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François Mitterrand on the Issue of German Reunification (July 27, 1989)

After Mikhail Gorbachev, general secretary of the CPSU, made a visit to Paris, the French president discussed the question of German reunification and warned against drawing rash conclusions. The interests of both German states, he mentions below, had to be considered, along with those of the western powers and the Soviet Union.

Question: Mr. President, what kind of effects could this “common house” of Europe¹ have on Germany? What is your future vision of Germany?

Answer: Your question is too broad for me to answer just like that.

Question: Do you think Germany will attempt reunification?

Answer: Definitely. Reunification is a concern of all Germans. And that is easy to understand. This problem, which has waited forty-five years to be solved, is assuming ever more significance as Germany continues to grow stronger. This strength has already been proven in the economy and is on its way in politics.

Question: Could the Federal Republic be tempted into having its eye more on the East than on the EC countries?

Answer: To turn around entirely, so to speak? No, I don't think so. It is not at all surprising that the Federal Republic would want to have better relations with the Soviet Union and the other countries in the East, in view of its geographic location and its history. And who would want to deny it that? But Germany has no interest in changing camps and sacrificing its European policies for a reunification that the Soviet Union is not ready to allow anyway. And I don't think Germany is even considering it.

Question: Have you spoken to President Gorbachev about it?

Answer: Reunification is in my view a justified wish of the Germans. But it can only be implemented in a peaceful and democratic way.

Question: But you don't think it would change anything regarding the Soviet veto?

Answer: I don't know if I would call it a veto. Just look at the press release after the conversation between President Gorbachev and Chancellor Kohl in Bonn. I don't have the impression that the foreign policy of the two countries will change fundamentally on account of the improved climate.

¹ Reference to the common European house that was introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, general secretary of the CPSU and head of state of the Soviet Union – eds.

Question: Mr. President, could you imagine the German Question being resolved without the approval of all European countries?

Answer: No, not without the approval of those who today are concerned with the application of the treaties and the Federal Republic's security. The Germans must of course be able to decide freely for themselves, but the approval of the Soviet Union and the western powers will require a true dialogue.

Question: Since Gorbachev visited Germany the right of the people to self-determination is again the subject of much discussion. Is that the proper approach to a solution?

Answer: One thing is for sure: As indisputable as this right is, it cannot be an occasion for a forceps delivery, to use a medical metaphor. First, the two German governments must agree. Neither of the two German states can force anything upon the other. This German-German aspect is of fundamental importance. None of the leaders of the Federal Republic whom I have met has ever claimed to be able to force reunification by intensifying tensions in Europe.

Question: Is the Federal Republic not in the process of drifting away from the West? Isn't it trying to assume a special role, to take the so-called special path [Sonderweg] with an eye toward central Europe and the Soviet Union, despite all the risks of neutralism?

Answer: I have noted that those who have a trained eye for the Federal Republic have indeed noticed an effective shift in public opinion. I personally cannot say anything about that. But nothing indicates that the political leadership, the government, or the Federal Chancellor have changed their standpoint at all – if for no other reason than the continued active politics of the Federal Republic in the European Community of twelve.

Let me repeat what I already said about Germany's geographical location and its history. France has always tended toward Mediterranean policies because of its opening to the Mediterranean, to Africa and the Middle East. Who could point a finger at Germany for paying greater attention to the East, to Poland, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia? A Germany that has also regained its strength as a great economic power with world status would of course also want to play a greater political role. That is also not surprising. For me this situation is part of the idea that I have of European and world politics, and it gives me reason also to strengthen France's presence and efforts in the concert of the nations.

Source: French President François Mitterrand on the Issue of German Reunification, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 27, 1989.