



France and the Reunification of Germany

Leadership in the Workshop
of World Politics

TILO SCHABERT

Second Edition

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Foreword by Jean Musitelli

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FOREWORD

Thirty years ago a new page in European history was turned.¹ The profound and totally unexpected shock caused by the Fall of the Berlin Wall during the night of 9–10 November 1989 was to lead, one year later in Paris, at the Summit of the Organization and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to the solemn funeral of the Cold War and the end of the division of Europe, with the reunification of Germany as its most obvious symbol. Around François Mitterrand, host of the conference, thirty-three heads of state and government had gathered—among them George Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev, Helmut Kohl, Margaret Thatcher—who had been the major actors in this exceptional sequence of events. For those who, like myself, were present at the occasion, the emotional charge was palpable. All who took part expressed their hope to see a pacified and more united world born from the new conditions.

Now, thirty years later, Tilo Schabert revisits this moment of history, which he knows particularly well, having scrupulously analysed the available documentation and interviewed some of the main witnesses. In the present edition of his book, he enhances his intimate knowledge of facts and persons by means of a more detached evaluation made possible by the lapse of time and new documentary evidence, with the same ambition as before to understand and explain what happened at the time. It really was a singular history, I must say, that inscribed itself during those years, a history whose scenario nobody could have foreseen. And it has to be added that this history has been considerably distorted by certain authors more motivated by short-sighted ideological considerations or polemical intentions than by the love of truth. One of the most controversial topics refers

to the attitude and the role played by the French President François Mitterrand, who was accused even, and most vehemently, in his own country, to have sided against the reunification of Germany. A German historian was needed to tell the French people how to read their history properly and to interpret that decisive episode of their recent past. He was to open the eyes of people blinded by political passion or common opinion, making them aware of this crucial moment in the history of Europe when everything could have collapsed into chaos. To launch into such an enterprise demanded a considerable amount of intellectual intrepidity as well as the courage to think against the grain, with the strong will “to represent things as they are in real truth, rather than as they are imagined”, according to the formula of Machiavelli. Tilo Schabert accepted the challenge, with perfect objectivity, without an ounce of complaisance, driven by the wish to understand and explain, motivated by the supreme disinterestedness of someone who has nothing in view but the quest for what had really happened. With *Mitterrand et la réunification allemande* (German edition 2002, French version 2005) he has written a key study for the understanding of the complex and intense quality of the relations between France and Germany at the end of the twentieth century. Of this book, I had the chance to assist in the creation.

I met Tilo Schabert for the first time on 3 December 1991, shortly after the events just mentioned. I was then government spokesman of President François Mitterrand, after I had been his diplomatic counsellor. At the Élysée, we were restlessly engaged in preparing the European Council of Maastricht, scheduled to take place a few days later. My functions obliged me to receive plenty of visitors, from France and from abroad, journalists, political scientists, historians who wrote about François Mitterrand and his political and diplomatic activities. They came to test their ideas or round off their information. Since our first meeting I realized that the project of Tilo Schabert was of a different kind, driven by a different ambition. That it was neither of an anecdotic character nor did it pursue a preconceived goal. That he was aiming at something that he had not yet fully identified, but towards which he was driven by a strong intuition.

His reflection was then oriented towards issues such as the mechanism of power, the alchemy of political decision-making, the functions of the modern Prince. His approach interested me immediately, for I had always found that there was much to learn, for officials immersed in political routine, from the distant view of those who regard things from the outside, provided their attitude is neither malicious nor complaisant but

severe and sharp-eyed. Now, the view of Professor Schabert was not only that of a well-informed observer, which would already have been something out of the ordinary. It was the view, sharp and penetrating, of a philosopher who contemplates the business of politics by means of cognitive categories generally unknown by professional commentators of political affairs. A voice whispered to me that this visitor was not uninteresting and by no means unworthy of my confidence. The latter, in my position, was crucial for everything else, especially for opening some useful doors to him. This is how the story began. From his early researches and his meetings with François Mitterrand and his close collaborators he gathered, among other things, a serious and sensible portrait of the president, published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* two days after the president's death, with the title "The Silence in the Centre of Power". He also wrote a penetrating short essay, "Mitterrand. A Classical Prince".

However, even more importantly, with the findings in his research the focus of his interest began to shift. By and by I saw a project of a wider reach and more urgent topicality and emerging, namely the decisive question of Mitterrand's attitude with regard to the German unification and the lack of comprehension it met with in France. I could not but encourage the new agenda, together with Hubert Védrine, the secretary general of the Élysée. To those who saw the president at work during that period, the reproaches directed against him appeared both superficial and unjust. In an article published at the beginning of 1997 in the journal *Commentaire* I asked myself, perhaps in a rather rhetorical style, whether the time would not have come at last, with regard to this chapter as well as to some others, to replace polemical fury and apologetic eagerness by historical investigation.

The publication, after several years of hard work, of Schabert's book *Wie Weltgeschichte gemacht wird: Frankreich und die deutsche Einheit* early in 2002, exceeded all our expectations. Three years later a French translation was published, enlarged and completed by the author. What made the work so precious was not only the novelty of a thesis that went against the hackneyed clichés, but also the original manner of scrutinizing the facts as well as the singular way in which, rejecting the orthodox methods of analysis, it forged its own conceptual instruments of investigation and explanation, instruments specially adapted to the object of its research. In particular I associate terms like "atelier", "workshop", "scenario" and "legend" with the Schabertian hermeneutics in progress.

The author's *tour de force* consists in the feat of making the reader enter into the "workshop where world politics is made", the place where the answer to the incredible fact of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the rush of subsequent events was being worked out. Why is the metaphor of the workshop or atelier pertinent? It is because it suggests a creative process resulting in a carefully crafted piece of work. In contrast to the ready-made solution, the standardized article that government officials and international institutions are apt to turn out. A custom-made product. *Haute-couture*. This was the point. To take the metaphor further, Tilo Schabert describes a group of *grands couturiers* engaged in mending the tissue of a world riven with conflict. The artists Bush, Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher, Kohl and Mitterrand were assisted by their ministers for foreign affairs and their collaborators. Thus under our eyes, in a collective effort a masterpiece took shape, created by strong individualities and refined day after day in an extreme dense net of communication, a constant attempt to dissolve contradictions considered insoluble only some weeks before, to reconcile the harmony of the whole with the close attention to every detail. One cannot speak highly enough of the merit of these heads of state who succeeded in creating a new type of leadership, based on the transparency of interrelations, on mutual attention and confidence in one another, on the consideration of common interests. The little tricks of classical diplomacy were left behind in favour of a coordinated quest for a general agreement that would serve the common good and at the same time satisfy particular needs. In the history of international relations one would hardly find another constellation thus finely attuned to its work.

The idea of the workshop or atelier is associated with that of the "scenario". With the totally unexpected Fall of the Wall, world politics took on the appearance of a stage where the actors were so to speak left to their own wit, deprived by the familiar repartees that they had rehearsed during forty years of Cold War. The good old clichés churned out by diplomatic routine had suddenly lost their meaning, faced by a reality that could neither be fully understood nor put into adequate words. The situation, similar to that of Pirandello's persons in search of an author, was not without its dangers. One risked to get out of the arctic conditions of Yalta into an uncontrollable conflagration. Now, after everything has turned out well, one hardly remembers the moment of extreme tension, when everything was on the razor's edge and the least error of judgement could have had fatal consequences. To answer this challenge, a scenario, as Tilo Schabert lucidly explains, is important even though it may be unreliable. It helps to

control the disorder and to render a meaning and a purpose to what has happened. During the first stage of the negotiations, a plurality of scenarios, of German, French, American or Russian origin, were presented and collided with one another, until, in a process that was not free of tensions, the contradictions were clarified and the expectations were made compatible. Tilo Schabert's book throws a new light on the process as a whole and on the construction of the *scénario français* by Mitterrand, on the stages of its composition, its variant readings, its deletions. And he firmly puts the emphasis on the continuity, at the centre of Mitterrand's reflections, of a leading idea: for him the German problem is a European problem, the unification of Germany offers a chance to strengthen the European unity (not the inverse); however, the unification has to be achieved without raising a destructive storm in the eastern part of the continent.

The historian's mission is also to deconstruct the "legends". According to common opinion, Mitterrand wanted to rein in, if not totally prevent Germany's reunification. "How and why do such legends come into being?" the author asks himself. They are never disinterested; in the present case they might have resulted more from the hostility towards the man than towards his politics, or from the habit of journalists to copy from one another's writings. Anyhow, once the *doxa* is established, it is difficult to change the direction of the current. To find fault with legends, be they *légendes noires* or *légendes dorées*, is not without risk for one who dares correct errors and expose fakes. Tilo Schabert learned this by experience when he became the object of jibes and digs from some who were responsible for the legends and whose comfort and interests he disturbed. But in every legend, however mystifying, is a rudiment of truth, which the author tracks down with considerable astuteness. If the position of Mitterrand has raised so many storms on the left bank of the Rhine, it was because during those years the German question was at the heart of the whole French political strategy. Never did French leaders plan an initiative without asking themselves: What will the Germans say? What will Chancellor Kohl think? It was a time when it was inconceivable for France to reflect on the future of Europe without associating Germany to the reflections. The author demonstrates, by means of a thorough analysis of Mitterrand's declarations and actions, that nothing uncertain or improvised and even less of anti-German resentment could be detected in his position; rather, it was the result of a prolonged mediation on the fate of Europe especially in the light of his personal experience of the tragedies that had marked its history during the twentieth century. In his eyes, one had to make certain that the

good news of the Fall of the Berlin Wall would not be thwarted by hasty initiatives. And one has to admit that Chancellor Kohl listened to the advice of his friend François and had the wisdom to concede that the reunification could not be realized against the wishes of Germany's neighbours.

To sum up, this is a book that, by the wealth of its questioning and the clearness of its presentation, by the scrupulous criticism of all available sources and the use of an analytical method which is thoroughly original and perfectly adapted to the exceptional character of the historical moment in question, leads the reader to the very heart of the decision-making process in international politics and provides him with the apt keys for its interpretation. With this work, Tilo Schabert establishes himself as one of the finest and subtlest exegetes of Mitterrand's complex world of thought, and a sharp-sighted decoder of the relation between France and Germany in its singularity and uniqueness. Interpreting politics as a phenomenon of fluidity, Schabert offers a beautiful illustration of the art of government practised by persons who are conscious of their responsibility in the face of history. Having closely observed its functioning, he believes in the creativity of political power in an age when remote observers theorize about its dissolution. His answer to a journalist, who wanted to know how he came to roam at his will through the corridors of the Élysée and to read confidential notes, he answered: "This remains a mystery for me." It is a mystery only for him. For those who know him, the explanation is simple: it is the confidence that he inspires in his interlocutors. If the historian's aim is to produce true accounts of the past that all people of good will recognize as such, the goal has been reached. I cannot think of a better illustration, for all who are interested in the way how history is made and written under our eyes, than the present book, which is a unique work of reference.

Paris

Jean Musitelli

NOTE

1. Translated from the French by Ina Schabert.

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Whitsunday, 2021
Erlangen, Germany

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Akten. Aus. Pol. Institut für Zeitgeschichte (ed.). 2012. *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland-1981*. Vol. III: 1. Oktober bis 31. Dezember 1981. Munich: Oldenbourg.
- AN Archives Nationales (Pierrefitte)
- Auss.d.E. Werner Weidenfeld (in collaboration with Peter M. Wagner and Elke Bruck), 1998. *Aussenpolitik für die deutsche Einheit. Die Entscheidungsjahre 1989–1990*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt.
- Bush Pres.Lib. George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum (Digital Collections)
- CDU Christlich Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union)
- CPSU Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- CSCE Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
- CSU Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian-Social Union)
- DBPO Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Patrick Salmon et al., eds. 2009/2010. *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Vol. VII, German Unification, 1989–1990*. London: Taylor & Francis/London-New York: Routledge
- Dipl.d.E. Hilger, Andreas (ed.). 2011. *Diplomatie für die deutsche Einheit. Dokumente des Auswärtigen Amtes zu den deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen 1989/90*, Munich: Oldenbourg.
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- ECU European Currency Unit

EEC	European Economic Community
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	Élysée Palace
FAZ	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
Gensch.	Hans-Dietrich Genscher. 1995. <i>Erinnerungen</i> . Berlin: Siedler.
Germ. Unif.	Zelikow, Philip, Rice, Condoleezza. 1995. <i>Germany Unified and Europe Transformed. A Study in Statecraft</i> . Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Germ.vop.	Galkin, Aleksandr, Chernyaev, Anatolii (eds.). 2006. <i>Mikhail Gorbachev i Germanskii vopros: sbornik dokumentov 1986–1991</i> . Moscow: Ves' mir.
Gorb.a.	Mikhail Gorbachev. 1999. <i>Wie es war. Die deutsche Wiedervereinigung</i> . Berlin: Ullstein.
Gorb.b.	Mikhail Gorbachev. 1993. <i>Gipfelgespräche. Geheime Protokolle aus meiner Amtszeit</i> . Berlin: Rowohlt.
La Déc.	Favier, Pierre, Martin-Roland, Michel. 1990–1999. <i>La décennie Mitterrand</i> , 4 vols., Paris: Seuil.
La Dipl.fr.	Vaïsse, Maurice, Wenkel, Christian (eds.). 2011. <i>La diplomatie française face à l'unification allemande. D'après des archives inédites</i> . Paris: Éditions Tallendier.
NYT	The New York Times.
PC	Private Collection.
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of the Democratic Socialism)
Pol.Dipl.	Baker, James A. 1995. <i>The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace. 1989–1992</i> . New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Union Party of Germany)
Sowj.Dok.	Galkin, Aleksandr, Tschernjajew, Anatolij (eds.). 2011. <i>Michael Gorbatschow und die deutsche Frage. Sowjetische Dokumente 1968–1991</i> . German edition: Altrichter, Helmut, Möller, Horst, Zarusky, Jürgen (eds.). Trans. J. Glaubitz. Munich: Oldenbourg.
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social-Democratic Party of Germany)
SZ	Süddeutsche Zeitung
Teltsch.	Horst Teltschik. 1991. <i>329 Tage. Innenansichten der Einigung</i> . Berlin: Siedler.
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)
Védr.	Hubert Védrine. 1996. <i>Les mondes de François Mitterrand. À l'Élysée (1981–1995)</i> . Paris: Fayard.
WorldTrans.	George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft. 1998. <i>A World Transformed</i> . New York: Alfred A. Knopf.



Introduction: The Political Science of History

ACTING OUT POLITICAL CREATIVITY

A play to be performed and no script. Imagine a group of actors on a stage involved in a play. Their situation is unusual. The curtain is rising, dramatic things are going to happen on the stage and these actors know that they are to play the leading roles. Their task is momentarily to perform and to have the drama shaped through their performance. Yet, in the midst of all the drama the actors discover that none of them, for their performance to enact, has seen a script. While shaping the drama through their acting they still have to write for it a scenario. And they perfectly know they must not fail.

The tale presented in this book is the tale of such a group of actors: political leaders in Europe and the United States find themselves confronted on the stage of world politics with a situation like the one described. We shall speak of François Mitterrand, Helmut Kohl and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, George H.W. Bush and James A. Baker, Mikhail Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze, Margaret Thatcher and Douglas Hurd. We shall also speak of their advisers, who, too, were very much involved in the drama that is the subject of our tale. For good reason, as will be seen,

This introduction was written by the author, in English, for the present English edition of the book.

many other political leaders from around the world will appear in the narrative.

The actors and their workshop. There was no script. There was, however, the workshop of world politics, as I have called it. The term designates the professional and interpersonal operative configuration formed by the protagonists of our tale. It is this configuration, present already for some years, that they could rely on when they had to face the revolutionary events in Europe in the years 1989–1990 and went about to find a response to them. Without the existence of their workshop they would hardly have been able to do this. The workshop is to be considered as a crucial and highly fortunate element in international politics at the time. In Chap. 3 it will be described in detail. Throughout the book it is shown how the actors put it to use.

Creativity unto leadership. With the fall of the Berlin Wall—starting in the evening of November 9, 1989—everyone could see that the “order” under which Europe had existed since the end of World War II—dividing it into two antagonistic parts—was breaking down. People rejoiced. Freedom would soon reign everywhere in Europe. Would it? Upon the fall of a political order a new one by no means follows necessarily. On the contrary, chaos may set in. There were burning issues: the drive of the Germans toward unity; the future of the security structures in Europe; the renewed recognition of national borders there, among them, in particular, the German-Polish border; the precarious position of Mikhail Gorbachev as leader of an empire in decay, plagued by an enormous financial and economic stress; old national prejudices weighing again on perceptions and decisions. Would indeed a new order replace the old, vanishing one?

Creative efforts were called for. Leadership had to be assumed. In the workshop and through the workshop of world politics this task was taken on. In the forging furnaces of political analysis and diagnosis, of advice and reflection, the instruments of political creativity were being formed: resolve and visions, tools and plans of action, certainty of purpose and strength of character. Briefly, the will to lead. By now, in an age of international distrust, antagonism, and self-absorption one looks back to these years of concert and cooperation with nostalgia.

SOURCES TO BUILD A TALE ON

This book is an inquiry into the art of political leadership, and the subject matter of the inquiry is the daringly creative political action of political leaders in the historical era of 1989–1990. Fittingly, although unintentionally, the research for the book began and was to a considerable extent carried out at a site of government—the Élysée, the palace in Paris where the offices of the president of France and his staff are housed. I had been authorized, under a permission from President Mitterrand, to peruse his presidential archive.¹ I did so in the years 1992–1995. While occupied with another research project, the issue of the role of France in the story of Germany’s reunification began to claim my attention. The sources I was consulting by and by made me realize that generally this role was not perceived correctly. Public opinion as well as scholars seemed to have it wrong. I concluded that I should focus my investigations in the presidential archive on the topic of “France and the reunification of Germany.” In this way I obtained the major part of the material on which this study is based. I should wish to emphasize that it was the material, not any personal or political inclination, that led me to the study’s theme. From the evidence I discovered, I came to write an alternative account of the unification process, differing in particular from prior ones offered by German historians. I was confirmed in my account by observing that it has gained increasing support in subsequent studies.

A brief description of the presidential archive might be opportune. This comprehensive collection—a huge amount—consisted of: (1) notes and memos that the president received from his advisers, among them notes from his military staff; (2) the minutes of Cabinet meetings, minutes of deliberations of various councils, among them the council of defense; (3) the verbatims of the conversations between Mitterrand and other heads of state or government; (4) copies of letters written by or addressed to him; (5) letters and personal (often handwritten) notes that he received from members of his government; (6) diplomatic telegrams; (7) notes and memos from diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Quai d’Orsay*), and from officials at the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Economy; (8) copies of newspaper articles and governmental documents.

In the years 2015–2019, at various times, I pursued further research at the *Archives Nationales* (at Pierrefitte), by then the site of the archive holdings concerning the Mitterrand presidency. Besides identifying documents that I had studied at the Élysée and ascertaining their call numbers,

I hoped to find further documentary material. In the course of a search through the *Fonds Mitterrand* that indeed was effective I noticed, though, that not a few of the documents that I knew were missing. Upon my inquiry, as to one particular and highly significant document, for example, I was informed that a search for it in the *Archives* had led to a negative result. I was informed, furthermore, that the quantity of material from Mitterrand's military staff held in the *Archives* is "poor." Apparently, not all the documents that I had formerly consulted at the Élysée had found their way to the *Archives Nationales*. I gather this study remains a primary source.

Sources for the book also were the interviews that I could conduct with actors at the Élysée, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the federal chancellery in Bonn, and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The interviews are listed in the bibliography at the end of the book.

Over the years, a substantial number of German, British, American, Russian and Canadian governmental documents concerning the period 1989–1990 successively became accessible for consultation (see bibliography). This, of course, is a new challenge. For example, two different verbatims of the same political conversation may be available for comparison. Thus, we shall see, at this or that instance, that one verbatim includes a certain important statement that the other does not. Or we can proceed significantly with our tale, in its new form, in telling the high points of a critical report found only through perusing the whole range of sources into which the field of documentary evidence has widened. The way in which the present revised edition of our book has been taken on reflects, therefore, the attempt to respond, to a reasonable extent, to the challenge just described. The thrust of the study is still the "French" one. The field where to place it, however, is the purview of comparison.

IT'S THE ACTORS' TALE

The book aims at involving its readers in the experience of the political actors. Its purpose is to make them visualize and listen to the protagonists, who are presented, as far as possible, in terms of their own words and actions. It is *their* story that is told and *they* are the authors of all that makes up the story. For this reason a narrative form of representation has been chosen. The political actors left us a prodigious wealth of documents wherein the testimony of their doings lies, their deliberations, discussions, decisions, and deeds. There, in those documents, the tale to be told is to

be found, in a raw way, as it were. Hence, our study closely develops along the traces drawn by the documents. The traces I am speaking of—this, I think, should be added at once, to avoid any misunderstanding—were precisely that: the evidence holding the tale. They, by themselves, were not yet the story. They had to be sifted, interpreted, compared, contextualized, in order to arrive at the story offered here.

There is a method to make written representations of human thoughts and actions “speak.” It is known as the art of hermeneutics, a methodological discipline for the study and interpretation of written verbal and non-verbal communications. This method was applied to our documents. In a long process of sifting through them, they were examined and re-examined, compared with each other, scrutinized as to how they were phrased, analyzed as to their contents and the significance of it, sounded out for possible double meanings. Finally, all the painstaking reading process led to an increasingly plausible and comprehensive interpretation of the ensemble of the materials. The story emerged from the stories: a distinct story of things past, once represented. The actors’ tale could be rendered into the form of a scholar’s authorship.

A TALE UNTO MEANING

Through the hermeneutical approach a particular undertaking also came to the fore that to the actors was obviously quite important: their search for meaning in view of the extraordinary events that they were facing. Would it be possible at all fully to grasp the revolutionary upheavals that took place in the European political world in the fall and winter of 1989, this “revolutionary surge in Eastern Europe” compared by the French Government’s Office of National Defense to the “wave of revolutions in 1848”?² And to arrive at a comprehension that would allow a true governing of the events? No one could be sure, and this was an acute frightening feeling that all the actors in Moscow, Bonn, Washington, London, shared. They found themselves in the situation that has been described above: in midst of a drastic political drama within which they had to act but for which they had no script. Years later, Felipe González, Spanish prime minister at the time of German reunification, used the metaphor of “history galloping like a riderless horse” to express their experience.³ What, in this situation, could be the first thing to do? Of all actors can be said that they did the same: they sought to put the historical forces that they saw were at work into a frame of interpretation.

Mikhail Gorbachev continuously raised the theme of “time” as an elementary historical force over which one could hardly, if at all prevail. Political actors, he said, acted wisely in aligning themselves to the flow of time and its changes. He emphatically wished the policy of all actors to be adjusted to the time a settlement regarding Germany would, in his view, take. François Mitterrand, on the other hand, constantly worried about the possible disjunction of two paces: the pace of the European Community to a closer union and the pace of Germany to its unity. Both processes, Europe’s unification and Germany’s unification, should by all means be parallel developments, progressing at the same “rhythm.” If Germany’s unification will progress at a greater pace than that of Europe’s unification, there will be, he feared, an “accident.” Persistently, he pleaded with Helmut Kohl and Hans-Dietrich Genscher wisely to measure the time of a unification of Germany.⁴ Kohl declared, indeed, at a meeting on December 15 with the president of the Swiss Confederation, Jean-Paul Delamuraz, that he counted on “doing everything” so that changes in Germany “not go too fast.” He asserted: “I’m trying to reduce the speed.”⁵

Mitterrand considered “nationalism” to be a deep and driving force in European history. It was much stronger, he thought, than any governmental structure, be it a state or an imperial entity such as the Soviet Union. Because of the pressure of nationalism, the prospects of the Soviet Union were gloomy, as he told his advisers already in 1981. The same pressure, he further noted, worked in favor of a Germany that aspired to its unity.

Margaret Thatcher liked to say that she believed in national character. As to that of the Germans, she held it to be everlastingly bad. The Germans of 1989 were as arrogant, high-handed and pretentious as, in her view, those of the time of the Kaiser. Therefore, the two German states existing at the present should not be allowed to unify. Thatcher interpreted the developments in East Germany that pointed to a conjugation of the two Germanies in the light of her ideas on the German national character. Whereas others understood the rebellion of the masses of East Germans in the streets of Leipzig, Dresden, East Berlin as an onslaught that indicated a historical move toward the disappearance of East Germany as a state, her understanding of German history and the Germans’ national character urged her to oppose such a development. Eventually, Margaret Thatcher accepted Germany’s unification. However, she kept, in spite of contradicting herself, to the interpretation with which she accompanied it.

WHAT THE TALE TELLS US

For all its findings our study has to speak for itself. However, to enumerate here the major ones will presumably be appreciated. There are six of them:

- For France the “German question” was always topical. President François Mitterrand held here the same views as his predecessors, especially President Charles de Gaulle. As seen from Paris, Germany remained far from having found its place in European geopolitics. How might this country succeed, this country whose partition, decided upon at Yalta, guaranteed the division of the planet that appeared to ensure world “order”? It was precisely this Yalta order with which French foreign policy clashed. President Mitterrand never missed an opportunity to condemn Yalta. Since then the world was divided, with the German question at the center of its problems, as Mitterrand explained to Mikhail Gorbachev on October 2, 1985.⁶ Mitterrand and his advisers (with one exception) worried not about the fact of German reunification but about how it would come to pass. If the Germans wanted it, unification would happen, but it had to follow the best path for all, Germans and Europeans alike. Such was France’s sole objective.
- The imaginative and productive practice of political leadership whose story we tell culminated in three crucial moments: (a) the European Summit at Strasbourg in early December 1989, at which the European construction was significantly advanced; (b) the conceptualization of the “two-plus-four negotiations” and, then, their execution, settling in particular the issue of the German-Polish border; (c) the persuasive steering of the Soviet leadership, Mikhail Gorbachev in particular, by Western leaders, chiefly François Mitterrand, toward an acceptance of a membership of unified Germany in NATO.
- In the fall of 1989 François Mitterrand expected from the Germans, in particular from Chancellor Kohl, an act of faith on behalf of Europe similar to the one that he had performed in 1983 by aligning the economy of France to the European project. Without a deepening of the European conjunction, a reunification of Germany could not be imagined. Over the years, Kohl had made Mitterrand believe in his unshakable allegiance to the European project, most recently on June 2, 1988 at Evian. But then, a year later, in June 1989, to the great concern of Mitterrand, he began sowing seeds of doubts. In a

battle of wills that lasted until a few days before the Summit at Strasbourg, Mitterrand prevailed and extracted from Kohl, finally, the desired commitment.

- In the dawning of 1989 France and the Federal Republic of Germany were caught up in a frictional relationship. For years, the government at Bonn had been feeling exceedingly uneasy as to the nuclear strategy of France. Mitterrand who, as France's president, was the sole person to unleash the French nuclear force, was convinced that an essential part of this strategy was its vagueness. Thus the Germans did not know, whether and when the French would use their nuclear force for their defense, whereas they were perfectly aware that the French short-range nuclear missiles would destroy *German* cities. In spite of all pleading by Chancellor Kohl and his defense minister Manfred Wörner, Mitterrand constantly refused (and his advisers and military people followed him) to alleviate the sway France held over Germany through its nuclear force.

The Federal Republic of Germany, on the other hand, had long been looming over France economically. Increasingly, France had been compelled to rely on Germany for upholding its economic and monetary sovereignty. A great irritation had grown at the Élysée as to the necessity always to request the Germans favorably to consider the economic and financial situation of France.

In the spring of 1989 the friction between the two countries was grievous.

- In the winter of 1989 and the spring of 1990 the economic and financial situation of the Soviet Union was dreadful. Governing the Soviet empire meant to act under a necessity of survival. The leaders in Moscow looked to the West, in particular to West Germany, for aid. The wants and needs of the Soviet Union coincided with the exigency of Germany moving toward its unity. The exchanges of the Soviet leaders with Western leaders—Mitterrand, Bush, Kohl, Thatcher—and their own wisdom, as Gorbachev demonstrated, led them to adjust.
- Political leaders in the West held the epochal events in 1989–1990 to be an achievement advantageous to Western models of human political life. We are dealing with this perception and issues related to it, like the much debated enlargement of NATO, in a study in progress. In a conversation with Helmut Kohl on November 2, 1989 François Mitterrand markedly articulated the perception. In the end, he

judged, “the further construction of Europe will bring us to the day when the division of Europe will be overcome and Germany will be reunified. The Soviet Union will have trouble understanding this evolution. It is Western civilization that will gain the upper hand and keep it.”⁷ The East changed, not the West.⁸ This was Europe’s revolution.

THE TALE’S TEACHING OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

In the preceding paragraphs a number of elementary notions and expressions—political creativity, leadership, nuclear strategy, revolutionary events, world politics, freedom, nationalism—appeared that, seen together, indicate the discipline of which our tale provides knowledge: political science. This book therefore can be read as an introduction to the study of politics. It represents, as will become obvious, a perception of politics in its truest form: in the state of its making. Through this perception, for instance, a most essential figure in political reality emerges, as embodied and, through their action, made vivid by different persons: the political leader. At an earlier time this figure was called “Prince”, and it was modelled in the form of a “Mirror of Princes.” The book contains such a “Mirror.” The elements of a paradigmatic practice of political leadership are made visible: a fluid approach to politics in correspondence to the fluidity of political realities, a recognition of the primacy of persons in the conduct of politics, an overriding interest in the character and behavior of the other actors in the common field of action, a thirst for information, a solicitation of advice and an effective as well as wise use of advice received. The science of politics, the reader will see, is a great art. Its best teachers are its practitioners.

ON THE HISTORY OF OUR STORY: METAMORPHOSES

The German original of this book appeared in 2002. In 2005 a French translation was published. In view of this translation I revised the text, added new material, and augmented the book by new parts. For an American edition this later and larger French version was, in contractual accordance with the American publisher, translated into English by John Tyler Tuttle. However, upon receipt of this translation, at the moment it was scheduled for publication, the publisher commanded that it be considerably shortened. I had to cut out substantial parts

from the translation. The resulting edition, prepared by Barry Cooper, appeared in 2009.

For the present edition now I returned to Tuttle's comprehensive translation. I did not fully restore it, though, in order to have the possibility of adding to this edition new parts and new information gained by new research. I thoroughly reviewed and, in many instances, revised the translation as well, as to structure and style. I divided up the whole book into shorter and hence more chapters. Chapter 1 consists of an entirely new introduction that I wrote for the book.

In a number of ways this edition of it represents a new book.

NOTES

1. For further information see the Foreword by Jean Musitelli and the article of Hubert Védrine "Contribution à un recueil des textes sur Tilo Schabert" <https://www.hubertvedrine.net/contribution-a-un-recueil-de-textes-sur-tilo-schabert/> (accessed April 10, 2021).
2. Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, *Note*, November 10, 1989.
3. See below, p. 207, note 4.
4. See below, p. 301ff.
5. See below, p. 335.
6. See below, p. 59.
7. *Dok. Dt.Ein.*, 473.
8. See the section below: "The Principle of Change: The East Changes," p. 71ff.



CHAPTER 2

Thinking at the Élysée

THINKING THROUGH DIALOGUE

In politics, creative power is silent, for it is, above all, thought. And thought begins in silence, in the dialogue that he who reflects carries on with himself, in the noiseless world of his mind. We grasp thoughts once they have been verified and reflected upon and, not, contrary to others, dismissed or rejected. We decide on the fate of thoughts that have been preserved and the way in which to use them. We can pass over them all in silence but we can also express them all. We can communicate only some of them and put the rest aside. The expression of thoughts can take place immediately or later on, all of a sudden or bit by bit. It can unfold in such a way that transmitted thoughts be perceived by only one person, by a small number, or by many. These can be integrated into the evaluation of reflections and become sensors in a test allowing for measuring their virtual impact. We may choose the circumstances that lend themselves best to the expression of thoughts, and we can, regardless of the thought, choose the most favorable period for revealing it.

All that unfolds in the course of the silent dialogue that the thinking person carries on with himself as soon as he¹ wonders how he can handle his ideas, to what procedures he must subject them, and what he must do with them. And yet, many events occur at that moment: you verify, you evaluate, you reflect, and you choose, the mind working according to its

most specific manner of functioning, and according to your own capacities for conceiving intentions and anticipating future consequences.

And all occurs noiselessly. Thoughts are integrated by the imagination into the play of their externalization. Thought is put on stage. Starting from the dialogue that the thinking person establishes with himself, the power takes shape allowing the thinking person to become a figure of power himself, in the face of his thinking: henceforth, it is he who rules.

The thinking person stages the representation of his thoughts, presenting, *for others*, thoughts stemming from his thinking. Thought is represented in the mode of its externalization. It appears to be performed. Someone acts out the play of his thinking on the stage that the perception of others offers him. They see his thinking in the style he gives it.

No one totally masters his or her creative power. Political power is essentially its spectacle, the representation of political power. First of all, it is thought—thinking about power—but to exercise it, one has to begin by staging it. If one wishes to exercise political power, above all, one must think. One thereby weaves the fabric from which the raiment of power will be cut, but the dressing of power is an invention, a representation of the appearance of power. There is no power if one does not invent one's own specific style. Power does not belong to the person who "has it" if that person does not provide the creative thinking that goes along with it: the invention of the staging. Political power is entirely and, on principle, creative power. It requires the strength of creation. What preparations are necessary for the spectacle of power, what gestures, what speeches, what arrangements are indispensable?

François Mitterrand committed himself—himself and others—to thinking in the form of dialogues. At the Élysée, he presented a president of France who thought on his own and did so preferably in company. He withdrew to think, establishing a physical and intellectual distance with others to do so. "I keep my distance," he told me during an interview I had with him. And when I asked him, then, where he would be while keeping his distance, he explained: "I reflect, I read, I take a walk."² The physical distance could in fact be topographical or else take the form of body language that created the distance even in the presence of others.³ Yet, he also invited others to act out his thinking with them. He sought to have clear ideas on his thinking by staging it in the presence of others.

Thought in the form of conversation, thought in motion. A staging of the power to be exhibited, of the figure of the powerful man, of the government that already begins with thinking, progresses with thinking and