

Editorial

France, Germany and Europe

In 1999, a book appeared in Paris with the rather alarming title *De la prochaine guerre avec l'Allemagne* ('On the future war with Germany'). It had not been written by some sensationalist science-fiction writer, but by none other than Philippe Delmas, a former aid to Roland Dumas, who was twice minister of Foreign Affairs under the Mitterrand administration.

For historians who are familiar with the history of France between 1870 and 1914, the title of this book must have rung a bell. In that period, many books with similar titles appeared in France, for example, *La prochaine guerre* by General H. Bonnal (1906); *La guerre de demain* (1889) by Danrit, a pseudonym and anagram of the, later famous, Colonel Driant, who under his own name also published *Vers un nouveau Sedan* (1906); F. Delaisi's *La guerre qui vient* (1911); A. Grouard's *La guerre éventuelle* (1913); M. Legendre's *La guerre prochaine et la mission de la France* (1913); Ch. Malo's *La prochaine guerre* (1912) and General Palet's *Les probabilités d'une guerre franco-allemande* (1913); while similar works also appeared in Germany, such as *Deutschland und der nächste Krieg* by General F. von Bernhardi (1912) and *Jena oder Sedan* (1903) by F. A. Beyerlein. All these books reflected, of course, the strong and ever increasing tensions that existed between France and Germany after the defeat of France in the war of 1870, the foundation of the German Empire in 1871 and the resulting annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. With these developments of 1870–71, a new question was borne in Europe: the so-called German question (or in French 'la question allemande'). This question came down to one simple problem: the German Reich was too big and too powerful a state to be integrated into the existing European state system. Two more Franco–German wars, which eventually developed into two World Wars, were the result of this 'question'.

After 1945, the conditions changed completely. Germany was devastated, partitioned and under the control of four alien powers. The same went for her capital, Berlin. France, on the other hand, was one of these four controlling powers. France's position however was also complicated. It was a member of the Great Four but only by permission of the Great Three; it was defeated in 1940 but pushed forward as a fellow-victor in 1945. Soon it was getting involved in

a desperate struggle to hold on to its colonial empire in Indochina, which ended in a humiliating defeat and retreat, and was followed by the even worse nightmare of the war in Algeria. Never-ending financial, social and economic problems (inflation, strikes) as well as permanent political crises (the average life of a French cabinet at that time was only five months) were characteristic of the France of the Fourth Republic.

All these problems notwithstanding, it was France that took the leadership of Europe. This is perfectly understandable because France was the only nation that *could* take it. For obvious reasons, neither Germany nor Italy could do this. Britain could have, but did not want to. Thus, France took the initiative towards European unity because it was the only nation in a position to do so and because it had reasons of its own for doing it: it was in France's own interest. Certainly, however, it would be unfair to deny all idealism in this move. Robert Schuman was no less sincere in his desire to remove the matters of conflict than Briand had been 30 years earlier. But there was another side to it as well. The European concept in France was based not only on hope, but also on fear. European integration was not only a reconciliation, but also an exorcism of Germany.

The first Defence Treaty that was concluded in Europe after 1945, the Treaty of Dunkirk, was aimed against Germany, not Russia. The European Community of Coal, Iron and Steel was created in order to get a grip on Germany's heavy industry. Under strong American pressure, and in order to escape the even greater danger of the creation of a new German army, France developed the plan for a European Defence Community. The final rejection of that plan by the French parliament in 1954 illustrated France's fear of Germany. It did not help, because in that same year Germany was rearmed and became a member of NATO. After the defeat of the European Defence Community project, another course was selected for European cooperation, that of economic integration – which was inaugurated by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The idea was that economic integration would eventually also lead to the political integration of Europe. This, however, was not the thinking of General de Gaulle.

The Fifth Republic, which was founded by General de Gaulle in 1958, produced an unmistakable increase in internal stability, in economic growth and in the continuity of foreign policy, and thus laid the basis for an increasing French influence in the 1960s. The unravelling of the drama of decolonization and the thaw in the Cold War opened up new opportunities for French diplomacy. Thus, the 1960s witnessed the considerable impact of France on European politics. The foreign policy of General de Gaulle was the most stunning example of this. His diplomacy was aimed at nothing less than a fundamental revision – not only of the European, but also of the entire world, order.

The first thing de Gaulle did, on 17 September 1958, thus still as prime minister of the Fourth Republic and even before he had been elected president of the Fifth

Republic, was to present a memorandum to the United States and the United Kingdom with the proposal to reform NATO in such a way that it would be led by a directorship of the US, the UK and France. This suggestion was not accepted by 'the Anglo-Saxons'. That America had very different ideas became clear when, somewhat later, the newly elected American president, John F. Kennedy, presented his 'grand design' for a new American leadership over the Western alliance. De Gaulle's reaction was to make a bid for French autonomy and French leadership over Europe. He rejected Kennedy's offer of a Multilateral Nuclear Force (MLF) and further developed France's own 'force de frappe'. At the same press conference where this was announced, he also vetoed Britain's admission to the European Economic Community. For him Britain was simply a puppet of America. De Gaulle wanted to reform the process of European unification by introducing the Fouchet Plan for a European Political Union, which would be based on cooperation – not integration – of the European states. This was rejected by the other partners in the EEC. In order to take revenge, de Gaulle then, in 1963, signed with Chancellor Adenauer the French–German Friendship Treaty, which is generally known as the Treaty of the Elysée.

The successors of de Gaulle faced different problems. The events of May 1968 demonstrated France's economic weakness, just at a time when the growing financial and economic power of Germany had become apparent. At the same time, through the gradual erosion of the past and the succession of generations, German diplomacy regained its freedom. The moral catharsis of Germany, brought about by the Willy Brandt administration, has been a strong catalyst in what was, anyway, an inevitable process. A new generation born after the War and thus unconnected with the Nazi era, was to take over the German leadership.

In retrospect, the above-mentioned aspects of chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* are unmistakable but, at the time, they were noticed only by a few observers, typically to be found in France. De Gaulle's confidant Christian Fouchet, for example, labelled the 'Ostpolitik' a 'genuine Bismarckian policy'. And, as Henry Kissinger told us, President Pompidou (as well as he himself) was worried whether this policy might not be the first step to an uncertain and possibly dangerous future for Germany and Europe. Pompidou, in the classic traditions of French diplomacy, tried to outbid Germany in good relations with Russia, while at the same time re-enacting the Entente Cordiale by opening the Common Market to Britain as a counterweight against Germany. Giscard's diplomacy was basically the same, only more so, because in the meantime Germany's influence had grown. Thus, when chancellor Helmut Schmidt was known to be planning a visit to Brezhnev, Giscard flew to Warsaw to see the Russian leader first.

Pompidou, a former banker, and Giscard, a brilliant economist, understood more of economics than General de Gaulle had done. Under them, the main aim

of France's European policy was, in some way or another, to control Germany's economic power. This implied an austere economic policy which, apart from the first two years of euphoria after the election of President Mitterrand, was also to be continued under the Left. The 'franc fort' became the symbol of this economic policy. The policy of the 'franc fort' implied, however, that France had to follow the German D-Mark and thus became dependent on the policy of the German Bundesbank. Getting a grip on that policy became the main aim of French European policy. President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl developed a new 'special relationship', somewhat similar to the one that had existed between de Gaulle and Adenauer. They were both seriously concerned about the future of Europe and also saw parallel interests for their two countries. Germany wanted political and defence cooperation with France, France wanted economic and monetary cooperation with Germany. The Economic and Monetary Union and the European Political Union were the results of this.

In the meantime, however, a completely unexpected and astonishing series of events had taken place: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the unification of Germany, the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War. Thus, the Maastricht Treaty became effective in a completely different European and World order than the one for which it had been planned. French leaders who were confronted with German unification were, of course, very worried by it. However, they quickly realised they had to accept the situation and put their hope that this time the German leaders did not want to create a German Europe but a European Germany.

As a consequence of all this, after 1989, the European centre of gravity has moved to the East and, accordingly, the capital of Germany has also moved in that direction, from Bonn to Berlin. The future enlargement of the European Union will undoubtedly increase the political weight of Germany. Thus, in a way, 'the German question' has come back. But it has now taken on a very different form and we should be grateful for that. Books such as the one by Delmas however, as well as many other publications, indicate that – at least for France – it will still be a while before it becomes accustomed to this new situation.

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