



Michael Gehler

**Contextual Factors of Backgrounds,  
Causes and Challenges linked to the  
End of the Cold War in Europe  
1985-1991**

# I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989

## 1. The permanent Economic Crisis and Erosion of Bureaucratic State Socialism



Chemical industry Bitterfeld 1970 in the GDR – nitric acid plants come toxic nitrous waste gas plumes

# **I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989**

2. The Policy of Détente: The Helsinki Final Act of August 1, 1975, and the CSCE Follow-up Process (Belgrad 1977-1979, Madrid 1981-1983, Wien 1986-1989)



A historic conference in Helsinki: U.S. President Gerald Ford (left), CPSU Party Leader Leonid Brezhnev (center), and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko (July 31, 1975)

# **I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989**

## **3. The Holy See as an Actor in the Cold War**



Pope John Paul II in 1996, Vatican Media



# **I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989**

## **4. The Overstretching of the Soviet Sphere of Influence by the Intervention in Afghanistan 1979**



The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

# **I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989**

## **5. NATO Double Resolution 1979/1982 provoked SU Concessions on the Arms Issue**



The NATO Council Meeting in Brussels on December 12, 1979

# **I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989**

## **6. The Reform Efforts of Mikhail S. Gorbachev since 1985**



Mikhail Gorbachev, one of the 20th century's most consequential world leaders, who ushered in an era of reform in the Soviet Union and played a role in ending the Cold War with the West



# I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989

## 7. The Weakness of Reaction to the Change in Communications Technologies



There is great joy: In 1988, Carl Zeiss Jena CEO Wolfgang Biermann (center) hands Erich Honecker the megabit chip manufactured in Dresden. Fig.: ZMD archive

# I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989

## 8. The Inability to Compete in the World Economic Context of Globalization



World map of globalized economy

# I. Nine Long-Term Factors and Causes: The longer Prehistory of 1989

## 9. The Failure of COMECON in Comparison with the Successful EC Model



New Arbat Avenue in Moscow where the headquarters of Comecon used to be



## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors: The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

### 1. The Military Failure of the USSR in Afghanistan and its Withdrawal



## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors: The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

### 2. The Dismissal of the old Political Guard in the Kremlin



Moscow, March 3, 1981: The 20th Congress of the CPSU



## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors:

### The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

### 3. The Creeping Process of Ideological Erosion

**10 GEBOTE**  
für den neuen  
sozialistischen Menschen

- 1 DU SOLLST Dich stets für die internationale Solidarität der Arbeiterklasse und aller Werktätigen sowie für die unverbrüchliche Verbundenheit aller sozialistischen Länder einsetzen.
- 2 DU SOLLST Dein Vaterland lieben und stets bereit sein, Deine ganze Kraft und Fähigkeit für die Verteidigung der Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Macht einzusetzen.
- 3 DU SOLLST helfen, die Ausbeutung des Menschen durch den Menschen zu beseitigen.
- 4 DU SOLLST gute Taten für den Sozialismus vollbringen, denn der Sozialismus führt zu einem besseren Leben für alle Werktätigen.
- 5 DU SOLLST beim Aufbau des Sozialismus im Geiste der gegenseitigen Hilfe und der kameradschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit handeln, das Kollektiv achten und seine Kritik beherzigen.
- 6 DU SOLLST das Volkseigentum schützen und mehrten.
- 7 DU SOLLST stets nach Verbesserung Deiner Leistungen streben, sparsam sein und die sozialistische Arbeitsdisziplin festigen.
- 8 DU SOLLST Deine Kinder im Geiste des Friedens und des Sozialismus zu allseitig gebildeten, charakterfesten und körperlich gestählten Menschen erziehen.
- 9 DU SOLLST sauber und anständig leben und Deine Familie achten.
- 10 DU SOLLST Solidarität mit den um ihre nationale Befreiung kämpfenden und den ihre nationale Unabhängigkeit verteidigenden Völkern üben.

WALTER ULBRICHT AUF DEM V. PARTEITAG DER SED  
AM 10. JULI 1958 IN BERLIN

1958: 10 commandments for  
the new socialist man.  
Source: Bundesarchiv

## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors:

### The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

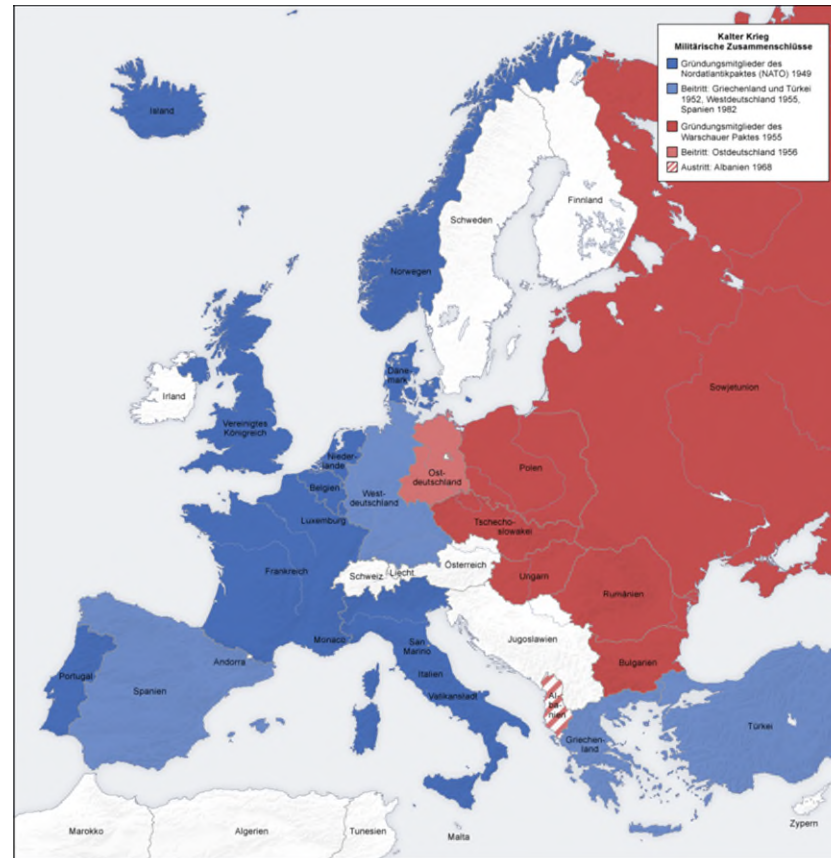
4. The Emergence of “second” Shadow economies in the “Brother States” (Hungary)  
and the Growth of a Civil Society as a “second Society” (Solidarnosc)



Solidarność demonstration in Warsaw in May 1982. (© AP)

## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors: The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

### 5. The increased Integration of Central and Eastern Europe into the Western capitalist economic System



The blocks in Europe: blue the West, red the Eastern bloc, Yugoslavia in between neutral white marked

## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors: The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

### 6. The failed Attempts to replicate the Innovations of Microelectronics



Semiconductor production at VEB Kombinat Mikroelektronik Erfurt



## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors: The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

### 7. The Nuclear Disarmament Agreements between Gorbachev and Reagan with the INF Treaty



Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev exchange ratified copies of the INF treaty



## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors:

### The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

#### 8. The bloody Suppression of the Democracy Movement in Beijing on June 3-4, 1989



A Beijing demonstrator blocks the path of a tank convoy along the Avenue of Eternal Peace near Tiananmen Square. For weeks, people have been protesting for freedom of speech and of press by the Chinese government.

## II. Nine Medium-Term Factors: The Shorter Prehistory on the Eve of November 9

### 9. The “Inability of communist Dictatorships to renew themselves”



Revolution in Romania December 1989: a confiscated and corrupted Revolution

### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

#### 1. The Stuttgart "Solemn Declaration on European Union" June 19, 1983



Hans-Dietrich Genscher (r.) with his Italian counterpart Emilio Colombo in Bonn on January 19, 1983, picture-alliance/dpa|Heinrich Sanden

### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

2. Draft Treaty (Spinelli draft) for the foundation of the "European Union" by the European Parliament, February 14, 1984



The European Federalist Altiero Spinelli founded the Crocodile Club,  
Photo : © Communautés européennes 1985



### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

#### 3. Launching the Single Market Concept "EC 92" by Jacques Delors 1985

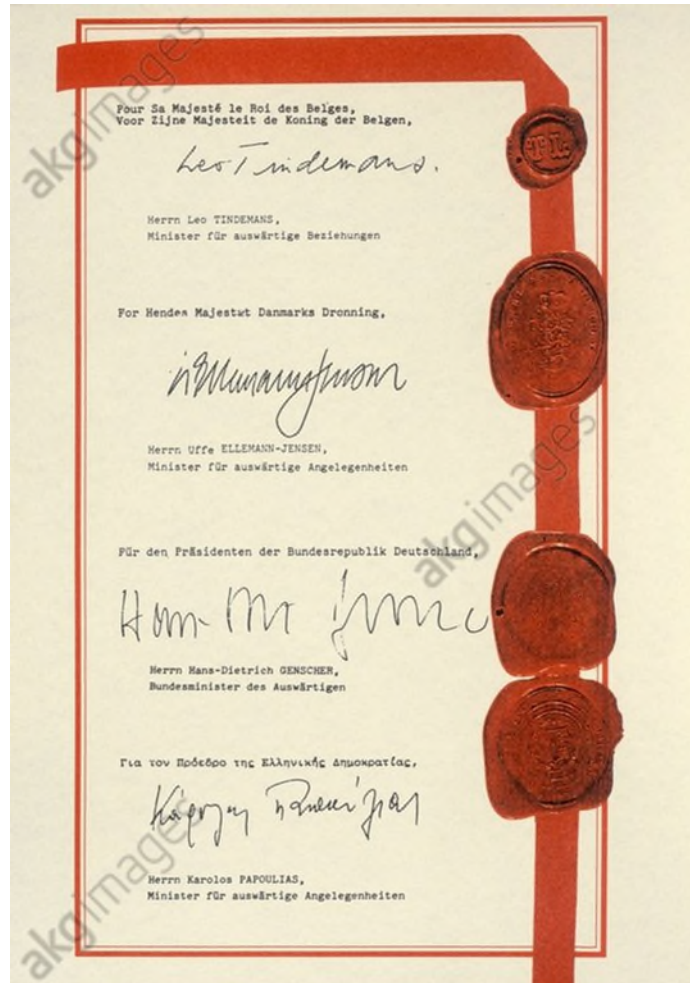


Jacques Delors – President of the European Commission 1985-1995



### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

4. "Single European Act" (SEA), February 17, 1986 to expand the contractual basis of the EC, entering into force on July 1, 1987



The Single European Act –  
after the Treaties of Rome,  
the most significant new push  
in integration policy

### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

5. The Report "The Cost of Non-Europe" by Paolo Cecchini of May 1, 1988, concerning the Costs of the Failure to achieve the Single Market



Paolo Cecchini: A native Perugian, he had developed his career at the international level, concluding it as Director General of the European Commission, who calculated the costs of the failure of an Internal Market.

### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

#### 6. The "Three-Stage Delors Plan" creating an Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)



### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

#### 7. Germany's Unification and the Maastricht Summit 1990/91



EC Summit in Dublin, June, 25/26, 1990, Photo: Federal Government/Stutterheim



### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

8. The Single Market and the Maastricht Treaty on the European Union entering into force on November 1, 1993



December 9, 1991 – the EC summit in Maastricht begins



### III. Parallel Developments in Western Europe

9. Sweden, Austria and Finland becoming EU members, January 1, 1995



## IV. Weighting of the factors

### 1. The permanent Economic Crisis and the ideological Erosion of State Socialism



Empty display in a grocery store. At the end of the Soviet Union, there were supply shortages. Even later, Russians had to provide for themselves to some extent, Photo: Ptyzin/ RIA Novosti

## IV. Weighting of the factors

### 2. The Overstretching of the Soviet Sphere of Influence in Afghanistan



Returning Soviet soldiers are greeted on the bank of the Amudarya River near the town of Termiz, Uzbekistan, Viktor Budan, Georgy Nadezhdin/TASS



## IV. Weighting of the factors

### 3. The Loss of Credibility, Communication and Legitimacy of the Communist One-Party Systems with the continued Attractiveness of the West



One million citizens of the GDR demanded the resignation of the SED government on Alexanderplatz in East Berlin on November 4, 1989. They demonstrated for free elections, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and freedom to travel.



## IV. Weighting of the factors

4. Helmut Kohl as an Actor and Decision-maker, as well as U.S. support for German unification policy



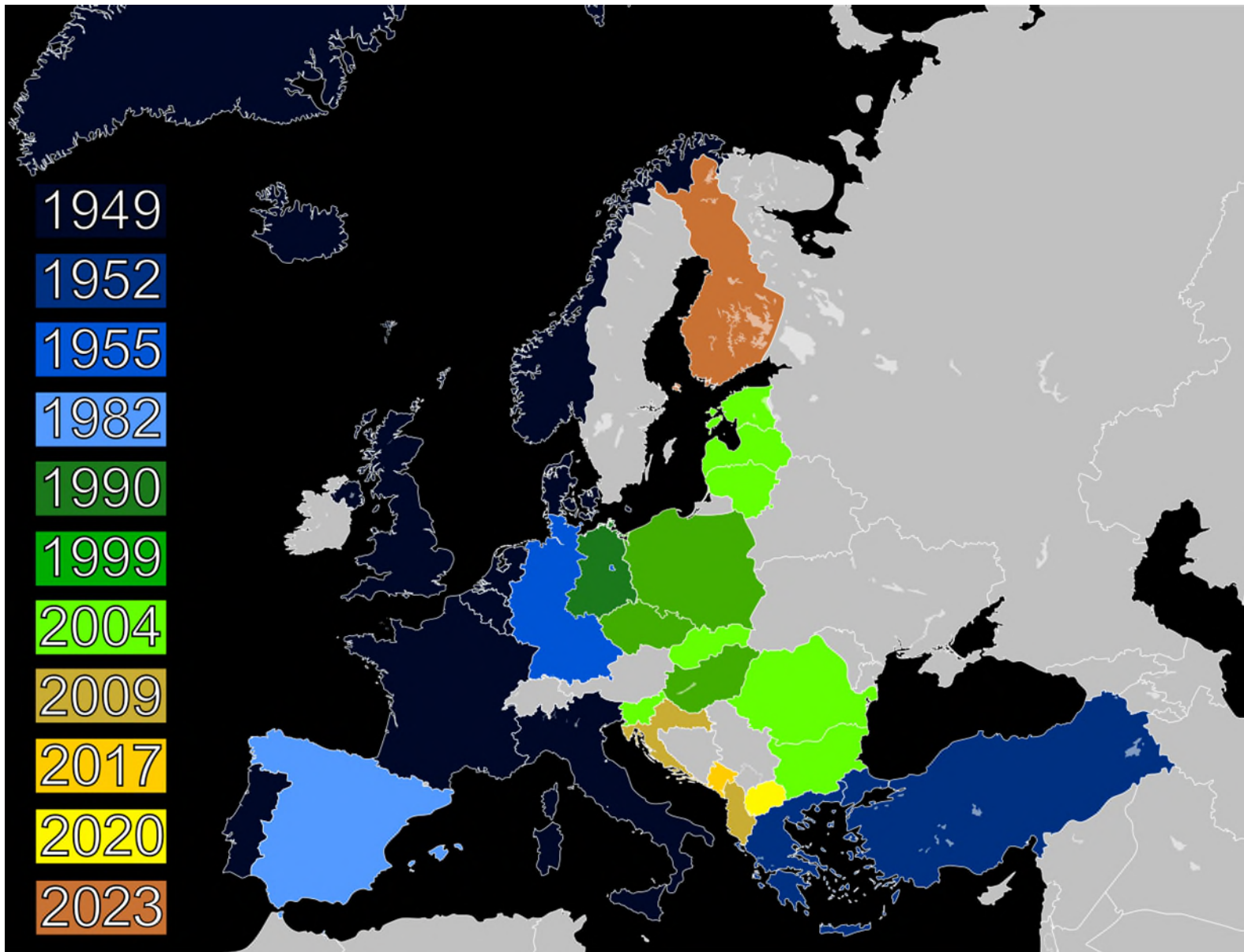
Kohl at an election campaign event on February 20, 1990, at Erfurt's Domplatz,  
Photo: Heinz Wieseler / dpa

## IV. Weighting of the factors

5. The delayed American Decision on NATO "Eastward Enlargement" was a Security Policy Anticipation, Preparation and Safeguarding of EU "Eastward Enlargement"



Marian Kamensky January 12, 2022



## V. Conclusion and Outlook



Actor-specific and structural factors brought the end of the Cold War in Europe between 1987 and 1990. Odd Arne Westad characterizes what happened as follows, among other things: “The Cold War was a confrontation between capitalism and socialism that peaked in the years from 1945 to 1989, although its origins lay much further in the past and its consequences are still felt today.”



## V. Conclusion and Outlook

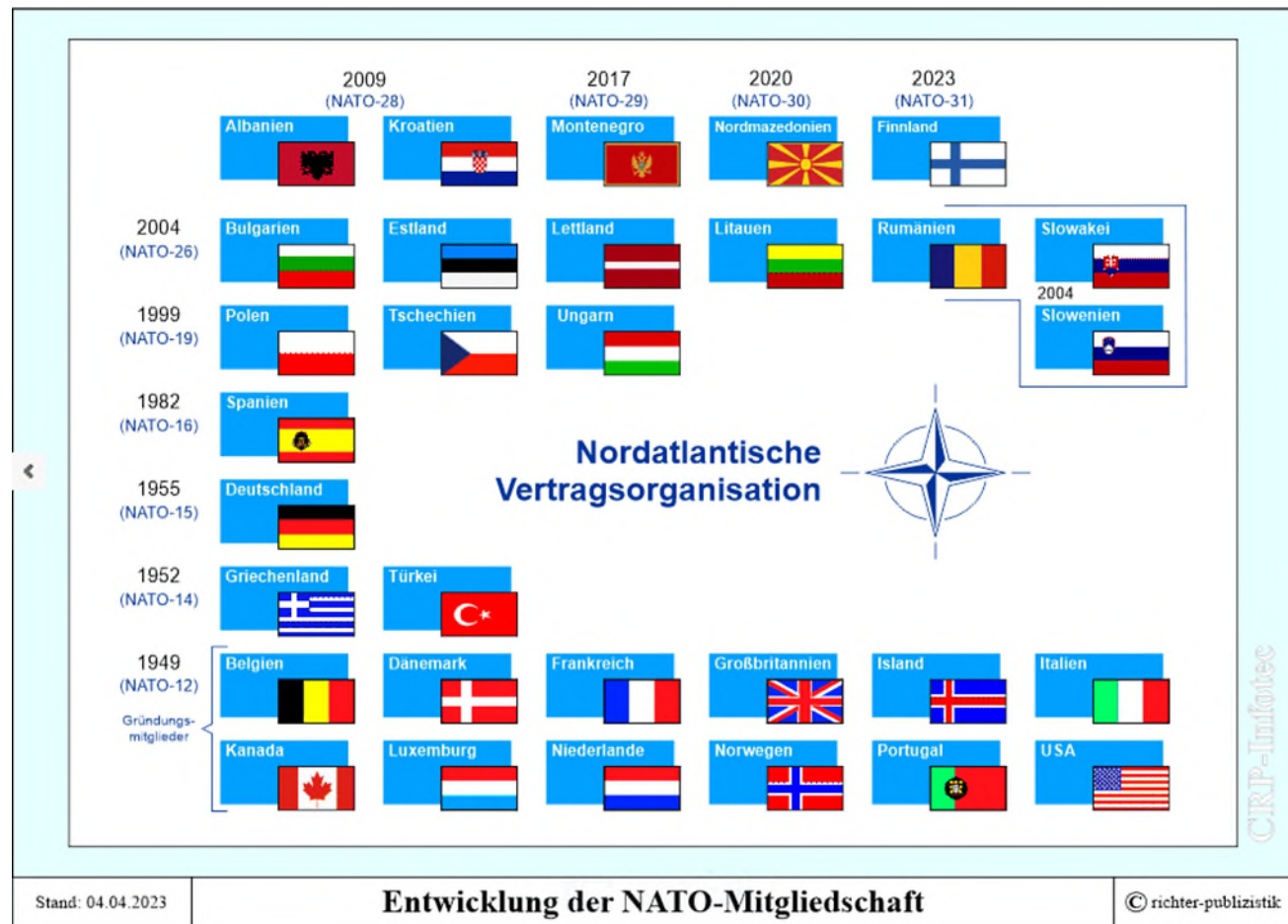
1. The Charter of Paris of November 21, 1990, solemnly declaring the end of the Cold War in Europe, was merely a political declaration of intent without any binding legal force under international law or international enforceability.



34 Heads of State and Foreign Ministers: the participants at the conference in Paris in November 1990 © State Archives

## V. Conclusion and Outlook

With the solution of the German question through Germany's total commitment to the West by the EU and NATO, the European postwar order was decided, without major modifications and visions of the future in the sense of a pan-European peace order in the future.



## V. Conclusion and Outlook



Yugoslavia ethnic map

## V. Conclusion and Outlook



2. The decline of the USSR produced a process of disintegration and even the disappearance of Yugoslavia. This was also conditioned by the demand for self-determination from Croatia and Slovenia to Kosovo (1991-2008). The so-called Balkan area was and still is the first area of responsibility for the EU (neither Afghanistan nor Mali). However, other powers are exercising their influence on the Balkans: the PRC, the RF, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The EU is thus threatened with the loss of its position as a regional power in its immediate neighborhood. If the peripheral problems (Turkey: refugee issue; Ukraine: the war with Russia; UK-Northern Ireland: backstop, Cyprus <---> Northern Cyprus-Turkey) are pacified and solved politically, the EU again can come back to a regional power for and in Europe.



## V. Conclusion and Outlook



Yugoslavia 2008 ethnic map

## V. Conclusion and Outlook

3. An imperial-historical duplicity occurred: the foundation of the EU and the end of the USSR in December 1991 took place simultaneously. The destabilizing consequences for a European security order were either ignored or underestimated by the West.



Map of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991: the borders of the USSR, the countries that fell away and the date of their independence.

## V. Conclusion and Outlook

4. Without strong and binding institutions and state support, the OSCE was founded in 1995 and became a shadow organization as quasi a second UN for Europe.



The OSCE flags in front of the Hofburg in Vienna. (OSCE/Sarah Crozier)



## V. Conclusion and Outlook

5. The first NATO Enlargement to the East in 1999 signaled the first beginnings of a new Cold War with Russia, which felt its security needs threatened by subsequent NATO enlargements. Thus the continuation of the Cold War (George F. Kennan) was given.



In 1999, the then NATO states signed the accession protocol for Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.



## V. Conclusion and Outlook



The (new) Cold War is a confrontation between a more or less liberal-democratic and free-market capitalism in the West and an autocratic-dictatorial-oligarchic semi-private and state capitalism in the East, which has been going on since the late 1990s until today.

The German question was removed by the internal and external unification in 1990/91 as a catalyst for a continued new Cold War, while the “Russian question” remained unresolved (1991-1999), grew into a Russian crisis (1999-2021) and escalated in the sign of the expansion of the Ukrainian war (from 2022) – a doubtful expression of the overcoming of phantom pains of a battered, injured and collapsed world empire after considerable territorial losses in its peripheral areas. Thus, the (new) radicalized Cold War turned into a hot regional war on the borders of the EU member states and the Russian Federation.