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The Thatcher Government, the Fall of the Berlin Wall, and German Reunification, 1989-1990

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Gary Love

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Cover photo: Photographer unknown, Margaret Thatcher and Douglas Hurd at a conference, 18 March 1989. Available at <https://www.ssplprints.com/image/114567/margaret-thatcher-and-douglas-hurd-at-a-conference-18-march-1989>, retrieved 14th April 2021.

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the Thatcher government's responses to German reunification in the period 1989-1990. It focuses on Margaret Thatcher's and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's statements from three different stages of the reunification process: the months leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the weeks after the fall, and the months up until the reunification was finalised. Furthermore, it does a comparative analysis in order to evaluate how aligned the views and opinions of Thatcher and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office were with each other. More specifically, this thesis recognises the internal conflicts the Thatcher government had in relation to German reunification, and the nuances in their conflicting responses.

Acknowledgements

This thesis marks the end of five years at NTNU. The learning curve has been steep and the work considerable, but I am proud of what I have accomplished, and proud to complete such a comprehensive academic study which I hope will contribute to existing scholarly work on the subject.

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Any errors that remain are my sole responsibility.

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Introduction

Historical Context

The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s brought about unparalleled changes to the political landscape in Europe. Within a short period, a revolutionary wave spread across the Eastern Bloc, resulting in democratic elections and transitions of power in several countries.¹ These few years, spanning from 1989 to 1991, have been strongly identified with the ‘Fall of Communism’, because they mark the end of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe.² One of the most important events during this period was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification of Germany. On the eve of the 9th of November 1989, nearly three decades after its construction, the Berlin Wall fell.³ The fall would for many people represent the beginning of the end of the Cold War because the physical border between communist East Germany and capitalist West Germany was demolished.⁴ But an ideological border between the two Germanies remained. This would prove to be a vitally important issue for world leaders, whether they welcomed it or not.

On the 28th of November, eighteen days after the fall of the Wall, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl announced a 10-point programme charting how the two Germanies should expand their cooperation and work towards reunification.⁵ However, to implement his plan, Kohl would need the support of other governments, particularly that of the Four-Power Authorities – France, the Soviet Union, the United

¹ Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, "The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe: Origins, Processes, Outcomes," in *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism*, ed. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 1.

² Graeme Gill, "Foreword," in *30 Years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall: Turns and Twists in Economies, Politics, and Societies in the Post-Communist Countries*, ed. Alexandr Akimov and Gennadi Kazakevitch (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), v.

³ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin & Prague* (London: Atlantic Books, 2019), 64; Norman M. Naimark, "'Ich Will Hier Raus': Emigration and the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic," in *Eastern Europe in Revolution*, ed. Ivo Banac (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1992), 77.

⁴ Douglas Hurd, *Memoirs* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), 381. See also Archie Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 247.

⁵ Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher - the Authorized Biography, Volume Three: Herself Alone* (London: Allan Lane, 2019), 494.

States, and the United Kingdom – and it would be from the British leadership that Kohl would meet the most resistance.⁶

What would a unified Germany mean for Europe and what would it mean for Great Britain? These were questions that preoccupied the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, during the final years of her decade-long Premiership.⁷ The Cold War had been important in shaping Thatcher's politics, both ideologically and internationally. During her time in Downing Street, Thatcher had put up a hard front against socialism, reinforcing the position of capitalism nationally and internationally.⁸ She was known for her anti-communist views and politics, which had earned her the title 'the Iron Lady'.⁹ During her Premiership she had also sought to strengthen Britain's stance as a broker between the two Cold War superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Her relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev has been credited as her "greatest achievement in foreign affairs".¹¹ For even though she was sceptical of whether the Soviet Union was changing, Thatcher viewed Gorbachev as a reformer.¹² It was him and his position in the Soviet Union that Thatcher wished to secure when the Wall fell, arguing that the recent changes would not have happened had it not been for him.¹³

Despite the possibilities for what a reunited, democratic Germany could mean for the Cold War, Thatcher did not have an optimistic approach to the situation. During the early days of the reunification process, Thatcher was an active and outspoken advocate against immediate German reunification, voicing her opinions both openly to the public and privately to other political figures.¹⁴ Though she was not against the establishment of a democratic East Germany, she feared what a united Germany would mean for the future of Europe.¹⁵ Having grown up during the Second World War, her views on Germany were formed by it, and she knew very well what a

⁶ Ibid., 495.

⁷ Margaret Thatcher, *Statecraft* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), 2.

⁸ Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* (London: Fontana, 1992), 19-20.

⁹ Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War*, 97-98.

¹⁰ On Britain's importance, see *ibid.*, 92-93. On Britain and Thatcher as a broker, see *ibid.*, 308.

¹¹ Geoffrey Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty* (London: Pen Books, 1995), 317.

¹² Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War*, 212.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁴ Christopher Mallaby, *Living the Cold War: Memoirs of a British Diplomat* (Gloucestershire: Amberley, 2017), 209.

¹⁵ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher - the Authorized Biography, Volume Three: Herself Alone*, 472.

strong, united Germany could accomplish.¹⁶ In her opinion, a reunification was not in Europe's best interests, and she worried what a hasty reunification would mean for the stability of the continent.¹⁷

However, the Prime Minister's views on German reunification did not reflect the British government's opinion as a whole. The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), with Douglas Hurd at the top as the newly appointed Foreign Secretary, was one of the departments in the British government which had a noticeably more favourable outlook on German unification.¹⁸ When appointing Hurd as Foreign Secretary, Thatcher had expressed that she hoped he would not let "those Europeans get away with too much".¹⁹ This hope was put to the test only a fortnight after Hurd's appointment when the Berlin Wall fell, paving the way for a new Europe. The fall would demonstrate that the Prime Minister and the FCO were not subjected to the same perception of the situation. Following the immediate response from Thatcher, Hurd and fellow FCO members felt that Thatcher judged the events and the possible outcome too cynically and that she put too much weight on Germany's involvement in the two world wars.²⁰ The FCO thought that any effort to either postpone or prevent German reunification would not be beneficial to Britain.²¹

Thesis Question

The aim of this thesis is to further examine the relationship between the views and opinions expressed by Thatcher and members of the FCO concerning German reunification. The chronological scope of the study is confined to the period between January 1989 and October 1990. At the beginning of 1989 German unification did not seem to be a likely outcome in the foreseeable future. It was nonetheless a time of great political unrest in Europe and in East Germany.²² In October 1990, after the fall

¹⁶ Ibid., 471.

¹⁷ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 791.

¹⁸ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher - the Authorized Biography, Volume Three: Herself Alone*, 480; Mallaby, *Living the Cold War: Memoirs of a British Diplomat*, 197, 218.

¹⁹ Hurd, *Memoirs*, 375.

²⁰ Ibid., 382.

²¹ Hurd comments on this in *ibid.*, and Christopher Mallaby, British Ambassador to Germany 1988-1990, in Mallaby, *Living the Cold War: Memoirs of a British Diplomat*, 209.

²² Ivo Banac, "Introduction," in *Eastern Europe in Revolutions*, ed. Ivo Banac (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1992), 3.

of communism in Eastern Europe and great pressure from both the German people and Chancellor Kohl, reunification was finalised. During this period both Thatcher and the FCO worked towards forming a collective British attitude towards and policy for dealing with the reunification process in Germany. I have chosen to research this in order to further explore the British government's response to the 'German question' in this period. Therefore, my thesis question is as follows:

How far were Margaret Thatcher's views on the reunification of Germany shared by British diplomats and officials working for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

I will also be examining three sub-questions which will contribute to answering the main research question. First, how similar were Thatcher's and the FCO's attitudes towards the two German states before the fall of the Berlin Wall? Second, how did Thatcher and the FCO respond to the events after 9 November 1989, when the Wall came down, and after 28 November 1989, when Kohl announced his wish to work towards reunification? Finally, what were Thatcher's and the FCO's views on the situation during the reunification process itself, until it was finalised on 3 October 1990?

Historiography

This thesis touches upon three major areas of historiography: the leadership and politics of Margaret Thatcher, British foreign relations during the Cold War, and the history of Germany from the fall of the Berlin Wall to reunification. Numerous scholars have written detailed studies about the events leading up to and following the fall of the Berlin Wall, and how it affected the Cold War and the political landscape in Germany, Europe, and the rest of the world. Thatcher's role and opinion concerning the reunification has been touched upon in several studies, but not much academic research has been devoted explicitly to her views and even less has been devoted to that of the FCO. One historian who has contributed something important to the question is Robert Saunders. Recently, in October 2020 – marking the 30th anniversary of the reunification of Germany – Saunders published a short article in the *New Statesman* magazine.²³ In his article, Saunders reflects upon Thatcher's

²³ Robert Saunders, "Britain at the End of History." *New Statesman*, October 7, 2020. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/10/britain-end-history>. Retrived 24th October 2020.

handling of the German reunification process and its aftermath by discussing her attitudes and actions during this period. Saunders points out four main factors which contributed to forming these attitudes and actions. First, Thatcher's often conservative approach to foreign affairs reflected a suspicion and a general caution towards "utopian visions", which the idea of German reunification could be considered to be.²⁴ Second, Germany's situation was different from that of any other of the states that underwent a revolution or transition of power during this unrestful period. Unlike other countries in the former Eastern Bloc, East Germany collapsed as a nation state and was reintegrated into the West German state. Without the ideological differences between the two Germanies, a new unitary state emerged with one German people. This is what Thatcher referred to as 'the German problem'.²⁵ Third, Thatcher's opinion of contemporary Germany was chiefly negative and strongly influenced by the world wars. She did not trust the German 'national character', which she associated with words such as "angst, aggressiveness, assertiveness [and] bullying".²⁶

Thatcher's opinions, and the fact that they were made public, were of concern for many, particularly the FCO who worked towards a reunification which would suit Britain's interests.²⁷ Last, Thatcher's actions and intentions backfired and can in hindsight testify to the fact that she lacked the skill of being a unifying force in a changing Europe. Thatcher's tactics "failed at every turn", Saunders writes.²⁸ In the beginning of the unification process, she tried to postpone development, claiming that it is was moving "much too fast".²⁹ Later, when this tactic proved unsuccessful, she wished to position the Soviet Union as a counterpower which could contain and restrain Germany. This idea was not met with support from other world leaders.³⁰ Thatcher's lack of success in regard to Germany weakened her position in Britain, and Britain's position in Europe and the world. This contributed to forming an image of Thatcher as unfit for the changed political world which was anticipated in the coming 1990s.³¹

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

In addition to his analysis of Thatcher, Saunders also briefly comments on the FCO in his article. Specifically, he remarks on the weakened voice of the department, referring to the fact that there had been three different Foreign Secretaries in the last four months, where the last, Hurd, had only been appointed two weeks before the fall of the Wall.³² Because of this it was Thatcher herself who had the strongest voice and “rang out most clearly in the early stages of unification”.³³ This gave way for Thatcher’s “megaphone diplomacy”.³⁴

Even though Saunders’ article is not published in an academic journal, it is still a very thought-provoking work of journalism based on primary sources. The sources were not included in the article itself, but Saunders published a thread on Twitter shortly after the article was issued where he supplied the documents he had used.³⁵ The text is very much a scholarly article and Saunders makes many notable contributions to the research field by provoking new questions about the topic and suggesting potential lines of enquiry by looking at different reasons for why Thatcher acted as she did. For this reason, Saunders’ work serves as an excellent starting point for further research. With this thesis, I have the opportunity to build on his work constructively and to test his arguments concerning Thatcher and her opinions on German unification. However, in contrast to Saunders’ text, my thesis will additionally provide a larger focus on the FCO’s role and views during the reunification process. As Saunders does not concentrate on the FCO – and because he still only scratches the surface of the research topic – I will use other secondary sources that shed light on these matters as well.

Pyeongeok An is another scholar who has contributed to this field of research. In 2006, An published an article where he looked at British policy towards German reunification in 1989-90, with a particular focus on the FCO. In his article, An writes that British policy towards German reunification has been “over-identified with the rhetoric of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher” which in turn has drawn attention

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Robert Saunders (@redhistorian) 2020. " Redhistorian Twitter Thread." Twitter, October 8, 2020, 6:47-54 PM. <https://twitter.com/redhistorian/status/1314245966636216320?s=21>. Retrived 24th October 2020.

away from the FCO's role in the reunification process.³⁶ As a result, British policy towards reunification has been viewed to be "reluctant at best, obstructive at worst".³⁷ An challenges this perception in his article, by highlighting the contributions of the FCO.

An's main argument is tied to the FCO's role in the Two Plus Four meetings – the forum created to deal with the external aspects of German reunification.³⁸ An writes that the FCO, who were not under instruction from Downing Street, took the lead in several key negotiations in the Two Plus Four talks.³⁹ Their role in these talks was both helpful and constructive, working with the other Western Allies to secure a diplomatic reunification. Their primary concerns were the German-Polish border and German NATO membership, and a substantial amount of time and effort were therefore devoted to these issues.⁴⁰ However, the work of the FCO was played out behind the scenes and several of the documents outlining their effort were subjected to the thirty-year rule which concealed them from the public until the 2010s. Their positive contributions to the reunification process were thus easily overshadowed by the attention given to Thatcher's public statements.⁴¹

By comparing the works of Saunders and An, one can observe that Saunders represents the viewpoint which An challenges: the over-fixation on Thatcher and her views and opinions. However, An does not deny that Thatcher and her many statements had a significant effect on the contemporary perception of British opinion towards German reunification. This effect is highlighted and problematised throughout the article. His critique lies in the continued practice of identifying the British government's response to German reunification with that of Thatcher's response, ignoring the efforts of others, particularly that the FCO's whose work was confidential.

Although memoirs and biographies are not technically part of the historiography, in the sense that they are not academic studies with a critical examination of sources, they have made a substantial contribution to our knowledge

³⁶ Pyeongeok An, "Obstructive All the Way? British Policy Towards German Unification." *German Politics* 15, no. 1 (2006): 111.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 115-16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

of Thatcher's and the FCO's views on German unification. An example of this is Sir Christopher Mallaby's memoirs, which are dedicated to the years he worked as a diplomat for the FCO. Mallaby was the last British Ambassador to West Germany from 1988-1990 and the first British Ambassador to a united Germany from 1990-1993.⁴² Like An, Mallaby writes that the work done by the FCO during the reunification process was "greater than it appeared in public to be" and that the British made helpful contributions despite being perceived as unhelpful.⁴³ According to Mallaby, this was a result of Thatcher's negative statements concerning reunification, which gave a "strong impression that Britain was against unification".⁴⁴

Mallaby writes that he was early aware of Thatcher's opinions towards Germany and the possibility of reunification, describing her as having an "acute sensitivity" on the matter.⁴⁵ Mallaby links, as many others have done, Thatcher's distrust towards Germany with their role in the world wars, particularly the second which coincided with her teenage years.⁴⁶ This belief has also been confirmed by Thatcher herself in her memoirs.⁴⁷ Looking back at the process, Mallaby is critical of Thatcher not taking contemporary factors into consideration when assessing Germany. He stresses the fact that the Federal Republic was "deeply integrated" in the West European community and was economically one of the most successful states in post-war Europe.⁴⁸ Additionally, he points out that Britain had for years declared commitment "to the aim of a reunified, democratic Germany", which had now become a reachable goal.⁴⁹ A democratic Germany at the heart of Europe would also be to the benefit of Britain as it would weaken the Soviet Union's position in Europe and ensure a peaceful Cold War victory for the West, thus eliminating "the greatest threat to the United Kingdom's security".⁵⁰

⁴² Mallaby, *Living the Cold War: Memoirs of a British Diplomat*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 199, 209.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁴⁷ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 791.

⁴⁸ Mallaby, *Living the Cold War: Memoirs of a British Diplomat*, 208.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

The works presented in the historiography highlight that there are different interpretations of the role of the British during the reunification process and the main inconsistencies relate to the British attitude towards reunification, how much the FCO contributed to this process, and how overshadowed their work was by Thatcher. However, the works also show that there is still much that remains to be researched on this topic. With this thesis I aim to make an original contribution to the historiography on this important topic. By examining Thatcher's views and opinions in comparison with that of prominent figures in the FCO, this thesis will add a new comparative dimension to the study of both Thatcher and the FCO in relation to British policy about German reunification. In doing so, it offers a more in-depth study of these questions, and it tests already established arguments against a broader set of sources.

Sources, Method, and Chapter Structure

The primary sources used in this thesis are mainly gathered from two document collections. The first is the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, an online archive which extensively covers historical documents relating to Thatcher and the Thatcher period (including her own private papers).⁵¹ The second is a published collection of documents from the FCO's archive, focusing on the German unification of 1989-1990. The collection is edited by Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, historians at the FCO.⁵² I have chosen these collections as they, along with the secondary literature, are able to provide a very detailed and thorough source base for my research. Nonetheless, the scope of this thesis necessitates some compromises when it comes to selecting source material and even more could be drawn upon in a larger study of this subject.

The findings in this thesis are based on an interpretation of the primary sources. The sources are close in time and space to the events they depict and are therefore reliable links to the past.⁵³ By using source material from two different

⁵¹ The Margaret Thatcher Foundation's home page: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/>

⁵² Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, eds., *German Unification 1989-90: Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Volume VII* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010).

⁵³ Knut Kjeldstadli, *Fortida er ikke hva den en gang var: En innføring i historiefaget*, 2. ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999), 177.

collections that portray the same set of events, I am able to research the topic from two angles. This provides a degree of protection against potential misinterpretation and exaggeration, as the perspective of the present can distort the view of the past.⁵⁴ As the thesis question and the chosen source material indicate, the method used in this research is comparative with a high political angle. This will include an assessment of the opinions and views found in historical documents such as letters, speeches, and recorded conversations, issued from both No. 10 and members of the FCO. With an archival study such as this it is important to acknowledge potential gaps in the historical records, but this is true of any subject of historical research. The objective of this thesis is to construct as full a picture as the source material allows me to achieve within the scope of my research and to compare these findings with what we already know more broadly from the historiography. The latter is vital for providing me with the necessary historical context for primary source analysis and to be able to bridge the gaps in the archive when needed.

In order to answer the thesis question clearly, I have chosen to structure the thesis around the three sub-questions and the chronological periods they represent. The first period is the months leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall. 1989 was a momentous and transformative year for Europe in general, and even before the fall of the Wall there were difficulties in defining British policy towards the two Germanies, as there was unrest and disturbances in both countries. The first chapter will therefore focus on this period, in order to establish the pre-existing attitudes the Thatcher government had towards the two Germanies. It will also look at the relationship between Thatcher and the FCO. This chapter is essentially a historical background chapter, but it makes use of both secondary reading and newly-researched primary sources. Whereas chapters two and three present systematic research from the archive and other sources, which represent the most original contribution to research in this thesis.

The second period and the second chapter concern the time immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the announcement of Kohl's 10-point programme. This is a shorter period, but also one of great importance. As the dust had yet to settle and no one could be certain of the outcome, the period is of significant interest because it

⁵⁴ Tracey Loughran, "Introduction," in *A Practical Guide to Studying History*, ed. Tracey Loughran (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1.

features the immediate, and perhaps instinctive, reactions of the Prime Minister and the FCO's members. The third and final period deals with the time leading up to the official reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990. During this period, reunification was by many considered inevitable, but there were disagreements regarding the conditions for it. The last main chapter will therefore look at the planning phase of reunification, as well as the time surrounding finalisation, in order to obtain a better understanding of how Thatcher and the FCO considered the changing situation.

As there are two prime actors in this thesis – Thatcher and the prominent figures in the FCO, considered collectively for the purpose of this thesis – it is natural to study their opinions separately. Each of the three chapters will therefore be divided between Thatcher and the FCO. However, a key objective of this study is to see Thatcher's and the FCO's opinions in comparison to each other. To accomplish this, each chapter will include a comparative conclusion where I summarise my findings and look at the similarities and dissimilarities between the two. The accumulative results of my analysis will then be evaluated and finalised in the conclusion of the thesis.

By structuring the chapters in this manner, I have the opportunity to study the development of Thatcher's and the FCO's opinions chronologically during the scope of the study. This will add to the comparative dimension of the study and contribute to the concluding results. Collectively, the different sections of the thesis will provide the reader with a better understanding of the viewpoints of both Thatcher and the FCO, the differences and similarities in their opinions, and the reasons behind their analysis. The results will contribute to a greater understanding of the nuances of the British government's responses to German reunification during 1989-1990.

The Thatcher Government and the Two Germanies

Patrick Salmon writes that by 1989 the division of the two German states had formed the bedrock of Europe's security for forty years.⁵⁵ However, since becoming General Secretary of the Soviet Union four years prior, Gorbachev's reforms were taking effect across Europe, and both Germanies were susceptible to a potential change.⁵⁶ Dealing with a changing Europe and an increasingly unstable East Germany, the British government was making efforts in order to secure British interests for the future, by continuously assessing their relationship with both the German states.⁵⁷ This chapter, then, researches Thatcher's and the FCO's opinions of the two Germanies before the fall of the Berlin Wall, focussing particularly on the months between January and November 1989. To facilitate the building up of a more nuanced picture of both parties, the chapter analyses Thatcher's views separately before moving on to those of the FCO. But the chapter also pays attention to and assesses the working relationship between Thatcher and the FCO in this period in order to better understand the views and opinions of each other.

Thatcher's perspective of the two Germanies was heavily influenced by their history in the two world wars. In her book *Statecraft*, Thatcher linked the security of Europe to the division of Germany. She wrote that "[a] defeated, divided and humiliated Germany was not in any position to cause trouble", and emphasised that not since Napoleon had any other country than Germany caused wars in Europe.⁵⁸ Even in 2002, over a decade since reunification, she could not – as she could not before reunification – regard Germany as "just another country".⁵⁹ Although these are retrospective judgments, they are representative of the opinions she expressed in 1989.

In the beginning of the year, German reunification had yet not surfaced as a possibility for the foreseeable future and 1989 was predicted to be a year of no

⁵⁵ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge, *German Unification 1989-90: Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Volume VII*, ix.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, ix-xii.

⁵⁸ Thatcher, *Statecraft*, 327.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

“substantive change” for East Germany.⁶⁰ The security of Europe was, nevertheless, a question that concerned the Prime Minister. Thatcher was worried about the state of NATO, which was beginning to lose its ground after 40 years of success.⁶¹ Thatcher met with Kohl in February to discuss the modernisation of NATO’s short-range nuclear forces (SNF) located on West German soil.⁶² The question of modernisation had been met with some alarm from both the public and the government in West Germany.⁶³ Gorbachev’s reforms had created a doubt in the minds of the people whether strong defence against the Soviet Union still was necessary.⁶⁴ Thatcher’s view was that the Soviet still posed as a military threat and that NATO should “take all the steps necessary to defend itself”, including updating its weapons. She also stated that it was NATO which had secured West Germany’s freedom for forty years.⁶⁵ Kohl was fundamentally in agreement with Thatcher but was challenged as the public opinion was not in favour in a time where defence policy had become a central issue in West Germany.⁶⁶

The coming months would not resolve the issue. Thatcher was not satisfied with West Germany’s efforts regarding the situation, and in July, No. 10 considered West Germany as an increasingly uncomfortable partner who was said to be “losing their backbone on defence”.⁶⁷ At the same time, the pressure for rapid change in Eastern Europe was spreading. By autumn, the situation in the two Germanies was changing because of the increased unrest in East Germany. In a phone conversation with the American President, George Bush, Kohl said that the changes in the neighbouring state was “quite dramatic”, making it difficult to give a prognosis of the

⁶⁰ Nigel Broomfield, “Cold War: UK Embassy in East Berlin to FCO (1988 Annual Report on GDR)”, 4th Jan. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111018>. Retrieved from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org> (MTF), 29th April 2021.

⁶¹ Charles Powell, “Foreign policy: Powell briefing for MT (“Bilateral with the Foreign Secretary”)”, 26th July 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215222>. Retrieved from MTF, 29th April 2021.

⁶² Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl, “Germany: No.10 conversation record (MT-Kohl)”, 20th Feb. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212213>. Retrieved from MTF, 29th April 2021.

⁶³ Charles Powell, “Foreign policy: Powell briefing for MT (“Bilateral with the Foreign Secretary”)”, 31st Jan. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215237>. Retrieved from MTF, 29th April 2021.

⁶⁴ Thatcher and Kohl, “Germany: No.10 conversation record (MT-Kohl)”, 20th Feb. 1989.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Powell, “Foreign policy: Powell briefing for MT (“Bilateral with the Foreign Secretary”)”, 26th July 1989.

coming time.⁶⁸ The instability of the situation and the consistent call for reform among the East German people drew attention to the future of the German states.

In September, Thatcher visited Moscow and talked to Gorbachev about his political reforms and their effect in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. During their talk, Thatcher asked the recording of the meeting to be paused, as she wished to speak to him confidentially.⁶⁹ It was the German situation and the prospect of reunification she wanted to address. Thatcher was concerned about the developments in East Germany, and made it clear that she did not regard reunification as a favourable outcome:

We [Britain and West Europe] do not want the unification of Germany. It would lead to changes in the post-war borders, and we cannot allow that because such a development would undermine the stability of the entire international situation, and could lead to threats to our security.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, she was in favour of internal change, both in East Germany and other East European countries. Gorbachev agreed with this position and said that the Soviet Union would not hinder any internal process of change.⁷¹

Late October, Thatcher's remarks regarding German reunification were beginning to cause concern in the FCO, who feared what would happen when her views became publicly known.⁷² They pointed to three different occasions where Thatcher had "aired her misgivings about German reunification".⁷³ The first was in a conversation with the French President, François Mitterrand, on 1 September, where they had discussed the matter of reunification at some length. No official record of the conversation mentions German reunification, but several independent sources confirm that the topic was discussed, though there is disagreement regarding what was said.⁷⁴ John Major, who was Foreign Secretary at the time, recalled the

⁶⁸ George W. Bush and Helmut Kohl, "Cold War: Bush-Kohl phone conversation (European situation)", 23rd Oct. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109450>. Retrieved from MTG, 30th April 2021.

⁶⁹ Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev, "Cold War: MT conversation with Mikhail Gorbachev (extract from Soviet memcon in Gorbachev Archive)", 23rd Sept. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/112005>. Retrieved from MTF, 29th April 2021.

⁷⁰ Ibid. This part of the conversation was recorded from recollections.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Patrick Wright, "No. 26: Minute from Sir P. Wright to Mr Wall", 30th Oct. 1989. In *German Unification 1989-90: Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Volume VII (GU:DBPO)*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 78-80. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

conversation in his memoirs and remarked on the sharpness of both Thatcher's and Mitterrand's tone.⁷⁵ Major also revealed that Kohl was aware of the exchanges and that they would have lasting effect on the Anglo-German relationship.⁷⁶

The second occasion was the conversation Thatcher had had with Gorbachev, proving that despite her wish for confidentiality, the content of their talk was being spread – at least within the British government.⁷⁷ The third was at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOMG) which had been held at Kuala Lumpur 18-24 October.⁷⁸ During the summit, Thatcher had said that with the upsurge of several nationalist groupings there was a risk of “German Reunification raising its head again”.⁷⁹ Following the conference, the FCO, in consultation with No. 10, had arranged for her remarks on the subject to be removed from the official record of the meeting.⁸⁰ They could, however, not censor the public speech Thatcher had held on the first day of the summit. Thatcher had talked about the crisis of communism and of the international conflicts, where she had mentioned the instability of East Germany.⁸¹ She regarded the question of German reunification as problematic for the security of Europe and said it would need “very careful management” in order to avoid “the upheavals and conflicts we have experienced twice this century”.⁸² Two weeks after the summit, the German situation would reach a new peak as the Berlin Wall fell, spurring new questions regarding the future of the two Germanies and their place in Europe.

Simultaneously as the Prime Minister, the FCO was also making their contributions and assessments of the changing political situation. The FCO faced internal turnover in 1989. Before the end of October, three different men had occupied the position of Foreign Secretary since January of the same year: Geoffrey

⁷⁵ John Roy Major, *John Major: The Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 122.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Wright, “No. 26: Minute from Sir P. Wright to Mr Wall”, 30th Oct. 1989.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to Commonwealth Summit (global trends and prospects)”, 18th Oct. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107792>. Retrieved from MTF, 29th April 2021.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Howe, John Mayor, and Douglas Hurd.⁸³ Despite this frequent change of leadership, the FCO had a consistent policy towards the two Germanies and the possibility of reunification. The policy was based on the Bonn/Paris Conventions of 1955, which established that the end-goal was a reunified Germany.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the political landscape in 1989 was rapidly changing, and the German question was moving upwards on the agenda, demanding more attention and consideration.

In early April 1989, the FCO was worried about how reliable West Germany was as an ally, fearing that their alliance to the West would weaken if reunification with East Germany became a possibility.⁸⁵ Mallaby identified the origin of this doubt to two trends. The first was the uncritical enthusiasm for the Soviet leader and the growing willingness to overlook or deny the Soviet threat.⁸⁶ The second was the public impatience regarding defence activities in Germany, such as the modernisation of the SNF.⁸⁷ Despite this, Mallaby did not consider these trends as a sign that West Germany would cease to be an ally of the West in the future. Instead, he believed it to be a question of how difficult an ally and partner they would be in the future.⁸⁸

Given that West Germany was important for the prosperity and security of Britain, Mallaby urged Howe in April to form closer Anglo-West German relations, and suggested that Britain should offer repeated verbal support to the aspiration of reunification.⁸⁹ However, despite this wish for closer relations, events would push the relationship in the other direction. By the summer of 1989, the Anglo-West German relationship was considered to be declining.⁹⁰ Several members of the FCO linked the conflict to the dominating perception of Britain as being anti-Europe and that the Germans did not see eye to eye with British policies.⁹¹ As a result, West Germany

⁸³ GOV.UK. "Past Foreign Secretaries." N.d. <https://www.gov.uk/government/history/past-foreign-secretaries>. Retrived 30th April 2021.

⁸⁴ Hilary N.H. Synnott, "No. 25: Submission from Mr Synnott to Mr Radford", 25th Oct. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 67-78. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

⁸⁵ Christopher Mallaby, "No. 1: Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Sir G. Howe", 10th April 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 1-8. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Christopher Mallaby, "No. 7: Letter from Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Sir J. Fretwell" 27th July 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 20-23. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

⁹¹ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge, *German Unification 1989-90: Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Volume VII*, xii-xiii.

opted to strengthen their bonds with France and the United States, instead of seeking British friendship.

At the same time there were also difficulties in East Germany. In late April, the FCO considered the state of East Germany to be unstable. Nigel Broomfield, the British Ambassador to East Germany, reported to the FCO that there was increased pressure, both internal and external, for change. The very fact that another German state with better living conditions existed was a conundrum which had challenged the East German leadership for years.⁹² As the democratic wave swept across the neighbouring countries of Poland and Hungary, and mass migration from East to West Germany was becoming an increasing problem, East German reform became more and more anticipated.⁹³

Throughout these months, members of the FCO had discussed and considered reunification as a possibility for the future. FCO diplomats and staff in both Bonn and East Berlin thought it important that if – or when – reunification surfaced on the agenda, Britain should stress the principle of self-determination.⁹⁴ In September, Major made a successful visit to West Berlin, where he emphasised this: the British would maintain the position they had had for over thirty years as supporters of reunification.⁹⁵ By October, the situation escalated and talk of reunification increased, both in the two German states and within the FCO.⁹⁶ For the FCO it became more important than ever to tie West Germany to the West and give them no reason to question their allegiance with NATO and the European Community (EC).⁹⁷ The FCO recognised that even though there could be some potential disadvantages for Britain from German reunification, there might also be some potential advantages. It could be a victory for Western values, improve Western security, and strengthen the EC's

⁹² Nigel Broomfield, "No. 2: Mr Broomfield (East Berlin) to Sir G. Howe" 20th April 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 8-14. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

⁹³ Mallaby, *Living the Cold War: Memoirs of a British Diplomat*, 191-92.

⁹⁴ For Bonn, see Christopher Mallaby, "No. 9: Letter from Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Ratford" 11th Sept. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 25-27. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. For East Berlin, see Munro, Colin A. "No. 10: Teleletter from Mr Munro (East Berlin) to Mr Ratford", 15th Sept. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 28-30. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

⁹⁵ Christopher Mallaby, "No. 13: Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Major", 21st Sept. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 33-34. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

⁹⁶ John C.S. Ramsden, "No. 18: Letter from Mr Ramsden to Mr Budd (Bonn)", 11th Oct. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 44-45. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

economy.⁹⁸ Therefore, the FCO considered it best not to discourage reunification and instead seek to exert influence over speed and timing if reunification became possible.⁹⁹

In late October, Hilary Synnott, Head of the Western European Department in the FCO, submitted a paper on the German question. Before submittal, Synnott had received and incorporated comments from the embassies in Bonn and East Berlin, the British Military Government, and from other Departments and individual members of the FCO.¹⁰⁰ The paper outlined the current situation and possible outcomes for the future, where reunification was considered as one of four likely outcomes.¹⁰¹ In order to secure British interests, Synnott, as other FCO members had before him, advised Britain not to “stand in the way of German aspirations”.¹⁰² Instead, Britain should encourage freedom and democracy in East Germany as a priority and nurture the British relationship with both Germanies.¹⁰³ By handling the situation in a “sensitive, forward-looking way”, Synnott hoped Britain could earn lasting goodwill and trust with the Germans.¹⁰⁴

Nearing the end of this period, in early November 1989, tension rose higher and the desire for change grew – especially in East Germany, but also in West Germany. In East Germany, the increasing emigration had become so prominent that the government pleaded with the people not to leave and instead have faith in the government’s ability to reform.¹⁰⁵ On 5 November, Broomfield considered East Germany to be “[i]n the middle of a revolution” and warned that if the government did not manage to halt the emigration flow, East Germany would be heading towards political and economic collapse.¹⁰⁶ In West Germany, the majority of the population now considered reunification to be a serious possibility and 80% were in favour of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Synnott, “No. 25: Submission from Mr Synnott to Mr Radford”, 25th Oct. 1989.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Nigel Broomfield, “No. 32: Mr Broomfield (East Berlin) to Mr Hurd”, 5th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 90-92. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

it.¹⁰⁷ If reunification were to happen, however, there was a consensus in West Germany that the alliance and partnership with the West should continue in order to secure freedom, security, peace, and prosperity.¹⁰⁸ To adapt to the changes, the FCO was working to establish British preferences to the likely outcomes outlined in Synnott's paper and hoped to talk to the Americans about their thoughts on the German question.¹⁰⁹ The FCO considered it probable that developments would happen "fast and disorderly", and that "some degree of self-determination might come sooner than [they] had expected".¹¹⁰ This premonition was not far off, as the Berlin Wall fell six days later.

As Britain's two most influential contributors in foreign politics, Thatcher and the FCO worked together in order to form British foreign policy. Yet, the working relationship between the two was not without its problems. Thatcher was rumoured to have a dislike for the FCO, some even going as far as saying she "despised" them.¹¹¹ Howe, who was Thatcher's Foreign Secretary for six years, wrote in his memories that she had a "profound antipathy towards the Office" and that she preferred to keep them, including to some extent the Foreign Secretary, at arm's length.¹¹² In her own memoirs, Thatcher wrote that the FCO had a tendency to have a distorted view on matters, explaining it as an occupational hazard, a *déformation professionnelle*.¹¹³ In hindsight, in *Statecraft*, she expressed scepticism towards how reliable the work and calculations done by diplomats were, writing that "whatever the diplomats say, expect the worst".¹¹⁴ Thatcher trusted her own instincts and was said to prefer getting

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Mallaby, "No. 34: Letter from Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Sir J Fretwell", 8th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 93-98. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Wright, "No. 30: Submission from Sir P. Wright to Mr Wall", 3rd Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 85-87. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Norman Stone, "Cold War: "Germany? Maggie was absolutely right" (Norman Stone on 1990 Chequers Germany seminar)", 23rd Sept. 1996. URL:

<https://www.margarethatatcher.org/document/111048>. Retrieved from MTF, 21st April 2021.

Archie Brown also comments on Thatcher's distrust towards the FCO in Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, and the End of the Cold War*, 101.

¹¹² Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*, 394.

¹¹³ Margaret Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher: The Autobiography* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 553.

¹¹⁴ *Statecraft*, 43.

opinions and ideas from the outside, rather than from the FCO.¹¹⁵ For the FCO's part, Thatcher's strong determination meant that they at times had trouble affecting her views on occasions when they were not in agreement with each other.¹¹⁶ Her reluctance to cooperate with the FCO also had implications for their authority and recurrently resulted in disagreement on key questions.¹¹⁷

It is perhaps because of the tense relationship between Thatcher and the FCO that one can recognise a "radical re-ordering" during Thatcher's time in office.¹¹⁸ Before Thatcher became Prime Minister, diplomatic negotiations were usually left to the residing diplomats and ambassadors, employed by the FCO, or the Foreign Secretary. There had been evidence of a change in this structure from before Thatcher was elected, but after Thatcher stepped into office it became increasingly more common that the Prime Minister took a more active part in foreign affairs and foreign policy making.¹¹⁹ By choosing former FCO members as her private advisors and secretaries – including her key foreign policy adviser, Charles Powell – Thatcher made way for new opportunities for forming her own foreign policies, without extensively consulting the FCO.¹²⁰ Thatcher's continued habit of dealing with foreign issues on her own created friction between her and the FCO and diminished the authority of the Foreign Secretary.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Stone, "Cold War: "Germany? Maggie was absolutely right" (Norman Stone on 1990 Chequers Germany seminar)", 23rd Sept. 1996.

¹¹⁶ Zara Steiner, "The Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Resistance and Adaptation to Changing Times," in *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Gaynor Johnson (London: Routledge, 2005), 16.

¹¹⁷ Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*, 394.

¹¹⁸ Steiner, "The Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Resistance and Adaptation to Changing Times," 16.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*, 394.

The Thatcher Government and the Fall of the Berlin Wall

On the evening of 9 November 1989, Günter Schabowski opened the Berlin Wall.¹²² Schabowski was an East German politician and an official of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, and had been instructed to present the new, temporary travel regulations in a meeting with the German press.¹²³ He had been given limited information and when asked about when these regulations – which would make emigration from East Germany and East Berlin considerably simpler – would come into effect, he improvised slightly and informed the press that they would be in effect immediately – “without delay”.¹²⁴ Schabowski’s improvisation would result in the rushed opening of the Berlin Wall and, in hindsight, his words symbolised the dramatic speed of the broader changes that would take place inside the two Germanies over the following year before reunification. On 28 November 1989, Kohl announced his 10-point programme for how the two countries should work towards unification. He did this without giving prior notification to other heads of state, which caused some concern.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, at the European Council summit in Strasbourg on 8-9 December, the Council endorsed the possibility of reunification if the German people willed it for themselves, and if it happened in accordance with the “principles defined by the Helsinki Final Act”.¹²⁶

This chapter will explore the statements of Thatcher and the FCO between 10 November and 9 December 1989. This will provide a better understanding of the views and opinions evident in the statements of these two parties, and gain insight of where their opinions might have differed. I will again start with looking at Thatcher’s statements, before moving on to the FCO’s.

¹²² James Shotter, "Politician Who Hastened Wall Collapse Dies." *Financial Times*, November 1, 2015. <https://www.ft.com/content/ab67393a-8094-11e5-a01c-8650859a4767>. Retrived 28th April 2021.

¹²³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 245.

¹²⁴ For circumstances, see *ibid.*, 245-46. For quote, see Shotter, "Politician Who Hastened Wall Collapse Dies."

¹²⁵ Luca Ratti, *A Not-So-Special Relationship: The US, the UK and German Unification, 1945-1990* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 237.

¹²⁶ The European Council, “EC: Strasbourg European Council (Presidency Conclusions)”, 9th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/114167>. Retrieved from MTF, 6th March 2021.

Events might have been moving quickly in Germany, but evidence shows that the speed and unpredictability of these changes caused the British Prime Minister some concern. Following the fall of the Wall, Thatcher made two statements concerning the events in Berlin. In the first, a private announcement in No. 10, she expressed that she welcomed the lift on travel restrictions and hoped that this was the start of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. However, she also stressed that events were happening rapidly, and that the future priority should be to see a “genuinely democratic” government in East Germany.¹²⁷ The second statement, an interview in front of No. 10, was the first public announcement from the British government concerning the German situation.¹²⁸ It could therefore be judged to set a precedent for how the government regarded the changing situation and what they considered to be the likely and the preferred outcome, the last two not necessarily being one and the same. The interview, where Thatcher echoed and elaborated the views in her previous announcement, is often remembered for the phrase “a great day for freedom”, referring to the fall of the Wall and what it could mean for the liberty of the East German people and for the future of Eastern Europe.¹²⁹ However, the interview is also remembered for Thatcher’s reluctance to discuss the possibility of a reunited Germany. Thatcher was asked twice about German reunification to which she replied that the journalists were going “much too fast” and hinted to that reunification would not be possible within her lifetime.¹³⁰ Instead, the focus should be devoted to securing democracy in East Germany.¹³¹

Thatcher’s responses might have been sober, and they appeared to be discouraging, but her views were shared by other European leaders at the time. On 18 November, the European Council held a summit in Paris where the recent unrest in East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia was discussed.¹³² From the

¹²⁷ Margaret Thatcher, “Statement on GDR decision to lift travel restrictions (hopes prelude to dismantling of Berlin Wall)”, 10th Nov. 1989. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/112008>. Retrieved from MTF, 23rd Feb. 2021.

¹²⁸ Margaret Thatcher, “Remarks on the Berlin Wall (fall thereof)”, 10th Nov. 1989. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107819>. Retrieved from MTF, 23rd Feb. 2021.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² The European Council, “EC: Paris European Council (Presidency Conclusions)”, 18th Nov. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/114171>. Retrieved from MTF, 25th Feb. 2021.

discussions, the participants noted three main positions. The first two are of particular interest:

- (i) the will to back up and encourage democratic change;
- (ii) the wish to confirm the stability of existing alliances and borders;
- (iii) the desire to respond to non-member countries' concern that the Community market should be opened up to them.¹³³

Judging by these statements, Thatcher's views were very much in line with those of the European Council: they were positive to the changes in Eastern Europe and wanted to further encourage a democratic development in these countries, but not at the expense of the pre-existing borders.

In an interview with *The Times* after the conference, Thatcher was asked about the "the prospect of the reunification of Germany".¹³⁴ She replied that borders were not on the agenda for the moment and also referred to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, where the participating countries (among them the two Germanies) had agreed that annexation of territory would be a violation of international law.¹³⁵ Thatcher emphasised that the borders agreed upon in the Act were finite: "they were not made de jure borders, they were de facto".¹³⁶ Nevertheless, Thatcher did conclude that in ten to twenty years one could have a very different picture if one for the time being focused on the bigger task at hand which was to ensure democracy and economic liberty in East Germany. If these conditions were ensured one could start to "look at these things".¹³⁷

The Helsinki Final Act was brought up again in an interview with David Dimbleby, on 27 November. This time Thatcher acknowledged that Germany could be reunified without violating the principles of the Act, as it permitted change of borders through peaceful agreements.¹³⁸ In the interview, Thatcher was further questioned about the border situation. Dimbleby highlighted that many heads of

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Margaret Thatcher, "Interview for The Times", 22nd Nov. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107431>. Retrieved from MTF, 26th Feb. 2021.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Thatcher, "Interview for The Times", 22nd Nov. 1989.

¹³⁸ Margaret Thatcher, "TV Interview for BBC1 Panorama ("What Future for Thatcherism?")", 27th Nov. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107544>. Retrieved from MTF, 5th March 2021; and Sarah B. Snyder, "'Jerry, Don't Go': Domestic Opposition to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act," *Journal of American Studies* 44, no. 1 (2010): 69.

states, including President Mitterrand, Chancellor Kohl, and President Bush were talking about the “prospect of united Germany”, and that there had been expressed a wish to move towards a united Europe.¹³⁹ In response, Thatcher argued that West Germany was already a part of the united Europe, and to insinuate otherwise was insulting: “[West Germany] is part of the European Community, so why raise the issue?”¹⁴⁰

With these statements Thatcher had, in the first weeks after the fall of the Wall, established a firm and publicly known opinion concerning the future of East Germany and what priorities should be made. Thatcher’s opinions were soon challenged when Kohl announced his plan to reunite the German states and, not long after, when the European Council gave their endorsement for reunification.

After Kohl’s speech on 28 November, Thatcher did not directly address the German situation publicly until 4 December. She did, however, have private conversations where her thoughts on the matter were made clear. On 1 December, Thatcher had a private phone conversation with the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Ruud Lubbers, where she confessed that she was “rather worried” about Kohl’s speech.¹⁴¹ Kohl’s speech seemed to be entirely of his own making, as it had not been “cleared with others either in Germany or within NATO”.¹⁴² Thatcher hoped Lubbers could “calm Chancellor Kohl down and point out tactfully that his speech was causing concern not just in Moscow but within some western countries”.¹⁴³ Lubbers shared her concerns.¹⁴⁴

On 4 December, NATO held a summit in Brussels. During this summit, Thatcher gave a speech which was published in *The Times* the following day. In her speech, Thatcher stated that “there should be no change in the borders of Eastern Europe until democracy had taken a firm hold for at least 10 years” and that “German reunification was not on the cards for a long time”.¹⁴⁵ European leaders should

¹³⁹ Thatcher, “TV Interview for BBC1 Panorama (“What Future for Thatcherism?”)”, 27th Nov. 1989.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ Charles Powell, “Netherlands: No.10 record of conversation (MT, Lubbers)”, 1st Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/218061>. Retrieved from MTF, 5th March 2021.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Thatcher [quoted by Peter Stothard & Michael Binyon], “Speech to NATO Summit”, 5th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/110773>. Retrieved from MTF, 5th March 2021.

continue their support to the positive changes in Eastern Europe but should do nothing which would “destabilise the Warsaw Pact”.¹⁴⁶ During the press conference following the summit, Thatcher was asked whether she had found herself on the edge of the NATO consensus given that she had taken a more “cautious and even negative view of events in Eastern Europe” than the majority of her colleagues.¹⁴⁷ Thatcher rejected this and replied that caution and stability was necessary in times of turmoil, before concluding that “[t]imes of great change are times when you have even greater need for a secure and stable Alliance [...]”.¹⁴⁸ However, Thatcher had been found to be of a more reluctant mindset than the other heads of state that participated in the summit. Horst Teltschik, Kohl’s national security advisor, wrote in a diary entry that he suspected Thatcher of “playing for time”, a tactic Saunders also has linked to Thatcher.¹⁴⁹

The following day, on 5 December, Thatcher met with the House of Commons where the summit and Thatcher’s contribution was discussed. There, Thatcher was accused of having “great difficulty in coping with the great changes that [were] taking place in eastern Europe”.¹⁵⁰ The MPs expressed that it was likely that the Prime Minister would end up isolated at the forthcoming summit in Strasbourg, prompting the question what Thatcher would do to counter this or if she was “determined to remain in the past and to condemn this country to a future without friends, without influence and without a role in Europe in the future?”¹⁵¹ The accusation was not directly tied to the question of German reunification, but it highlighted her general attitude towards the EC and her handling of the recent unrest in Europe.

On 8-9 December, the European Council’s summit in Strasbourg was held, where it was agreed upon supporting German reunification. After the summit, Thatcher said that the Council had “confirmed the decisions [they] reached at the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Margaret Thatcher, “Press Conference after NATO Summit”, 4th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107837>. Retrieved from MTF, 4th March 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ For Teltschik, see Horst Teltschik, “Cold War: Horst Teltschik diary (Germans think MT playing for time at NATO summit) [translation]”, 4th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111025>. Retrieved from MTF, 4th March 2021. For Saunders, see Saunders, “Britain at the End of History.”

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Thatcher, “House of Commons PQs”, 5th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107838>. Retrieved from MTF, 5th March 2021.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

meeting on 18 November in Paris on help for reform in Eastern Europe” and that their response was “positive and [measured] up the needs of Eastern Europe although the situation [was] developing very fast”.¹⁵² However, she still maintained that borders were still not on the agenda.¹⁵³ When asked about whether she would care to comment on the Council’s statement which reaffirmed Germany’s right to unity, Thatcher insinuated that very little regarding Europe’s response had changed, focusing on the fact that Germany was still bound to the treaties of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, and the agreements stipulated in the Helsinki Final Act.¹⁵⁴ Later, in an interview with BBC, she said that if reunification was to take place it had to take place in light of these obligations and agreements.¹⁵⁵

Despite there being constant development concerning the German situation, as pointed out by the Prime Minister herself several times, Thatcher’s opinion on the matter seemed to be essentially unchanged, looking at her statements between 10 November and 9 December 1989. Early on, she expressed a clear wish not to change any borders before democracy had been secured and practised for at least a decade. Then, and only then, she argued, could one consider a change in borders, which would have to be in accordance with the principles required by various treaties, Acts, and agreements that the Germanies were bound to. When this slow-paced approach did not fit an emerging international consensus in favour of rapid reunification, one could have expected to see a change of mindset or tactic in Thatcher as she was forced to take alternative views and new developments into consideration. Judging by her statements it appears that such a change did not happen.

To better understand why this change in mentality never occurred at this stage, we need to look behind the public rhetoric and retrace the debate between the Thatcher government and FCO officials. Only then can we understand why Thatcher was so determined to hold fast to her view based on principles like self-determination and international treaty obligations.

¹⁵² Margaret Thatcher, “Press Conference after Strasbourg European Council”, 9th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107841>. Retrieved from MTF, 6th March 2021.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Margaret Thatcher, “Press Conference after Strasbourg European Council”, 9th Dec. 1989.

¹⁵⁵ Margaret Thatcher, “TV Interview for BBC (Strasbourg European Council)”, 9th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107546>. Retrieved from MTF, 5th March 2021.

The opening of the Berlin Wall was for the FCO, as for the Prime Minister, both an occasion for celebration and reflection on the future of the Germanies and Europe. On 10 November, Stephen Wall, Principal Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, wrote to Powell informing him that the Prime Minister's speech earlier the same day was a welcome one and would most likely be appreciated by the German people.¹⁵⁶ Wall agreed with Thatcher that the priority in the coming time should be to establish a democratic government in East Germany. Given the new, liberal travel restrictions, the East German authorities would have "no alternative but to hold free elections" as a means to hinder mass emigration.¹⁵⁷ This was also the observation made by Broomfield. Broomfield wrote that even when the "tears and euphoria" die down, the East German people will not forget their newly acquired experiences in West Germany and taking away these liberties could result in "overwhelming political reaction".¹⁵⁸

On 15 November, Hurd visited Berlin as the first Western Minister after the opening of the wall.¹⁵⁹ In preparation for Hurd's visit, Mallaby wrote to him explaining that spirits were high and that there was a "greater confidence that some serious reform [would] come".¹⁶⁰ Mallaby pointed out that Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the West German Foreign Minister, was at the time the most popular politician in West Germany and that Genscher was, according to Mallaby, being responsible by not using the word 'reunification'.¹⁶¹ Mallaby urged Hurd to cooperate with Genscher as this would strengthen the Anglo-German relationship.¹⁶²

For there was concern regarding the Anglo-German relationship. Before Hurd's visit, Sir John Fretwell, Political Director and Deputy to the Permanent Under Secretary PUS, warned that if Britain was to convey a policy – publicly or privately –

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Wall, "No. 36: Letter from Mr Wall to Mr Powell (No. 10)", 10th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 100-101. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Nigel Broomfield, "No. 43: Mr Broomfield (East Berlin) to Mr Hurd", 13th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 110-112. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁵⁹ Mallaby, *Living the Cold War: Memoirs of a British Diplomat*, 198.

¹⁶⁰ Christopher Mallaby, "No. 44: Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Hurd", 13th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 112-114. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

that opposed to German reunification, it would harm Britain's relationship with both the United States and West Germany:

When the tide of history is bringing a chance of freedom and democracy in Eastern Europe, with the prospect of reducing or even eliminating the Soviet presence, the Americans would have no sympathy with a policy which put all that at risk in order to maintain the division of Germany.¹⁶³

The British government should therefore take care to not express a policy noticeably 'cooler' than others.¹⁶⁴ However, this did not mean that the FCO did not see difficulties with reunification. On the same day, Broomfield wrote to Hurd explaining that the atmosphere in East Germany was 'changeable' and that the question of reunification could with benefit be delayed for two to three years in order to diminish Soviet concerns, and that the primary concern should be to guarantee free elections in East Germany.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Hurd and the FCO were firm that Britain would stand by their commitments stipulated in the 1955 Bonn/Paris convention that dictated that the allies are committed to the "[a]im of a reunified Germany enjoying a liberal democratic constitution, like that of the Federal Republic, and integrated within the European community."¹⁶⁶

By mid-November, members of the FCO were observing a change in pace. Hurd remarked that the recent changes in East Germany were welcome, but that "the speed of which these changes are taking place carries its own risk of instability".¹⁶⁷ On 17 November, Wall received a letter from Powell who urged that the talk of reunification should be ceased, as it "aroused strong emotions in the Soviet Union and in Europe".¹⁶⁸ The same day, Hurd wrote to Thatcher informing her that "the German analysis of developments in the GDR [was] very close to [their] own" and that they

¹⁶³ Geoffrey Adams and John Fretwell, "No. 45: Minute from Mr Adams to Sir J. Fretwell, with Minute by Sir J. Fretwell", 14th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 114-116. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Nigel Bloomfield, "No. 46: Mr Bloomfield (East Berlin) to Hurd", 14th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 116-117. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁶⁶ Douglas Hurd, "No. 47: Mr Hurd to HM Representatives Overseas" 14th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 118-120. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Douglas Hurd, "No. 50: Mr Hurd to Sir R Braithwaite (Moscow)" 15th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 125. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Powell, "No. 51: Letter from Mr Powell (No. 10) to Mr Wall" 17th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 126-127. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

too wished to avoid talk about reunification in order to reassure the Soviets.¹⁶⁹ However, reunification was being discussed regardless of the governments' wishes. On 15-17 November, Jonathan Powell, member of the Policy Planning Staff of the FCO, participated in a conference in Berlin. J. Powell reported that "[t]he people of the GDR were not yet asking for reunification but in their hearts they all demand it."¹⁷⁰ J. Powell advised that the Four Powers should not interfere before the Germans themselves had made their decision, by reasoning that this could sway the coming election in the Republicans favour.¹⁷¹

The FCO's response to the opening of the Wall during these first weeks appears to reflect careful consideration of both the will of the German people and the perception of the British government. As with the Prime Minister, members of the FCO welcomed the new changes and supported the upcoming democratic elections in East Germany. As for the possibility of reunification, there was a consensus among the FCO that the question should be delayed until the continent was stable again, but that it nevertheless was a question which only the German people could decide upon.

On 27 November, Mallaby wrote that there was a "feeling in the air that the Federal government, especially Kohl [was] not rising to [the] historic moment and looking like the master of events".¹⁷² Less than 24 hours later, Kohl delivered his 10-point programme speech, accelerating the pace of events. Following Kohl's speech there was significant activity – as would be expected – in the FCO. After being briefed about the programme by Teltschik, Mallaby wrote to Hurd that the fact that Kohl had not consulted the coalition partners was a testimony of the speed of which the debate was now taking.¹⁷³ Although, noted Mallaby, because of the ever-changing scene, Kohl's vision of unity might be overrun by other visions before long.¹⁷⁴ The following day he repeated this twice and emphasised that the coming elections in both

¹⁶⁹ Douglas Hurd, "No. 52: Minute from Mr Hurd to Mrs Thatcher" 17th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 128-129. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Jonathan Powell, "No. 55: Minute from Mr J.N. Powell (Policy Planning Staff) to Mr Cooper", 22nd Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 132-134. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Christopher Mallaby, "No. 57: Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Hurd", 27th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 135-136. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁷³ Christopher Mallaby, "No. 59: Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Hurd", 28th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 138-140. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Germanies might hinder Kohl's vision.¹⁷⁵ However, Mallaby also observed that the speech had received positive response from both Genscher and the West German media.¹⁷⁶ Mallaby marked the speech as a significant event that took "reunification out of the realms of aspiration and [made] it the culmination and aim of staged programme".¹⁷⁷

Broomfield also reported back to Hurd, conveying that there was some 'irritation' in East Germany and that Kohl's intention seemed to be to "accelerate the process of bringing the future relationship with the FRG to the top of the political agenda".¹⁷⁸ This was also the opinion of Fretwell who wrote to Wall on 29 November. Fretwell remarked that "the effect of the programme will be to focus attention much more directly on reunification and on the steps leading towards it".¹⁷⁹ As for which position the FCO should take, Fretwell was clear: he urged that extra consideration should be taken in order to not appear hostile towards the prospect of reunification. Fretwell pointed out that Kohl and Teltschik had been in continuous conversation with Bush, Mitterrand, Gorbachev, and the politicians within East Germany, and that it was concerning that they had not found the time to consult the UK.¹⁸⁰ This, wrote Fretwell, implied that the Germans saw the British as "being outside the mainstream", and so would the Americans.¹⁸¹ If the British government did not soon start conveying a more positive response to the possibility of German reunification, the Germans will conclude that they were "fundamentally hostile to that sort of vision", Fretwell concluded.¹⁸²

The period between the evening of 9 November and 9 December 1989 was a period of emotion, reflection, and concern within the British government. The opening of the Wall was considered by both the Prime Minister and the Foreign

¹⁷⁵ Christopher Mallaby, "No. 61: Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Hurd", 29th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 142-143. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Nigel Broomfield, "No. 60: Mr Broomfield (East Berlin) to Mr Hurd", 29th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 141-142. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁷⁹ John Fretwell, "No. 62: Minute from Sir J. Fretwell to Mr Wall", 29th Nov. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 143-144. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

Office as a joyous occasion. The two had similar beliefs regarding which priorities should be made for the future as both urged the focus in a direction of securing free elections in East Germany and thought it wise to first stabilise the continent before moving on to the question of reunification.

However, as the statements presented in this chapter show, the two parties also had differing views concerning the German situation. This is most notable in their thoughts regarding how long the question of German reunification should be put off. While Thatcher suggested 10 to 15 years, the FCO suggested a mere two to three years, thus creating a split in British attitude towards reunification. This split is also prominent in how the two parties chose to discuss reunification. Within the FCO, there was a constant discussion of how and when reunification should take place, what position Britain should assume, and about the implications of reunification. Thatcher, on the other hand, seemed to prefer not to engage in the conversation in favour of delaying it to an unspecified time in the distant future. As a consequence, the FCO seemed more in tune with the changing situation in the German states and seemed more concerned by how British policy would be interpreted by the Germans.

Despite their differences, however, both Thatcher and the FCO can in hindsight be considered to be slow to embrace reunification. Their reasons for this are both instinctual and practical. Both voiced concern for the upcoming elections, which served as an unpredictable element that could sway the course of events in one way or another, making it difficult to consider how likely the possibility of reunification was. Looking back, reunification may seem inevitable, but this need not have been the view of the British at the time, who had lived with a divided Germany since the end of the Second World War. The recent changes in Europe and within the Soviet Union may have been remarkable, but they could not serve as a guarantee that German reunification would happen. The wish to not end up on the wrong side of history could also have influenced the early British attitude towards reunification. By taking a more conservative stand the British might have been trying to safeguard themselves from future judgement.

As time would show, however, this would have the opposite effect. Already in late 1989 negative reactions to British attitude were apparent. Having taken an immediate cautious view, Britain was losing its footing in the EC and seemed to have

been locked out of the inner circle of the international scene. With Bush instead of Reagan in the Oval Office, Britain had also lost some of the warmth and influence they had previously enjoyed with the United States' government. The accumulative effect was an increasing concern within the British government for what the past and forthcoming changes would mean for Britain's future position in Europe and the world.

The Thatcher Government and German Reunification

The first weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall had left Europe in a state of shock and anticipation. The situation was changing quickly, and plans were being overtaken by events rapidly. The fast pace would continue into the new year and by autumn 1990, one Germany would stand in the place where two had stood less than a year before. However, before that much had to be done, not least concerning the external aspects of reunification. On 10 February, Gorbachev agreed that Germany alone could decide on whether to unify, allowing the formal process of reunification to begin.¹⁸³ At a conference in Ottawa on 11-13 February, the six powers – the two German states and the Four Powers – met to discuss the implications of reunification. The result of this meeting was the founding of the Two Plus Four, a forum which would handle the discussion regarding the Four's rights and responsibilities, as well as the overall security of Europe.¹⁸⁴ This forum symbolised the start of the official process of reuniting Germany.¹⁸⁵

Between 10 November and 9 December 1989, Thatcher and the FCO had taken similar yet noteworthy different stands regarding German reunification. The coming months would further develop their views, as the situation progressed. In order to uncover Thatcher's and the FCO's opinions on German reunification during the process itself, this chapter will look at statements from both parties between 10 December and October 1990. By analysing their statements, I will gain a better understanding of how their opinions developed during the course of the process and how similar or dissimilar to each other this development made them. As before, I will begin with Thatcher before moving on to the FCO.

In the first weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Thatcher had taken a sober approach to the possibility of German reunification. In late December and early

¹⁸³ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher - the Authorized Biography, Volume Three: Herself Alone*, 516.

¹⁸⁴ Chauncy D. Harris, "Unification of Germany in 1990," *Geographical Review* 81, no. 2 (1991): 171.; and Hurd, *Memoirs*, 385.

¹⁸⁵ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher - the Authorized Biography, Volume Three: Herself Alone*, 517.

Thatcher and several of her staff in No. 10 would however call the meetings the Four Plus Two, rather than the other way around, until June 1990. See Charles Powell, "Foreign policy: Powell briefing for MT ("Bilateral with the Foreign Secretary")", 12th June 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215212>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

January her thoughts remained much the same. She was worried about the speed of events and the instability of East Germany (especially as they were approaching elections), and feared that if East Germany deteriorated, they would seek quick reunification in order to “restore prosperity”.¹⁸⁶ To re-establish order, and to secure Gorbachev’s position in the changing political landscape, Thatcher believed that stability was of the utmost importance and wished therefore to slow the process down.¹⁸⁷ She would not deny the Germans the principle of self-determination but thought it important that they were made aware of the “sensitivities” of the European community.¹⁸⁸ She also insisted that a possible reunification had to be in agreement with the existing alliances and treaties, such as the Four-Power agreements for Berlin and the Helsinki Final Act.¹⁸⁹

Thatcher was confident that her views were shared by other leaders, and to some degree this was true. The Soviet Union was in agreement with her on several aspects, and so was the Italian Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti, and the French President, Mitterrand.¹⁹⁰ As two of the Four Powers, there was a mutual wish between Mitterrand and Thatcher that France and Britain should form a common policy and attitude towards German reunification.¹⁹¹ The United States, however, was much more in favour of reunification. Bush and Kohl had frequent phone conversations and Kohl viewed Bush as an important ally.¹⁹² Bush was therefore surprised by the declining Anglo-German relationship which had suffered because of the perceived British attitude towards German reunification.¹⁹³ He became especially

¹⁸⁶ Charles Powell, “Soviet Union: No.10 record of conversation (MT, Hurd, Shevardnadze)” 19th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212287>. Retrieved from MTF, 17th March 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ For Soviet, see *ibid.* For France, see Charles Powell, “France: Powell letter to Hurd PS (“Meeting with President Mitterrand”)", 22nd Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212290>. Retrieved from MTF, 17th March 2021. For Italy, see Giulio Andreotti and Stephen Egerton, “European Policy: UKE Rome telegram to FCO (“Meeting with Andreotti”)", 18th Dec. 1989. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/220775>. Retrieved from MTF, 17th March 2021.

¹⁹¹ Powell, “France: Powell letter to Hurd PS (“Meeting with President Mitterrand”)", 22nd Dec. 1989; and Charles Powell, “Germany: No.10 record of conversation (MT, Hurd”)", 10th Jan. 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212643>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

¹⁹² Example of Bush-Kohl conversation: George W. Bush and Helmut Kohl, “Cold War: Bush-Kohl phone conversation (Gorbachev visit to Washington”)", 30th May 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109458>. Retrieved from MTF, 20th March 2021.

¹⁹³ For Bush’ thoughts, see Andrew M. Wood and Stephen Wall, “Germany: UKE Washington letter to FCO (report of Bush's concerns at MT position from Robert Blackwill, NSC official”)", 26th Feb. 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212504>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

concerned when Thatcher, in February, expressed a wish to position the Soviet Union as a counter power to a unified Germany.¹⁹⁴ Officials at No. 10 claimed that this was a misunderstanding and urged Thatcher both to soothe the Anglo-German relationship and eliminate all confusions with Bush.¹⁹⁵

Even in mid-January, Thatcher still refused to consider reunification as an inevitable fact and was said to be treating the possibility like an “unexploded bomb”.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, by February reunification was very much on the agenda and it was fast approaching. After Gorbachev agreed to reunification in February, two main issues would be the primary concern for Thatcher: the German-Polish border and full NATO membership for a unified Germany.

Though the German-Polish border had been discussed before, Gorbachev’s agreement to reunification made it considerably more important. At the same time as the Foreign Ministers were meeting in Ottawa, Thatcher held a speech at a dinner for the Polish Prime Minister where she made her stand publicly known. She argued that the present border of Poland should be guaranteed before reunification.¹⁹⁷ Kohl had long remained silent, but in early March he claimed that a unified Germany would not recognise the current German-Polish border. This, however, caused considerable criticism and distrust towards Kohl, whereas Thatcher was praised in the media

For worsening Anglo-German relationship, see Robert F. Cooper, “Germany: Policy Planning Staff letter to No.10 (“Trilateral Conference on Ostpolitik: 12 & 13 January”)", 15th Jan. 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212642>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

¹⁹⁴ For Soviet as counter power, see Charles Powell, “Germany: Powell letter to Wall (“Germany and NATO”)", 10th Feb. 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212632>. Retrieved from MTF, 18th March 2021; and Charles Powell and Stephen Wall, “Germany: No.10 record of conversation (MT, Hurd)", 8th Feb 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212635>. Retrieved from MTF, 18th March 2021.

For Bush’s concern, see Andrew M. Wood and Stephen Wall, “Germany: UKE Washington letter to FCO (report of Bush's concerns at MT position from Robert Blackwill, NSC official)", 26th Feb. 1990.

¹⁹⁵ For misunderstanding with Bush, see Charles Powell, “Powell minute to MT (“Relations with President Bush: German unification”)", 5th March 1990. URL:

<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212327>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021. For Anglo-German relationship, see Charles Powell, “Foreign policy: Powell briefing for MT (“Bilateral with the Foreign Secretary”)", 28th Feb. 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215203>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

¹⁹⁶ For Thatcher denying the inevitability of reunification, see Charles Powell, “Germany: No.10 record of conversation (MT, Hurd)", 10th Jan. 1990. For bomb-reference, see unknown author, “Media: Press Digest for MT (soccer, East-West)", 31st January 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215429>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

¹⁹⁷ Margaret Thatcher and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, “Speech at dinner for Polish Prime Minister (Tadeusz Mazowiecki)", 13th Feb. 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108014>. Retrieved from MTF, 18th March 2021.

because of her early concern.¹⁹⁸ In response to the public backlash, Kohl quickly withdrew his statement, for which Thatcher had praised him for his “statesmanlike steps”.¹⁹⁹

The issue with NATO membership was a longer affair. It was not from the Germans but from the Soviets Thatcher (and Kohl) met resistance concerning German NATO membership. The Soviets feared that a German membership would be a threat to the Soviet Union and wished instead for a neutral Germany.²⁰⁰ Thatcher devoted much of her time to ensure German NATO membership and she exchanged letters with Gorbachev where she made her opinions known. Furthermore, in early June, she met with him where this issue was the main concern.²⁰¹ Thatcher acknowledged Soviet fears and sought a solution with a transitional period, which could reassure the Soviet Union. But she also pointed out that the time to make any attempts to slow the process down was now past, and that NATO membership would be a guarantee towards a peaceful Europe.²⁰² Gorbachev, who was still developing his thoughts on the matter, did not dispute Thatcher’s claims.²⁰³ On 16 July, Gorbachev agreed to German NATO membership, but also after Kohl had promised financial support to the Soviet Union.²⁰⁴

In order to develop her policy towards Germany, Thatcher arranged a seminar at Chequers on 24 March.²⁰⁵ She invited six academic experts to discuss “Germany’s

¹⁹⁸ Unknown author, “Media: Press Digest for MT (Community Charge, Germany)”, 6th March 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215457>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Margaret Thatcher, “Germany: MT letter to Chancellor Kohl (border between Germany and Poland)”, 8th March. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212315>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

²⁰⁰ Unknown author, “Media: Press Digest for MT (Political Comment, Social Security, Gorbachev (East/West))”, 15th March 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215527>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

²⁰¹ For Thatcher’s letter, see Margaret Thatcher, “Soviet Union: MT letter to President Gorbachev (German unification & European security)”, 5th March 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/211836>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021. For visit, see Andrew Turnbull, “Soviet Union: No.10 record of conversations (MT, Soviet Prime Minister Ryzhkov; MT, Professor Popov, Chairman of Moscow City Soviet)”, 8th June 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212249>. Retrieved from MTF, 20th March 2021.

²⁰² Ibid. and Margaret Thatcher, “Speech at dinner given by Soviet President (Mikhail Gorbachev)”, 8th June 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108108>. Retrieved from MTF, 20th March 2021.

²⁰³ Turnbull, “Soviet Union: No.10 record of conversations (MT, Soviet Prime Minister Ryzhkov; MT, Professor Popov, Chairman of Moscow City Soviet)”, 8th June 1990.

²⁰⁴ Margaret Thatcher, “Germany: MT letter to Helmut Kohl (his visit to USSR)”, 17th July 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215479>. Retrieved from MTF, 23rd March 2021.

²⁰⁵ Charles Powell, “Germany: Powell letter to Timothy Garton-Ash (“Meeting at Chequers on 24 March”)", 19th March 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212303>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

past and the lessons to be learned for it” and “Germany’s future role in Europe”.²⁰⁶ Debate questions were prepared beforehand and included what Germany’s national characteristics were, if Germany had changed in the last 40 years, whether Germany would seek territorial dominance after unification, and what Britain could do to “neutralise their drive to extend their sway, whether politically or territorially”.²⁰⁷ Following the discussion, no formal conclusion was drawn, but the argument “favoured those who were optimistic about life with a united Germany”.²⁰⁸ Therefore, the overall message of the seminar was that they “should be nice to the Germans”, though there was uneasiness tied to what might lie ahead in the distant future.²⁰⁹

Though the seminar ended on a positive note, a leaked memorandum of the discussion caused great upheaval in July 1990. The features of the German ‘national character’ (which were all but negative) were paid much attention to by the press, and so were the questions, which were described as “loaded”.²¹⁰ The leak happened at the same time as the Ridley affair, which heightened the media coverage. In mid-July, an interview with Nick Ridley, Secretary for Trade and Industry, was published in *The Spectator*. The interview focused on Ridley’s thoughts on the Economic Monetary Union (EMU) which he described as “a German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe”.²¹¹ In the same interview he also compared Kohl to Hitler and insinuated that Hitler was preferable to Kohl.²¹² The interview was met with considerable criticism and Ridley resigned shortly after.²¹³ The scandal drew further focus to the government’s attitude towards Germany, especially since Dominic Lawson, the interviewer, wrote that Ridley’s thoughts regarding were “not significantly different from those of the Prime Minister”.²¹⁴ Thatcher was subjected to

²⁰⁶ Charles Powell, “Germany: Powell minute to MT (“Germany”)”, 7th Feb. 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212636>. Retrieved from MTF, 18th March 2021.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Charles Powell, “Germany: No.10 record of conversation (MT, Hurd, Professor Gordon Craig, Profesor Fritz Stern, Lord Dacre, Professor Norman Stone, Timothy Garton-Ash, George Urban)”, 24th March 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/212302>. Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Unknown author, “Media: Press Digest for MT (Ridley - memo)”, 16th July 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215613>. Retrieved from MTF, 23rd March 2021.

²¹¹ Nick Ridley and Dominic Lawson, “Interview with The Spectator (“Saying the unsayable about the Germans”)”, 14th July 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111535>. Retrieved from MTF, 23rd March 2021.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Nick Ridley and Margaret Thatcher “Letter to Nick Ridley MP (resignation)”, 14th July 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108153>. Retrieved from MTF, 23rd March 2021.

²¹⁴

considerable criticism from the media and from the Parliament, where she was accused of being unfit to govern.²¹⁵ Thatcher defended herself by pointing out that she was at the time of the seminar “accused of being isolated and of not consulting anyone” and that she now was being berated for doing the opposite.²¹⁶

During the unification process, No. 10 expressed discontent with the FCO’s method of approach and general policy making. These complaints were not exclusively tied to German reunification, but it did contribute to the tension between the parties. On 9 January, Powell briefed Thatcher and commented that the FCO often were slow to follow up good ideas and that their own ideas were lacking imagination. Powell urged Thatcher to talk to Hurd so that the FCO could follow through her ideas “much more effectively and rapidly”.²¹⁷ Despite this, six months later the discontent was still not eradicated, and Powell reported back to Thatcher that the FCO’s policies were full of “FCO orthodoxy on every issue” and that there was “not an ounce of imagination or originality”.²¹⁸ Powell therefore advised Thatcher to form her own conclusions on foreign issues.²¹⁹

From December 1989 to October 1990, Thatcher’s views on the reunification of Germany changed from still wanting to deny the possibility, to playing an active, though controversial, role in establishing the conditions for it. Her main concern was the stability of Europe and wanted therefore a unified Germany that would be integrated in the European Community, though not at the expense of the safety of other countries. As the seminar at Chequers testifies to, Thatcher was still very cautious about the future of Germany. Nevertheless, on 3 October, the day reunification was realised, Thatcher said she welcomed the new Germany, with hopes that it would be a “true ally in NATO, a true partner in Europe and a friend”.²²⁰

²¹⁵ For media, see unknown author, “Media: Press Digest for MT (Ridley - memo)”, 16th July 1990. For Parliament, see Margaret Thatcher, “House of Commons PQs”, 17th July 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108154>. Retrieved from MTF, 23rd March 2021.

²¹⁶ Thatcher, “House of Commons PQs”, 17th July 1990.

²¹⁷ Charles Powell, “Foreign policy: Powell briefing for MT (“Bilateral with the Foreign Secretary”)”, 9th Jan. 1990.

²¹⁸ Charles Powell, “Foreign policy: Powell briefing for MT (“Bilateral with the Foreign Secretary”)”, 12th June 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/215195>. Retrieved from MTF, 23rd March 2021.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Margaret Thatcher, “Remarks on German unification”, 3rd Oct. 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108211>. Retrieved from MTF, 21st March 2021.

Much of what concerned Thatcher between December 1989 and October 1990 also concerned the FCO. Compared to the Prime Minister, however, the FCO was seemingly quicker to adapt to the changing situation and the approaching reunification. Already in December, members of the FCO were formulating policies and requirements for German reunification, highlighting NATO membership and a settlement on the German-Polish border as important issues.²²¹

To ensure stability and predictability, there was a hope within the FCO that a reunification process would take a few years and thus give time to structure the security agreements needed before reunification could take place.²²² However, this would not happen. Throughout the entirety of the reunification process, the FCO was worried about the deterioration of East Germany.²²³ Mass emigration and fear of economic collapse were constant concerns in East Germany and in order to soothe the crisis the Germans would bring both the elections in East Germany and the reunification date forward, quickening the pace of process.²²⁴ Despite the fear of early collapse, the FCO strongly advised against using Britain's "residual powers" as a "barrier to reunification".²²⁵ They feared this would undermine the Anglo-German relationship and weaken Britain's position to influence the reunification process.²²⁶ Diplomacy was essential to the FCO, and their ability to impact events was strongly

²²¹ For NATO, see Kevin R. Tebbit, "No. 76: Letter from Mr Tebbit (Washington) to Mr Synnott", 14th Dec. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 173-175. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. For border, see Patrick Wright, "No. 83: Submission from P. Wright to Mr Waldegrave and Assistant Private Secretary", 20th Dec. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 185-186. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²²² Nigel Broomfield, "No. 79: Letter from Mr Broomfield (East Berlin) to Sir J. Fretwell", 15th Dec. 1989. *GU*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 178-180. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²²³ Expressed in among others: *ibid*; Nigel Broomfield, "No. 101: Mr Broomfield (East Berlin) to Mr Hurd", 18th Jan. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 212-214. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010; Patrick Eyers, "No. 132: Mr Eyers (East Berlin) to Mr Hurd", 7th Feb. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 267-269. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010; and Patrick Eyers, "No. 216: Mr Eyers (East Berlin) to Mr Hurd", 13th July. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 430-432. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²²⁴ For elections, see Douglas Hurd, "No. 129: Mr Hurd to Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn)", 6th Feb. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 261-264. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. For reunification date, see Patrick Eyers, "No. 240: Mr Eyers (East Berlin) to Mr Hurd", 2nd Oct. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 474-479. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²²⁵ Patrick Wright, "No. 83: Submission from P. Wright to Mr Waldegrave and Assistant Private Secretary", 20th Dec. 1989.

²²⁶ *Ibid*.

ted to the perceived British opinion on reunification. The Foreign Secretary stressed to the Prime Minister in December that “the attitude and tone” of their bilateral diplomacy towards West Germany would be a key factor.²²⁷ Despite this, the FCO struggled almost continuously with a worsening Anglo-German relationship during the months leading up to the finalisation of reunification.²²⁸

The declining state of the Anglo-German relationship had implications for the FCO’s work in the Two Plus Four. The FCO saw many advantages of the Two Plus Four, listing among others that it would give them a handle on the reunification process, ensure that they were consulted at all stages, and that it could offer reassurance to the Soviet Union.²²⁹ However, lacking influential power with the Germans, their task of promoting British interest was not straightforward. In order to push their agenda, the FCO worked towards convincing either or both of the Americans and the French, before presenting any matter to the Germans.²³⁰ Though presented with their fair share of challenges, the FCO managed to do considerable work in the Two Plus Four meetings, attributing securing an agreement that ensured Polish involvement in any discussion of their borders as one of their more explicit and substantial contributions to the process.²³¹

In addition to the Two Plus Four meetings, the FCO also participated in the One Plus Three meetings, which included West Germany and the three Western Allies. The British wished that the One Plus Three meetings would be an arena where security issues and concerns were brought to the Germans, before taking it further to the Two Plus Four. The preliminary discussion would prepare them for any Russian objections.²³² By advocating for this, the British had risked getting a “bad name” as they had not received much support from the others who had instead interpreted the

²²⁷ Stephen Wall, “No. 74: Letter from Mr Wall to Mr Powell (No 10)”, 12th Dec. 1989. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 169-172. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²²⁸ Christopher Mallaby, “No. 242: Letter from C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Weston”, 11th Oct. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 488-490. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²²⁹ The Foreign & Commonwealth Office, “No. 137: Memorandum by the Policy Planning Staff”, Feb. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 279-281. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²³⁰ Christopher Mallaby, “No. 149: Letter from Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Weston”, 16th Feb. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 298-301. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²³¹ Stephen Wall, “No. 182: Letter from Mr Wall to Mr Powell (No. 10)”, 26th March. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 355-357. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²³² P. John Weston, “No. 221: Minute from Mr Weston to Mr Wall”, 23rd July 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 438-439. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

wish to prepare as a manoeuvre to overrule the “priority of returning sovereignty with unity to the Germans at the earliest possible moment”.²³³

Nevertheless, the FCO’s contribution to reunification was on several occasions recognised by the Germans, who expressed sincere gratitude towards the FCO and recognised their role in the negotiations.²³⁴ Dieter Kastrup, the Political Director for the FRG’s Foreign Ministry, additionally expressed regret over how Britain had been portrayed in German media as it had given the impression that the British had been less helpful than the other allies.²³⁵ This was an observation shared by Mallaby who reflected that Britain’s role in the reunification process had been diminished in the public eye because of the excessive focus on the Prime Minister’s rhetoric and because much of the FCO’s contribution was withheld from public view.²³⁶

During the process of reunification, members of the FCO had voiced repeated concern regarding Thatcher’s negative statements towards Germany, and the effect they had on the FCO’s ability to exert influence. Already in February, the Germans had begun to single out the British as the least cooperative out of the Four Powers, Kohl referring to the Four as “our Soviet partners, our American friends, our French friends and Great Britain”.²³⁷ After reunification was finalised, the further implications of these statements were examined by Mallaby. On 11 October, Mallaby wrote a letter where he pointed out four main reasons for why the Anglo-German relationship had taken a toll during these months: Thatcher’s reluctance concerning German reunification between November 1989 and February 1990; Thatcher’s interview in *Der Spiegel* in late March (where she had said that Kohl would not guarantee the current German-Polish border, despite Kohl already having agreed to it half a month before); the Ridley affair; and the leaked memorandum from the

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Expressed in among others Charles Powell, “No. 222: Letter from Mr Powell (No. 10) to Mr Wall”, 30th July 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 439-441. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010; and Christopher Mallaby, “No. 243: Letter from Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Weston”, 12th Oct. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 491-490. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²³⁵ Mallaby, “No. 243: Letter from Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Weston”, 12th Oct. 1990.

²³⁶ Mallaby, “No. 242: Letter from C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Weston”, 11th Oct. 1990.

²³⁷ Helmut Kohl quoted by Pauline Neville-Jones in “No. 142: Miss Neville-Jones (Bonn) to FCO”, 13th Feb. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 287-288. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

Chequers seminar.²³⁸ Thatcher's statements had drawn attention away from the positive role Britain had played in the Two Plus Four and the supportive statements made by other members of the British government.²³⁹ As a result, Britain's influence in Germany was now devalued and thought less important, at a time when Germany was becoming the most important country in Europe and Britain had lost her special standing as one of the Four Powers of Germany.²⁴⁰

Between December 1989 to October 1990, the FCO showed a notable adaptability to the changing situation. They were quick to both acknowledge reunification as a strong possibility and to make plans with the assumption that reunification would happen. The concern they expressed during these months was tied to the process rather than reunification itself. As a diplomatic agency, the FCO dedicated much time and energy to the present and future relationship between Britain and Germany, in an attempt to secure Britain's status in a changing Europe. When they welcomed the new Germany in October, they did so with the confidence that Germany would remain a "strong democracy" with a firm position in Europe, a victory only tainted by the weakened Anglo-German relationship.²⁴¹

The period between December 1989 and October 1990 was an eventful and important period for Anglo-German relations. Trying to keep up with the fast-tracked pace, Thatcher and the FCO worked continuously towards shaping British policy and attitudes. This was, however, not a joint effort where both parties worked together in order to formulate a singular, consistent policy. Instead, the two worked separately, but towards their common goal of protecting British interests. What is perhaps most striking is that with the exception of a few details (some more substantial than others), Thatcher's and the FCO's priorities were the same, yet their approach was far

²³⁸ For Mallaby's letter, see Mallaby, "No. 242: Letter from C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Weston", 11th Oct. 1990. For Thatcher's interview, see Margaret Thatcher, Hans Werner Kilz, Dieter Wild and Hans Hielscher, "Interview for Der Spiegel", 23rd March 1990. URL: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107900>. Retrieved from MTF, 8th April 2021.

²³⁹ Mallaby, "No. 242: Letter from C. Mallaby (Bonn) to Mr Weston", 11th Oct. 1990.

²⁴⁰ For Britain's influence, see *ibid.* For Germany's importance, see Robert F. Cooper, "No. 102: Minute from Mr Cooper (Policy Planning Staff) to Mr Weston", 18th Jan. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 214-215. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

²⁴¹ For welcome of Germany, see Christopher Mallaby and Patrick Eyers, "No. 241: Sir Mallaby (Bonn) and Mr Eyers (East Berlin) to Mr Hurd", 2nd Oct. 1990. In *GU:DBPO*, eds. Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge, 480-487. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

from aligned. German NATO membership and the German-Polish border were issues both parties worked towards securing on different arenas: Thatcher in talks with political figures, both publicly and privately; and the FCO mainly through negotiation in the Two Plus Four and the One Plus Three, principally in private. Yet, their attitude towards reunification was interpreted quite differently by the Germans. The FCO, whose power lied predominantly in their ability to influence, sought to cultivate a positive relationship with the Germans, taking great care not to appear negative towards reunification, while simultaneously arguing for British interests and concerns. This yielded a more fruitful relationship built on a common understanding of each other's interests and wishes. Thatcher, in contrast, already harnessed power from her position and her reputation, and was therefore not as dependent on a good relationship with the Germans in order to exert influence. The lack of need for an unimpaired relationship is likely one of the reasons for Thatcher's acute straightforwardness on the matter.

Thatcher's lack of consideration for how her statements would impact the Anglo-German relationship is surprising and appears to amount to a degree of short-sightedness on her part. Considering how powerful she expected a united Germany to be in both Europe and the world, it would have been more strategic to soften her public concerns and to try to strengthen the relationship, or at least avoid diminishing it. Although, it is fair to argue that her seemingly cold and calculated approach was not uncontroversial given her belief that German reunification was not in Britain's and Europe's best interests for the foreseeable future. Given her belief, she was acting accordingly to what she thought was best for her country. Furthermore, her concern for Gorbachev and his future in the Soviet Union as a reformer of Eastern Europe might also have affected her course of action.

Nonetheless, it is surprising that after accepting reunification as being inevitable by February, Thatcher did not express a significant change in attitude. Her focus changed, but her rhetoric remained similar to the one before the acknowledgment of inevitability. It is interesting that Thatcher did not take greater care to use a language more agreeable to the Germans – who she herself thought would be the most powerful country in Europe after reunification – in order to secure Britain's position with Germany in the future following reunification. This especially considering she was urged to do so several times by the FCO. As a result, the rift in

the British government's attitude towards reunification, which became apparent during the first month after the fall of the Wall, grew into a definite rupture. The increasing tensions between Thatcher and the FCO testifies to this, as both parties disagreed with the other regarding which approach to take, evoking strong feelings in both parties.

Conclusion

Historians and diplomats are sometimes fond of quoting Lord Palmerston's famous dictum about the making of British foreign policy: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow."²⁴² To some degree, Palmerston's words ring true if we relate them to the findings of this thesis on the Thatcher government's response and approach to German reunification in the period 1989-1990. In order to secure their interests – their freedom, security, and standard of living – Britain's relations with several countries were tested and strained throughout the reunification process. This is perhaps most evident in the Thatcher government's relationship with both of the German states and the 'special' friendship it had with the United States, which all suffered as a consequence of British attitudes towards reunification. Although Britain welcomed a unified Germany into the European community as an ally, friend, and partner when the reunification process was completed in October 1990, the Prime Minister remained uneasy about what a strong and unified Germany at the heart of Europe might mean for Britain's future.

The desire to secure British interests during the reunification process was not without internal disagreement as this thesis has shown. Thatcher and the FCO, the two most prominent foreign policy contributors, did not always see eye to eye on the matter. In order to provide a more nuanced picture of the British government's response to German reunification, this thesis has sought to find out how far Margaret Thatcher's views on the reunification of Germany were shared by British diplomats and officials working for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. After analysing statements from both parties issued throughout the entirety of the reunification process, one can draw several specific conclusions about the similarities and differences between the views of the two parties. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, their immediate responses and priorities were quite similar. Both welcomed the development because they wanted to see a permanent change of government in East

²⁴² Lord Palmerston was a former Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. For the original quote, see Lord Palmerston, Speech to the House of Commons, 1 March 1848, in Susan Ratcliffe, ed. *Oxford Essential Quotations*, 6. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). It is cited by several other individuals mentioned in this thesis, among others Horst Teltschik in "Cold War: Horst Teltschik diary (Kohl-MT talks at No.10) [translation]", 30th March 1990. URL: <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/111034>, Retrieved from MTF, 19th March 2021; and by Christopher Mallaby in his memoirs *Living the Cold War: Memoirs of a British Diplomat*, 15.

Germany based on the transition towards a stable democracy. When Kohl announced his plan to reunify Germany, both Thatcher and the FCO showed concern about the pace of change because they viewed it as a potential threat to the stability of Germany and Europe. In addition, both parties were unsure at this stage about whether reunification would actually happen.

However, as the situation progressed, a number of differences between the head of government and the FCO emerged. Thatcher displayed an unwillingness to consider the possibility of reunification and she employed different tactics to try to avoid discussing the question. This was in contrast to the FCO who urged a more diplomatic approach, stressing the importance of looking towards German self-determination and the preservation of good relations with Germany. As a result, the FCO appeared to be quicker to embrace both the possibility of reunification and the pace of it. Nevertheless, following the initial months after the fall of the Wall, their priorities were in agreement with each other. Both focused on the future security and stability of the continent and their efforts complemented each other's.

The most distinguishing difference, however, was their rhetoric towards the two Germanies. Both before and after establishing reunification as an inescapable fact, Thatcher's rhetoric was sharp, creating an image that Britain was not in favour of German reunification. This had severe implications for the FCO's work and the Anglo-German relationship. Despite the FCO's efforts to minimise the damage, Thatcher's inability to be more diplomatic weakened Britain's authority and influence in Europe.

A question that remains is why Thatcher and the FCO used so different tactics in order to reach their common goal of securing Britain's interests and seeing the end of communist rule in Europe. To understand the reasoning behind their different tactics we must look to the historiography and the sources used throughout this thesis. As mentioned in the introduction, Robert Saunders pointed to several reasons for why Thatcher had a sober approach to German reunification. Her displeasure for 'utopian' ideas and her negative predisposition towards Germany being two of them. The research in this thesis supports these arguments. Thatcher's suspicious nature towards radical change shines through in her statements and actions. She prioritised stability over the pace of change that was being proposed and then finally implemented in

Germany. Even when faced with the prospect of ending the Cold War she was still not in favour of reunification before democracy had been firmly established and practiced in East Germany for at least a decade. Thatcher's deep-rooted anxieties about Germany makes it difficult to measure how far her reactions were fuelled by an inherent bias against the country or a pragmatic conservatism towards making foreign policy in a Cold War climate. Nevertheless, both factors certainly had a significant influence on her decision making when it came to the German question. It is therefore questionable how objective Thatcher was and if she acted in accordance with what she considered best for Britain's 'eternal and perpetual' interests, or if her intentions were overshadowed by her predisposition towards Germany.

It was not necessarily just Thatcher who was affected by prejudicial attitudes or political biases. Thatcher accused the FCO of having a narrow perspective and it is plausible that members of the FCO – especially those residing in West and East Germany – were affected by their environment and line of duty. The problem is that this does not fully explain the broad agreement within the FCO on how to best handle the German situation, and none of the sources presented in this thesis indicate that there was any real internal disagreement in the FCO. Their conclusions and actions appear to have been founded on a collective agreement reached after thorough discussions on the subject. Subsequently, the FCO's response to German reunification can be considered to be fundamentally in line with their shared understanding of how to best secure Britain's interests in a changing Europe.

Saunders also challenges the position of the FCO, which he describes as lacking in strength because of recent and repeated changes in leadership. As sources show, the foundation for the FCO's policy towards both Germanies had been set decades before. The diplomats and officials working for the Department made constant efforts in order to stay on top of the changing situation. Furthermore, the staff of the embassies in East Germany, West Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States did not experience any notable turnover during the course of action, which ensured a high degree of stability within the FCO. Nevertheless, Thatcher's views were subjected to more attention than those of the FCO's and the question remains whether a more experienced Foreign Secretary would have been able to match the weight of her words. There is an unbalanced power dynamic to take into consideration here. Being a Prime Minister of her reputation and credentials, Thatcher

yielded considerably more weight than any member of the FCO, including the Foreign Secretary. It is therefore understandable that it was her rhetoric that attracted the most attention. To make an estimation of whether the situation would have played out differently had there not been a turnover within the FOC, one would have to research the relationship between Thatcher and her former Foreign Secretaries, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Lastly, we need to address the question raised by Pyeongeok An about whether we need to change our contemporary understanding of the Thatcher government's response to German reunification. An argued that current interpretations are primarily based on knowledge of Thatcher's rhetoric. This has encouraged the perception that British policy was obstructive towards or at the very least reluctant to engage positively with reunification. It is difficult to assess the substantialness of the contributions the FCO made without knowledge of the other Powers' contributions. Nonetheless, the recognition from German politicians is an important indicator that their work was not thought to have been obstructive or reluctant, despite the Germans and the FCO having some disagreements with each other. This recognition should be emphasised, as it was the Germans who were the most knowledgeable about how British policy towards reunification was perceived. It is also worth considering the efforts the FCO went through in order to limit Thatcher's obstructiveness. Had they not been concerned about the effect her actions would have had, the damage to the Anglo-German relationship might have been much worse. Collectively, the FCO's endeavours and positive contributions ought to provoke a reassessment of the perception of British policy towards German reunification. While their work cannot overshadow Thatcher's actions and their consequences, it is important to acknowledge the nuances behind the Thatcher government's responses to German reunification.

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Appendix

The Thesis' Relevance for My Work in the Norwegian Educational System

Having now carried out what is likely the most comprehensive study I will ever have the opportunity to take on, this thesis has taught me valuable lessons that will be of use for my future work in the Norwegian educational system. The process of this study has entailed comprehensive researching, evaluating the reliability of sources, writing, rewriting and revising, all of which are important abilities students in lower and upper secondary schools in Norway are expected to have some familiarity with after graduating.²⁴³ By having finished a larger study where these skills are important and having learned from my missteps and from the process itself, I have become better equipped to guide my future students in their endeavours.

The focus of my thesis will also serve as an advantage. The national English curriculums in Norway are divided into broad competence aims, which together represent the expected knowledge a student should acquire during their schooling.²⁴⁴ These aims do not explicitly mention any specific historical events, and it is therefore up to the individual teacher or teacher unit to choose which events to focus on. The Thatcher government's response to German reunification might seem narrow and perhaps a little dated, but it is important to recognise its position in the larger historical context: Thatcher's Premiership, the Cold War, and British history and politics. Additionally, the thesis touches upon the interdisciplinary topic "Democracy and citizenship" where the students are inspired to "develop their understanding of the fact that the way they view the world is culture dependent".²⁴⁵ Being able to understand and draw lines between actions and reactions with a political perspective is important for the students understanding of how politics and policies shape the world we live in. It is important for their understanding of the democracy they are a part of. By using what I have learned from this thesis I am able to use concrete examples in order to better their understanding.

²⁴³ Utdanningsdirektoratet. *Curriculum in English* (ENG01-04). 2019. Retrieved from <https://data.udir.no/kl06/v201906/laereplaner-1k20/ENG01-04.pdf?lang=eng>, 10th May 2021.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

