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Resuming European Détente and European Integration

France and the INF Treaty

In 1987, the two superpowers signed the INF Treaty, thus officially ending the Euromissile crisis. Though neither the French President nor any other French representative sat at the negotiation table, France itself was present—for throughout the Euromissile crisis, French diplomacy had played a decisive role. Pursuing his own *Ostpolitik*, in which he always took a tough line with Moscow, President François Mitterrand had actively encouraged Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev to resume the U.S.–Soviet dialogue on détente and disarmament, which had come to a standstill at the beginning of the 1980s. Mitterrand had held extensive conversations with both Reagan and Gorbachev in 1984/85 and had offered both of them advice on how to get back into meaningful negotiations.¹

This was important to Mitterrand's own policy aims. The return to confrontation between the superpowers at the end of the 1970s considerably reduced France's room for maneuver in the field of East–West cooperation. It also hindered progress towards European integration. So, from the French perspective, any improvement in the area of détente and disarmament between the two superpowers and any steps forward towards ending the Euromissile crises would make better conditions for cooperation within Europe—both between the East-

1 For French policies during the last years of the Cold War see Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification*, New York 2009; from the same author with a particular focus on the Euromissile Crisis, France, the Euromissiles, and the End of the Cold War, in: Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, and Bernd Rother (eds.), *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War*, Stanford 2015, pp. 196–212; an excellent PhD thesis on this issue, completed in 2017 at Sorbonne Paris Cité University (USPC) under Frédéric Bozo's supervision, is Ilaria Parisi, *La France et la crise des euromissiles, 1977–1987*, 627 pages; see also Parisi's article: *L'indépendance européenne en question. La France et la crise des euromissiles (1977–1987)*, in: *Relations Internationales* 178 (2019), pp. 57–71. Another approach to the topic can be found in Georges-Henri Soutou, *Mitläufer der Allianz? Frankreich und der NATO-Doppelbeschluss*, in: Philipp Gassert, Tim Geiger, and Hermann Wentker (eds.), *Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung. Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss in deutsch-deutscher und internationaler Perspektive*, Munich 2011, pp. 363–376; so far as the French archives are concerned, a large part is already accessible, in particular the holdings of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; a part of the holdings of the Mitterrand archives can be consulted via special permits (e.g. talks with heads of government from the U.S., the Federal Republic of Germany, or the Soviet Union), but important papers on the INF endgame are still being kept closed for another twenty years.

ern and the Western parts of the continent and between the member-states of the European Economic Community (EEC).

The process of European integration had been linked to Cold War dynamics ever since the early 1950s.² French foreign policies were much involved with both of these crucial issues, in particular with regard to the German question.³ Thus, it seems quite productive to focus on France during the INF endgame. In fact, the French attitude towards the INF Treaty of 1987 helps us understand the impact the last major crises of the Cold War—including the Euromissile issue—had on the European integration process right up to the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, and even beyond.⁴

The link between the profound crisis in East–West relations during the 1980s and the various steps towards European integration, such as the beginnings of Franco-German Defense cooperation, enlargements in the Mediterranean area,⁵ and the European Single Act of 1986, is of a quite different nature from what had been seen in earlier decades. Nevertheless, as in the 1950s, it is easy to assume a stimulating role played by the darkening on the horizon of international relations, which is what was experienced in the early 1980s. A very first result was closer policy coordination inside the EEC, especially between Paris, Bonn, and (to a lesser extent) London, concerning relations with Eastern Europe.⁶ In

- 2 For the interdependencies between the Cold War and European Integration see, above all, the works of Piers Ludlow, *European Integration and the Cold War*, in: Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. II: Crises and Détente*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 179–194, and *The new Cold War and the Expansion of the European Community—a Nexus?*, in: Johnny Laursen (ed.), *The Institutions and Dynamics of the European Community 1973–1983*, Baden-Baden 2014, pp. 131–149; see also Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (eds.), *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*, Cambridge 2013; Angela Romano, *Re-Designing Military Security in Europe. Cooperation and Competition between the European Community and NATO During the Early 1980s*, in: *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 24 (2018), pp. 445–471; for the 1950s see, for example, Klaus Schwabe, *The Cold War and European Integration 1947–1963*, in: *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12/4, (2011), pp. 18–34.
- 3 Frédéric Bozo and Christian Wenkel (eds.), *France and the German Question*, New York 2019.
- 4 The issue of this linkage between the last major Cold War crisis and the Maastricht process is the main focus of my current research on the relations between the United States and the European Community; for earlier treatments of this complex issue, see Silvio Pons and Frederico Romero, *Europe between the Superpowers, 1968–1981*, in: Antonio Varsorri and Guia Migani (eds.), *Europe in the International Arena during the 1970s. Entering a Different World*, Brussels 2006, pp. 85–97; Philipp Gassert, *Did Transatlantic Drift Help European Integration? The Euromissiles Crisis, the Strategic Defense Initiative, and the Quest for Political Cooperation*, in: Kiran Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (eds.), *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*, New York 2013, pp. 154–176.
- 5 As shown, for example, in Eirini Karamouzi, *Greece, the EEC and the Cold War 1974–1979*, Basingstoke 2014.
- 6 Some reflections on this issue can be found in Christian Wenkel, *Overcoming the Crisis of Détente 1979–83. Coordinating Eastern Policies between Paris, Bonn, and London*, in: Oliver Bange and Poul Villaume (eds.), *The Long Détente. Changing Concepts of Security and Cooperation in Europe 1950s–1980s*, Budapest 2016, pp. 235–251; on the American impact

order to foster genuine European détente,⁷ Paris was now much more willing to make concessions on European integration issues, as can be seen in its attitude towards the Genscher–Colombo initiative. Above all, it urged a deepening of Franco–German cooperation. The crisis clearly helped the relaunch of the European integration process during the Fontainebleau EEC Summit in June 1984 and thus the signing of the European Single Act two years later.

The signing of the INF Treaty in 1987 confirmed François Mitterrand's conception of European détente and European integration and provided a base from which he could resume both his *Ostpolitik* and his European policy as soon as he was re-elected in May 1988 and able to end his former *cohabitation* with Jacques Chirac. Against this background, the present essay will address the question of how the end of the Euromissile crisis and the signing of the INF Treaty can be linked to the various European policies of the French government. In a more general way, the discussion may also help us answer the broader question of what interdependencies there were between the Cold War crisis and European integration during the 1980s. To address these questions, the first section of the essay explores the beginnings of French policies with regard to the Euromissile crisis from the late 1970s on, and highlights the particular role Mitterrand played as a bridge-builder between East and West. A second section deals more specifically with varying French attitudes towards the INF Treaty in 1987 and towards Gorbachev, focusing on public opinion, on French diplomats and on the President himself. The last section discusses the consequences of the Treaty for French foreign policy concerned with East–West relations and integration within Europe.

1. France, the Euromissile Crisis, and the Disarmament Issue

From the beginnings of the Fifth Republic, and in particular after the 1966 decision to withdraw from NATO's military integration, France was known for its opposition to superpower disarmament deals. Despite a gradual reinterpretation of Gaullist doctrines under de Gaulle's successors, this was still the case during the 1980s. Charles de Gaulle had indeed been opposed to any arms control deal between Moscow and Washington, which he regarded as the symbol of a superpower condominium.⁸ The French position evolved considerably in 1978 under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who believed that disarmament was

on French policies, see also Laurent Césari, *Les effets des politiques américaines sur la France 1984–1988* (forthcoming article).

7 Angela Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente. How the West shaped the Helsinki CSCE*, Brussels 2009.

8 Pascal Boniface, *Repenser la dissuasion nucléaire*, La Tour d'Aigues 1997; Pascal Boniface, *La dissuasion nucléaire dans la relation franco-allemande*, in: *Relations internationales et stratégiques* 10 (Summer 1993), pp. 19–25; Bertrand Goldschmidt, *La France et la non-prolifération*, in: *Relations internationales* 69 (Spring 1992), pp. 41–50.

a matter for all members of the international community—not just the United States and the Soviet Union. Giscard therefore asked for a commission on disarmament within the institutional framework of the United Nations. Following this change of course, French diplomats took part in the Geneva Conference on disarmament and also supported the SALT negotiations. However, France fiercely resisted any Soviet attempts to include French (or British) strategic nuclear weapons in the Geneva disarmament talks. Then, in the context of the Euromissile crisis, François Mitterrand redefined the conditions that would allow France to participate in the disarmament process at the United Nations' tribunal in 1983.⁹ For Mitterrand, it was not the weapons themselves that guaranteed effective protection but the political will to use them at the decisive moment. For him, the French *Force de frappe* was first and foremost a political weapon and he did not anticipate actually using it. The most crucial political issue for the various French governments was to maintain their independence in defense by keeping the French nuclear arsenal out of any disarmament negotiations. However, they were continually confronted by Soviet demands to include the nuclear forces of third countries in the arms control negotiations. Persistently, Paris insisted on rejecting this.

In a conversation with the new Soviet Ambassador to Paris, Yuli Vorontsov, Mitterrand explained the point of the French nuclear force: “Our *Force de frappe* plays a strategic role, not a tactical one. [...] So why should France use its nuclear weapons if this would lead to a devastating disaster? We are not crazy! This force is our ultimate means of honor and defence.”¹⁰ Considering the Soviet demands unfriendly, he complained bitterly about the unwillingness of the Soviets to understand the French position: “I have not understood anything in Russian analyses of French politics for quite a while. It is as if I spoke Assyrian. But I speak French!”¹¹

The usual Soviet demand for the inclusion of French and British nuclear weapons was repeated by Gorbachev immediately after he took office in April 1985; with the same regularity it was rejected as foolish by François Mitterrand.¹² However, the *Force de frappe* was now coming under additional pressure from the other side—from Ronald Reagan and his idea of a Strategic Defense Initiative: “The real risk in terms of space is not that the United States may become

9 François Mitterrand, *La France et sa défense. Paroles publiques d'un président 1981–1995*, Paris 2015, pp. 103–114; see also the dossier prepared for this purpose in the Mitterrand Papers, in: Archives nationales de France (AnF), series 5AG4, vol. CD264/3.

10 Memo of conversation between François Mitterrand and Yuli Vorontsov, June 24, 1983, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD76/2.

11 Ibid.

12 Telegram from the French embassy in Moscow, April 24, 1985, in: Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter AMAE), series Europe after 1944, vol. 5642; see also François Mitterrand, *Réflexions sur la politique extérieure de la France. Introduction à 25 discours, 1981–1985*, Paris 1986, pp. 32–33.

invulnerable but that the USSR may become so in turn. This would render the French deterrent force obsolete and would have incalculable consequences for our country.”¹³ In preparation for a meeting he was to have with Ronald Reagan in 1985, Mitterrand’s advisors urged him to clarify the French position: “As long as there is no other credible security system, our deterrent capacity must be maintained militarily and this has to be explained to the public.”¹⁴

One of the major differences between Mitterrand’s stance in the Euromissile crisis and that of his predecessor, Giscard, was the unreserved support he gave to the NATO Double-Track Decision from the very beginning of his Presidency. His diplomatic advisor, Hubert Védrine, described it as the “founding act” of his foreign and security policy.¹⁵ In return for this support, the French diplomats expected the Federal Republic of Germany to take a clear stance against the inclusion of French nuclear weapons in the Geneva discussions.¹⁶

In this context, a new Franco–German cooperation on security and defense was established, nearly thirty years after the failure of the European Defense Community in 1954 and nearly twenty years after the signing of the Elysée Treaty of 1963, which led to the failure of De Gaulle’s ideas concerning a common Franco–German foreign and defense policy. An expression of this close cooperation between Paris and Bonn in dealings with Moscow—if not an indication of a new common Franco–German *Ostpolitik*—was Mitterrand’s speech to the Bundestag on January 20, 1983.¹⁷ In contrast to Giscard and his Administration, Mitterrand considered the Federal Republic to be not the cause of the crisis but rather its victim.

During the early 1980s, the Euromissile crisis brought about a growing convergence of German and French views about Soviet policies, even if French diplomats were far from convinced by the West German conception of the strategic (im)-balance in Europe. As a reaction to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and to Washington’s stance on East–West issues, Paris had already intensified its political consultations with Bonn. Henceforth, the German–Soviet relationship was once again considered to be a crucial element even for French détente policy, and the Federal Republic was now regarded as an honest broker between the East and the West.¹⁸

13 Memo for the President, Hubert Védrine, January 4, 1985, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD257, quoted in: Parisi, *La France et la crise des euromissiles*, p. 431.

14 Memo in preparation for the meeting with Ronald Reagan, Elisabeth Guigou, and Hubert Védrine, May 1, 1985, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. 4863, quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 433.

15 Hubert Védrine, *Les mondes de François Mitterrand. À l’Élysée 1981–1985*, Paris 1996, p. 93.

16 Report of the Franco-German Working Group on the relations with Eastern Europe to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, pp. 14–20, in: AMAE, series Europe after 1944, vol. 4911.

17 For Mitterrand’s speech see *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages. Stenographische Berichte*, 9th Legislation Period, 143rd Session, pp. 8978–8992.

18 Memo of the Europe Directorate of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Joëlle Timsit, December 8, 1981, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. 160/1.

In the same period a common rejection of the Soviet demand to include British and French nuclear weapons in the nuclear balance calculation in Europe also created a rare moment of unity between Margaret Thatcher and François Mitterrand. In accord with his British counterpart, he stated: "Our loyalty to the Alliance must not make us the plaything of decisions made between Washington and Moscow. All the more reason to strengthen the Franco-British relations that will be useful in this domain."¹⁹ Together with the Franco-German relationship, which he had described as "the last bulwark against madness" in a conversation with Helmut Schmidt some days earlier, Mitterrand intended the strengthening of such bi- and multilateral relationships between European countries to send out a message to the superpowers.²⁰

The troubles caused by the Euromissile crisis, and in particular the deployment of the American Pershing II missiles, resulted in a deterioration in the Soviet-German relationship and, in consequence, lent growing importance to the Franco-Soviet one.²¹ Paris could once again assume a leading role in the field of East-West relations. In this context, 1984 marked a turning point which led to substantial changes in French relations with Moscow in particular, but also with Washington. This was symbolically manifested in state visits the French President made to both capitals. Looking back at the end of the century, Anatoly Chernyaev, Gorbachev's diplomatic advisor from 1986 and a foreign policy expert in the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU from 1984, regarded Mitterrand's visit to Moscow as a major event.²²

Throughout the years 1984 and 1985, Mitterrand traveled and acted as a bridge-builder between East and West, explaining to his American and Soviet counterparts how they could deal with each other. While playing a crucial part in re-establishing the East-West dialogue and encouraging a resumption of détente at superpower level, he was convinced that he was conferring a leading role on France. As he confided to Henry Kissinger: "Beyond my own person, it must be said that France is currently the only country in Western Europe that can have a meaningful dialogue with the Russians."²³

In particular, he used his meetings with President Ronald Reagan and Vice-President George Bush to prepare them for a revival of the dialogue with Moscow. In February 1984, he called on Bush to resume talks with the Soviets after a certain period had elapsed: "What we need to do is to get the Russians used to

19 Memo of conversation between François Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher, January 10, 1981, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD75/2; see also memo of conversation between François Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher, October 20, 1983, in: *ibid.*

20 Memo of conversation between François Mitterrand and Helmut Schmidt, January 7, 1981, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD72/2.

21 Memo of the head of the Europe Directorate of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, December 10, 1984, in: AMAE, series Europe after 1944, vol. 4907.

22 Anatoly C. Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, University Park 2000, pp. 75 f.

23 Memo of conversation between François Mitterrand and Henry Kissinger, June 28, 1984, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD74/1.

dialogue again.”²⁴ Some months later, on March 22, 1984, in a conversation with Reagan he explained how he saw the French role in helping the Soviets overcome their bad trajectory: “It is with you that they want to negotiate on the substance. But it’s more convenient for them to start with France.”²⁵

According to the French version of the minutes of this conversation, Reagan seemed to be very curious, and appreciated being advised by the French President. The central piece of advice Mitterrand gave was a psychological one: “With regard to the USSR, it is necessary: 1) not to give up anything, 2) not to concede anything, 3) to place yourself in a good psychological situation for the day when the Soviets want to discuss.” Reagan, he said, should deal very carefully with the Soviets: “Dialogue must be as much about signs as it is about substance. Primarily, for reasons of dignity. Signs and sensitivity are decisive.”²⁶ In return, the American President praised France’s role in the INF affair just as much as Bush had complimented Mitterrand for his speech to the Bundestag.

In October 1985 in Paris, Mitterrand also gave advice to Mikhail Gorbachev, when the Soviet leader made his first visit to a Western capital, just before the Geneva Summit.²⁷ For the President’s advisor Hubert Védrine, it was clear from the very beginning, that France should help Gorbachev carry through his reform agenda.²⁸

However, in March 1986 Mitterrand lost his governmental majority. For more than two years he had to work with a right-wing government under Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. This somewhat limited the degree of initiative he was able to take in the domain of foreign policy. The chief foreign policy disagreement between the left-wing President and his right-wing Prime Minister centered round security issues, particularly those raised by the INF affair. It highlights how differently they perceived the Cold War and how this conflict should be brought to an end.²⁹

24 Memo of conversation between François Mitterrand and George Bush, February 15, 1984, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD74/1.

25 Memo of conversation between François Mitterrand and Ronald Reagan, March 22, 1984, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD74/1.

26 Ibid. Reagan noted in his diary how he had probed Mitterrand on the USSR: “His views were most informative & confirmed some thoughts I’ve been having.” See Douglas Brinkley (ed.), *The Reagan Diaries*, New York 2007, p. 227.

27 Memo of the Europe Directorate of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, September 11, 1985, in: AnF, serie 5AG4, vol. CD413/1; see also Marie-Pierre Rey, Gorbatchev et “la maison commune européenne”, une révolution mentale et politique?, in: *Revue russe* 38 (2012), pp. 101–110.

28 Hubert Védrine, *Les mondes de Mitterrand*, p. 381.

29 For Chirac’s position on INF see Jacques Chirac, *Mémoires*, Paris 2009, pp. 369f.; on the *cohabitation*, Jean Lacouture, Mitterrand. Une histoire de Français, Vol. 2, Paris 1998, pp. 271–300; on the INF issue during the *cohabitation*, Parisi, *La France et la crise des euromissiles*, pp. 426–448.

2. French Attitudes Towards Gorbachev and the INF Treaty

Compared to those in other Western countries, French intellectuals were late in turning away from the Soviet Union and Communism. An important turning point came with the events in Prague in 1968 and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's testimony about Soviet Communism some years later. But it was at the beginning of the 1980s that the rejection of the Soviet Union reached its peak in French civil society. Despite Communist participation in the French government from 1981 to 1984, French skepticism with regard to Moscow was now widespread and deeply rooted. This attitude was made particularly clear by none other than François Mitterrand in the speech he made to the German Bundestag in 1983. In 1985, only five per cent of the French had a positive image of the Soviet Union. This changed fundamentally with the appearance of Mikhail Gorbachev on the political stage—albeit with some delay. French opinion researchers therefore compared Gorbachev's impact, and especially his peace initiatives, with the perceptual shifts triggered by Stalin and Khrushchev in earlier decades.³⁰

By 1989, Gorbachev was the first Soviet leader towards whom the French showed more trust and sympathy than they did to his American counterpart. Surveys confirm that it was above all the dimension of peace that shaped the image of both Gorbachev and the Soviet Union most strongly at this moment. The decisive change in the perception of Gorbachev dates back to 1987 and can be linked to the negotiation and signing of the INF Treaty. While in April most French people were still against a double-zero solution, by June they had already come to favor it—a turn probably due to the silencing of the Gorbachev and INF critics in the ranks of the Chirac government. In 1988 Gorbachev was even proclaimed “Man of the Year” by the right-wing conservative newspaper *Le Figaro*.³¹

In the commentaries of French journalists who specialized in foreign and defense policy issues, three currents can be identified when Gorbachev and his reform policy were assessed. Between the outright skeptics at one extreme and the optimists at the opposite pole, the largest group cautiously appreciated that change, but focused on the narrow limits set. They were particularly impressed by the changes being made in foreign policy, which gave them an overall positive picture of Gorbachev.³²

As in other countries, the Washington Summit of December 1987 was well covered by TV stations and in the press. The French public was fascinated, and, according to surveys, was largely in favor of abolishing intermediate nuclear forces in Europe. The country's press, however, was divided in its assessment of

30 Olivier Noc, *Le choc Gorbatchev*, in: *Société française d'enquêtes par sondages* (ed.), *L'état de l'opinion 1990*, Paris 1990, pp. 51–69.

31 *Le Figaro Magazine*, January 2, 1988.

32 Stéphane Verlhac, *La perestroïka gorbatchévienne vue par les politologues et observateurs français*, in: *Cahiers d'histoire immédiate* 10 (Autumn 1996), pp. 143–185.

the Summit and the INF Treaty. Left-wing newspapers and journals, and also those from Catholic circles, were clearly in favor of the Treaty. They thought it a spectacular achievement, especially because of the verification measures, and liked the way Reagan and Gorbachev were readjusting to peace. But those from the right-wing camp were very critical about the Treaty as well as about Reagan—and especially about Mitterrand. Typical headlines during the days of the Washington Summit ran: “75 hours are enough to undress Europe”, “The illusion of the zero-option”, and “A fool’s bargain”.³³ Articles under such titles reflected not only the official French position before the turn under Giscard in 1978 but also the attitude of the right-wing government in office in 1987. This government considered the Treaty pointless, and even dangerous, for French security. Gorbachev was portrayed as a clever winner, able to triumph over a weak old man in the U.S. who had become a victim of efficient Soviet propaganda.

The Summit also provided an occasion for French diplomats, former military officials and political opponents of Mitterrand to express their fears about his attitude towards the INF Treaty. They wanted to “wake up” the French public. François Fillon, right-wing President of the National Defense and Armed Forces Committee of the French Parliament, for instance, suspected Mitterrand of envisaging the scrapping of French nuclear forces and criticized the way he had given his support to the Germans in 1983.³⁴ Others feared a potential new Yalta, in which the superpowers would decide on Europe’s future without Europeans themselves having any say on the issue.³⁵ What is much more remarkable, however, is that some of the critics suggested taking the bull by the horns and creating a European Defense Community and a European Political Union. This last argument proved quite useful to the French President in pursuing his European ambitions.³⁶

The outlook of the French Foreign Ministry was colored by a traditional anti-Sovietism. At the time of the Reykjavik Summit of October 1986, French diplomats were very disappointed with Washington and Moscow and the willingness to sign an INF Treaty as soon as possible that both sides seemed to show. A lot of memos, written during the weeks around the Summit, dealt with the risk of a possible denuclearization of Western Europe and the fear of the expected

33 Robert Lacontre, Washington. 75 heures pour déshabiller l’Europe?, in: *Le Figaro Magazine*, December 12, 1987; Jean Denipere, Les illusions de l’option zéro, in: *Rivarol*, January 29, 1988; Jacques Bonomo, Accord de désarmement ou marché de dupes?, in: *Le Figaro*, February 27, 1988; all the articles from the French press quoted in this chapter were found in the various press packs on the subject compiled by the Sciences Po Paris library.

34 François Fillon, Pas de salut sans un front commun, in: *Le quotidien de Paris*, December 4, 1987.

35 Alain Peyrefitte, Un parfum de Yalta, in: *Le Figaro*, December 9, 1987.

36 Jean Denipere, Les illusions de l’option zéro, in: *Rivarol*, January 29, 1988; Noël Darbroz, Pas d’Europe aux sommets, in: *La Croix*, December 8, 1987; Michel Drancourt, L’Europe au défi, in: *Le quotidien de Paris*, December 8, 1987; Jean-François Poncet, Une grande absente, in: *Le Figaro*, December 7, 1987.

weakness of France's position should this happen.³⁷ The various departments of the Quai d'Orsay remained skeptical or were as outright pessimistic as Jacques Chirac and Jean-Bernard Raimond, his Minister for Foreign Affairs: "Since World War Two, our security and that of our allies has been based on nuclear deterrence [...]. Again, the Reykjavik meeting gave the impression that the abolition of deterrence could be a matter for a US–Soviet consensus, which is a cause of serious concern for France."³⁸ The French Minister of Defense, André Giraud, even described Gorbachev's proposition for a double-zero option made on February 28, 1987 as a "European Munich" that would give the Soviets free rein to use all their other military levers to dominate Europe.³⁹

Prime Minister Chirac stood on the side of the British and the Germans when he emphasized his doubts about the double-zero solution. Only the German decisions of 1987 to approve the double-zero solution and to give up any plan to modernize the Pershing IA missiles—decisions in line with Mitterrand's position—brought the President's dispute with his Prime Minister to an end, at least formally.⁴⁰

French diplomats believed that strategic nuclear forces were the real danger to their country and therefore insisted on the necessity of nuclear deterrence in Europe and on maintaining the existing strategic link between Western Europe and the United States. The question now being asked in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs was how the link between European and American security interests could be re-organized.⁴¹ Another issue much discussed at the Quai d'Orsay during the months and weeks before the signing of the INF Treaty concerned the verification measures and the question of whether these measures could endanger the West in subsequent disarmament negotiations.⁴²

Nevertheless, despite all these initial criticisms and fears, and although, in the end, France was only indirectly affected, the majority of French diplomats approved of the INF Treaty, believing that it fulfilled the Western objectives formulated in 1979. Clearly, they would have preferred it if Washington and Moscow had first settled the issue of their strategic nuclear forces (START) and

37 For example, a memo on the French position towards the INF affair of the Strategic Affairs Directorate, November 27, 1987, in: AMAE, series Europe after 1944, vol. 6621.

38 Memo of the Strategic Affairs Directorate of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 3, 1986, in: AMAE, series Europe after 1944, vol. 6652.

39 Quoted in Pierre Favier and Michel Martin-Roland, *La décennie Mitterrand*, vol. 2: *Les épreuves 1984–1988*, Paris 1996, p. 650; see also Bozo, *France, the Euromissiles, and the End of the Cold War*, p. 206.

40 Parisi, *La France et la crise des euromissiles*, p. 443. See also the essay by Tim Geiger in this volume.

41 Memo of the Center for Analysis, Planning and Strategy of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 2, 1987, in: AMAE, series Europe after 1944, vol. 6621.

42 The question arises for the first time in a memo of the Strategic Affairs Directorate of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 11, 1987, in: AMAE, series Europe after 1944, vol. 6621.

the disarmament of short-range missiles. They were also a little worried—though not as much as their German counterparts—about the convergence of denuclearization ideas in Moscow and Washington. And finally, they wondered whether the Allies would now be able to clarify their objectives. They therefore suggested that, after the signing of the INF Treaty, nuclear disarmament in Europe should be slowed down until a clear common position on European security was found.

At the time, French Socialists, too, generally distrusted Gorbachev's disarmament rhetoric. Amongst them, as with others, a change in attitude can be observed from the year 1987 onwards. It may be explained by a variety of events, such as the release of Andrei Sakharov, eased emigration possibilities for Russian Jews, and a trip the General Secretary of the *Parti Socialiste* (PS), Lionel Jospin, made to Moscow; but the INF Treaty was also highly significant. At the end of the year, most French Socialists and, above all, the French President were vehement supporters of *Perestroika*.⁴³ Previously, Mitterrand had not been completely convinced of the honest intentions of the Soviet leader, but his attitude towards Gorbachev's reform policy evolved considerably after the Summit meeting in Moscow in July 1986.⁴⁴

When the INF Treaty was signed in December 1987, neither Mitterrand nor Chirac could react in any other way than positively; but the French President's reaction was especially enthusiastic. In contrast to many of his contemporaries (and not only in France), he believed in a possible end to the Cold War, and the Treaty confirmed this conviction.⁴⁵ He even expressed his support for the Treaty on German television.⁴⁶

Like his predecessor Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Mitterrand considered the INF Treaty to be a historical milestone, putting a European position into practice, and serving as a starting point for a longer-term process of ensuring peace. At the same time, he agreed with his critics that a disengagement of the United States from Western Europe would pose a potential threat. However, he was confident that the Treaty would not fundamentally change the picture. What he feared much more than the chances of a nuclear attack was a military conflict fought with conventional arms along the length of the Iron Curtain.⁴⁷

At the NATO Summit in March 1988, he praised the Treaty again, describing it as a beginning, and now calling for a fifty per cent reduction in the strategic arms of the U.S. and the USSR, simultaneously urging that conventional forces be disarmed, a plea he had already made in 1986. To West European critics of the INF Treaty, he recommended attending more carefully to these disarmament

43 Marie-Pierre Rey, *La gauche française face à la perestroïka gorbatchévienne 1985–1991*, in: *Communisme* 76/77 (2003/2004), pp. 141–167.

44 See Bozo, *France, the Euromissiles, and the End of the Cold War*, p. 208.

45 Parisi, *La France et la crise des euromissiles*, p. 444.

46 Interview with François Mitterrand on East German television, January 6, 1988, <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-6732-fr.pdf> (accessed on May 6, 2020).

47 Interview with Yves Mourousi (TF1), in: Mitterrand, *La France et sa défense*, pp. 390–394.

issues and to the asymmetry of the conventional forces on either side of the Iron Curtain.⁴⁸

A few months later, in September 1988, he called on the United Nations tribune to organize a European conference on these issues within the framework of the CSCE.⁴⁹ Indeed, Mitterrand now considered that disarmament was one way—perhaps the most appropriate way—to change the Yalta order in Europe, especially if it meant disarming along the frontiers of the Iron Curtain. For him, the signing of the INF Treaty came at just the right moment in terms of domestic politics, a few months before the French Presidential elections. In the letter he wrote to the French people in the spring of 1988 during his campaign, Mitterrand could argue, with reference to the Treaty, that security and disarmament should be handled together and not separately.⁵⁰ His security policy stance thus gave him a domestic political advantage over Jacques Chirac.

3. The INF Treaty and French Policies towards European Integration

The Euromissile crisis was decisive in bringing about a relaunch of Franco-German cooperation, especially in the fields of security and defense. This was part of a renewed French effort to solve not only the German question but also the European one.

During the second half of the 1970s, French policies towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were characterized by vehement competition with West Germany's *Ostpolitik*. Just before the Euromissile crisis, French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and his diplomats were particularly worried about the expected end of the Brezhnev era and tried to make the Soviets accept the idea of a conference on disarmament in Europe. This proposal was unsuccessful, coinciding as it did with the dwindling of French political influence in Moscow. As Bonn now seemed to stand in a better position than Paris, French diplomats saw a growing necessity to foster a European framing of the Federal Republic, and in particular of its *Ostpolitik*.⁵¹

The election of François Mitterrand in 1981 gave French diplomacy the opportunity to make a fundamental change in terms of détente policy. Strategy had already begun to shift under Mitterrand's predecessor, but the transition at the

48 François Mitterrand, Declaration at the opening session of the NATO Summit, March 2, 1988, in: François Mitterrand, *La France et sa défense*, pp. 377–381. See also report of the German Ambassador to NATO, March 3, 1988, in: *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1988*, ed. by Michael Ploetz, Matthias Peter, and Jens Jost Hofmann, Munich 2019, Doc. 75.

49 Mitterrand, *La France et sa défense*, pp. 395–400.

50 François Mitterrand, *Œuvres*, Vol. IV, Paris 2018, pp. 821–891.

51 Memo for the President, December 31, 1981, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. 160/1.

Elysée Palace gave critics of the French détente policy a voice. The in-house think-tank of the Quai d'Orsay now concluded that France had never been a privileged partner of the Soviet Union but had merely been a useful plaything in the hands of Brezhnev. Even worse, the French détente policy was not only deemed ineffective but was seen as harmful for the Western allies because it favored a sort of "moral disarmament."

France's endorsement gave détente the seal of the legitimacy it needed. The diligence shown by French leaders in defending the 'achievements of détente', despite the incidents along the way, had made it possible to consolidate a concept that has been proven useful to Moscow in order to pursue a policy of military strengthening and of expansion in the Third World [...]. The deepening of the dialogue with France, and its preservation during periods of crisis (Afghanistan), has made it possible to give external credibility to the idea that the USSR is a power like any other belonging without any restriction to the community of nations. However, the quest of normality is one of the oldest objectives of the Soviet state since Rapallo. [...] France has favoured, if not the disarmament of its allies, at least some moral disarmament.⁵²

Following this new predominant perception of its own *Ostpolitik* and due to the Euromissile crisis, France reduced its relations with Moscow and other Eastern European capitals on the political level, while maintaining exchange and interpenetration economically and culturally.⁵³ This shift was largely of a symbolic nature and mainly affected the ways of communication and dealing with the Soviet leadership. During the 1970s a newly elected French President would have paid a visit to Moscow straight after coming into office. Mitterrand waited until the deployment of the Pershing II missiles on West German territory had happened. As late as 1984, he was able to revive an official French policy of détente that still seemed to have potential for widening the room for maneuver in French foreign policy.

Aiming to change the patterns of French *Ostpolitik*, Mitterrand traveled to Hungary in 1982, thereby supporting Hungarian concepts of détente and human rights. His visit to Budapest was regarded as a way of communicating to Moscow that there was a European community straddling the Iron Curtain, and also to show how the French were determined to overcome the order of Yalta:

Under these conditions, the visit of the President of the Republic will have a particular resonance: Towards the Soviet Union, it will demonstrate, at the time of the Warsaw coup, our persistent desire for dialogue with the Eastern European states, despite the pressure that Moscow is putting on them and the policy it is imposing on them. With regard to

52 Memo of the Center for Analysis, Planning and Strategy, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 14, 1981, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD392/4.

53 On the persistence of détente during the crisis of détente policies, see Poul Villaume and Oliver Bange (eds.), *The Long Détente. Changing Concepts of Security and Cooperation in Europe 1950s–1980s*, Budapest 2016.

the countries of Eastern Europe, it will underline our desire for openness and dialogue with the members of the European Community, which has its roots in the oldest history and whose future may not necessarily have been shattered by Yalta.⁵⁴

That some countries of the Eastern part of the continent themselves claimed membership in Europe at this very time, believing that European integration should not be limited to the West, was considered as a sign of success and change: “This concern alone constitutes recognition of the importance of the Community phenomenon and is the best encouragement on the path taken since 1957.”⁵⁵

The Euromissile crisis prompted France to reconsider its own attitudes and policies towards the East–West conflict as well as towards European integration and, linking both, the German question. This last appears to have been of particular importance to the Elysée, as Mitterrand expected a solution to it before the end of the twentieth century.⁵⁶ The political decisions taken in 1982 and 1983 due to these changes of perception remained valid for the following years—at least until the end of the Cold War.

Although Mitterrand had rejected Franco–German relations because of their exclusionary character during his Presidential election campaign, he came to rely on this bilateral relationship as a central pillar of his foreign policy only a few months after taking office. More than ever French diplomats saw this as a key guarantee of the Federal Republic’s ties to the West. This is why, at this time, they were prepared to make concessions to their German partner on the forthcoming institutional reforms of the European Community.⁵⁷ Fearing that German *Ostpolitik* might drift, with a general deterioration in German–Soviet relations in 1982 and 1983, the Quai d’Orsay expended much time and effort proposing a European vision of East–West relations to the Germans. It was a vision that would differ from the American approach and from the one that Bonn was used to conducting, which French diplomats found “non-strategic.”⁵⁸

To get the Germans to change their strategic approach, French diplomats worked at deepening Franco–German relations in the field of security policy. In the re-orientation of French defense policies which they considered necessary for this purpose, they even went as far as to call into question the Gaullist doctrine of an independent French deterrent force: they were prepared to place

54 Memo of Bertrand Dufourcq, Head of the Europe Directorate of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 5, 1982, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD274/4; see also a memo of the Working group on East–West Relations of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in: *ibid.*

55 Memo of the Europe Directorate of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the attitude of the Soviet Union with regard to the European integration, September 13, 1983, in: AMAE, series Europe after 1944, vol. 4911.

56 Memo of conversation between François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl, October 21, 1982, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CD72/2.

57 Memo for the President, September 22, 1981, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. 160/1.

58 See for example the memo of the Center for Analysis, Planning and Strategy, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 12, 1982, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. 160/2.

it at the service of an emerging Europe. Their long-term objective was clearly the organization of a more European, and thus more independent, system of defense for Europe.⁵⁹ The joint Franco–German declaration on these issues made on February 25, 1982 was seen in Bonn as helpful support in the debate over the deployment of the Pershing II missiles, and in Paris as a base for a renewed *Ostpolitik* to be implemented in the future.⁶⁰

As in earlier decades, French wishes to contrive a common *Ostpolitik* with the Federal Republic were received with some reluctance in Bonn, however: “As I argued that a policy in the East should have as a necessary corollary a tenacious effort to strengthen European integration, develop common policies and consolidate existing ones, I was unanimously told that the differences in economic ideology between the partners did not allow us to be so ambitious.”⁶¹

The speech Mitterrand made to the Bundestag enabled him to clarify his own position, and to send a clear, strong signal that France wanted to enhance Franco–German solidarity. Mitterrand was quite worried by the pacifist movement in the Federal Republic and its potential impact on German policies—indeed, this was one of his main motivations for delivering the speech. One of the most important results that came from it was the very close and strategic relationship Mitterrand struck up with Chancellor Helmut Kohl. It lasted at least until 1989/90 and the dispute over how to put German unity into practice.

Once the INF Treaty had been signed, making European détente possible once again, the German question came back on the agenda too. From the French point of view, the renewed European détente could facilitate European integration, and this was seen as particularly urgent as a renewed German *Ostpolitik* was becoming increasingly active:⁶² “There’s only European unification. If not, Germany will play between East and West.”⁶³

The decisions taken at the Franco–German Summit on November 12 and 13, 1987 (on the eve of the Washington Summit) marked the beginning of a new chapter in the bilateral partnership and prepared the ground for the deepening of the European integration process. The Summit saw the creation of the Franco–German Defense and Security Council, and the Coordination Group for Economic and Monetary Policy. In January 1988, just a couple of weeks after the INF Treaty was signed in Washington and directly connected with

59 Memo of the Center for Analysis, Planning and Strategy, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 12, 1982, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. 160/2.

60 Memo of a meeting of the political directors of the French and German Ministries of Foreign Affairs, April 30, 1982, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. 160/2.

61 Telegram of Bertrand Dufourcq, head of the Europe Directorate of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the meeting of the Franco–German working group on relations with Eastern Europe, October 1, 1982, in: AMAE, series Europe after 1944, vol. 4911.

62 Bozo, France, the Euromissiles, and the end of the Cold War, p. 207; see also Bozo and Wenkel (eds.), France and the German Question.

63 Council of Ministers, February 11, 1987, in private papers, quoted in: Bozo, France, the Euromissiles, and the End of the Cold War, p. 209.

the issues raised by it, the French President and the West German Chancellor together signed an additional protocol to the Elysée Treaty on defense and security issues, establishing, for instance, the Franco–German brigade. However, the Franco–German Defense and Security Council, officially created on this very occasion, was not allowed any competence in the nuclear domain: France preferred to retain its conservative stance on the nuclear issue. This was one of the reasons for the rather poor results the new institutions had in developing a common Franco–German strategic vision for Europe in the Cold War context. Nevertheless, French diplomats continued their quest to open up a long-term perspective, pursuing this until the German question was resolved in 1990.⁶⁴

Following his re-election in October 1988, Mitterrand delivered an important speech at the *Institut des hautes études de défense nationale*, calling for a new French spirit of engagement in defense, though not without reaffirming that a European alternative to NATO would not work.⁶⁵ This speech of his shows how far France had moved on in its strategic thinking during the Euromissile crisis and had the approval of NATO representatives and German security specialists.⁶⁶

At a range of levels French policy took advantage of the momentum set going by the INF Treaty. This was apparent in the disarmament conference in Vienna, in the revival of French *Ostpolitik* immediately after Mitterrand's re-election, and in the European integration process leading to Maastricht. Mitterrand's re-election with a Socialist majority in May 1988 seems to have shown popular approval of his positive evaluation of East–West relations after Mikhail Gorbachev's arrival in office, and his optimistic acceptance of the INF Treaty as an invitation to deepen the European Community at both political and defense levels. He could thus resume an *Ostpolitik* that corresponded to his own conception of détente. Throughout the years 1988 and 1989 he made numerous trips to Eastern European countries establishing new relationships with them on the pattern inaugurated during his trip to Hungary in 1982.⁶⁷

In Paris, the rapprochement of the two superpowers was seen as a precondition for a European response to the continent's security requirements. A new European defense policy was envisaged—to be created from 1993 onwards. The basis for it was the close Franco–German cooperation on defense issues that had been started in 1982 and was formalized in 1988. Energized by the INF Treaty, as a signal announcing the crumbling of the two Cold War blocs, European actors

64 Memo of the Center for Analysis, Planning and Strategy, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the Franco–German relationship, April 30, 1989, in: Maurice Vaisse and Christian Wenkel (eds.), *La diplomatie française face à l'unification allemande. D'après des archives inédites*, Paris 2011, pp. 55–60.

65 Mitterrand, *La France et sa défense*, pp. 401–417.

66 Samuel F. Wells, *France and NATO under Mitterrand 1981–1989*, in: Maurice Vaisse, Pierre Melandri, and Frédéric Bozo (eds.), *France et l'OTAN*, Brussels 2012, pp. 559–631.

67 Memo for the President, Caroline de Margerie, January 23, 1992, in: AnF, series 5AG4, vol. CDM33.

could expect greater room for their own maneuvering. France played a central role in pushing forward the Maastricht process that was about to begin and, in particular, in the integration of security and defense issues into the European Union project. When this process started in 1988, the plan to reinforce security in Europe meant first and foremost strengthening European integration so that the European countries could themselves be actors, rather than passive objects of the East–West conflict.⁶⁸ It can safely be assumed that in 1987/88 Mitterrand was already looking beyond the end of the Cold War order.

At the time, the real question was about how French defense capacities could be integrated into a European defense project—a tricky question, as the French defense doctrine did not correspond with that of NATO. However, the INF Treaty marked a turning point in the relations France had with this organization. In 1988—for the first time since 1966—France adopted a NATO resolution, and thus created a unanimity in the West that had been unknown for more than twenty years. Finally, the signing of the INF Treaty paved the way for the French government to sign its own first major disarmament treaty in Vienna in November 1990—the Treaty on Conventional Force Reductions in Europe (CFE).

All these efforts—in the fields of *Ostpolitik*, of Franco–German relations, of European integration, and of disarmament—can be understood as expressions of the French will to solve the European question, to find ways to go beyond the still existing Yalta order in Europe and to end the East–West division of the European continent. In the course of the INF affair, the French changed their perception of Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet Union, and it seems that this led them to an altered view of Europe, so that they saw the overall European question differently as well. This had direct consequences on the policy the French adopted in 1989/90 to deal with that question. Largely unnoticed by American foreign policy, but still in its wake, the European Community had been evolving since the mid-1980s, not least under French political influence. From 1988 on, decisive moves were made towards the creation of new structures. These can be understood as a reaction to the experience of the Euromissile crisis, but, at the European level, they would last far beyond the end of the Cold War.⁶⁹

68 See also Parisi, *La France et la crise des euromissiles*, p. 409.

69 Samuel F. Wells, *From Euromissiles to Maastricht: The Policies of Reagan–Bush and Mitterrand*, in: Helga Haftendorn, Georges-Henri Soutou, Stephen F. Szabo, and Samuel F. Wells (eds.), *The Strategic Triangle. France, Germany, and the United States in the Shaping of the New Europe*, Washington 2006, pp. 287–307; Dieter Krüger, *Sicherheit durch Integration? NATO, EU und der lange Schatten des Kalten Krieges*, in: Bernd Greiner (ed.), *Das Erbe des Kalten Krieges*, Hamburg 2013, pp. 176–193.