war, which meant that everything had to move very gradually;

- the recognition that the Germans had a right to decide their own national destiny, while taking their neighbors' interests into account; and

- the inviolability of the principle that force could not and would not be used.

Only if these three points are considered can one explain what and why in subsequent months Gorbachev did or did not do, said or refrained from saying, what he did. Only by understanding these points

can we understand the contradictions in his public speeches or in his statements during various talks.

For example, on 7 October 1989, during a visit to Berlin on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the GDR, Gorbachev told Honecker that "the GDR is the USSR's most important ally." But it did not follow from this that, if this ally were to disappear by the will of its own people, Gorbachev would take steps to preserve it at all costs. At the time Gorbachev was not at all keen to go to Berlin, as he said several times within his own circle and to the Politburo. He did not wish his presence and his unavoidable compliments to the celebrators to give inadvertent approval to Honecker's policies.

By then Gorbachev had already abandoned the American principle that drove the cold war: be whatever you like, even the ultimate scoundrel, but if you are our ally, we will support and save you. However, Gorbachev was later accused of treachery for rejecting this immoral principle (and not only in regard to the GDR).

From his anniversary visit to the GDR, Gorbachev returned personally convinced that Honecker's regime was doomed, and had only days or weeks to live. He mentioned this when he came back to Moscow.

Endless questions were asked: what measures had the Soviet leadership had in mind when it sent Gorbachev to Berlin, and how did he evaluate his trip?

I remember the discussions and conversations in the Politburo. I do not remember the decisions. I do not think that any sort of resolution was adopted. After all, what could we do, if the use of tanks was ruled out? Gorbachev, counting on the chancellor's understanding and decency, endeavored to restrain him from a dangerous haste. But his behavior toward the succession of new leaders in the GDR was designed to keep them from committing follies and provoking armed conflict and bloodshed (as later happened in Romania).

Gorbachev is reproached for inconsistency, for contradicting himself. He said one thing on one occasion, and something a little different the next time. However, I am afraid that, if Gorbachev had been strictly consistent—as his opponents and his adversaries wanted him to be—and if he had stubbornly held on to words said to someone at some time or other without regard for the course of events, a major disaster would have befallen Europe.

In October–November 1989, Gorbachev was firmly convinced that the GDR could be saved for a relatively long period if it undertook

radical reforms, during which time he could seek rapprochement with the FRG. Both Kohl and Genscher once agreed with him about this.

This explains his position at the time and his promise of support and solidarity in talks with Krenz and Modrow.

However, at Malta on 2 December, he was already discussing with Bush whether a *united* Germany would remain in NATO, and for the first time he tossed out the idea of "neutralization," stipulating, of course, that it was premature to discuss this question officially.

Three days later in Moscow, Genscher literally found a scandal brewing over the "ten points" that the chancellor had unexpectedly presented to the Bundestag. The main complaint concerned the infringement of the GDR's sovereignty, interference in its internal affairs, and the *de facto* course toward confederation.

In early December 1989, after meeting Mitterrand in Kiev, Gorbachev assured his interviewer (I quote) that "more than half of the inhabitants of the GDR want to retain the present configuration of their country, while changing its political structure, increasing democracy, etc. They envision relations between the GDR and the FRG as relations between two *sovereign* states."

But in late January 1990, at a small conference held at Gorbachev's office in the CPSU Central Committee building, all the participants assumed that the GDR's fate was sealed, and that the state was already collapsing. The idea of the "six points" (4 + 2; 2 + 4) was approved: this was supposed to define the relations between the victor states with a Germany that was already essentially one and completely sovereign. At this point, Gorbachev ordered Marshal Akhromeev to prepare to withdraw the troops from East Germany.

However, less than a week later, on 30 January, at a meeting with Modrow in Moscow, Gorbachev continued objectively to discuss issues associated with the GDR's viability and the USSR's collaboration with it, although Modrow himself recognized that "a growing segment of the GDR population no longer supports the existence of two German states. It does not seem that this idea can be sustained any longer."

Modrow asked that the process of unification be delayed, suggesting that Gorbachev mention the USSR's rights in Germany and, together with other states, reach an agreement to support rapprochement. He invited Gorbachev to visit the GDR. Gorbachev declined, saying he had been there just recently. He suggested that perhaps Ryzhkov could

go, but later did not insist on the premier's visit (Modrow personally invited Ryzhkov). Gorbachev advised Modrow to hold a steady course, not to lose his bearings, and to accustom himself to the idea of concluding a cooperative agreement with the FRG on good-neighborliness with elements of confederation, and to "make the transition to confederative structures further down the road, when the two states will grow into one. . . . The most important thing," he declared, "is to retain the state sovereignty of the GDR."

But only recently, as we saw, Gorbachev had been angry with the chancellor merely for alluding to confederation in his "ten points," without uttering the word itself.

At a meeting with the chancellor in Moscow (on 10 February), Gorbachev, apparently contradicting what he had said ten days before to Modrow, discussed with Kohl questions that in fact reflected the problems of a *unified Germany* (membership in NATO or neutralization, borders, relations with Poland, Czechoslovakia, continuity in agreements concluded with the GDR, etc.).

At this point, he uttered the famous, decisive sentence: "The Germans must choose for themselves. And they should know our position."

Kohl asked again: "You want to say that the question of unification is the Germans' own choice?"

"Yes, but in the context of realities."

However, he immediately reproached the chancellor for using his election campaigns in the Bundestag to force unification, although obviously the election campaign was entirely a German affair, and how someone behaved in it was no business of anyone outside.

The day before Kohl's arrival, Gorbachev firmly defended his dislike of a united Germany's membership in NATO during a conversation with U.S. Secretary of State [James] Baker. But this took place in the context of a detailed discussion of a program for the functioning of the 2 + 4 mechanism.

The Politburo instructed Shevardnadze on no account to agree to Germany's entry into NATO in a 2 + 4 meeting in Paris. He did not succeed in defending this position, and indeed it was hopeless, since it contradicted the objective logic of the process of unification; once Germany became an absolutely sovereign state in the context of international law, it was free to enter any bloc or no bloc, as it wished.

Nonetheless, Gorbachev went to Washington for his next summit meeting with Bush in late May 1990. There, after long disputes, a

specific formula was agreed upon. That is in Gorbachev's memoirs, and here I reproduce the main points from the minutes:

*Gorbachev:* That means we should formulate it in this way: the United States and the Soviet Union agree that a united Germany itself should decide which alliance it wishes to join after reaching a final settlement that takes into account the results of World War II.

*Bush:* I would propose a somewhat different formulation: the United States is unequivocally in favor of a united Germany's membership in NATO. However, if Germany makes a different choice, we will not dispute it and will respect it.

*Gorbachev:* Agreed. I accept your formulation.

I repeat: when one now rereads the minutes of Gorbachev's talks with different figures involved in the German question, his own notes on these talks to the Politburo and other meetings, and his conversations, one on one or in someone else's presence, one can find quite a few discrepancies in words and approaches.

However, this reveals a *tactic* based on the principles of the new thinking.

Let me stress this point once more. As soon as Gorbachev was finally persuaded that the German enthusiasm for reunification was insurmountable, that this was at bottom a *genuinely popular and democratic* movement, and not someone's political game or the emotion of a segment of youth that was under the influence of Western propaganda, he made a firm decision: history, to which he referred, had pronounced the last word, and all that remained was to help it to translate this word into action *in a peaceful way*.

One might also accuse the chancellor of engaging in cunning from time to time, of mixing colors, of hastening events and using them in his election struggle.

However, from the historical standpoint (and even from the moral standpoint) this is just as unimportant as the superficial contradictions in Gorbachev's statements.

For what these two men did reflected the will of the German people and served the interests of the peoples of the USSR, Europe, and the world. Gorbachev and Kohl abolished the main focal point of the cold war. They created a precedent for resolving problems of world politics in a *new way*, in accordance with the criteria of the dawning age.

After the Washington meeting between Gorbachev and Bush, the

question of whether Germany would be unified was no longer a *problem of the movement of history*. What remained was to establish the political and legal form it would take, a task that was completed over the course of three months in Moscow, Arkhyz, and Bonn. The question of regulating the external aspects of Germany's unification through the 2 + 4 mechanism was, of course, also included.

It is typical that in July 1990 the chancellor brought to Moscow a draft of a "grand accord" between the USSR and a united Germany. Moreover, Gorbachev accepted this gesture as quite natural and timely (I remember this moment—in the private residence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Spiridonovka, in the presence of only aides, myself, and Telschik).

In the intellectual confusion that reigns in Russia, many assessments of Gorbachev's policy on German unification are making the rounds.

According to some, unification should have been actively resisted. There were almost half a million Soviet troops in the GDR, equipped with the best weapons. What came about "without a battle" is viewed as a betrayal of the interests of our own country and of our friends in the GDR.

Others think that agreement to unification was possible, but that much more should have been asked for and obtained in return for this agreement.

Still others think that Germany should not in any event have been permitted to enter NATO, and that it was necessary to blackmail both the Germans and the Americans, thereby prolonging and perhaps even stopping the process.

What can one say about this matter?

Gorbachev could have accomplished neither one nor the other—nor the third, nor even the fifth (there are versions and subtle variations of these alternatives). If he had, he would not have been Gorbachev. His position and his policy on the question of Germany's unification were organic to the great historical work that he began in 1985, as well as natural for the statesman that Gorbachev had become during the course of perestroika.

It is utterly inconceivable that Gorbachev would have used something like the fate of a great nation in the center of Europe as a trump card in the diplomatic game.

Gorbachev completed his serious "schooling" in this game in 1987—

88 during his bitter argument with George Shultz, the American secretary of state, over a fundamental issue of world policy—nuclear disarmament. In the end, having understood the futility of a method based on the assumption that one could outfox one's partner, they became friends. So, when it came to a question such as the unification of Germany, Gorbachev was, of course, incapable of playing such games, and still less would he have engaged in blackmail.

Gorbachev raised international politics to a new level where morality had meaning. Perhaps he did not completely succeed, but no matter what sarcastic remarks the traditionalist cynics make about diplomacy, his efforts were not in vain. The logic of history required the elimination of the threat of nuclear war and, moreover, a fundamental change in the very essence of world politics. Viewed in the context of this logic, Gorbachev was right. He did his best to achieve this end under conditions that included his role in the unification of Germany. Using the logic of "diplomacy"—which makes "national interests" absolute and in which the most important goal is to outplay one's partner or adversary, to snatch as much as possible and to give as little as possible in return—would have made it simply impossible to achieve this end.

Germany's gains from unification require no clarification. Germany wanted one thing from us: to end a situation in which everything was defined in terms of "winner and loser." And that is not so much, if one considers how many decades have passed since the war.

We, meanwhile, received something that Germany, itself a mighty nation and a principal ally of a nuclear superpower, did not have to give us: support for those of our troops who were stationed there long-term; construction of officer housing; loans; assistance, including humanitarian aid; and active support in international matters, above all in the Group of Seven. In terms of money, all this amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars.

How we have managed these funds is another issue.

Helmut Kohl, honestly and loyally and with the support of the vast majority of Germans, fulfilled all that he had promised with his word and his signature. He changed his approach toward Russia—and, moreover, without ceasing to treat Gorbachev decently, we should add. He did not demean himself with a diplomatic "loss of memory," which is more than one can say of all his former partners.

In a situation that changed fundamentally, the chancellor "gave what

he could." But this was several orders of magnitude less, both geopolitically and materially, than if the "Moscow-Berlin axis," with which I began, had been invoked.

The story of "what was" and what was promised calls to mind an old truth: history does not forgive a missed opportunity. The unification of Germany could have played a vast and irreplaceable role in the democratic transformation of our country and could have facilitated and considerably shortened its transitional period, which has become so dramatic and so offensive.

**Selected by Nils H. Wessell  
Translated by Michel Vale**