

Tilo Schabert

When *Virtù* and *Fortuna* met

Political leaders perceive and think philosophically in facing the contingency of Germany's reunification

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Abstract

In the years 1989-90 a revolutionary ‘tempest’ raged across Eastern Europe. The speed of events accelerated with the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. Suddenly, a reunification of Germany appeared to become possible. This meant, however, a re-ordering of the political and security architecture of all of Europe. Could the ‘tempest’, in spite of its apparently overwhelming force, be mastered – politically? It was done, indeed, by, first, an attitude of resolution by the principal political actors concerned, in Washington, Paris, London, Bonn, Paris, and, secondly, by the great art of government and diplomacy that they set at work to organize Germany's reunification along a wisely chosen political chronology and to open with it a path towards overtaking the division of Europe into two blocs.

I *Historical Lessons*

The reunification of Germany would not have taken place as it did, if an extraordinary configuration of political leaders – notably George H.W. Bush, Helmut Kohl, François Mitterrand, Mikhail Gorbachev¹ – would not have exerted a great amount of *virtù* at the time. Their action – if he had been a witness of it - would immensely have pleased Niccolò Machiavelli. In the fall and winter 1989-1990 *fortuna* showed herself, all over Central Europe, and in East Germany in particular, to the utmost of her might. She displayed nothing less than a “triumph of the unexpected”, as a learned witness observed. “The speed of events in Eastern Europe,” he wrote, “the hectic complexities of inward collapse and realignment are such as to make the morning papers obsolete before evening. There may have been comparable *accelarandos* before this: in France, from June to September 1789 (there is a haunting leap from that date to ours); or during those ‘ten days that shook the world’ in Lenin's Petrograd. But the geographical scale of the current earthquake, its ideological and

¹ To this configuration ought to be added, of course, the principal advisers of those leaders as well as the Foreign Ministers James Baker (United States), Hans-Dietrich Genscher (West Germany), Eduard Shevardnadze (U.S.S.R), and Douglas Hurd (Great Britain). – Under the expression “workshop of world politics” I have given a detailed account of the configuration in: *France and the Reunification of Germany. Leadership in the Workshop of World Politics*, Cham: Palgrave/Macmillan 2021, 21-45.

ethnic diversity, the planetary interests which are implicated, do make it almost impossible to respond sensibly, let alone have any worthwhile foresight.”²

Concerning the political actors of whom I speak, and whose attitude, approach, and performance regarding the “triumph of the unexpected” I shall describe in the following, the observation just quoted holds, however, only in part. They did not fail to grasp the immensity of the “seism” (Hans-Dietrich Genscher)³ that was occurring. To them, as to many others, the “tempest”⁴ raging across Eastern Europe appeared to have an overwhelming force. Certainly. Indeed, looking back later, Felipe González, Spain’s Prime Minister at the time, when speaking of the fall of the Berlin Wall, could evoke a telling image: “History” had seemed to him to be “galloping like a riderless horse through the night.”⁵

History - a riderless horse? In Berlin, at that night of November 9, 1989? Presumably, yes. A heady brute, surely, throughout its course. But, actually, one also that by no means was entirely beyond the reach of human command. In this the political leaders concerned - the “principals” I shall call them from now on - strongly believed. When they spoke about the “seism” hardly a shadow of gloom was noticeable in their words. Theirs was an attitude of resolution. The political world around them appeared to break down. Yet, nonetheless, they kept to their profession: governing, leading, “riding” - to remain with González’ image - “the horse”. Moreover, through the manner in which they performed the process of handling Germany’s reunification, and especially the international consequences of it, they left us a paradigm of the art of government and diplomacy.⁶ A singular paradigm, we are compelled to note, in looking back to what obviously appears to us now to have been an extraordinary moment of *virtù* in the history of Europe. While it seems, unluckily, to be a phenomenon of the past, the truth of the paradigm remains. Surely, the *variazioni della fortuna*⁷ are unpredictable. But precisely this is the reason for observing and remembering what *virtù* can achieve.

How then did the principals actualize their *virtù* when facing the contingency of Germany’s reunification? They reacted initially in a way to which they were accustomed. They spoke with each other. This was their first step to rein in the events out there, to get

² George STEINER in: GRANTA, „The State of Europe: Christmas Eve 1989”, February 2, 1990 – Online edition (see: <https://granta.com/the-state-of-europe-christmas-eve-1989/> accessed on February 16, 2024).

³ Hans-Dietrich GENSCHER, *Erinnerungen*, Berlin: Siedler, 1995, 627.- Helmut Kohl used in his memoirs the expression „tumultuous development“ (*Erinnerungen 1982-1990*, München: Droemer, 2005, 1010). – Like this translations all other translations in the following from German or French into English are mine (T.S.).

⁴ Ibid., 642.

⁵ See the article „Europa am Scheideweg“, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 17, 2000, 1,2.

⁶ I have here in mind in particular the „Two-Plus-Four Process” by which the external aspects of Germany’s reunification were successfully settled. See: *France and the Reunification of Germany*, 383-411.

⁷ Niccolò MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe*, Cap. XVIII, in: *Il Principe e Discorsi*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1960, 74.

control over a political world tending toward chaos. They wished to understand and hence to learn from one another. To be informed of their partner's views, to compare assessments, to discuss possible ways how to act in common, to encourage each other in a situation of bewilderment. Instances of wisdom were called for. Not least a wisdom that could be communicated, at the right moments and in various places in Europe, to the public.

In studying their memoirs⁸, records of their conversations, their public speeches, we find, then, historical lessons. They are articulated in those documents by the principals, to their mutual benefit, and, eventually to that of everyone, when pronounced publicly. Mikhail Gorbachev and François Mitterrand were particularly keen in formulating such historical lessons. "The world," Gorbachev stated, as if he would echo Machiavelli's tenets on *fortuna*, "is constantly changing, and you are bound to lose if you ignore this objective fact."⁹ He perfectly understood that "radical changes ... had taken place in the German Democratic Republic",¹⁰ and historic consequences had to be drawn from them. Mitterrand repeatedly analysed the issue of Germany's reunification in the light of a remark he attributed to Napoleon: "The policy of a state lies in its geography."¹¹ By its situation in the middle of Europe, Germany had a decisive geopolitical status on the European continent, Mitterrand argued. It could change the balance of power there either be leaning toward the Western part or the Eastern part of Europe. Nor should it play alone with regard to Europe's political structure, just because of its central location, and its economic weight. He and his government acutely feared, that, when Germany went for its reunification, it would act as a "cavalier seul". Germany might try to orchestrate a "réunification sauvage", solely on its own conditions, and neglect any concertation with the other nations that had a say in the affair¹² or were rightly concerned by it.¹³ President Bush and his advisors thought along similar lines and thence publicly argued for and, in the circle of the principals, energetically pursued a policy of anchoring a reunified Germany firmly in Western organizations, i.e. the European

⁸ The *Erinnerungen* of Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Helmut Kohl, the *Memoirs* of Mikhail GORBACHEV (New York: Doubleday, 1995); *A World Transformed* by George BUSH and Brent SCOWCROFT (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998), the *Memoirs* by Douglas HURD (London: Little, Brown, 2004). There are no memoirs of François Mitterrand.

⁹ Mikhail GORBACHEV, *Memoirs*, 668.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 666.

¹¹ *Interview accordée par Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République Française, à Madame Anne Sinclair dans le cadre de l'émission 7/7 sur TF1*, February 12, 1989, 42; *Interview accordée par Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République Française, à Madame Anne Sinclair dans le cadre de l'émission 7/7 sur TF1*, March 25, 1990, 27.

¹² The Four Allies, of course: the United States, the Soviet Union, France and Great Britain. France, to be precise, feared in particular that such a "réunification sauvage" could be arranged exclusively by Germany and the Soviet Union.

¹³ As Poland, for instance.

Community and NATO. The British principals didn't need to be convinced, they fully shared this view.¹⁴ As did François Mitterrand.¹⁵

In 1989 France celebrated the bicentenary of the French Revolution. For a President of France, therefore, thoughts on the revolutionary and hence historical power of the "people" were quite naturally in his mind. Thus, on October 25, 1989, while speaking in the European Parliament, François Mitterrand compared the revolutionary events of 1989 in Eastern Europe to the French Revolution in 1789. He shared with his audience the obvious historical lesson of the two revolutions: "But such élan! Such hope! Like the great moments of 1789, it is the people whose clamor is making itself heard. It is the people who are tracing the path that will be taken in this waning century ... Again, peoples are moving, and when they move, they decide."¹⁶

The principals didn't express their historical lessons in a political vacuity, of course. They were set to act. Might not the current revolutionary events that they were about to understand suggest road signs in virtue of which the lessons were more than historical but practical too? George Bush saw such signs. He realized the task ahead, the assignment that "history" gave: "Fortunately, the tide of history in Germany and across Eastern Europe was in our direction. We had to push, guide, and manage, to the extent possible, the positive currents that were flowing."¹⁷

II *Fortuna*

The principals, as well as their diplomats on the ground and in governmental offices, feared that the revolutionary changes in East Germany and Central Europe would overtake the posture of their states and leave their governmental and diplomatic strength inadequate. They were startled by the "great speed"¹⁸, the "unheard-of speed"¹⁹, the "rapid set"²⁰ of the

¹⁴ See, for instance, the record, dated on January 30, 1990, of a conversation between George Bush and Douglas Hurd in Washington in: Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Patrick Salmon et al., eds., *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Vol. VII, German Unification, 1989–1990*. London: Taylor & Francis/London-New York: Routledge, 2010 (in the following cited as: *DBPO*), 230f: "Bush said that everyone was worried about Germany. ... The Secretary of State [Douglas Hurd] repeated his concern about the need to keep Germany within NATO in subsequent conversation with Scowcroft and Blackwill [advisors of Bush]. Scowcroft agreed. He doubted whether Kohl wanted to leave NATO but if Gorbachev made the offer of unification in return for neutrality, he would be very tempted."

¹⁵ See *France and the Reunification of Germany*, 305ff., 363ff.

¹⁶ *Discours prononcé par Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République Française, devant le Parlement Européen de Strasbourg*, October 25, 1989. – Nigel Broomfield, British Ambassador in East Germany, sent on November 13, 1989 a message to Douglas Hurd in which he observed: "But power has passed in substantial measure to the people and it is they who from now on will increasingly decide the future of this country [East Germany]. (*DBPO*, 111).

¹⁷ *A World Transformed*, 231f.

¹⁸ *Minute from Mr. Munro (East Berlin) to Mr. Broomfield*, November 3, 1989, in: *DBPO*, 89.

¹⁹ GORBACHEV, *Memoirs*, 183.

events. “Changes were unfolding so fast”, Bush wrote later, “we had little time for introspection”.²¹ For all were taken by “surprise”,²² and yet they could not shrink back. The great change that came about occurred with “inevitability”²³. The principals felt they were “swept along with the history that was set in motion”²⁴.

Europe’s fate had turned around, evidently, with overpowering force. “Nothing can slow down the unification processes [in Germany], Mikhail Gorbachev said on May 31, 1990 to George Bush.²⁵ *Fortuna*, precisely because of all her might, did not only subdue, she had, this time, opened also, as it was concluded in Washington,²⁶ “a window of opportunity” – an *occasione* for creative politics, in Machiavelli’s language.²⁷ In Paris, Hubert Védrine, Mitterrand’s principal diplomatic adviser, had already on September 13, 1989, in a note to the President, articulated what apparently came into view. He had put down the following: “The literally extraordinary events occurring in the East showed the triumph of democracy and heralded the progressive overtaking of Yalta [the division of Europe into two blocs] within a greater Europe that would be less covered with arms and take up the thread of its own history.”²⁸ Still, “we could not be certain”, the principals in Washington thought, “how long the window of opportunity remain open”.²⁹ It might soon become shut again. America’s President, as his security adviser Brent Scowcroft later on set down, therefore “made clear that he wanted to take charge of the agenda and try to shape things rather than to be shaped by them.”³⁰ Machiavelli in Chapter XXV of *Il Principe* stated: “Fortune shows its power where no one has taken steps to contain it”. (*Fortuna dimostra la sua Potenza dove non è ordinata*

²⁰ *A World Transformed*, 299.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 231, 299.

²² *Ibid.*, 300. – Commenting on the problem posed to Soviet foreign policy by the mutations in Central and Eastern Europe Douglas Hurd in his *Memoirs* (p. 387) writes: “He (Shevardnadze) and Gorbachev had come to the conclusion that Soviet foreign policy was a disaster, that the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe must be abandoned to their fate, and the West approached for a new friendship based on trust. The change of foreign policy was more sweeping than anything Gorbachev himself contemplated inside the Soviet Union. *Its speed and completeness surprised us all.* [my emphasis, T.S.]” – See also Document 77, *DBPO*, 176.

²³ GENSCHER, *Erinnerungen*, 683.

²⁴ GORBACHEV, *Memoirs*, 183. – See also the section “Die Geschichte beschleunigt ihr Tempo (History accelerates its speed)” in: Michail Gorbatschow, *Wie es war. Die deutsche Wiedervereinigung*, Transl. Kurt Baudisch, Berlin: Ullstein, 1990, 83ff.

²⁵ *A World Transformed*, 688.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

²⁷ See the exemplary beginning of Chapter XXVI of *Il Principe*: “Going back over everything I’ve said, I’ve been asking myself whether the time is right, in Italy now, for a new ruler; whether there’s the sort of material available here that would give a shrewd man with the right qualities the chance [*occasione*] to impose some form, winning honour for himself and doing good to the people as a whole.” (Niccolò MACHIAVELLI, *The Prince*, translated and introduced by Tim Parks, Penguin Random House UK, 2014, 102.)

²⁸ Hubert Védrine, *Note pour le Président de la République, a.s.: Evolution des pays de l’Est; conséquences pour l’Europe de l’Ouest et pour la France et la relance de notre politique*, September 13, 1989.

²⁹ *A World Transformed*, 205.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

virtù a resisterle).³¹ George Bush was obviously moved by this kind of wisdom. Together with the other Principals, he engaged in what is perfectly conveyed by the term *kairopolitics*.

III Virtù

“We now have a real chance to redraw the political map of Europe”, Nigel Broomfield, the British Ambassador in East Berlin, stated on December 6, 1989 in a long letter to Douglas Hurd, Britain’s Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.³² What an ambition! What a vision arousing it! However – did not the principals overestimate their ability to perform what they aspired to do? Still, *fortuna* challenged them and they were, as we saw, very much aware of this challenge: Do rise to the rare occasion! For transmuting their vision into reality, though, a political will was needed that was both firm and creative, tenacious and flexible, scrupulous and affable. The principals summoned it up. In one word, it was *Virtù*.

It started with two insights, arrived at by the different actors at different times, but eventually shared by all of them. For one thing, the relentless push of the “people” - the East Germans sabotaging their *ancien régime* – made even Gorbachev, who in the first place was hostile to the idea of Germany’s reunification, admit that nothing could slow down its happening. For the other, the acknowledgment that Mitterrand had articulated already in July 1989 and continued to assert throughout the winter of 1989-90³³: “The Germans’ aspiration to unity seems legitimate to me.”³⁴ With these two assessments of the situation the putting into effect of the principals’ vision – for Germany, for Europe – could begin. From now on, in the view of Gorbachev, “the question was not how to prevent the unification, but what the pace and the conditions of this process should be.”³⁵ It was a “monumental undertaking”, George Bush felt, that was laying ahead: “Shepherding reunification and the future architecture of European security”.³⁶

³¹ Niccolò MACHIAVELLI, *Il Principe e Discorsi*, 99. For the English translation: Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 98.

³² *DBPO*, 156.

³³ A comprehensive list of Mitterrand’s statements, in the course of interviews and speeches, is presented by this memorandum: Pierre Morel, *Note pour le Président de la République, Objet: Allemagne de l’Est et réunification (juillet 89 juin 90)*, July 31, 1991 (AN-AG/5(4)/CDM/33 - “AN” = *Archives Nationales*, Paris).

³⁴ Interview de M. François Mitterrand, Président de la République, accordée au “Nouvel Observateur” du 27 juillet 1989 ainsi qu’à quatre autres quotidiens européens, notamment sur la construction européenne: l’union monétaire, la charte sociale, la politique de l’audiovisuel, la protection de l’environnement et le problème de la réunification de l’Allemagne. July 27, 1989 (<https://www.elysee.fr/francois-mitterrand/1989/07/27/interview-de-m-francois-mitterrand-president-de-la-republique-accordee-au-nouvel-observateur-du-27-juillet-1989-ainsi-quatre-autres-quotidiens-europeens-notamment-sur-la-construction-europeenne-lunion-monetaire-la-charte-sociale-la-politique>, accessed on February 26, 2024).

³⁵ GORBACHEV, *Memoirs*, 687.

³⁶ *A World Transformed*, 230.

However, “shepherding” in this case meant to battle with a fundamental force: time. “We sensed”, Brent Scowcroft recalled, “we were running against a clock, but we did not know how much time was left.”³⁷ Among the principals the feeling to be in a hurry spread. Douglas Hurd, in observing the behaviour of Helmut Kohl, noticed that the Chancellor was “driving ahead with unification as fast as he could.” Nevertheless, he thought that he couldn’t “blame him”. Kohl simply “saw the opportunity, and knew it might be fleeting.”³⁸ In Washington, where they had, “along with everyone else, greatly underestimated the speed with which East Germany was disintegrating”, the principals there reasoned, for a moment, that “if it was impossible to control the pace of unification, then the fastest movement toward it was perhaps becoming the best, or possibly the only, way to minimize chaos and unpredictability.”³⁹

Soon, however, doubts began to disturb their minds. Those in the West received sufficient notice, if not warnings, from Moscow to understand that the principals there were being alarmed by the “rapid German thrust towards unifying their country”.⁴⁰ By no means everyone in the Soviet Union was prepared to accept the “loss” of East Germany, namely the detachment of this part of Germany from the Soviet sphere which the unification with West Germany would entail. Gorbachev and his foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze complained to their Western partners. “The acceleration of events” concerning Germany would cause “confusion” and “could lead to unforeseen consequences”.⁴¹ “Kohl”, Gorbachev still maintained later, in his *Memoirs*, “was set on pushing through the process of unification. ... The Chancellor never tired of repeating that circumstances compelled him to his course of action.”⁴² Helmut Kohl irritated all the other principals by pushing forward in announcing on November 28, 1989 his “Ten-Point Plan for German Unity”.⁴³ Typically, the British Ambassador in Bonn, Sir Christopher Mallaby, now argued “for avoiding speed on the German question”.⁴⁴

How then, in the dimension of time, ought the issue of Germany’s reunification be approached? Swiftly? Or slowly? Or only in congruence with other current processes in

³⁷ Ibid., 206.

³⁸ Douglas HURD, *Memoirs*, 384.

³⁹ *A World Transformed*, 233.

⁴⁰ Douglas HURD, *Memoirs*, 381.

⁴¹ *A World Transformed*, 196.

⁴² GORBACHEV, *Memoirs*, 684.

⁴³ For the text of the plan see: https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=223 (accessed on February 28, 2024).

⁴⁴ *DBPO*, 145.

European politics, coordinating the time of its resolution with the timetables of those processes? Or curbing it altogether (Margaret Thatcher's view)?⁴⁵

Checking Fortuna by a Governing of Time

Inevitably, the principals wrangled over this problem. To be sure, they agreed on the purpose to avoid, by all means, a derailment of the unification process or an outcome that would humiliate the Germans in making them subjects of a new "Versailles". The course towards the unification had to be handled with the greatest care. Ideally, its course as well as its conclusion would make everyone content, the Germans, their neighbours and partners in Europe, the Russians, the Americans. With this in view, all depended on setting a rhythm for the unification process that did not conflict with existing timetables both in European politics and in national politics. The unification process would work only if it followed a wisely chosen chronology. Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika*, for one, should not be endangered. The disintegration of East Germany should be lessened by it. The negotiations as to a definitive recognition by Germany of the Polish-German border had to be successfully achieved within the process. The complicated issue of the military status of unified Germany needed at the same time to be resolved, not least with regard to its repercussions on future security structures in Europe. If given undue priority, the reunification of Germany could choke the advance towards their further unification that the member states of the European community were planning.

Capricious *fortuna* had many adverse *occasioni* in Europe during the winter of 1989-90. They would happen along the passing of time. However, they would only happen if in the time of human affairs no efforts were undertaken towards structuring hence governing this time. *Fortuna* could be checked by an exercise of prudent, wise, and determined political leadership.

The principals assumed such a leadership and it materialized in the form of an overriding concern that took hold among them: The unification of Germany should proceed along a well-measured time axis. Pressures towards achieving it speedily should therefore be kept in check. Appeals in this sense were mostly made to Chancellor Kohl, who of course responded by referring to the rapid disintegration of the East German regime and the demands by so many East Germans to join West Germany. Still, he "promised" Douglas Hurd "to be

⁴⁵ Margaret Thatcher isolated herself in holding this view, even within her own government (with the exception of her diplomatic advisor Charles Powell). That François Mitterrand shared her position is a legend that doesn't become true by being again and again reiterated in spite of all empirical evidence to the contrary.

flexible about dates”⁴⁶, assured Gorbachev of a “cautious and considered action”⁴⁷, told Bush that he would “do nothing to disturb the smooth running course”⁴⁸. Kohl himself reported in his memoirs that, at the beginning of February 1990, he and his team at the Chancellery had “set the course towards unity”, but had “hitherto, for good reasons, avoided to force the unification process”⁴⁹. Indeed, on December 15, 1989 in a conversation with François Mitterrand and the president of the Swiss Confederation, Jean-Pascal Delamuraz, Kohl had admitted: “I’m trying to reduce the speed”⁵⁰.

However, one day later, on December 16, Mitterrand indicated, in a conversation with Bush, that he wasn’t yet won over. For, in his view, there could still be perceived a “time difference between European construction and [German] reunification”⁵¹. Mitterrand had struggled with Kohl, fiercely one must say, throughout the late summer and early fall of 1989 just because of this problem. Any difference in speed between the two unification processes should be neutralized, he thought, and a parallelism between the two be arranged instead. In fact, due to his persistence in the struggle with Kohl, major decisions towards such an arrangement had been reached at the summit of the European Community in Strasbourg on December 8-9. In hindsight, they proved to have, in fact, made the European partners of Germany more easily ready to accept its unification. The perspective of a Germany united *within* a strengthened European Community did alleviate even the feelings of disinclination on the British side. “West European integration should go ahead as fast as possible”, Ambassador Mallaby wrote on January 25, 1990 from Bonn to Douglas Hurd, after a long conversation with Helmut Kohl on the “German question”.⁵² Not everyone was motivated by realism and wisdom, though. Fear – or rather the fancy of a spectre – could also be the reason for having Germany’s unification proceeding in the same rhythm as the greater integration of the European Community. “The more German sovereignty was fused in the European Community,” Mallaby continued in his message to Hurd, “the less there should be articles about a supposed Fourth Reich in London newspapers.”⁵³

Until February 1990 the principals wavered over the policy to be pursued with regard to the external aspects of Germany’s reunification. A number of options were put forward, but discarded sooner or later. To conduct the handling of those aspects by the Four Allies (United

⁴⁶ Douglas HURD, *Memoirs*, 384.

⁴⁷ GORBACHEV, *Memoirs*, 680f.

⁴⁸ *A World Transformed*, 199.

⁴⁹ Helmut KOHL, *Erinnerungen*, 1057.

⁵⁰ Report of the Mitterrand-Delamuraz-Kohl meeting in Basel, December 15, 1989 (AN-AG/5(4)/CD/67).

⁵¹ Report of the Mitterrand-Bush meeting in Saint-Martin, December 6, 1989 (AN-AG/5(4)/CD/74).

⁵² *Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr. Hurd*, Bonn, 25 January 1990, *DBPO*, 223.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

States, Great Britain, France, Soviet Union) was deemed by the Germans to be entirely unacceptable. To manage them within the frame of the “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe” (CSCE) in the form of a “peace treaty” was judged to be unworkable. The CSCE hardly offered an adequate structure, and negotiations, lasting years, would have been necessary with all the countries, who, at the end of World War II, were in a state of war with Germany.⁵⁴ To let the movement towards reunification go on in shelving the external aspects of it, no one really wished to choose this as an option. However, it would be the option, if those aspects did not become the matter of a carefully prepared resolution that held the promise for winding them up.

Such a resolution, after all, was made on February 13 at Ottawa, by six Foreign Ministers: those of the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, and those of West and East Germany. They decided to start a series of negotiations for resolving the external aspects of Germany’s reunification. The persons to conduct the negotiations were the six Foreign Ministers themselves and delegations of their diplomats.⁵⁵ Thus, the art of diplomacy would be applied, with all the experience and the tools provided by that art. In addition, the decision included the intention to set up a timetable for the negotiations. These soon became known as the “Two-Plus-Four Negotiations” and led to the desired result, namely the signing on September 12, 1990 in Moscow of a treaty making a definitive settlement concerning Germany.

Fortuna was not given a chance. Human wisdom, talents, and creative determination prevailed.

Afterthoughts

Today, in the year 2024, this epoch of wisdom, talents, and creative determination is far remote. Much of the hope that originated from it has vanished. Germany is unified,

⁵⁴ At the last stage of World War II more than 50 countries were in a state of war with Germany, among them countries like Honduras, Nicaragua, Uruguay that never were involved in any military battle with Germany.

⁵⁵ The six Foreign Ministers discussed and made their decision while attending in Ottawa a conference of the foreign ministers of the member states of the CSCE. Not everyone in the larger group was prepared to consent to what they felt an exclusive group had decided. Italy’s Foreign Minister, Gianni De Michelis, openly and angrily protested. As to his objection and the attitude of Italy’s government concerning the question of Germany’s reunification in general see: CUCCIA, Deborah, „Italien und die deutsche Einigung 1989–1990“, in: *Europa und die Deutsche Einheit*, eds. Michael Gehler, Maximilian Graf. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017, 677–699; Id., *There are two German states and two must remain?*, Hildesheim: Olms, 2019; Ulrich SCHLIE, „Es gibt Dinge, die man besser nicht öffentlich ausspricht“. Helmut Kohl, Giulio Andreotti und der Prozess der Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands 1989/90“, in: *Macht und Machtverschiebung*, ed. Hendrik W. Ohnesorge, Berlin: De Gruyter 2022, 183–199.

Central and Eastern Europe are blessed by freedom and democracy, the European Community consolidated itself into the European Union. Yet, the old antagonism between East and West – conquered apparently in 1990 – is very much with us again. Is this a reason for despair? No. The paradigm of 1989-90 is with us too. The promise of *virtù*.