

The Geopolitics of Europe. From the Atlantic to the Urals.

2 - Europe from Division to Reunification (1947-2004). The Story and the Sub-text

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What have been the major stages in the unification of part of geographical Europe ? After four decades of division, the opening of the iron curtain in the second half of 1989 marked a break in the strategic order. In fifteen years, NATO, and then the EU, took in three former Soviet Republics and USSR satellites. The USA won the Cold War and the post-Cold War, leaving the EU to carry part of the burden from the victory by taking on board countries impoverished by communism.

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Travelling along the banks of the Rhine, Victor Hugo realised back in 1840 how much this divided river also had the potential to bring peoples together. As early as 1849 he even imagined the creation of the "United States of Europe". This did not prevent Europe from being subsequently twice ravaged by World Wars.

In the aftermath of WWII, the USA and the USSR, though former allies against Nazi Germany, soon saw their relations sour. As early as summer 1944, Joseph Stalin put off for 63 days the agreed advance on Berlin while the German army crushed the resistance in Warsaw. Historians have since established that the Polish insurrection was encouraged by the Allies and its failure knowingly organised by Moscow in an implicit renewal of the Germano-Soviet Pact initially signed on August 23 1939. Stalin could not tolerate the renaissance of an independent Poland. Little was made of this alliance with Nazi Germany when the USSR regained the territories abandoned by the signature of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty (1918) and had the full intention of staying in the countries "freed" by its troops. In 1945-1946, the British statesman Sir Winston Churchill coined the term "iron curtain" in reference to the migration-proof border that Stalin was erecting between Eastern and Western Europe. The start of the Cold War is more usually dated to 1947, when the United States decided on its containment policy, which involved standing up to the USSR to thwart its revolutionary project, and even bringing its rival to change from within. Europe had been the centre of the world until 1913 but, in the aftermath of WWII, now found itself at stake in a faceoff between two superpowers. Yet, in 2004, former Soviet Republics and satellite countries of Moscow joined the EU.

So what were the main stages in this unification of part of geographical Europe ?

I. Europe divided by the Cold War

Before examining the main features of Eastern and Western Europe let us first take a look at the international context.

Europe divided by more than forty years of East-West tension

In 1947, the American financier Bernard Baruch coined the term Cold War to qualify the

nascent confrontation between the USA and the USSR. The formula was soon popularised by the American editorialist Walter Lippmann who published a series of articles and then a book under the title.

Georges-Henri Soutou offered this definition : “The Cold War was a global, ideological, political, geopolitical, and military conflict with very strong repercussions in a wide range of domains : the arts, the economy and science”. François Géré saw it as a “high-intensity balance of power between two States or two alliances that is not solved by a direct armed confrontation”. This was notably the result of nuclear firepower, in the hands of the USA since 1945 and then the Soviet Union as from 1949. The whole period was marked by the balance of terror and the arms race.

The Cold War was explained by the incompatibility between two forms of ideological messianism. The United States set themselves up as champions of parliamentary democracy and free enterprise. The Soviet mantra revolved around a monopoly of power to the benefit of the Communist Party and central economic planning. The Cold War thus opposed powers upholding contrary values and organised according to different principles

If the Cold War did not involve direct confrontation, it did use the full contemporary arsenal, including indirect warfare, economic weapons and misinformation. Intellectuals and journalists sometimes became mediators instrumentalised to convince public opinion.

Though there are different ways of analysing the Cold War timeline, there were three clearly delineated phases : the development of the bipolar system (1947-1962) ; the détente years (1963-1979) and the end of the Cold War (1979-1990). It is important to consider that for four decades, geographical Europe found itself transformed into a strategic arena for East-West tension. Though it may seem paradoxical, tension was also a binder, since exclusion produces its corollary : inclusion. Fear of the “enemy” effectively causes the formation of political, strategic and economic groups. In each crisis, camps close ranks. Yet these groupings should not be placed on a par, if only because of the nature of the underlying constraints. That the US supported the construction of the European Community is beyond doubt, but the pressure was not of the same magnitude as that exerted by the Soviet Union on its satellites.

Life in the East during the communist era

On March 12 1947, the doctrine of US President Harry Truman made it publicly clear that the Soviet Union embodied a threat.

On June 5 1947, the Marshall Plan for the economic rebuilding of Europe was published. Joseph Stalin rejected it and forbade Czechoslovakia and Poland from accepting American aid. On October 5 1947, the head of Soviet propaganda, Andreï Jdanov, declared that the world was divided into two irreducible camps : an Imperialist camp led by the United States and an anti-Imperialist camp under the authority of the USSR. The latter created a centralised organisation of the international communist movement, the Comintern, enabling greater cohesion within the USSR. The following year, the “Prague coup” (February 1948) was the final stage in Moscow’s successful bid to take control over the Eastern European countries. Stalin’s methods included forcing each country’s Communist Party to toe the line, banning other parties, eliminating resistance, dismantling churches and shredding national identity.

Politics aside, the regimentation process also used economic and social channels and acculturation.

Divided into four geographical zones, controlled by the United States, France, the United Kingdom and the USSR, the defeated Germany became the theatre of a major Cold War crisis, when the USSR blocked all access on the ground to West Berlin from June 24 1948 to May 12 1949. The Western nations stood up to the blackmail and organised an airlift with nearly 300,000 flights. The crisis split Germany into two States : on the West, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), with a free market economy and on the East, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), communist.

On January 25 1949, after the political break between the USSR and Yugoslavia (June 28 1948), Moscow proceeded to set up the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) between Eastern bloc countries.

In June 1953, a few weeks after the death of Stalin, worker demonstrations sprung up in GDR, the popular slogan being "We are not slaves !". The Soviets joined in the repression that resulted in 51 deaths, numerous injured and over 13,000 arrests.

As from May 14 1955, the Warsaw Pact, dominated by the Soviet Union, faced off against NATO. Conceived as a way of retaliating against the FRG's joining NATO, the Pact was made up of Eastern European countries : USSR, Poland, GDR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania, the latter pulling out a few years later.

In February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" was the cue for a destalinization process that became known as the Khrushchev thaw. The relaxation of cultural constraints nonetheless had limits.

The Hungarian uprising, centred in Budapest, took place from October to November 1956. When Imre Nàgy, the Hungarian Prime Minister, proclaimed Hungary's neutrality and the decision to pull out of the Warsaw Pact, a Soviet military intervention put a brutal end to the revolt, with a death toll of 25,000. The notorious event was eloquent proof of how bonds between the popular democracies and the USSR actually worked.

A decade later, in January 1968, Czechoslovakia uncorked its own set of liberal reforms : abolition of censorship, release of prisoners of conscience, and a more conciliatory attitude towards the Church. On August 21 1968, the "Prague Spring" was quashed by joint armed forces from the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and East Germany. Thus, Leonid Brezhnev's USSR spelt out its right to "safeguard socialism" in countries with "limited sovereignty".

On October 16 1978, a Pole became Pope John Paul II. Over the coming years he was to play a very big role in the unravelling of the Cold War, notably by not opposing the United States' strategy of leading the USSR to asphyxia by ramping up the arms race.

On May 4 1980, Marshal Tito, the artisan of Yugoslav unity, died. On November 11 1980, a group of Polish workers founded *Solidarnosc* (Solidarity), an unofficial trade union, the first in the socialist countries not to be under Communist Party control. The union was headed by Lech Walesa. With support from the USA and John Paul II, Walesa helped to make Poland the centre of Eastern Europe's protest movements.

In the early 1980s, economic growth in the USSR was closing in on zero, life expectancy was falling and shortages, notably in food, were becoming commonplace.

On March 11 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He embarked on a bold strategy to change the image of the USSR to attract West European credit while secretly organising the flight of Soviet capital. Internal forces were now weakening the USSR, including the crisis of nationalities, notably in the three Soviet Republics in Caucasia (pogroms perpetrated on Armenians in Azerbaijan, preludes to the Nagorno-Karabakh War) and in the Baltic countries.

On February 6 1989, the Polish government agreed to open negotiations with *Solidarnosc*, leading to the Round Table agreements. Protests continued to develop in the Eastern European nations, notably in GDR. On May 2 1989, as the flow of East Germans hoping to escape to the West via Hungary built up at the Austro-Hungarian border, Hungary decided to open the floodgates.

On November 9 1989, with the iron curtain now already breached, Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to open the Berlin Wall. As a result, the countries that had fallen under the thumb of Moscow in the aftermath of WWII ceased to be satellites, and the Baltic nations gained their independence in 1990-1991. Meanwhile, the Yugoslav Federation had also started to break up, a process that gathered speed in June 1991. The intervention of the Yugoslavian federal army triggered war, followed by the disintegration of the Federation, as Slovenia and Croatia both declared their independence.

In six months, the symbols of Soviet power crumbled. On June 28 1991, the COMECON dissolved. On July 1 1991, the Warsaw Pact followed suit. On December 8 1991, the USSR imploded as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) came into existence. On December 25 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned from the Presidency of a country that no longer existed.

Life in the West during the Cold War

On June 5 1947, in an address at Harvard University, the US Secretary of State George C. Marshall put forward the plan that would bear his name. Its aim was to speed up the reconstruction of the European countries to prevent the communist parties instrumentalised by Moscow from taking advantage of the crisis to foment revolution. On April 16 1948, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) was set up to help distribute this American aid. The aim was also to strengthen economic relations between members and promote free trade.

On April 4 1949, a North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington (DC). As from the end of the following year, the decision to create an "integrated Atlantic army" reflected the shift from containment in the economic and financial domains towards the strategic terrain. This was both a mutual defence agreement and a military alliance. There were twelve original member nations : the USA, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands and Portugal.

On May 5 1949, the Council of Europe was born. This was a pan-European cooperation

organisation. It is important not to confuse this with the EEC or the later EU. On November 4 1950, the Council of Europe adopted the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

As from October 26 1950, a plan put together by René Pleven, the French Prime Minister, envisioned a European army and a European Defence Community (EDC). This would enable the rearmament of Germany, kept in check by the joint authority of the member States.

On April 18 1951, following an initiative by Frenchmen Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, a treaty established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), with its founder members being the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The treaty entered force on July 23 1952.

On February 18 1952, Greece and Turkey joined NATO.

On August 30 1954, in Paris, a combination of communists and Gaullists scuppered the French parliament's ratification of the EDC. The first result of this was that the Paris and London agreements of autumn 1954 enabled the FRG to rebuild an independent army within the framework of NATO as from May 5 1955, bolstering the role of NATO in Western Europe's security architecture. The second result was that the prospect of an integrated European defence was shelved until the end of the Cold War and the negotiations that would lead to the Treaty of Maastricht.

On March 25 1957, the six member countries of ECSC signed the treaties of Rome that founded the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Committee (EURATOM). These Treaties of Rome entered force on January 1 1958.

On November 20 1959, seven countries — Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom — founded the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The setting up of EFTA was indicative of divergences in economic policy between the Western European nations. A factor underlying the decision to form EFTA was its members' need for collective bargaining power with the EEC.

On January 13 1960, the OEEC was superseded by the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD), the aim of which was to promote the greatest possible expansion of the economy and employment.

In January 1962, the EEC launched the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with the aim of securing food supplies. This was to be for long the European Community's number one budget item.

On January 14 1963, General de Gaulle rejected the US President John F. Kennedy's "Grand Design" to politically weld Europe and integrate the command of atomic weapons. France had been in possession of the atomic bomb since February 13 1960 and its president was not about to share the button. De Gaulle refused the unification of NATO's strategic forces and played the French veto to obstruct Britain's admission to the EEC.

In 1965-1966, France walked away from the Common Market negotiations and the ensuing "Empty Chair Crisis" lasted until the Luxembourg compromise of January 1966 : thenceforth,

unanimity was a requisite for decisions on the most important issues, a principle that would slow down the integration of the States in a common system.

On March 7 1966, President Charles de Gaulle wrote to the US President, Lyndon B. Johnson, informing him of France's withdrawal from the integrated military command of NATO. On October 26 1966, the headquarters of NATO were transferred from Paris to Brussels. Thereafter, the Belgian capital thus hosted the institutions of both the European Community and NATO, geographically reflecting the institutional proximity between the two organisations.

General de Gaulle resigned in 1969. His successor at the *Élysée*, Georges Pompidou (1969-1974), lifted the French veto on the opening of membership negotiations with London. The first EEC enlargement was signed on January 1 1973, with the admission of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Norway, however, by referendum, refused to join.

On March 13 1979, the European Monetary System (EMS) entered force with the European Currency Unit (ECU) becoming a unit of account.

On June 10 1979 the first elections for the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage were held.

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan on December 25 1979 put an end to the years of East-West détente. The United States feared that Moscow had designs on taking control of hydrocarbons in the Persian Gulf. This led President Jimmy Carter to officially call time on détente. In January 1981 a Republican who depicted the USSR as the "Evil Empire" was elected to the White House : enter Ronald Reagan. He quickly introduced a strategy to asphyxiate the USSR : the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), more commonly known as "star wars". Gradually, Washington started to occupy the high ground.

The second enlargement of the EEC took place on January 1 1981, the beneficiaries being a Southern European nation, Greece. In November 1983 NATO began to install its first Pershing missiles in Belgium, the Netherlands and the FRG. This opened the Euromissiles crisis that would last until 1987, date of the signature of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF).

On June 14 1985, the Schengen Agreement kicked off a process of intergovernmental European cooperation that became effective in 1995 with a view to abolishing the internal borders between the signatory countries, while setting up a common external border.

The third enlargement of the EEC in 1986 opened the doors to two new Southern European countries : Spain and Portugal. The European Community now had 12 member countries, a population of 320 million, and covered an area of 2 million km².

On March 12 1986, Spain joined NATO after a referendum. The Alliance had 16 members until 1999.

The "Single European Act" entered force in July 1987. It amended the Treaty of Rome, and thus the EEC. The aim was to complete the creation of a single interior market with a target date of December 1992. To do this it strengthened the powers of the European institutions (Council, Parliament, and Commission) and extended their areas of competence.

In May 1990, the European summit at La Baule confirmed the link between aid and democratisation for the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was created to achieve this, undertaking to support the Central and Eastern European nations.

The unification of Germany became a reality on October 3 1990. The united Germany stayed in NATO, thus effectively producing an enlargement in everything but name with the addition of the former GDR territory, while the USSR would have preferred neutral status for its erstwhile satellite. The Cold War came to an end on November 19 1990 when the 20th century's great debate tipped in favour of liberal democracy, as clearly spelt out by the second summit of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in the Charter of Paris for a new Europe. The Eastern European countries and NATO declared that they were no longer rivals and offered each other mutual friendship.

On November 7 and 8 1991, at a summit meeting in Rome, NATO confirmed that it would be strengthening its ties with Central and Eastern Europe. This was the epilogue of four decades during which the Iron Curtain had been the symbol of the division of Europe.

II. The life and death of the Iron Curtain

So how exactly did the relationship between Iron Curtain and Berlin Wall actually work ?

The Iron Curtain predated the Berlin Wall ...

The British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, borrowed the term "iron curtain" from the proscenium theatre where it is a device that traditionally separates the stage from the auditorium. He used it to refer to the hermetic frontier that was in the process of appearing between Eastern Europe and Western Europe, at the initiative of the USSR. He used it for the first time on May 12 1945 in a secret telegram to the US President, Harry Truman : "an iron curtain is drawn down upon their [the Soviet] front. We do not know what is going on behind." On March 5 1946, Churchill used the formula again in a public speech given at *Westminster College*, Fulton, Missouri. "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, he warned, "an iron curtain has descended on the continent". The image became iconic in representations of the Cold War. So what actually was it ?

The iron curtain spanned a total distance of over 8,500 km, separated into sections of 2,500 km each, the first in Northern Europe, separating Finland from the USSR, the second from the Baltic to Trieste. Its form varied from State to State and from one period of its history to another. In the GDR, specialists distinguish four generations, with SM 70 anti-personnel mines laid in the third generation, backed up by automatic firing guns. In Hungary, the 260 km border with Austria took the form of a double barbed and electrified wire fence.

It was because of its permeability in Berlin that, in 1961, the GDR built the "Berlin Wall", another major symbol of the Cold War. Since the creation of the GDR emigration had accounted for 2.6 to 3.6 million people who had taken the U-bahn to leave East Berlin for West Berlin, or the rail link to cross the border, casting serious political discredit on the East German regime.

The first signs of the Wall, the full meaning of which was not immediately seized upon by the West, began on June 12 1961 with the laying of mesh fences and barbed wire around West Berlin ; there was nothing the West could do about this, short of declaring war. The aim was to separate the Soviet occupied zone from the French, British and American occupied zones. The Soviets then chose a strategic date to start building the wall proper : the night of August 12 to 13 1961, during a long summer weekend when many western heads of state were holidaying. The West soon coined the term "Wall of Shame".

The Berlin Wall, over 43 km long, was thus built to fill a gap in the iron curtain. In reality, it was more than just a wall, for five reasons.

Other measures were implemented to prevent the population from getting near it.

Rail links between East and West Berlin were closed.

The number of crossing points was divided by eight.

Windows of buildings and houses in East Berlin close to the wall were bricked up.

It came to symbolise the Cold War and the division of the world into two rival blocs.

The Wall completely stemmed the tide of people crossing from East to West. Nonetheless, between 1961 and March 8 1989, 5,075 people succeeded in escaping from the East to West Berlin by every possible means : some climbed, others tunnelled, customised cars, or swam the River Spree... An estimated 136 to over 600 people died making the attempt.

The iron curtain did not, however, prevent all communications between the two blocs.

Diplomats and journalists, even tourists, crossed it. As from 1972, West Germany's *Ostpolitik* significantly stepped up exchanges between the two sides.

Also, the United States used the powerful transmitters of *Radio Free Europe* and *Radio Liberty* to broadcast information, anti-propaganda and cultural programmes to Eastern Europe and even as far as the USSR.

... but their dismantling was closely interconnected

Refusing to attempt to stem the migratory pressure to the West, Hungary started to dismantle the iron curtain between May 2 and 26 June 1989, along its Austrian border. On June 27 1989, the Hungarian Prime Minister and his Austrian counterpart took wire cutters to the barbed wire separating the two countries. A complex series of events, including the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9 1989, led to the complete dismantling of the iron curtain during the second half of 1989. This was a remarkable game of three-cushion billiards, or a strategy with two moves planned in advance, in which one player sought to obtain a result in two stages ... though it is always hard to establish with certainty who made which move and the level of complicity between players. Jean-François Soulet distinguishes three patterns in the process by which countries ceased to be satellites : top-down (Poland, Hungary) ; bottom-up (GDR, Czechoslovakia) and inspired (Bulgaria, Romania).

So what had been afoot in East Germany before the opening of the Berlin wall ? Since spring 1987 and, above all 1988, dissent had been fermenting among part of East German civil society. In spite of the omnipresence and brutality of the political police (Stasi), pacifist and feminist groups were becoming increasingly active. Opposition crystallised around a number of key issues, including fraud during the municipal elections of spring 1989. Steering clear of demanding the abolition of the communist regime or German reunification, the opposition

minorities demanded respect for citizens' rights, the legalisation of opposition and freedom of movement.

During a visit to GDR on October 6 and 7 1989, the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev refrained from condemning the demonstrations, criticised the behaviour of the East German leaders and urged reforms. On October 18 1989, the Politburo axed the General Secretary of the East German Communist Party, Erich Honecker, replacing him by Egon Krenz, in an attempt to save the regime... to no avail as the demonstrations continued. The spokesperson for the East German government, Günter Schabowski, declared on the afternoon of November 9 1989 at a press conference :

"Private travel into foreign countries can be requested without conditions (passports or family connections). Permission will be granted instantly. Permanent relocations can be done through all border checkpoints between the GDR and the FRG."

The news spread like wildfire but when thousands of East Germans converged on the Wall checkpoints, they found them closed. After a few hours' wait in a climate of uncertainty, the *Bornholmer Straße* checkpoint opened at 9:20 p.m. and tens of thousands of Berliners swarmed through to West Berlin.

It would nonetheless be an over-simplification to consider November 9 1989 as the day the iron curtain fell, powerful though the symbol may be. If we are looking for a single date, it would appear historically judicious to prefer December 25 1989, with the execution of the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena. According to research by Catherine Durandin, this episode was preceded by the intervention of special Soviet forces to expedite the change. This sheds a strange light on the whole process of the dismantling of the Iron Curtain. This is why, rather than the concept of "fall" of the iron curtain or the Berlin Wall, there is a case to be made for the terms "opening" or "dismantling", that more clearly point to something intentional.

VACLAV HAVEL (1936-2011). FROM DISSIDENT TO PRESIDENT

This is the story of a major figure in Central European history, a committed intellectual thrust by the most singular circumstances to a centre stage role in the national and then European political arenas.

Vaclav Havel was born on October 5 1936 into the Czech bourgeoisie, a social origin that would not serve him well in the wake of the 1948 Czech coup. There was to be no question of allowing him to study literature and film.

Theatre and dissidence

Havel nonetheless found his way into literature and more particularly playwriting, where his influences were Kafka, Beckett and Ionesco. Joining the *Theatre on the Balustrade* as a stagehand he drew attention as an author with *The Garden Party* (1963), *The Memorandum* (1965) and *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* (1968). The plays decrypt the

mechanisms whereby power manipulates language, while making fun of Communist doggerel. Resistance to censorship is a constant theme of his work.

After the Soviet repression of the Prague spring in 1968, Havel gradually became an emblematic figure of dissidence. After his works were banned as from 1969, he became an active dissident. Two years after the 1975 Helsinki Accords, he published the *Charter 77* manifesto for human rights demanding that the precepts of the Accord's "third basket" be respected. In 1978, he wrote and clandestinely distributed - as a *samizdat* - *The Power of the Powerless*, advancing the premise that all politics should be based on an ethic, insisting on the need for all to share responsibility, and rejecting institutional lies. The way out of communism was via the construction of a free and independent civil society. His work gained worldwide fame. However, his commitment earned him several months' imprisonment, notably in 1978, 1979-1983 and 1989. It was from prison that he wrote to his wife the *Letters to Olga*, published covertly in 1984.

"Havel president !"

This is why, during the "velvet revolution" of November-December 1989 that sealed the fate of communism in Czechoslovakia, the crowd chanted : "Havel president !". As interim president he led the country to the first free legislative elections in June 1990. Parliament chose him as President in July 1990. In 1992, he resigned to avoid being associated with the - peaceful - division of Czechoslovakia effective as from January 1 1993. He subsequently became President of the Czech Republic from January 1993 to February 2003. He was instrumental in the Czech Republic's admission to NATO in 1999. He also played a part in the country's EU membership bid fulfilled on May 1 2004, after his resignation from the presidency. Throughout these years, he firmly supported the USA - even signing the January 2003 *Letter of the Eight* in which eight European countries called for a united front against Iraq. Havel also strove to smooth over relations with Germany and inspired regional cooperation *via* the Visegrad Group or V4, made up of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

His was one of the names mentioned when a statesman of European stature was sought to become the first [stable] president of the EU as from 2009. He turned down the proposal for health reasons. After demonstrating that it is possible for a dissident to become president - with no sacrifice of principle -he died on December 18 2011.

III. The NATO enlargements set the pace for EU expansion

1991 was the year in which the Warsaw Pact pulled the plug on itself while the Soviet Union imploded.

A must-read text : Article 17 of the Treaty of Maastricht

On November 1 1993, the Treaty of Maastricht entered force. It notably addressed the desire to anchor the reunified Germany within the construction of Europe via a common currency. It also created European citizenship and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Article 17 states the following :

“The common foreign and security policy shall include all questions relating to the security of the Union, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy. [...] The policy of the Union in accordance with this Article shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and shall respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), under the North Atlantic Treaty and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework.”

Put simply : no way was the CFSP going to be incompatible with NATO interests ! On September 20 1992, the French accepted Maastricht, a referendum returning a majority of 51.04% “yes” votes.

On January 1 1995 the European Community was enlarged for the fourth time, the new members being Austria, Finland and Sweden. This was the first post-Cold War enlargement, since the USSR would probably not have allowed Finland to join. For the second time, Norway opted, by referendum, to stay out. By now, the procedures to strengthen the bonds between NATO and the former satellites or members of the USSR were already in motion, a development that was not without consequence for the EU.

A constant thread : NATO first, then the EU...

With the Cold War over, it became legitimate to reconsider the future of NATO. Some American strategists felt that this onerous, constraining and costly military alliance might now be dissolved. Having put an end to the military alliance of their own (the Warsaw Pact), the Russians of course expected the Americans to follow suite with NATO. The French - who secretly regretted the end of a strategic situation that enabled them to do something different - put forward a Cartesian logic. “NATO was the result of the Cold War. The Cold War was finished. NATO no longer had a reason to be.” Paris secretly hoped to contribute to a new configuration of the architecture of European security that would be to its own advantage, even if that meant bringing back into play a Russia that was on its knees through the 1990s. This could explain why French proposals failed. Finally, NATO, with its force of inertia, its ability to reinvent itself, and its appeal in the eyes of countries that Russia still scared, won the day. In 1993-1994, when the plan to admit former Soviet bloc countries into NATO was unveiled, Russia protested vehemently. On January 10 and 11 1994, NATO nonetheless launched its Partnership for Peace (PfP), a programme for military cooperation with the Eastern European countries. Moscow accused Washington of returning to a Cold War posture. This, however, did not prevent NATO and the EU from pushing ahead with their enlargements.

Thus Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic became members of NATO on March 12 1999, before joining the EU on May 1 2004 with the fifth enlargement. At the same time, it is worth noting that, from January 1999 to January 2002, the final phase of the Economic and Monetary

Union (EMU) was taking place as the conversion rates of the national currencies of the eleven original member states were set in stone. Greece was to join the movement on January 1 2001. The euro jingled for the first time in the pockets of consumers of the twelve countries on January 1 2002.

On March 29 2004, NATO then opened its doors to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia, offspring of the 1991-1992 breakdown of Yugoslavia. These countries also joined the EU on May 1 2004, just four weeks later, along with Malta and the Republic of Cyprus.

THE SPECIAL CASES OF CYPRUS AND MALTA

The Republic of Cyprus and Malta were never USSR satellites. So what are their relations with NATO ? The Republic of Cyprus (South) declares itself to be neutral and, as such, is not part of NATO's Partnership for Peace. Malta became a member of the PfP in April 1995 before suspending its participation in October 1996. In 2008, it asked the Allies to reactivate its participation in the PfP. In early 2015, Malta was not a member of NATO.

Five nations were thus beneficiaries of the fifth enlargement. With a total area of 738,300 km², they account for a population of 74 million. It is worth noting that at this time, the strategic context was such that not only could former USSR satellites join NATO, but also three former Soviet Republics : Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Treaty of Nice, signed in February 2001, entered force to enable a significantly expanding EU to function institutionally : it modified the distribution of powers at the expense of the most populated countries, notably by stripping them of their second Commissioner. Note that the Republic of Cyprus joined as a divided entity, the north of the island being occupied by Turkey. Whether a paradox or a sign of impotence, the 2004 enlargement was closely linked to the outcome of the German unification process, yet the EU accepted to accommodate a divided country... A decade later, the island of Cyprus is still divided, a state of affairs that smacks of impotence in Brussels.

Again, on March 29 2004, NATO opened its doors to Romania and Bulgaria, but the two countries had to wait nearly three years before joining the EU on January 1 2007 as part of the sixth enlargement.

Thus, the enlargements of NATO and the EU between 1999 and 2004 seem to point to a sort of procedure : the first step is to join NATO, and the second is to apply for — or finalise — an application for EU membership. Beyond our chronological framework, the "procedure" continues. Croatia and Albania became members of NATO on April 1 2009. Within a month, Albania had applied for EU candidature. Croatia became the 28th member of the EU on July 1 2013, with the seventh enlargement. At this time, the EU continued to consider Albania as a "potential candidate country".

... the real connection between the NATO and EU enlargements slips under the radar

Twenty-two of the twenty-eight members of the EU are also members of NATO, and the slated enlargements would bring other NATO members into the EU. Relations between NATO and the EU are more important than the media would suggest, notably when it comes to enlargements. A senior officer in the French military admitted this in a confidential interview in 2003 : "NATO sets the tempo. The EU runs along behind." So why is this so ?

Firstly, this process reflects a scale of priorities. The population of the European Baltic, central and eastern states have already heard Soviet tanks rumbling through their streets. They have no desire to relive the nightmare. Their "hunger for security" plays into the hands of the US and NATO. True, gaining membership of NATO remains a complex process, but the political dimension here outweighs the regulatory red tape. Worse however is the finalisation of an application to join the EU as this means wading through 80,000 pages of community *acquis*.

Secondly, the magnetism of NATO feeds on the weaknesses of the common defence policy envisioned by the Treaty of Maastricht. In other words, the Baltic, central and eastern European countries, witnessing, in the 1990s, Europe's collective inability to bring peace to the former Yugoslavia, have figured that it is best not to count too much on the EU.

Thirdly, the process is part of a strategic context that is, by nature, temporary. Put differently, faced with a weakened Russia, the US are pushing their advantage for as long as they can, even if this means giving the impression of attaching little importance to the interests of Russia, for example in the Balkans, and offering the Kremlin symbolic compensation via the creation of relatively formal structures. Thus, on May 27 1997, NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on relations, cooperation and mutual security. Only a few weeks later, preliminary negotiations began for the membership of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic... and from March 23 to June 11 1999, NATO dropped bombs on Serbians as part of Operation Allied Force, before deploying in Kosovo. Further formal compensation was offered and accepted on May 28 2002, when NATO and the Russian Federation - presided over since 2000 by Vladimir Putin - signed the Rome Declaration instating the Russia-NATO Council.

Thus the connection between the enlargements of NATO and the EU is as close as it is unhyped. With the United States having won the Cold War, it has been time to squarely face a new strategic configuration of geographical Europe. What is to be made of the former USSR satellites and the former Soviet Baltic Republics who aspire to leaving the Russian sphere of influence ? What is to be made of the countries spawned by the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia ? The answer is there to be seen in a timeline of the decision-making process : NATO takes charge of security - even at the cost of weakening *de facto* the chances of the EU common defence policy - leaving the EU to do the housekeeping. The necessary logistic support, dispensed via the funds earmarked for pre-accession, and then by the regional and agricultural policies - and this is not all - can span more than three decades. This is something that was not fully explained to taxpayers in the older member countries.

This is the parameter that is often missing when it comes to explaining why, since 2004, the countries that have joined the EU have always been poorer than the EU average. The aim was

not to economically enrich the EU but to make a contribution to an overall solution to the major strategic question that had arisen in the aftermath of the Cold War : how to address the new geopolitical configuration of geographical Europe ? NATO and the EU have each taken on board the satellites of the former USSR and the former Baltic Republics aspiring to leave the sphere of Russian influence. Though this move was not clearly explained — even less debated — it has changed the nature of NATO and the EU. It would have been more in keeping with democratic values to have dared the debate.

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So what have been the major stages in the unification of part of geographical Europe ? After four decades of division, the opening of the iron curtain in the second half of 1989 marked a break in the strategic order. In fifteen years, NATO, and then the EU, took in three former Soviet Republics and USSR satellites. The USA won the Cold War and the post-Cold War, leaving the EU to carry part of the burden from the victory by taking on board countries impoverished by communism. The question now is to make this responsibility into a success and to handle, as best as possible, relations with Russia and the former Soviet Republics, now in suspension between two worlds. For all this, to talk in 2015 about a “reunified Europe” would be wishful thinking as there is residual resentment - not, for that matter without ambiguity - among the new members of NATO and EU towards Russia. The latter is quick to point out that - at least its Western part - is as European as the EU countries, even though it does not share their values. Whatever, Russia is doing its utmost to re-join the circle of geopolitical big-hitters.

All of this shows the extent to which the word “Europe” remains so ambiguous. Diplomats use it abundantly when they criticise “Europe”, without specifying that they are actually complaining about the EU. Those who are under no pressure to resort to this pirouette have much to gain from specifying whether they are talking about geographical Europe, the European Economic Community, or - since the implementation of the Treaty of Maastricht - the EU. It is worth noting that the Treaties themselves refer simply to the “Union” as though the planet had only one !

3- Since 2005, Europe in Doubt

Manuscrit clos en 2015.

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P.-S.

Gérard-François Dumont, Professor at Paris-Sorbonne University ; Pierre Verluise, Director of Diploweb.com.