

U.S. President George Herbert Walker Bush's Conditions for Unification (December 4, 1989)

Abstract

Elated by the impending collapse of communism in Europe, U.S. President George Herbert Walker Bush speaks to NATO leaders in Brussels. He expresses firm support for German unification, but specifies that the process should be open-ended and peaceful, that Germany should remain anchored in the Western Alliance, and that all other existing borders should be respected.

Source

Outline of Remarks at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Headquarters in Brussels December 4th, 1989

[...]

The task before us is to consolidate the fruits of this peaceful revolution and provide the architecture for continued peaceful change. Great choices are being made, and greater opportunities beckon.

The First Principle for Europe's Future: Overcoming the Division of Europe through Freedom

In any time of great change, it is good to have firm principles to guide our way. Our governments committed themselves again in May to seek an end to the painful division of Europe. We have never accepted this division. The people of every nation have the right to determine their own way of life in freedom.

Of course, we have all supported German reunification for four decades. And in our view, this goal of German unification should be based on the following principles.

First, self-determination must be pursued without prejudice to its outcome. We should not at this time endorse nor exclude any particular vision of unity. Second, unification should occur in the context of Germany's continued commitment to NATO and an increasingly integrated European Community, and with due regard for the legal role and responsibilities of the allied powers. Third, in the interests of general European stability, moves toward unification must be peaceful, gradual, and part of a step-by-step process. Lastly, on the question of borders, we should reiterate our support for the principles of the Helsinki Final Act.

An end to the unnatural division of Europe and of Germany must proceed in accordance with and be based upon the values that are becoming universal ideals, as all the countries of Europe become part of a commonwealth of free nations. I know my friend Helmut Kohl completely shares this conviction.

The Role of NATO

The political strategy for NATO that we agreed upon last May makes the promotion of greater freedom in the East a basic element of alliance policy. Accordingly, NATO should promote human rights, democracy, and reform within Eastern countries as the best means of encouraging reconciliation among the countries of Eastern and Western Europe.

This effort recalls the origin of NATO as a political alliance of nations sharing the same fundamental

values, a foundation on which I expect NATO will increasingly build in this new age of Europe.

Alliance support for reform and positive change in the East needs to be broad, multifaceted, and flexible. It should not only be a question of economic assistance – as important as that might be – but of steps to support greater political pluralism, open up flows of information, develop needed technical expertise, and provide through our defense and arms control efforts a stable security environment for individual European states, both East and West. This fits the concept of "New Missions for NATO" which I proposed when I was here last May for our summit.

But we also must remain constant with NATO's traditional security mission. The potential for strife is inherent in any period of fundamental political transition. In seeking and preparing peaceful change, this alliance also must remain a reliable guarantor of peace in Europe, as it has been for 40 years. It unites the free states of the Atlantic community in sharing risks and responsibilities as we work together to nurture and guide the development of a new Europe.

As a defensive alliance and partnership of democracies, NATO should not be seen as threatening by the East; rather, it can help manage peaceful change in Europe in a way that preserves security and stability for all states. A healthy NATO will support both moves toward greater unity within Western Europe as well as the dissolution of barriers with the East.

Although this is a time of great hope, we must not blur the distinction between promising expectations and present realities. My government therefore remains committed to the alliance strategy for the prevention of war based on a mix of nuclear and conventional forces. I pledge today that the United States will maintain significant military forces in Europe as long as our allies desire our presence as part of a common security effort. As I said at NATO earlier this year, the United States will remain a European power. That means the United States will stay engaged in the future of Europe and in our common defense.

[...]

Similarly, we need to give thought to how the alliance can best maintain, in the midst of change, deterrence at the lowest possible level of forces. For that reason, I am prepared to look with an open mind at ways in which we can together achieve even lower levels of conventional and nuclear forces in Europe as part of a negotiated agreement.

The Role of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)

Many of the values that should guide Europe's future are described in the Final Act of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe. These values encompass the freedom of people to choose their destiny under a rule of law with rulers who are democratically accountable. I think we can look to the CSCE to play a greater role in the future of Europe.

Earlier this year, I suggested we expand the CSCE human rights basket to include free elections. Given the calls and commitments to elections in many nations to the East, this could be an excellent time for the CSCE to assume this additional mandate.

In addition, the economic basket of the CSCE has been underdeveloped. I suggested to Chairman Gorbachev this weekend that we could breathe new life into this aspect of CSCE by focusing on the practical questions involved in the transition from stagnant planned economies to free and competitive markets.

In sum, the 35 nations of the CSCE bridge both the division of Europe and the Atlantic Ocean. It is a structure that should be able to contribute much to the future architecture of Europe.

The Role of the European Community (EC)

I also appreciate the vital role the EC must play in the new Europe. Before my trip to Malta, President Mitterrand called to share with me the views about recent events expressed at the EC meeting he had called. And I know the Community will be returning to these topics in Strasbourg later this week.

It's my belief that the events of our times call both for a continued, perhaps even intensified, effort of the 12 to integrate, and a role for the EC as a magnet that draws the forces of reform forward in Eastern Europe. That's why I was exceptionally pleased that we agreed at the Paris economic summit on a specific role for the EC in the Group-of-24-effort to assist Poland and Hungary. Now the G-24, catalyzed by EC efforts, must deliver. One key step is to help Poland assemble the \$1 billion stabilization fund it has requested to support the major macroeconomic overhaul plan it intends to put in place within weeks.

I recognize, of course, that the EC cannot bear this burden alone. The United States will be at the Community's side in this noble endeavor. I also am committed to a close U.S. partnership with the EC. We are bound together by common values and democratic institutions, as well as by shared interests. So, we should look for ways to improve our ties, so a new Atlanticism will pull in harness with a new Europe.

Conclusion

The people of Europe, especially the brave citizens of the East, are illuminating the future. Yet the outcome is not predestined. It depends on our continued strength and solidarity as an alliance. It depends vitally on the actions we take, as governments and individuals, to offer leadership, protection, and encouragement for this process of peaceful transformation.

Europe is changing, and we will be equal to the change. Our transatlantic partnership can create the architecture of a new Europe and a new Atlanticism, where self-determination and individual freedom everywhere replace coercion and tyranny, where economic liberty everywhere replaces economic controls and stagnation, and where lasting peace is reinforced everywhere by common respect for the rights of man.

Source: John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available from World Wide Web: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/outline-remarks-the-north-atlantic-treaty-organization-headquarters-brussels>.

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