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## *COUNTERBALANCING THE GERMANS*

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# Holding On

Beate Neuss

**T**

he last year marked the end of an epoch not only for Germany, but for Europe. Up to then, "Europe" had become the designation for the countries in Western Europe, if not actually for the EC as a unit. <sup>1</sup>

The changes in Eastern Europe place the task of creating the architecture of the whole continent in the hands of the Europeans. Since the crumbling of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, overall attention has been focused on Germany, whose behaviour was considered a crucial factor in the success potential of new structures.

The most important questions resulting from this upheaval are the following: How is Germany to be anchored in the West? How can it be kept from a policy of oscillating between West and East and, last but not least, how can the balance of power be restored between the European nations?

It was not surprising that the unification touched off some gloomy predictions about the future German role. In the first half of 1990, the newspapers were full of discussions of the supposed military strength of a united Germany—just the same as forty years previously, where the subject had been the Western half of the then divided Germany. In the "Two plus Four" negotiations, Germany consented to reduce the size of its military force to a modest 370,000 troops. This surrender of military sovereignty—for that it was—appeased most of its critics, but directed attention to the more serious question of economic dominance.

The "old" Federal Republic of Germany, as we are getting used to say, played an important role in Europe. In recent years, Germany was the world's largest trading partner; even Bavaria ranked twelfth world-wide, a fact proudly proclaimed by its Prime Minister. Within the EC, the Federal Republic accounted for less than 19 per cent of the population but contributed over 26 per cent of the EC's gross product.<sup>2</sup> The strength of Germany's economy led to the Deutsche mark's world-wide adaptation as a reserve currency. Europe became a D-mark zone.

Today Germany is the country with the largest population in Western Europe. With its 78 million inhabitants it comes second in Europe only to the Russian Socialist Republic. Germany always had comparatively strong trade relations with Eastern Europe. The "new" Germany inherited the GDR's intensive economic exchange with the East. It will be much in demand as a partner to the newly reformed states and the Soviet Union.

Most analysts predict a harsh time for the German economy for some years to come because of the burden of revitalising the run-down economy of the former GDR. But in about 10 to 15 years, after the development of a new *Wirtschaftswunder*, the weight and therefore the influence of the German economy is expected to be larger than ever before. Does this mean that the EC will be taken over by the Germans?<sup>3</sup> How have the governments in the EC reacted to the new challenge?

The uneasiness about Germany's new role in Europe extended to probably every European capital. The catch-phrase "Fourth Reich" enjoyed a brief popularity in the newspapers, although most governments were careful to express themselves in more neutral terms.

### Nervous partners

Paris obviously felt uncertain about its own position. It had started the *entente élémentaire* with Bonn in the 1960s assuming itself to be the dominant partner. During the last two and a half decades it had taken the view that the Franco-German relationship was well balanced. While Germany's economy was

weightier, France's political influence in international affairs and in the EC was stronger. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as a nuclear power and as one of the four victorious countries of World War II it felt well able to cope with the German strength. Today, the latter two aspects have lost much of their significance or vanished altogether. With the gravitation of the EC to the East, Paris is apprehensive that its role is becoming a marginal one. The French government has therefore had to begin rethinking its political strategy.

Thus, in the first half of 1990 President Mitterrand was unsure how to react to the emerging new Germany. He tried different politics but was outmanoeuvred by the dynamic and speedy international development. First he tried to stabilise the GDR as a second German State, then adopted a pincers policy, leading to his meeting with President Gorbachev in Kiev. As of last summer, however, the Franco-German axis seems to be restored.

Great Britain appeared to be caught even more off balance than France. The former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had a hard time accepting the speedy German reunification.

Both these countries as well as the other EC members were therefore confronted with the same problem: to find the means to neutralise the German influence. Yet the answers were different—and history could have told so.

Ever since the late 1940s, both France and Great Britain have differed widely in their proposals for dealing with “the power-house of Europe”, as Dean Acheson dubbed their partner nation Germany as early as 1948.

Many aspects of the situation at that time were comparable to the present day. A new architecture for Europe had to be created. The United States, as the chief architect, sought a structure “in which Germany can be contained, in which Germany can play a peaceful and constructive, but not dictatorial role”.<sup>4</sup> They were convinced that “there is no solution of the German problem in terms of Germany, there is only a solution in terms of Europe”.<sup>5</sup> Washington tried to foster European integration with the Marshall Plan and the OECD. Secretary of State Dean Acheson painstakingly tried to convince the British government to





*Bavarian innkeeper*

accept the leading role in integrating the Western half of Europe, since France was thought to be far too weak for that undertaking. London refused. Washington reluctantly accepted that Great Britain was oriented towards its Commonwealth of Nations and the United States, with Europe ranking only third. The United Kingdom saw in its special relationship with the United States a guarantee of a balance of power. Therefore Acheson concluded: "The key to progress towards integration is in French hands... Even with the closest possible relationship of the US and the UK to the continent, France and France alone can take the decisive leadership in integrating West Germany into Western Europe".<sup>6</sup> And France did accept the mandate by proposing the Schuman Plan. Great Britain stayed away, anxious to maintain its sovereignty and only prepared to join after success had proved that it was not in their interest to stay out. The key of Monnet's concept was the demand for the surrender of sovereignty to an European institution before the start of negotiations. Pragmatic co-operation would not have resulted in the close, irrevocably linked community which today's EC is, but probably in a non-committal, weak organisation similar to the OECD or West European Union.

The concept of the European Community has indeed been able to weld together the core of Europe during the last 40 years more than any of its founding fathers may have expected. And it was able to counterbalance Germany. Should not this remedy against German hegemony and European dissolution be tried again in the present situation?

It was Jacques Delors, the president of the EC Commission who first followed in Monnet's footsteps. He immediately attempted to anchor Germany in the EC. Only weeks after the iron curtain had gone up, he invited East Germany to join the EC as soon as possible, calling the GDR an "exceptional case". It would be accepted as a member, he said, irrespective of other countries requests for membership. He argued that the GDR was "part of the family".<sup>7</sup> Of course, Mr. Delors understood very well that the alternative could have been West Germany's breaking with the Community and searching for unity and national greatness outside the EC, dashing the once-stable European structure into pieces. He argued in February 1990, pursuing the trend towards unification, that there should not be two Germanys holding EC membership but

only a united one. Jacques Delors did know of course that at the time the East German state was already absolutely dependent on West German financial aid and thus would only double the German weight in the EC's decision-making process.

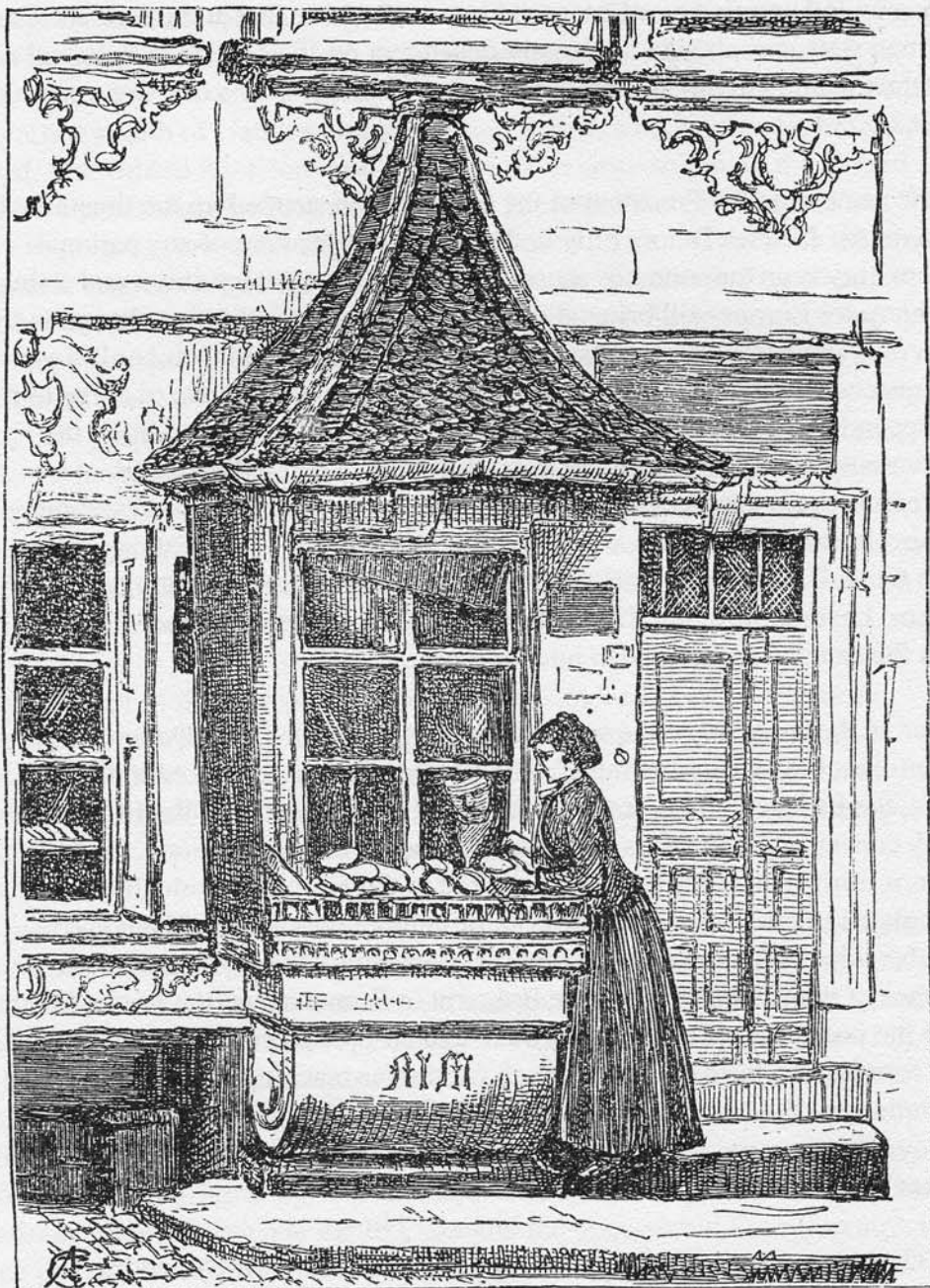
At the same time the President of the Commission stepped up the timetable for integration. Jacques Delors fully understands that the core of any national sovereignty is an autonomous monetary policy. A monetary union and a single currency for Europe will bring about a definitive and qualitative change in the present system of sovereign states. At the Rome summit in October last year he was successful in persuading all governments but Great Britain to agree to fix the second stage of the European monetary union at 1994. In addition the Community members consented to establish two intergovernmental conferences, one on monetary union and one on political union. Yes, political union. Until 1990 this term was taboo and called forth vehement opposition from Great Britain and others. Suddenly it became even necessary to press for reforms beyond the single European market. For the second time, Germany had been the catalyst for European integration.

As far as the structure of the whole Europe is concerned, Mr. Delors envisions a "Europe of Concentric Circles". The EC is to be closely linked to the first circle, the European Free Trade Association. It will be tied to the EC by a treaty concerning a European Economic Space. The second circle, the reformed Eastern European countries, will be linked to the EC by individually formulated treaties of association with or without the option of later membership. Countries with non-market economies and with democratic regimes of doubtful character like Bulgaria or Rumania and the Soviet Union have the possibility of negotiating trade and co-operation treaties with the EC thus forming the third circle. So much for the far-reaching ideas of the EC Commission. What about the member states?

### **Sovereignty or schizophrenia**

The German government acted according to tradition. Bombarded by expressions of mistrust by its friends and neighbours from the very first





A bakery in Würzburg

changes in Eastern Germany, it took recourse to Konrad Adenauer's policy of using integration as a means of reassuring its partners. On November 28, 1989, Helmut Kohl declared in his then sensational ten-point programme to overcome the division of Germany: "the development of inner-German relations remains an integral part of the pan-European process .... The future structure of Germany must fit into the future of Europe as a whole. The attraction and the image of the European Community is and remains a constant feature in the pan-European development. We want to strengthen this further".

<sup>8</sup> And in summer of 1990 he allowed himself to be persuaded to fix the date for the second stage of European monetary union, despite the warnings of Karl-Otto Pöhl, the powerful president of Germany's independent Bundesbank. As a return for his yielding on this issue Kohl proposed an acceleration of political integration as well.

At the time of the Dublin meeting of the European Council in June 1990, President Mitterrand had decided to continue the tried and tested way of the Franco-German "*Entente Elementaire*" in the context of the EC. In Dublin "Kohlerland", as Kohl and Mitterrand are dubbed in Brussels, again put the EC on the tracks of further integration as the two countries often had done before. The decision to open two intergovernmental conferences, one on monetary union and one on political union, was an attempt by the EC members to counterbalance Germany by taking the all-in-all successful road of building an organised and integrated core within Europe.

Consensus on the general direction of the EC for the future, although not about the details involved, had been astonishingly broad in Dublin. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, however, very much disliked the move towards closer European integration. <sup>9</sup> She tried to manage the new European situation by a traditional British approach. Afraid of a "European super-state" she kept to her "first guiding principle: willing and active co-operation between independent sovereign states" as "the best way to build a successful European Community". <sup>10</sup> She saw no need to speed up integration. On the contrary: the democratic development in the East European states provided the welcome chance to invite those countries to join the EC. This policy, which bore the characteristics of the nineteenth century, but supposed to solve the problems of



the twenty-first, recalls the British arguments rejecting the invitation to join a supranationally organised Europe in 1950 and 1955.

By enlarging the EC, Mrs. Thatcher tried to kill two birds with one stone: first, the German weight in the bargaining process of a Community with 15, 18 or even more members would be substantially reduced. Second, a European Community of this size, enlarged before deepened, would not be the EC we know today. Its means of decision-making as well as its policies would be seriously disrupted by the divergency of its members. The wave of migration to Western Europe and breakdown of the EC's financial system would necessarily destroy the EC. Thus the Community would probably be reduced to a kind of EFTA, possibly with a single European market, but without the EC's political implications. This position would be very much to the taste of the former Prime Minister and of the Tories' right wing.

The British Government could have achieved another aim in pursuing this policy, namely that of not surrendering further sovereignty in any other area to Brussels. Although none of Britain's European partners is transferring sovereignty to the EC swiftly, London's obsession with this principle is not easily understood in continental Europe. Living together so closely, the West European nations are well aware that the sovereignty of a nation-state has become only relative in many aspects. It could, and can, no longer provide for the main objective, the security—and thus culture and wealth—of a people. From the beginning of European integration, the participating states saw their identities better served by transferring part of their sovereignties, which had become empty shells, to European institutions.

The only relative value of sovereignty as a principle is most obvious in questions of environmental protection, drug traffic and international terrorism. Even in the realm of economic and monetary policy governments are being shorn of the power to set their own rules. Margaret Thatcher used to equate sovereignty with the national identity of a people. Germans, with their experience of a federal state and with a kind of hierarchy of identities, have no problems with being Bavarian, German and European. Usually, they do not feel schizophrenic in the least.

The United Kingdom has a new government. Is its attitude towards Europe different? John Major got a warm welcome at the Rome summit last December. It was the first time in a long while that the United Kingdom was not singled out for condemnation. Mr. Major's colleagues certainly appreciate his less rigorous style. But whether his position is much different from that of his predecessor remains to be seen. Shortly after taking office, he declared, according to *The Economist*, that "there is no need to surrender any more sovereignty to Europe" and he "also shares Mrs. Thatcher's views that extra countries should rapidly be recruited to the European Community, so slowing the momentum for a federal union".<sup>11</sup> It is still too early to assess his policy. In any case, the new prime minister needs time to bring the right wing of the Conservative Party to a more relaxed attitude towards Europe. The progress made in the intergovernmental conferences will indicate the British government's stance.

These, then, are the two main possibilities for further development in Europe: the continental one which seeks to provide an anchor for Germany and for Eastern Europe by further integrating the community economically as well as politically, and the British one, which tries to counterbalance German influence by close intergovernmental co-operation of all the democratic European states.

Certainly, both create a balance of power. The one in reducing the significance of nation-states, though without eliminating them, has created a remarkable stability. The other way, traditional but often shaky and unstable, has not exactly been a success story. Thus, one has to ask which of the two concepts is more appropriate in dealing with the German problem, with the European situation in the aftermath of the Cold War, and with the economic challenges?

### **Hegemon prevention**

The majority of the EC members is set towards integration. They agree that any move in the direction of a more federal Europe helps to create a viable, vigorous economy. They agree that the lack of a single currency is the ultimate barrier to the single market. And they share the view that the Eastern European countries are better served by providing a stable core which they can hold fast

to than by a more loosely organised Europe. And they are obviously convinced that a Europe based primarily on intergovernmental structures with most of the sovereignty resting with the nation states would make Germany the dominant power in Eastern Europe—because of its geographic situation and its economic strength. Then, and only then would Germany become the new hegemon of Europe.

In December 1990, the European heads of state and government agreed on guide-lines for two intergovernmental conferences which started to work in Rome on December 15, 1990. The conferences will reconfigure the power within the Community towards a more federal structure. This will help to prevent German hegemony.

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The conference on monetary union is well prepared and is certain to result in a treaty in 1991. Unless its outcome experiences the same fate as earlier plans for monetary union did in the 1970s, Europe will enter the second stage of EMU in 1994. Now as a member of the European exchange-rate mechanism, Great Britain has a far better chance to influence the negotiations than before. The future alone will show whether Britain's entry into the system was not a means to slow down the process. The Bundesbank will certainly be the model for a European Central Bank and monetary stability its prime task, but this probably will not be given as strict priority as in Germany. Whether Mr. Major's plan for a “hard ECU” as a thirteenth currency will be included remains to be seen. Although the Prime Minister's concept is widely criticised by central bankers as impracticable, the prejudice is gone that the “hard ECU” is only a political instrument to avoid monetary union altogether.



The differences between the British concept and the continental European proposals have some similarities with those concerning the Schuman Plan and the foundation of the EEC. The continental Europeans set the final goal—in this case monetary union—and then ask how to get there. This has been the underlying pattern of the process of European integration: the development of the EC was marked by political decisions, and the economy was then called upon to find adequate ways of achieving those goals. Great Britain, however, would prefer to enhance economic convergence in the EC without prejudging the final goal, as had been the case in past decades.<sup>12</sup> Of course, EMU means a merging of sovereignties. But “in respect to EMU, sovereignty means the right to let currency inflate”, which is no appropriate policy anyhow.<sup>13</sup> Eleven members of the EC consider monetary union to be a more successful method of reducing the predominance of the Bundesbank: Germany will no longer be able to pursue its own objectives independent of external constraints. This is far less sure with the open-ended approach of the British government.

The outcome of the negotiations on political union is harder to predict because of the awkwardly large amount of proposals. Before January 15, the outlook for a European foreign policy was quite good. In Dublin, the European Council decided to move on from primarily economic integration and from mere intergovernmental co-operation in foreign policy issues towards a political union including a common foreign and security policy.<sup>14</sup> The intergovernmental conference in Rome will not discuss the different options of making the EC's policy-making process—most probably—by finding a symbiosis between the EPC-EC mechanism.<sup>15</sup>

### **Self-therapy**

There is no question that adaptation to Europe's new situation is necessary. And there is a definite need for a common security policy as well. It is quite obvious that the US military presence will be drastically reduced by the end of 1991. Neither soldiers nor equipment withdrawn for the Gulf War will be restationed in Europe. But the reforms in the Soviet Union and the reduction of conventional forces are experiencing a severe set-back. Germany will come under strong political pressure from Russia, as Moscow certainly expects Bonn

to demonstrate its gratitude to the Kremlin for a long time to come. It would not be surprising if they used the remaining 350,000 troops in East Germany as a form of leverage.

Not only Germany but Europe too has to look after itself more, and to take care of the new democracies in the East and those of the stability of its hinterland. These problems cannot be solved by the nation-states themselves unless Europe wants to run the risk that the pressures—for instance in the case of Germany—or the immensity of the tasks involved, result in severe damage to the European stability and indeed to its very fabric.

Moreover, the war with Iraq showed the necessity for Europeans to participate in defending their interests, with both political and military means. The Franco-German proposal for a political union seeks to link the EC to the West European Union until 1996, as a European pillar inside NATO.<sup>16</sup> Kohl and Mitterrand are obviously thinking about incorporating article 5 of the West European Union into the EC treaty. In December 1990, the United States signaled interest in these ideas.

But the first casualty of the Gulf war was the idea that the European Community could act as a unified power. Indeed the behaviour of the governments differed widely. On August 2, Margaret Thatcher found herself at the side of George Bush at Aspen, Colorado. It was a welcome opportunity to prove that Great Britain is still America's staunchest ally and that it still makes sense for the United States to care for a special relationship with Great Britain. France, on the contrary, offered peace proposals until the clock struck twelve on January 15.

Germany reacted like a larger version of Switzerland, although Chancellor Kohl had promised on the eve of German unification that the new Germany would live up to its responsibilities. But this was soon forgotten. Germany was occupied with organising its first all-German elections and then with the difficult task of forming a new government. Bonn had obviously ruled out the possibility of war. It remained silent during the first days of war and left all arguments to the peace movement on the streets. The Chancellor and his Foreign Minister Genscher



*Across the Wall: a new Germany*

worsened the situation when they allowed a discussion to begin on Bonn's pre-conditions for defending NATO member Turkey. Any action before January 15, and since was taken under pressure from abroad.

Criticism from Britain and America was very strong. Both countries seem to have expected that—less than half a year after unification—Germany would behave as normally as any state of that size. This is clearly not the case. Firstly,



the weight and the responsibility of a united Germany is not yet on the mental maps of its politicians and citizens. Secondly, Charles Krauthammer's argument concerning the United States seems to fit Germany as well: "Except for revolution, nothing changes a country more than war. Great wars define the psyche and sensibilities of a people for decades".<sup>17</sup> Germany has started two wars during this century. Neither war can be described as "just". The enormous loss of life, the air-raids and the destruction of the last one, still belong to the collective memory. The war was lost, Germany was divided and re-educated. Half a year ago, Germany's neighbours feared unity would revive its belligerence. For better or for worse the Germans proved otherwise. Re-education was unexpectedly successful. Then as now, Germany seems to be dangerous. At first, for its assumed bellicosity, and now for its assumed pacifism. The check-book politics of united Germany were vilified and scorned.

The British government sees in the Community's ineffectual answer to the Gulf war, and in German behaviour especially, proof that the EC is not ready for a common foreign policy. The intensity of British criticism—there was virtually none from France or the other countries—gives the impression that the German policy is a welcome excuse to block progress towards a supranational organised foreign policy, or political union altogether. Instead, the pitiful result of the EPC in the Iraq crisis has to be taken as a challenge to develop a more coherent European foreign policy. The EC was pushed ahead not exactly because everything was moving smoothly but because deficits had to be acknowledge. International situations demonstrating Europe's powerlessness have often borne fruit: the list is an extensive one.

And the EC cannot afford the aloofness of its largest member state, nor this state's decision to go its own way, which could be damaging to European interests. The present German government is not interested in a *Sonderweg* (separate path), either in economy nor in foreign policy. It knows what the long-term price of such a move would be.

Another important question concerning the intergovernmental conference on political union in Rome is the transformation of the institutional system. The

reform will not result in a greater role for the new Germany as the weight of the German vote in the council of Ministers will not be changed. The "Big Three", Great Britain, France and Germany, want to increase the impact of the European Council although Italy and the smaller countries prefer to see the Commission and the European Parliament taking a larger role. This would reduce the weight of larger countries—Germany included. Jacques Delors proposed to reduce the Commission to only one member per country, but the new tasks of the EC are not consistent with a reduction in the number of members. Only for the European Parliament a more proportional distribution of seats is under discussion. But this would also not result in German predominance, because of a non-proportional distribution of seats to smaller countries.

### **Flexibility, flexibility**

If the EC is to accept the bolder but more forward-looking alternative of deepening integration first and enlarging the Community later, it will have to keep its structure flexible. It is counter-productive to force Great Britain and other more reluctant partners into a political and economic structure they are not able to stand. Far from being an appropriate means of keeping organisations or states together, pressure is rather a way of driving them apart. Enlightened self-interest which brought the EC together was the driving force behind the EC's development, not compulsion.

Regarding the EC members—neutral Ireland for instance, and Austria, a likely new member—membership in the West European Union poses a problem. The same may happen with a full membership of Great Britain, Greece and Portugal in the EMS. Therefore the EC will not have to fix the principle of subsidiarity in the new treaty—a German principle, much-loved in the United Kingdom—and this also leaves chances open for opting out on special issues and under prescribed conditions. The EC in the future will be as it has indeed been since 1973: a two-track community.

The EC should be flexible enough to be open for co-operation with the Eastern European countries, not in political core issues, but in spheres of minor

importance which nevertheless will accustom them to the style and procedures of West European politics. Suitable areas for participation would be technological research projects and environmental policy, among others—all those EC programmes which today already include West European non-EC members. A good example for a specially shaped programme helping Eastern Europe to close ranks with the West is PHARE. It provides financial and technological aid for the transformation of the former socialist economies.

Majority-vote wherever possible, opting out where absolutely necessary, this should be in the enlightened self-interest of the EC. But no country should have the chance to block the overall development against the will of the majority. Margaret Thatcher was adamant in her: “No, no, no”. John Major does not want to isolate his country. And Great Britain’s full participation is necessary to counterbalance the Franco-German special relationship. Britain contributed immensely to the single market programme and to the reform of the agricultural policy and it will make substantial contributions in the future. But Great Britain has to understand that the EC is an undertaking which, from the very beginning, meant far more than mere economic integration.

Western Europe seems to be heading for a thorough reform of the EC to counterbalance Germany and to prepare for the challenges ahead. The process towards integration will be as messy as ever with no final date ahead. But the increasing importance of informal flows of people and goods, of similar economic and social trends is transforming the shape of Western Europe with Germany as a catalyst and Eastern Europe dragged along in its wake. Opinion polls in the EC have shown a significant shift in the attitude towards Europe during the last decades, both in Great Britain and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Politics will have to adjust to transformations already taking place.<sup>19</sup> Europe’s manifest destiny is integration.

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