

CHAPTER 5

Robert L. Hutchings *Europe Between the Superpowers*

THE OPENING LINES of the Charter of Paris, signed by European and North American heads of state in November 1990, affirmed that Europe was “liberating itself from the legacy of the past.”¹ And indeed self-liberation was the accurate designation, for it was the Poles and Hungarians, soon joined by others, whose peaceful democratic breakthroughs touched off the stunning events of 1989 and 1990. Yet the end of Europe’s long division could not have occurred without the roles played by the Soviet Union and the United States. Liberation was not something bestowed on Europe by U.S. and Soviet leaders, but neither was it something that Europe could have achieved on its own. It was the *interaction* between superpower relations and developments in Europe, East and West, that brought about the end of the cold war.

By 1989 the bipolar world of the cold war had already broken down, and the leaders of the two superpowers both knew it in ways not true of their immediate predecessors. Preoccupied with the Soviet military and ideological threat, President Reagan accordingly held a Manichaeian view of the world. Theirs was the evil empire against which the Western camp needed to be ever vigilant—a notion that looks positively quaint in light of what we now know of the Soviet system in its final years. By the same token, Konstantin Chernenko was a dogmatic throwback to a bi-

1. “Charter of Paris for a New Europe, Paris 1990,” *New York Times*, November 22, 1990, A16.

polar world that no longer existed. For their successors, President Bush and General Secretary Gorbachev, the tasks of statesmanship were far different, calling for catalytic leadership rather than the assertive unilateralism that had characterized much of the cold war.

Europe was never as thoroughly bipolar as the cold war divide made it appear. Economically, the Bretton Woods system symbolized American hegemony up to the early 1970s, but, by the end of the 1980s, the global system increasingly reflected a tripolar distribution of economic power among North America, Europe, and East Asia. Politically, the junior European allies had long since slipped the leash in the Western camp and were poised to do so in the East as well. It was only in the military arena, especially in the nuclear field, that bipolarity remained dominant. The nuclear relationship generated rigidities that artificially preserved the formal bipolar structure of East-West relations and obscured the political and economic realities beneath the surface. It was a dynamic that John Lewis Gaddis once likened to the evolutionary history of the giant moose: just as the moose evolved ever more imposing antlers that intimidated other moose but were useless for other contingencies, so also did the vast U.S. and Soviet nuclear arsenals evolve within a cold war logic that was increasingly irrelevant to the realities of the late cold war.

By the end of the 1980s and indeed long before, this aspect of cold war confrontation—the prospect of nuclear war—had receded nearly to the vanishing point, taking with it superpower domination of East-West relations. Change was being driven by forces from below, springing from regime failure in the East and regime success in the West. It is something of a paradox that, whereas the relative decline of U.S. power in Europe pushed the Western Europeans closer together, the decline of Soviet power pushed the Eastern Europeans farther apart. And a more fluid East-West environment in the 1980s yielded new opportunities for intra-European engagement.

Eastern Europe in Crisis

By 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev took power in Moscow, the countries of Eastern Europe were in deep crisis, brought on by a combination of economic decline, political malaise, and social discontent.² The economic strategies on which they had embarked in the 1970s—relying on Western trade and credits in hopes of promoting economic growth—had bought a few years of relative prosperity but soon produced a regionwide financial crisis. Trade with the West collapsed, new credits dried up, and Eastern Europe was facing a political as well as an economic crisis. By 1982, all of the Eastern European countries save Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia had been compelled to enter into refinancing negotiations with Western creditors. Despite massive rescheduling, Poland's debt continued to increase. Hungary managed to stay afloat only through periodic refinancing and short-term loans. The GDR survived the financial squeeze thanks to generous West German credits but was mortgaging its political future in the process. As Miklos Nemeth, Hungarian prime minister in 1989, later put it, "The killing of the socialist bloc or the communist system started with that moment when the Western banks gave some credits and debt loans to certain countries."³

Trade with the Soviet Union in the 1980s fared little better as Moscow raised oil prices to reflect rapidly rising prices on the world market, cut deliveries by 10 percent, and put increased pressure on the Eastern Europeans for higher-quality goods in return. For a Soviet economy that was itself in decline, the economic burdens of empire were becoming more onerous, and Politburo dis-

2. Robert L. Hutchings, "Soviet Dilemmas in Eastern Europe," in *United States—East European Relations in the 1990s*, ed. Richard F. Staar (New York: Crane Russak, 1989), 15–34.

3. CNN interview for its Cold War Series, October 1997, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/kbank/profiles/nemeth>.

cussions of the time reflected Moscow's preoccupation with this concern. Poland was to some extent spared, owing to its fragile economic and political situation after the crushing of Solidarity in 1981, but the rest of Eastern Europe quickly felt the added financial squeeze from Moscow.⁴

As a consequence of this double economic bind from the East as well as the West, Eastern Europe as a whole experienced sharp economic decline during the 1980s, and some countries, notably Poland and Hungary, experienced multiple years of negative growth.⁵ External economic pressures, in turn, took a heavy toll on material living standards in the region, jeopardizing the fragile social contract many of these regimes had struck with their disaffected populaces. Poland's downward economic spiral destroyed whatever hopes its regime had of creating a new stability after the Solidarity debacle. By 1986, the Polish leadership was obliged to begin thinking the unthinkable: that Solidarity might have to be relegalized as the price of gaining public support for an economic recovery program. By mid-1988, this thought had crystallized into the idea of an "anti-crisis pact" that evolved a year later into the historic Roundtable Agreement of early 1989.⁶

Elsewhere the decline was less catastrophic but still severe, with no turnaround in sight. To keep personal consumption from declining even more rapidly, the Eastern European regimes cut back sharply on investment, with the result that every country in the region endured negative growth in the 1980s. Rates of investment

4. Recently declassified Soviet documents reveal how sensitive Moscow was to Poland's economic bind and how skillfully the Polish side exploited its own weakness. For a detailed compilation, see Mark Kramer, *Soviet Deliberations During the Polish Crisis, 1980–1981*, Cold War International History Project, Special Working Paper No. 1 (April 1999), Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC.

5. Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, *East European Economies: Slow Growth in the 1980s*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), viii–ix.

6. See, e.g., the Chronology and Documents 4 and 6 (transcripts of meetings of the Political Bureau, August 21, 1988, and the Secretariat, October 4, 1988), in *Poland 1986–1989: The End of the System: International Conference, 20–24 October 1999*, Polish Academy of Sciences, Miedzeszyn-Warsaw, Poland.

in Poland and Hungary dropped by 4.9 percent and 5.2 percent, respectively, in the first half of the 1980s before leveling off; for East Germany the figure was a whopping 10 percent.⁷ Sharply reduced investments had perpetuated the aging smokestack industries, further undermining Eastern European competitiveness in world markets, and failure to keep pace with the newly industrialized economies, much less the advanced Western democracies, had further mortgaged Eastern Europe's economic future. By the mid-1980s, some Hungarian reform economists were arguing that closing the scientific and technological gap was essential to Hungary's national survival. They seemed to mean that literally.

Adding to Eastern Europe's decline in the 1980s was the stagnation of its superannuated party leadership. The average age of the Eastern European party leaders was well over 70, and their average tenure in office was more than two decades. Political malaise in Eastern Europe had been accentuated by a prolonged period of drift in Moscow, stretching from the latter years of the Brezhnev era through the brief administrations of Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko and into the early experimental years of Mikhail Gorbachev. Thus, for most of the 1980s, the absence of clear and consistent Soviet leadership had left the Eastern European regimes largely to their own devices.⁸ The more conservative among them—the East German, Czechoslovak, Bulgarian, and Romanian regimes—retreated into obsessive orthodoxy, eschewing any hint of reform for fear that it might stir their repressed populations to action. At the other end of the spectrum, the cautiously reform-minded Polish and Hungarian regimes soon found their half-measures eclipsed by public calls for much more sweeping change.

For Gorbachev, the Eastern European situation presented sev-

7. CIA figures presented in "Soviet Policy toward Eastern Europe under Gorbachev" (Secret), NIE 11/12-9-88, May 1988; declassified in 1999 and reprinted in *At Cold War's End: U.S. Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989-91* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1999), 154-177.

8. Robert L. Hutchings, special editor, "The Effects of 'Leadership Drift' on Communist Systems," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 1-55.

eral dilemmas. Severe economic decline implied a continued drain on Soviet resources as well as a growing threat of economically induced political crisis in the region. The hidebound regimes in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania were also foreign policy liabilities, interfering with his efforts to promote a "common European home." Gorbachev obviously hoped that the example of his own reform agenda would have a persuasive effect in Eastern Europe and strengthen reform tendencies there as well. But his efforts to promote change by dint of his own example were having little impact on the entrenched hard-line leaderships in the region.

Yet Gorbachev was not as hands-off as he would have had us believe by his repeated assurances that interference in Eastern Europe was a thing of the past. His visit to Prague in April 1987 was a case in point. Although he avoided direct criticism of the Czechoslovak leadership during the trip, he nonetheless made plain his preference for a reform agenda modeled on his own. And when asked during the visit to explain the difference between Gorbachev's reforms and the Prague Spring, Soviet press spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov put it succinctly: "Nineteen years." Later in the year, as their frustrations mounted, Soviet officials interfered more directly in the Czechoslovak party leadership's internal machinations. One of Gorbachev's key advisers on Eastern Europe published excerpts of a November 1987 memorandum to Gorbachev that revealed a level of intrusion that would have made Stalin proud: "Given that maintaining [party leader Gustav] Husak . . . is hardly possible, . . . the most suitable scenario remains cooperation between Jakes and Strougal in the offices of General Secretary and Premier. . . . Bil'ak will have to go. . . . The only way . . . is to convince Jakes that it is necessary to find common ground with Strougal."⁹

9. Vadim A. Medvedev, *Raspad: Kak on nazreval v 'mirovoi sisteme sotsializma,'* excerpt published in Czech in *Soudobe dejiny* 5, no. 4 (1988): 541-545. (Stalin's blush would have been one of pride and not of embarrassment, of course.)

Just as Metternich, after the election of Pius IX, is said to have remarked that he had “bargained for everything but a liberal Pope,” the Eastern European Communists were ill-equipped to handle the consequences of a reform-minded Soviet leader. The more dogmatic among them found it hard to rule with the same ruthlessness, and those predisposed to reform were unable to stay ahead of public demands for more sweeping change. It was also apparent that, just as Gorbachev’s reforms in the USSR encouraged and legitimized the far more radical efforts taking shape in Poland and Hungary, successful challenges to Communist rule in Eastern Europe would eventually blow back on the Soviet Union, particularly among its restive nationalities.

Indeed, as I wrote in *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War*, “It is hard to imagine the Soviet enterprise unraveling in any other sequence than it ultimately did . . . first in Central and Eastern Europe, next among the Baltic states, then in Ukraine and other republics, and finally in Russia itself.”¹⁰ This sequence and logic, it should be noted, was the assumption of U.S. policy from the earliest days of the cold war, dating to National Security Council (NSC) Report 58/2 of December 1949, which considered Eastern Europe to be the “weakest link” in the Soviet empire.¹¹ J. F. Brown nicely captured its implications for the Soviet system: “One of the ironies of 1989 and after was the way reform in Eastern Europe, made possible by Gorbachev, interacted with Soviet developments much to his embarrassment and political disadvantage. Would the East European revolution devour its own patron?”¹² The question anticipated the answer.

10. Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider’s Account of U.S. Policy in Europe, 1989–92* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 8.

11. “Report to the President by the National Security Council (NSC 58/2): United States Policy toward the Soviet Satellite States in Eastern Europe,” December 8, 1949, in *The Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949*, 5 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 42–54.

12. J. F. Brown, *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 59.

Soviet and U.S. Assessments

What did Soviet and U.S. leaders make of these developments? Newly declassified documents from the Soviet and U.S. archives reveal strikingly similar conclusions about the crisis of Communist rule in Eastern Europe. A secret memorandum from the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU to Aleksandr Yakovlev, dated February 1989,¹³ described the “prolonged crisis of the model of socialism” in Eastern Europe and the “lack of legitimacy” of those political systems. “The ruling parties cannot rule in the old way any more,” yet “new ‘rules of the game’ . . . have not been worked out.” In this precrisis situation, the memorandum continued, three future scenarios presented themselves: a peaceful path of democratization led by the ruling parties, regime capitulation following a political crisis, and preservation of the existing system through repression. Of the three—reform, revolution, or repression—the first was seen as preferable, in that the analysis presumed that the ruling parties would be able to retain control of the situation internally and would remain allied with Moscow externally.

Another memorandum written for Yakovlev by Marina Silvan-skaia of the Bogomolov Institute, also dated February 1989,¹⁴ likewise described “crisis symptoms . . . in all spheres of public life” in Eastern Europe. It distinguished between those countries where crises had broken out into the open (Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia) with all the others (Czechoslovakia, GDR, Bulgaria, and Romania), where conflict was also acute even if less easily detected.

13. From the National Security Archive, George Washington University, Washington, DC.

14. From the National Security Archive, George Washington University, Washington, DC. A similar but more cautious treatment of the same topic by the Bogomolov Institute (The Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System) was presented at a conference held in Alexandria, Virginia, July 6–8, 1988, and published in *Problems of Communism* 37, nos. 3–4 (May–August 1988).

In the first group, the analysis contrasted the “most favorable” scenario of regime-led reform with the “pessimistic scenario” of conservative retrenchment. However, the memorandum found the situation in countries in the second group more dangerous as the failure of their regimes to undertake long overdue reforms had made a popular explosion more likely. These trends could well lead in some countries to internal power sharing and external “Finlandization,” in which “they would pass from the sphere of monopolistic influence of the USSR into the sphere of mutual and joint influence of the Soviet Union and the European ‘Common Market.’” Then came the sanguine conclusion that “this process not only poses no threat to the interests of the USSR” but, on the contrary, could facilitate Soviet ties with the whole of Europe.

On the U.S. side, a National Intelligence Estimate issued in May 1988 reached similar conclusions. It found that Gorbachev’s policies had “increased the potential for instability in Eastern Europe” but also “expanded the scope for diversity and experimentation.” Its three scenarios of popular upheaval, sweeping reform, or conservative backlash all pointed to diminished Soviet influence in the region. The Estimate did not exclude Soviet military intervention but noted that sweeping reforms pushed from below and led, at least nominally, by the ruling party would be hard to arrest. The Estimate waffled on how Gorbachev would respond to such a challenge: “His choice—by no means a foregone conclusion—would hinge on the scope of change and the perceived challenge to Soviet influence in the region.”¹⁵

In an October 1988 memorandum for Gorbachev, Georgi Shakhnazarov asked essentially the same question: “What shall we do if the social instability that is now taking an increasingly threatening character in Hungary will combine with another round of trouble-making in Poland, demonstrations of ‘Charter 77’ in Czechoslova-

15. “Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe Under Gorbachev,” *At Cold War’s End*.

kia, etc.? In other words, do we have a plan in case of a crisis which might encompass the entire socialist world or a large part of it?"¹⁶ Clearly, Gorbachev had no such plan, nor did he appreciate the consequences of his policies for the fragile regimes in Eastern Europe. As I put it in 1987, "For many in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev represented fresh hope for the gradual transformation of their political systems toward greater efficiency, diversity, and openness . . . [but] he projected a self-confidence that struck some as self-delusion in his ability to manage the process of change he had unleashed."¹⁷

Meeting with Hungarian Communist Party leader Karoly Grosz in Moscow in March 1989, Gorbachev stressed the need to "draw boundaries." He told Grosz, "Democracy is much needed," but "the limit . . . is the safekeeping of socialism and assurance of stability."¹⁸ Those boundaries were soon to be toppled, as Gorbachev's foreign policy adviser Anatoli Cherniaev foresaw in May 1989: "Inside me depression and alarm are growing, the sense of crisis of the Gorbachevian Idea. He is prepared to go far. But what does it mean? . . . He has no concept of where we are going."¹⁹

Meanwhile, pressures were building in Hungary and Poland, where change was driven by revolutionary pressures from below and reform sentiment from above, by some segments of the ruling establishment, to produce a "refolution," to use Timothy Garton

16. Georgi Kh. Shakhnazarov, *Tsena Svobody* [The Price of Freedom], 368–369. Trans. Vladislav Zubok for the National Security Archive.

17. Robert L. Hutchings, *Soviet–East European Relations: Consolidation and Conflict*, rev. ed. (1983; repr., Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), xxvi–xxvii.

18. Memorandum of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Karoly Grosz, General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, Moscow, March 23–24, 1989 (Top Secret), from *Political Transition in Hungary, 1989–90; International Conference, June 12, 1999*, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest; A Compendium of Declassified Documents.

19. Excerpts from the diary of Anatoli Cherniaev, May 2, 1989, from Anatoli Cherniaev, *The Diary of an Assistant to the President of the USSR*, trans. Vladislav Zubok, (Moscow: TERRA, 1997).

Ash's term.²⁰ In Hungary, the ouster of veteran Communist leader Janos Kadar in May 1988 was a delayed acknowledgment of the collapse of "Kadarism," the tacit social contract that had evolved in the decades after the Hungarian Revolution and its bloody suppression. The deteriorating economy meant that the regime could no longer fulfill public expectations of steady improvements in material living standards. Moreover, the passing of the 1956 generation, coupled with the demonstration effect of Soviet reforms, meant that the sense of self-imposed limits was giving way to a new impatience for fundamental change. Rival centers of power sprang up as reformist figures within the Communist Party joined forces with dissidents outside the ruling establishment. By early 1989, the Hungarian regime had lost its capacity to govern and was obliged to enter into roundtable negotiations with the democratic opposition.

Karoly Grosz told a meeting of the Hungarian Communist Party's Political Committee in early 1989 that he envisioned a political opening that would lead to a "transition period" lasting until around 1995 before real power sharing would take place. Another speaker disagreed with this sanguine forecast, noting that "we are sometimes accused, not only by orthodox party members, of being . . . a Political Committee which aims at liquidating its own party."²¹ A month later, Gorbachev declined to interfere when Hungarian prime minister Miklos Nemeth informed him that Hungary intended to remove its border controls with Austria. "Of course," Nemeth added, in anticipation of the East German emigration tide he was about to unleash, "We will have to talk to comrades from the GDR."²²

20. Timothy Garton Ash, "Revolutions: The Springtime of Two Nations," *New York Review of Books*, June 15, 1989.

21. Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Miklos Nemeth, March 3, 1989, Doc. 13 from *Political Transition in Hungary, 1989-90*.

22. Meeting of the Political Committee of the MSzMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers Party), February 7, 1989, Doc. 9 from *Political Transition in Hungary, 1989-90*.

In Poland, nearly a decade after the delegalization of Solidarity and the imposition of a “state of war,” the regime of General Wojciech Jaruzelski had yet to establish political authority or implement a reform program to arrest the alarming deterioration of the economy. Having failed to suppress Solidarity, and having seen its reform program roundly repudiated in a national referendum in 1987, the Jaruzelski regime was forced to open direct talks with the Solidarity-led opposition. As mentioned earlier, the “anti-crisis pact” of 1988 gave way to the Roundtable Agreement of 1989 and soon thereafter to the rout of communism in Poland.

Western Europe: Toward Greater Unity

While the countries of Eastern Europe increasingly were going their own ways, the European Community was embarking on a bold new drive for unity, heralded by the Single European Act of 1986. The political impetus came, in part, from two seemingly contradictory perceptions of U.S. power: that the decline of U.S. power obliged the Europeans to assume a larger leadership role, and that continued and unwelcome U.S. dominance in European affairs could only be offset by a more cohesive and effective European policy. Yet the two perceptions were not as contradictory as they might have appeared. Well before 1989, the transatlantic relationship was in a state of flux in which the institutional relationships created in the early cold war period no longer reflected the real balance of U.S. and European power and influence. U.S. predominance was preserved institutionally even while it was receding in actuality. Thus, however annoying it may have been for U.S. policymakers, it was not altogether illogical for Western Europeans to conclude that the United States was both retreating and overbearing.²³

Similarly, U.S. attitudes toward European unity had always been ambivalent, fluctuating along a spectrum from partnership

23. The French in particular were prone to argue one day that the United States was retreating into isolationism and the next day that the United States was bent on perpetuating its domination of Europe through NATO.

to rivalry. In the immediate postwar period, the United States had given strong support to the goal of European unity. Future secretary of state John Foster Dulles was the secretary of the American Committee for a United States of Europe in 1947 and 1948, and Marshall Plan aid explicitly required European coordination through the Organization for European Economic Cooperation and so created a framework for the future European Economic Community. Before the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, President Eisenhower remarked that this would be “one of the finest days in the history of the free world, perhaps even more so than winning the war.”²⁴ Of course, even in those early days and certainly later, U.S. attitudes about European unity were ambivalent. The United States wanted a more capable Europe but not necessarily a more willful one; U.S. administrations often seemed to support European unity in the abstract but to oppose it in practice when European aspirations collided with U.S. aims. Toward the end of the cold war, it was U.S. resistance to a more united Europe, rather than encouragement of it, that provided the impulse for greater unity.

The Single European Act, which targeted 1992 as the date for the achievement of Economic and Monetary Union, had its genesis in the global recession of the early 1980s and the period of “high Reaganism” in U.S. foreign policy. The driving forces behind “1992” were many and varied,²⁵ but the most salient was that the global recession and the ensuing period of stagflation in Western Europe had led EC leaders to a common conclusion: that no European economy could successfully pursue national economic goals without careful coordination with its partners. As negotiations entered the final stage, European thinking was influenced by the European Commission’s White Paper as well as the so-called Cecchini

24. Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 1992), 375.

25. For a review, see Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 314–378.

Report prepared for the Commission under the title “The Costs of Non-Europe.”²⁶ Citing the growing interdependence of Western European economies as well as their vulnerabilities if they acted alone in a more competitive global economy, the report helped galvanize political and corporate support for the single market.

There was a parallel and reinforcing political dynamic springing from European alarm over the unpredictability and unreliability of U.S. foreign policy—beginning with the erratic twists and turns of the Carter administration to the early bellicosity of the Reagan administration. The final straw for many Western European governments was the U.S.-Soviet summit in Reykjavik, at which President Reagan negotiated away, without so much as consulting his NATO allies, the very INF (intermediate-range nuclear force) missiles the Americans had insisted on deploying shortly before. (As will be seen, there was a similar and equally divisive INF controversy in the Warsaw Pact, as a Soviet-led “peace offensive” aimed against INF deployments in Western Europe boomeranged into Eastern Europe instead.) Thus, as was the case with respect to economic policy, Western European leaders increasingly came to the judgment that concerted action within and by the European Community was required to provide an effective counterweight to U.S. policy.

The reversal in French policy was particularly abrupt as President François Mitterrand, having tried and failed after his election in 1981 to address France’s economic woes through national policies, had done a complete turnaround by 1983. Influenced by his finance minister, Jacques Delors, Mitterrand made the historic decision to embrace the single market and to fuse France’s political and economic future with Europe’s.

As president of the European Commission after 1985, Delors also played a key role in projecting a vision of a Grand Europe—a new European ideology few politicians save Prime Minister

26. Paolo Cecchini, *The European Challenge 1992* (Aldershot, England: Wildwood House, 1988). Although this abbreviated version was not published until 1988, the preparation of the multivolume sectoral studies influenced Western European thinking just as the Single European Act was being considered.

Thatcher had the temerity to challenge.²⁷ Less obviously, Delors and the EC were overseeing a process of “informal integration”—from the bottom up, as it were—whereby more political and economic activities were being taken over by EC agencies in Brussels. As a legal matter, Title III of the Single European Act codified European Political Cooperation (EPC), that is, foreign policy coordination, as a recognized act under international law and renamed it the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).²⁸

Apart from aiming to counter U.S. preponderance, the evolution of European foreign policy coordination from EPC to CFSP was responding to new opportunities and challenges in Europe. EPC had been created in 1970 to provide a mechanism for coordinating EC approaches through the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and CFSP was a political counterpart to the rapidly developing relationship between the EC and the countries of Eastern Europe. Thus, the Community’s internal development and its external evolution—“deepening” and “widening”—always went hand in hand, although the Americans were slow to discern this linkage.

From the beginning, the very existence of a peaceful and cooperative European Community served as a magnet for the countries of Eastern Europe—or, better, as a beacon, to use the English translation of the EC’s PHARE program of economic assistance to the region.²⁹ EC efforts to establish formal relations with the region

27. See, e.g., Delors’ speech at the opening ceremony of the College of Europe at Bruges, October 1989, and compare it with Prime Minister Thatcher’s speech at that ceremony a year before, as excerpted in Trevor Salmon and Sir William Nicoll, eds., *Building European Union: A Documentary History and Analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 208–220. See also Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), esp. 727–754.

28. Simon Nuttall, “Two Decades of EPC Performance,” in *Foreign Policy of the European Union: From EPC to CFSP and Beyond*, ed. Elfriede Regelsberger, Philippe de Schoutheete de Tervarent, and Wolfgang Wessels (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 20–23.

29. PHARE simultaneously served as an acronym for Poland/Hungary Aid for Restructuring of Economies.

began with the period of détente in the early 1970s. In 1974, the EC Council offered to negotiate bilateral trade agreements as well as extend Most Favored Nation status to individual Eastern European countries. Only Yugoslavia and Romania accepted; the others hewed to the Soviet position that an agreement with the Moscow-led and controlled Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) had to precede and supersede any agreements with individual countries. These matters stood until Gorbachev opened the way for the signing of an EC-CMEA declaration that allowed individual CMEA members to negotiate bilateral trade agreements with the EC. While these negotiations were beginning, the EC member countries were busy implementing the terms of the 1986 Single European Act.³⁰ This exerted a powerful magnetic pull, conveying to Eastern European governments the benefits of economic cooperation with a rapidly integrating EC market as well as the costs of failing to do so.

It is not that the European Community had an overarching political strategy with respect to Eastern Europe; indeed, in early 1989 Delors expressed his personal regret that political cooperation was lagging behind and that the 12 EC member countries could not agree on common positions.³¹ Yet the gradual, piecemeal progress toward bilateral trade agreements had created a process for East-West economic negotiation and for an unparalleled degree of EC intrusion into key economic sectors in Eastern Europe. With domestic remedies long since exhausted and with Moscow in no position to help, the Eastern European economies had nowhere else to turn but westward, and they had to do so on Western political and economic terms.

Thus, by 1989, Henry Kissinger could ask a disconcerted Gorbachev, “How are you going to react if Eastern Europe wants to

30. See Alan Mayhew, *Recreating Europe: The European Union's Policy Towards Central and Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6–20; and Karen E. Smith, *The Making of EU Foreign Policy: The Case of Eastern Europe* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 22–42.

31. Smith, *The Making of EU Foreign Policy*, 46.

join the EC?” Gorbachev had no answer but later told his own Politburo, “The peoples of those countries will ask: ‘What about the Soviet Union, what kind of leash will it use to keep our countries in?’ They simply do not know that if they pulled this leash harder, it would break.”³²

East-West Relations in the Era of “Divisible Détente”

In the 1970s, U.S.-Soviet relations and East-West relations were in plausible harmony. Although the premises of the two approaches differed, the Nixon administration’s détente policy coincided with and largely supported West German *Ostpolitik* under Chancellor Willy Brandt. After the cooling of U.S.-Soviet relations in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the imposition of martial law in Poland, however, superpower relations and intra-European relations increasingly diverged.

Fearing the advent of a new ice age in East-West relations, Western European and especially West German leaders aimed to insulate intra-European détente from the vagaries of superpower relations. In a May 1980 meeting (on the occasion of Marshal Tito’s funeral), Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and East German party boss Erich Honecker confirmed their shared interest in insulating inter-German relations from superpower conflicts and agreed to use their influence within their respective alliances to improve U.S.-Soviet relations. After the meeting, Schmidt said, “I was moved to hear from Honecker and [Polish party leader Edward] Gierek the same things that I told them: that we shouldn’t let ourselves be pulled in if we can avoid it somehow.”³³ By the end of the 1980s, the West German Social Democrats were proposing various schemes for a

32. Gorbachev’s remarks from a meeting of the Politburo, January 21, 1989, from the notes of Anatoli Cherniaev, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow, trans. Svetlana Savranskaia.

33. Klaus Boelling, *Die fernern Nachbarn: Erfahrung in der DDR* (Hamburg: Gruner & Jahr, 1983), 78–82, as cited in Eric C. Frey, *Division and Détente: The Germanies and Their Alliances* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 146n3.

nuclear-free zone in central Europe in the spirit of “common security.”³⁴

“Divisible détente” it was called, and West German initiatives were reciprocated on the other side of the East-West dividing line, particularly after the Soviet walkout from the Geneva disarmament talks in late 1983. Trying to forestall West European INF deployment, the Soviet Union launched a massive “peace offensive” that failed in Western Europe but reverberated unexpectedly in Eastern Europe. For most of the Eastern European regimes, the preservation of European détente was no longer negotiable; it had become an essential element of political and economic stability. What ensued was an unprecedented and public breakdown of Warsaw Pact unity. Romania refused to join the Soviet-led boycott of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, the East Germans expressed their determination to “limit the damage” to inter-German relations, and the Hungarians and others defended the “role of small states” in promoting détente.³⁵ This made for some odd political bedfellows in Eastern Europe, with the dogmatic East Germans aligning themselves on foreign policy issues with the reform-minded Hungarians.³⁶

These trends were reflected in the structure of East-West relations as well. The Helsinki process had offered new opportunities for intra-European interaction in arms control and other arenas. Owing partly to the European Community’s political cooperation

34. Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe’s Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, 1993), 312–330.

35. See, e.g., Ronald D. Asmus, *East Berlin and Moscow: The Documentation of a Dispute* (Munich: Radio Free Europe Research, 1988); Charles Gati, “The Soviet Empire: Alive but not Well,” *Problems of Communism* (March–April 1985): 73–86; Frey, *Division and Détente*, 88–118.

36. At a meeting with Hungarian party chief Karoly Grosz in September 1988, Honecker recalled that “at the time of the stationing of the missiles in western Europe, the SED (East German Communist Party) was pleased with how the fraternal Hungarian party reacted by adopting a position similar to that of the SED.” Zentrales Parteiarhiv, J IV/931, *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv*, Berlin, trans. Catherine Nielsen, National Security Archive.

and coordination within the CSCE context, what started as a bloc-to-bloc affair (with the neutrals and nonaligned countries in the middle) soon broke free of the bipolar framework. By the late 1980s there had emerged a “configuration that no longer fit the original dramaturgical scheme” of East-West competition within the CSCE framework. A new “sociogram” of support for the CSCE process developed, consisting of the two German states, the neutral and nonaligned Caucus, central European countries that urgently needed détente (Poland and Hungary), and other countries, such as Romania and France, that simply wanted to loosen the grip of the two superpowers. Thus, CSCE as a “field of strategic interaction” had evolved considerably by the late 1980s. Where once there had been “Western proposals” or “Eastern proposals,” arms control and other initiatives increasingly came out of ad hoc sponsor groups transcending the East-West divide.³⁷

Thus, paradoxically, what appeared to signal a resumption of East-West confrontation in the early 1980s disguised a profound loosening of cold war tensions as Europeans, East and West, carved out new areas of cooperation. What looked like a new ice age turned out to be the beginning of a profound thaw.

West European Perspectives on the Eve of Revolution

The major European powers were divided over how to respond to the opportunities and challenges posed by Mikhail Gorbachev’s new thinking. Where the Germans saw new opportunities in the East and were eager to exploit them, the British saw new dangers for the West and were at pains to offset them, while the French saw new opportunities for “overcoming Yalta” but doubted their capacity to contain a newly resurgent Germany.

British perspectives were informed by a deep, enduring skepticism of the reformability of Communist systems, whether in the

37. Heinrich Schneider, “The Twelve/Fifteen’s Conference Diplomacy,” in Regelsberger et al., *Foreign Policy of the European Union: From EPC to CFSP and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner Publishers, 1996), 237–241.

Soviet Union or among the countries of Eastern Europe. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher turned this perspective into a paradox: these systems must change but cannot. They must change, given the manifest superiority of liberal democracy and the conspicuous failures of Soviet-type systems; yet they cannot do so from within because the same rigidities that produced failure also engendered a reactionary immobility in the ruling apparatus.³⁸ While believing these systems were doomed to collapse in the longer term, she had little sense of *how* this might occur—save, one assumes, through revolutionary upheaval—and was therefore more impressed than most with their staying power in the short term. Meanwhile, her focus was on assuring the cohesion of the Western alliance during what was likely to be a prolonged and skillful Soviet “peace offensive”; her worry was that a lax and irresolute West, above all West Germany, would be seduced by high-sounding but empty Soviet peace initiatives.

British analysis coincided neatly with British interests, for the UK had less reason to want to disrupt the status quo than most of its continental partners. Its preoccupations were with managing a difficult process of adjustment with the European Community in ways that preserved British freedom of maneuver while maintaining the integrity of the Western Alliance and the “special relationship” with the United States. It is not quite right that the British “never developed a grand design for Europe,” as one writer suggested.³⁹ The design, offering consistency if not imagination, was status quo in the West and “status quo plus” in the East, where the hope was that gradual political liberalization would lead to a more secure, though essentially conflictual, East-West relationship. Execution of this design hinged on U.S. leadership; hence Mrs. Thatcher’s impatience with the Bush administration’s initial slowness to engage Gorbachev, which she felt was eroding Western resolve and

38. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 452–453.

39. Edwina Moreton, “The View from London,” in Lincoln Gordon et al., *Eroding Empire: Western Relations with Eastern Europe* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1987), 246.

common purpose. (Her efforts to mediate between the two leaders were reminiscent of similar attempts by previous British prime ministers, from Macmillan on, to serve as “honest broker” between Washington and Moscow.)

If Thatcher betrayed occasional impatience with the Americans, her real antagonism was directed at the West Germans, whom she believed had “gone wobbly” on security and were succumbing to public antinuclear pressures. The immediate issue of contention—Bonn’s push for early negotiations to reduce short-range nuclear forces (SNF)—was part of a larger worry about the complete denuclearization of Europe, leaving Western Europe hostage to Soviet conventional forces. British thinking in early 1989, in short, saw few prospects for meaningful change in the East and many dangers for the cohesion of the West. The main task for British diplomacy was to prod the Americans into organizing a cogent, coordinated Western response to Gorbachev that would both test the seriousness of Soviet new thinking and rein in those, like the Germans, who might be tempted down the garden path of denuclearization.

“Gorbymania” never caught on in France as it did in Germany or Italy. In many ways, France shared British skepticism about the prospects for change in the East and certainly shared British concerns about further denuclearization. Having launched early on a campaign of “disintoxication” to cleanse the French Left of delusions about Franco-Soviet friendship, President Mitterrand had remained cool to Soviet blandishments even after Gorbachev chose Paris for his first official visit to a Western country. Additionally, he worried that further nuclear force reductions would diminish the significance of France’s independent *force de frappe*, even as a more fluid situation in central Europe threatened to upset the vision of an EC-centered Europe under French and German co-leadership. As one French analyst put it in late 1988, “De Gaulle’s France of the mid-1960s was a revisionist power, intent on modifying the existing European security system. Today France is, at heart, a status-quo power, whereas Germany’s deepest hope must be to transcend the division of Europe between East and West. . . .

As long as Germany's hope remains France's fear . . . the French-German nucleus of Europe will . . . remain central but inadequate."⁴⁰

To consider the France of the late 1980s a "status-quo power" makes sense only in the context of two seemingly contradictory factors: undiminished French ambitions to "overcome Yalta" and the substantial evolution in French strategic thinking, particularly during the 1980s, toward fusing France's future with that of Europe.⁴¹ As Mitterrand put it in a November 1988 interview, "Yalta is the symbol of the division of Europe into zones of power and influence between the Soviet Union and the United States. I cannot make do with it. My dream is of a reconciled and independent Europe."⁴² Yet, in French thinking, this ambition had to be deferred until "European construction" was complete, and this was still a long way off. While remaining deeply dissatisfied with the status quo in this larger sense, France was even more hesitant than Great Britain to disturb it in the near term, lest rapid change in the East undermine EC integration before Germany had been safely tied up in a more federalized Europe.⁴³ Thus France pursued the deliberate aim of decelerating the process of change in the East while accelerating integration in the EC. It was an approach that had much to recommend it from the point of view of French interests, but it presumed vastly more influence than France actually had to retard history's course. It was a race against time, and France was losing.

The West Germans, meanwhile, were not to be restrained. Their attitudes were expressed in Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's controversial speech in Davos in 1987 entitled "*Nehmen Wir Gorbatschows 'Neue Politik' beim Wort.*" It is interesting that

40. Dominique Moisi, "French Foreign Policy: The Challenge of Adaptation," *Foreign Affairs* 27 (Fall 1988): 157–158.

41. Steven Philip Kramer, "The French Question," *Washington Quarterly* (Autumn 1991): 83–96; and Samuel F. Wells Jr., "Mitterrand's International Policies," *Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1988): 59–75.

42. *Liberation*, November 23, 1988.

43. Ronald Tiersky, "France in the New Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 131–146.

the title—literally, “Let’s Take Gorbachev’s ‘New Policy’ at Its Word”—was rendered in the foreign ministry’s official English translation as “Let’s Put Mr. Gorbachev’s ‘New Policy’ to the Test.” The latter, tougher-sounding title was actually closer to the sense of the text, which did not imply that Gorbachev should be taken at face value but rather called on the West to take his policies seriously and challenge him to translate his words into concrete actions. It was the more provocative “at its word” that took hold, however, and gave rise to fears that the Federal Republic had succumbed to “Gorbymania.” (Much was made of opinion polls showing that only 24 percent of the West German public considered the Soviet Union a military threat,⁴⁴ but polls in Italy, the UK, and even the United States yielded similar results.)

To understand German approaches in terms of an assessment of Gorbachev is to get the analytic cart before the strategic horse. Policy toward the Soviet Union was part of a larger German *Ostpolitik*, which in turn was driven by *Deutschlandpolitik*, aimed at expanding ties with the “other” Germany. Facilitating the ultimate goal of German unity, or at least doing nothing to retard it, was the determining objective. *Ostpolitik*, as it had evolved, pursued “change through rapprochement.” Its logic was that reassuring Moscow would allow it to relax its grip on Eastern Europe, giving reformers there greater leeway to pursue gradual change. Regime-led reform, in turn, would produce greater stability and confidence, which would encourage Eastern Europe and Moscow alike to undertake further steps toward reform. The result of this “virtuous circle” of reassurance and reform would be an easing to the division of Europe and of Germany, making possible eventual rapprochement between the two German states.

Thus, West German policy was not wedded to “stability” any more than France’s was wedded to the status quo. The German aim, in best dialectical fashion, was stable change, born of the belief that positive change could occur only under conditions of stability.

44. *Economist*, May 27, 1989, 47, citing a 1988 West German poll.

The strategy depended on reassurance, gradualism, and predictability: West German goals, as Helmut Kohl put it in early 1988, were “long-term stable cooperation with the Soviet Union” and its emergence as a “more predictable security partner.”⁴⁵ In this concept, too much détente was as risky as too little, for rapid change could be seen as threatening to Eastern European and Soviet leaders and risked converting the “virtuous cycle” into a “vicious cycle” of revolt and repression.⁴⁶ (This predisposition stood in marked contrast to the approach, favored in American conservative circles, of doing nothing to help or reassure the Eastern European and Soviet regimes but rather letting them be hoisted by their own petards.)

Although some on the West German left had argued, as has been seen, for the *Trennbarkeit* (divisibility) of East-West détente, both Kohl and Genscher proceeded from the conviction that *Deutschlandpolitik* and *Ostpolitik* could not be divorced from broader Western approaches toward the East. As Horst Teltschik, Kohl’s national security adviser, put it in June 1989, “The West German government knows . . . that its freedom of action with respect to the Soviet Union or the other Warsaw Pact countries basically depends on the superpowers’ relationship to one another. The better and more constructive the relationship between the USA and the USSR, the greater the freedom the small and mid-size countries in Eastern and Western Europe to cultivate relations with the leading power of the other alliance and among each other.”⁴⁷

45. Speech at the Twenty-fifth International *Webrkunde* Conference, February 6, 1988, as cited in Guenter Muechler and Klaus Hofmann, *Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of German Unity: A Biography* (Bonn: Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 1992), 144–145.

46. Josef Joffe, “The View from Bonn,” in Gordon et al., *Eroding Empire*, 151–153.

47. Horst Teltschik, “Gorbachev’s Reform Policy and the Outlook for East-West Relations,” *Aussenpolitik* 40, no. 3 (June 1989): 210. Interestingly, at the beginning of the 1980s, East German party leader Erich Honecker told his party congress essentially the same thing: “We do not dream of the possibility of maintaining good relations with the Federal Republic of Germany . . . when relations between the USA and the USSR are aggravated.” *Neues Deutschland*, April 12, 1981.

Hence German ambitions required bringing the Americans and their European partners around to a new, coordinated pattern of engagement with the East. Kohl's meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow in October 1988 and Gorbachev's reciprocal visit to Bonn in June 1989 were designed to accomplish just that. In Washington, anticipation of the Gorbachev visit, together with Teltschik's admonition that "we ought not to ask too much of Gorbachev,"⁴⁸ lent urgency to the articulation of a U.S. strategy. Indeed, between German eagerness, British skepticism, and French ambivalence, there was ample room for a U.S. tactic that could weld a coordinated Western approach toward Gorbachev and test the limits of Soviet new thinking.

U.S. Diplomacy at the End of the Cold War

For policymakers in Washington, the April 1989 Polish Roundtable Agreement, which called for freely contested national elections, was the mobilizing event. It was apparent then that the Roundtable Agreement, if fully implemented, would be the beginning of the end of Communist rule in Poland. And if communism was finished in Poland, it was finished everywhere in Eastern Europe, including East Germany, which in turn meant that German unification had just leapt onto the international agenda.⁴⁹ These, of course, were very large questions; Washington's appreciation of the potential for such sweeping change was by no means a prediction that it would actually occur, much less that it could occur in a matter of months. Yet the potentialities inherent in these events underscored how much was at stake and how critical the U.S. role would be.

48. Teltschik, "Gorbachev's Reform Policy," 203.

49. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 9. Outside of government, William Hyland had come to a similar judgment: "If there is some kind of new order in Hungary, Poland, and perhaps Czechoslovakia, with less of a Soviet presence . . . then the question is whether that can be applied to East Germany. And if it is, aren't you just a step or so away from the unification of Germany . . . ?" Cited by Don Oberdorfer in *From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1991* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 346.

Accordingly, the Bush administration developed in early 1989 an overarching strategic design aimed at bringing about the end of the cold war. As I put it in *American Diplomacy*,

American grand strategy involved a sequence of steps. The first was to alter the psychology of East-West relations away from an accommodation based on existing “political realities” toward a much more radical vision of Europe’s future. The second was to restore the cohesion of the Western alliance . . . and to begin building a new transatlantic partnership that encouraged and accommodated a stronger, more united Western Europe. The third was to place Eastern Europe at the top of the international agenda and to engage American leadership on behalf of political liberalization and independence. Then, as U.S.-Soviet relations had been put on hold while the first three steps were being carried out, the fourth was to challenge the Soviet leadership to respond to specific proposals. These proposals were consistent with the spirit and promise of Gorbachev’s “new thinking” but went well beyond its practice to date; they would address the sources rather than the consequences of East-West conflict.⁵⁰

Thus the various strands of policy were all connected. Eastern Europe had logical priority: it was, as President Bush argued in his first foreign policy address, where the cold war began and where it had to end.⁵¹ Improved U.S.-Soviet relations, as Bush elsewhere noted, “would reduce the pressure on the nations of Eastern Europe, especially those on the cutting edge of reform” and so facilitate their self-liberation.⁵² And forging the closest possible unity in the Western alliance called for unequivocal U.S. support for the proposition that a “strong, united Europe means a strong America.”⁵³ Within Europe, as a March 1989 memorandum to

50. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 46.

51. Speech in Hamtramck, Michigan, April 17, 1989, cited in *American Diplomacy*, 38.

52. Speech in Leiden, the Netherlands, July 17, 1989, cited in *American Diplomacy*, 70.

53. Speech in Boston, May 21, 1989, cited in *American Diplomacy*, 42.

President Bush argued, “the top priority for American foreign policy . . . should be the fate of the Federal Republic of Germany. . . . Even if we make strides in overcoming the division of Europe through greater openness and pluralism, we cannot have a vision for Europe’s future that does not include an approach to the ‘German question.’”⁵⁴ It was from this analysis that the idea of the United States and Germany as “partners in leadership” arose, not as a rhetorical flourish but as a serious judgment about Germany’s role in Europe then and in the future.

The ultimate hope, as President Bush put it in a July 17 speech in Leiden, the Netherlands, was “that the unnatural division of Europe will now come to an end—that the Europe behind the wall will join its neighbors to the West, prosperous and free. . . .” Citing Winston Churchill’s 1946 speech at the same pulpit in Leiden’s Pieterskerk, Bush looked to the belated vindication of Churchill’s vision for Europe: “The great wheel has swung full circle. . . . Let freedom reign.”⁵⁵

54. Memorandum from National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft to President Bush entitled “The NATO Summit,” March 20, 1989, as cited in Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 28.

55. Speech in Leiden, cited in *American Diplomacy*, 70.