German Historical Institute
London

THE 2004 ANNUAL LECTURE

Always Good Neighbours – Never Good Friends? Anglo-German Relations 1949 - 2001

by

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London 2005

Published by
The German Historical Institute London
17 Bloomsbury Square
London WC1A 2NJ
Tel: 020 - 7309 2050 Fax: 020 - 7404 5573/7309 2055
e-mail: ghil@ghil.ac.uk homepage: www.ghil.ac.uk

ISSN 0269-8560
ISBN 0 9533570 8 2

*My association with the German Historical Institute has been one of the most fruitful of my academic life, and I count myself among its most sincere admirers. As a focus of German historical studies in the British Isles it has been of enormous benefit to those of us who work in the field of German History. It has done this by providing us with facilities for our own research in its admirable library and by enabling us to exchange ideas with German colleagues who come here to lecture or to use research materials in London. The Institute has also been outstandingly generous in offering assistance to our graduate students in the form of advice, contacts, workshops and financial support for research trips to Germany.

It can therefore be argued that this Institute itself is a living disproof of the title I have chosen for my talk. It is very clear that in the field of historical studies – and indeed of academic endeavour generally – the British and the Germans *are* good friends, and have been so for many years. The same rosy picture of friendly collaboration can be seen in other professions: commerce, the armed services and diplomacy, for example. And at a time when Her Majesty the Queen has been visiting Germany with an agenda which includes a fund-raising concert for the final restoration of the Frauenkirche in Dresden, the title of my lecture might seem to be especially inappropriate. But then again, it may be the moment at which to consider why it has taken so long for the British authorities to try, as *The Times* put it three weeks ago, to 'focus on presenting a new Anglo-German alliance unshackled from the wartime obsession.'[1] We might also ask: 'why do we keep on having to do this?' It is by no means a new endeavour, as I shall demonstrate below.

*I should like to thank the Leverhulme Trust for enabling me to carry out the archival research reflected in this lecture.

It certainly cannot be argued that the United Kingdom and Germany suffer from any deep-seated differences of interest that inevitably draw them into conflict. When, in 1984, I had the privilege of organising a public lecture in Oxford by the Federal Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, I was – for the first and only time in my life – invited to the Foreign Office in London to discuss the arrangements. My charming hosts told me that they had been searching through their files to see what bones of contention existed between the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic. They had only been able to find one. It was the thorny issue of who would pay the municipal rates on the German Historical Institute, which was already occupying its present palatial headquarters. A problem, I thought, hardly to be compared with the naval race before 1914.

It turned out, however, that my hosts at the Foreign Office were being slightly optimistic. In his Oxford lecture the Federal Chancellor stated firmly that the European Community was more than just a bank into which members could deposit money in the expectation that they would subsequently be able to withdraw a larger sum.[2] Since Margaret Thatcher was sitting in the front row of his audience, the point of this remark can hardly have gone unnoticed.

It will be the purpose of this lecture to tease out some of the difficulties that stood in the way of a warm Anglo-German relationship after 1949. I shall begin by focusing on a period in the post-war era when the future of Anglo-German relations looked particularly bright and try to explain why things did not work out quite as well as many people had hoped. Then I shall discuss the major obstacle to closer understanding that has existed from at least 1950 onwards, and had certainly not disappeared by the year 2001. In the former section, therefore, I shall be dealing with what might be termed episodic, or even chance,

causes of friction; in the second I shall be examining a structural problem.

To begin with the disappointing episode. When, on 21 October 1969, Willy Brandt was elected Federal Chancellor by the Bundestag and formed a Government with Walter Scheel's Free Democrats, it seemed that Anglo-German relations were on the brink of a break-through to genuinely warm collaboration. This was certainly the view of the British Ambassador in Bonn, Sir Roger Jackling, who had already spent quite a lot of his career in the Federal Republic.[3]

In Jackling's Annual Review, dated 1 January 1970, he stressed that 'The Germans have had a good year. Economic boom throughout 1969; upward revaluation of the D-mark; a smooth change to the first socialist-led government in the Federal Republic; and a new, realistic foreign policy, particularly to the East.' He thought Brandt had made an impressive start, and he also praised President Heinemann, who 'embodies many of the best characteristics in the complicated German national character...'. The coalition parties had 'shaken off clearly and irrevocably the inheritance of Dr. Adenauer'. The new government would be loyal to NATO but no longer subservient to France. In its relations with the Soviet Union, Bonn would not accept that the two parts of Germany could never come together, 'but', he wrote, 'reunification has certainly been dropped as a practical political aim'... and Brandt's government was seeking a *modus vivendi* between the two German states. It would also be likely that it would recognise the Oder/Neisse line as the Western frontier of Poland. Jackling thought the British government should welcome and support this new policy, whilst being ready to warn the Germans off 'any initiatives which could undermine the Allied rights in Berlin and so endanger the city's viability'. He concluded this section of his report with the words: 'We

have in Herr Brandt and his present Government perhaps the most favourably disposed administration towards Britain in modern German history: it will be up to us to take advantage of that fact in 1970'.[4]

Jackling's views were not received with unconditional enthusiasm in the British Foreign Office, but the scene did seem to be set for a marked improvement in Anglo-German relations. Brandt was already a popular figure with liberal-minded journalists and their readers in Britain. A champion of freedom in Berlin against Communist tyranny, he also had an impeccably anti-nazi background. As a youthful and self-consciously modern leader, he seemed just the sort of politician to arouse admiration in Britain, particularly amongst young people.

This optimistic outlook was reinforced when Brandt visited London on 2 and 3 March 1970. The German embassy delightedly reported that the visit had been rated as 'an unqualified success' in the British press. Prime Minister Harold Wilson raised some eyebrows by inviting personalities from sport and the theatre to meet Brandt in Downing Street, but this earned him praise even from the *Times* for having broken with the tradition of boring official receptions. In a TV broadcast one Labour MP claimed that a famous footballer who had met Brandt at the Downing Street reception, told him: 'This chap [Brandt, AJN] is really an Englishman although he happens to be a German'.

The *Evening News*, a Conservative paper, published a survey of its readers, who had been asked what they thought of the fact that, when Brandt made his speech to both Houses of Parliament, he had stood on the same spot as King George VI when the latter spoke after the capitulation of the Third Reich in 1945. The overwhelming majority of the respondents was happy with the honour done to the Chancellor and agreed that such a sad chapter

in Germany's past should be closed once and for all.[5] This warm reception for Brandt seemed to be the culmination of a healing process in Anglo-German relations that had begun with Queen Elizabeth II's successful visit to the Federal Republic in 1965.

In April 1970 the German Ambassador to London was able to send a glowing account of the annual Anglo-German Königswinter Conference back to Bonn. Held in the grand surroundings of Trinity College Cambridge, the meeting was bursting with mutual good will. It culminated in a sumptuous dinner presided over by the Master, the former Conservative Foreign Secretary, Lord Butler.[6]

But somehow this new dawn failed to deliver the promised era of close co-operation and friendship. For some years the British had been urging the West Germans to be more realistic in their attitude towards the Soviet Bloc. Yet when Brandt and his energetic negotiator in the Chancellor's Office, Egon Bahr, started to move fast in pursuit of their new Eastern policy, later to be known as the *Ostpolitik*, fears arose in London that the Germans might make unwise concessions to Moscow. All three Western Allies were uneasy about a German dialogue with the Soviet Union that they did not control, but it was the British who rushed in with words of warning. Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary, flew to Bonn to urge caution when negotiating with the Russians, and to inquire whether the West Germans were proposing to achieve closer relations with the German Democratic Republic than would be possible for the British. Bahr later noted this nervousness about West German initiatives with some irony in his memoirs.[7]

On 29 January 1970, Bahr arrived in Moscow to negotiate with the Soviet leaders. His aim was to normalise relations with the USSR by recognising the status quo in Eastern Europe without giving up Germany's claim to self-

determination. Bonn's three Western Allies agreed to these negotiations, but insisted that they should not compromise Allied rights in Germany, and especially in Berlin.

This difficulty applied to all three Western Allies but, not for the first time, it was the British who ended up causing most irritation. Although they regularly assured the West Germans of their enthusiasm for Brandt's policy, they seemed rather coy about stating this publicly. At the Königswinter Conference referred to above, two junior but by no means unimportant ministers in the Brandt/Scheel government expressed disappointment about the lack of public support from Britain for their new Eastern policies. The response in the Foreign Office was cool. It became clear that some officials in the relevant department in London were not keen to commit themselves whole-heartedly to Brandt in case the CDU regained power in Bonn, a possibility that did not seem entirely unlikely. Indeed, the speech delivered at the Königswinter Conference by Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart had been carefully drafted to avoid upsetting the Christian Democratic opposition in the Bundestag.[8] Nevertheless, the Labour Government did support Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, and was eager to enlist his support for British entry to the EEC.

But just when the relations between the Labour government in London and the Social/Liberal coalition in Bonn seemed to be cementing themselves, the eccentricities of the British electoral system intervened. Buttressed by favourable opinion polls, Harold Wilson called a general election for 18 June. The result illustrated the fallibility of political science. The Labour Party was knocked out by Edward Heath's Conservatives. The post of Foreign Secretary was filled by Sir Alec Douglas Home. Home was by no means anti-German, but he was unlikely to regard Brandt's Social Democratic Party with much sympathy. Above all, he was deeply suspicious of the Soviet Union. His experi-

ence of the Berlin crisis in 1961 had made him acutely aware of the risks involved if Britain were to be seen as taking the lead in pressing for détente with Moscow, even if such a policy was desirable in itself – which he doubted. This was the situation in London when Walter Scheel and a large German delegation flew to Moscow on 26 July 1970 to finalise the Soviet-German Treaty. The speed with which this was happening was disconcerting to the governments in Washington and Paris as well as in London. The American, British and French diplomatic representatives in Moscow were pressing the Germans to obtain some formal statement from the Soviet Government to the effect that Allied rights in Germany would not be compromised by the Treaty. In actual fact, during the tough negotiations between Scheel and Gromyko, the Germans did try to persuade the Russians to confirm Allied rights in Germany, but without success. They were sternly told that such rights had never been part of a treaty with the Federal Republic and should not therefore form part of a negotiation between Bonn and Moscow. Bahr and Scheel explained their difficulties to their Western colleagues, but in early August there was some confusion about the possibility of getting a written statement out of Gromyko on this issue.[9] It was only on 6 August, when the Treaty was about to be finalised, that it became clear no such statement would be forthcoming.

The British Ambassador, Sir Duncan Wilson, was in London, leaving matters in the hands of his chargé d'affaires. The Americans and French were represented by their ambassadors. On the face of it, therefore, the British were in a good position to keep a low profile in pressurising the West Germans, leaving the objections to be made by the more senior diplomats of France and the USA. But, once again, fortune was not to shine on London.

Shortly before midnight on 6 August 1970 West Germany's Foreign Minister, Walter Scheel, and Paul Frank, the most senior official in the German Foreign Office, returned to the German embassy in Moscow, having agreed with Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, the text of the Treaty between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union that was to become the cornerstone of West Germany's new *Ostpolitik*. On their arrival at their embassy they were greeted by somebody whom Frank later described in his memoirs as 'a British diplomat looking fresh as a daisy in his dark pin-stripe suit'.[10] The British diplomat was in fact the chargé d'affaires, Mr. Robert Edmonds, and if he did look elegant and cool it was not because he had had an easy day behind him. He had spent a good deal of it trying to obtain a clear version of an urgent personal message to Scheel from the British Foreign Secretary. The message stressed the importance of obtaining a formal Soviet declaration that the Soviet-German treaty did not affect the rights and responsibilities of the Allied powers in Germany. Home also requested that he should see in advance the language that Gromyko proposed to use in such a declaration.

When Scheel and Frank arrived at the embassy, Edmonds' first inclination was simply to act as a messenger and hand over Home's communication without comment. Edmonds, however, was brave enough to try to persuade Scheel that he should postpone the initialling of the Treaty, scheduled for eleven o'clock the next morning, to give the Western Allies time to study the language of the declaration. Edmonds hoped that such a postponement would enable him to enlist the help of the American and French ambassadors, who were still awaiting instructions from their governments. He had, however, been given authority by the American ambassador to say that he supported Home's message.[11]

Scheel and Frank, for their part, had no intention of putting the fragile text of their agreement with the Russians at risk by raising a proposal they knew perfectly well that Gromyko would reject. As Frank put it in his memoirs later, the German delegation would have lost its credibility as a negotiating partner at a stroke if it had acceded to the British demand. Frank also claimed that Edmonds, whom he did not seem to know, might have been playing a 'Hauptmann von Köpenick' role without authority from his superiors. This was an entirely unjustified suspicion, but we should remember that Frank, like Scheel, was exhausted after hours of wrangling with Gromyko.[12]

Scheel himself was affable, but confirmed that there could be no question of holding up the treaty. Edmonds reported to London that the German foreign minister 'took it very well, considering how much he must have been longing for bed and a whisky and soda'.[13] In any case, Scheel would have been unlikely to forget the conversation, since it lasted until past one in the morning.

This episode could be seen as just a storm in a tea-cup, but it did not pass unnoticed by the German public. On 13 August the German magazine *Stern* carried an article which purported to describe a West German cabinet meeting held in Bonn on Scheel's return from Moscow. According to this version, Scheel informed the cabinet that the time-table of his negotiations was almost wrecked on the last evening, not by the Russians, but by one of the three Western Allies. After describing the intervention by the British chargé d'affaires, the article went on to claim that Scheel had told the West German cabinet how Bonn was now being treated by the Russians as an equal partner, but added: 'The British thus attempted to the end to withhold this right of equality'.[14]

By this time the British Foreign Office was engaged in a damage limitation exercise, congratulating the German

Chancellor and Foreign Minister on their country's success, and excusing their own apparently clumsy diplomatic measures with reference to that chronic British problem in the 1970s – a labour dispute. On 15 August the Deputy Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office, Sir Thomas Brimelow, sent a letter to State Secretary Frank assuring him that in the British Foreign Office 'we all greatly appreciated the courtesy and friendliness with which Minister Scheel and yourself conducted that midnight talk with Mr. Edmonds at the end of what must have been for both of you a tiring and trying day'. He went on to suggest that Frank might not have been fully aware of the problems created for Edmonds by what he described as 'our current difficulties with communications with Moscow'. In recent years those communications had been handled by the Diplomatic Wireless Service. 'At present we are engaged in negotiations with the Diplomatic Wireless Service over the conditions of employment of its members, and until the present difficulties are resolved, we are hampered by a "go slow" policy on the part of the operators.' Because of this the message from Alec Home had not been sent by radio, but by telex. Since the first telex message was subject to interference on route it was indecipherable and the second attempt did not arrive in time for Edmonds to convey it to Scheel before the latter had left for his evening interview with Mr. Gromyko. Brimelow might have also mentioned, but did not, that the telex machine was situated in the Commercial Department of the British embassy, which was three miles from its Chancery.[15] If Edmonds had not been having such difficulty with his communications his late request would not have been necessary. 'As it was', Brimelow went on, 'your arguments against any postponement of the initialling of the treaty were seen to be compelling, and they were accepted without reserve.' Brimelow ended by adding his own warm congratulations

on the conclusion of the Treaty.[16] Well, we may ask, what was all that about? And did it matter?

We should remember that the Soviet-German Treaty of August 1970 was to be the basis of West German *Ostpolitik* for the next two decades. It marked the beginning of a new phase in Soviet-German relations and helped the Federal Republic to become a leading player in East-West relations.

So far as the last-minute intervention was concerned, the American and French Ambassadors were just as keen to apply pressure as the British chargé d'affaires, but, despite the desperate situation of his communications, it was he who received firm instructions from his superiors. The French and the Americans clearly shared British concerns, but they were not the ones whose heads were put above the parapet. Jake Beam, the American Ambassador, strongly supported Edmonds' views, and was angry about what he perceived as the incompetence of the American embassy in Bonn. I should also point out that internally the British Foreign Office completely absolved Edmonds from blame in the matter, without of course accepting that that any mistake had actually been made.[17] Edmonds had by no means exceeded his brief; as a conscientious diplomat he had carried out his instructions remarkably efficiently in the face of daunting technical difficulties.

It was, however, the British who upset the Germans with what could have been interpreted as a high-handed effort by the former occupiers to limit Bonn's freedom to conduct its own foreign policy. The incident was unlikely to be quickly forgotten by Brandt or Bahr.[18] It illustrated the fact that, despite British claims to support Brandt's efforts to create détente with the Soviet Union, in official and high political circles there was still a certain amount of uneasiness over the West German initiatives. [19]

Although Prime Minister Edward Heath duly sent warm congratulations to Brandt on the conclusion of the treaty, he was evidently not entirely happy, because on 12 August he requested from the Foreign Office an assessment of the treaty answering the following questions: Was it satisfactory from the British point of view? Who in the British judgement had got the most out of it? What was expected to flow from it?[20] The response from the British embassy in Moscow was reassuring, but stressed the need for the three Western Allies to obtain a really satisfactory settlement over Berlin, and warned against 'the West German urge to settle for half a loaf'.[21]

On the whole the British played a positive role in the Berlin negotiations that followed, and West German impatience over slow progress in them was mainly aimed at the Americans.[22] Nevertheless, the whole situation tended to underline the stresses created between the Federal Republic and her former occupiers by the post-war situation.

Again, it should not be thought that the British were alone in having such tensions with their German neighbours. But Britain was not a super-power like America; its complaints aroused more irritation than respect. On the other hand, it was not part of the same European project as France and West Germany — its transatlantic ties were too strong.

And this brings me on to the second part of my lecture, the structural problem that existed throughout the entire period we are discussing. I refer, of course, to Britain's relationship to Europe, and the misunderstandings with the Federal Republic that it created. The major political parties, Conservative and Labour, repeatedly upset Bonn by their attitudes to European integration. In 1950, when Labour was in power, Ernest Bevin showed no enthusiasm for Winston Churchill's demand that West Germany should

be admitted to the Council of Europe as a full member. In the summer of 1950 the Labour Government also rejected British participation in the Schuman plan for the integration of West European coal and steel resources. Here it is important to note that there were, indeed, powerful political and economic reasons why the British should decide against joining that scheme. In the early 1950s trade with the Commonwealth and Empire was far more important to Britain than trade with Western Europe, and this remained the case over the next ten years.[23]

Nevertheless, this rejection, coinciding with an obvious reluctance to sanction West German rearmament, reinforced Adenauer's existing distaste for the British Labour party. In October 1951, Winston Churchill once again became Prime Minister, but Adenauer soon discovered that the Conservatives were no more likely than Labour to commit themselves wholeheartedly to Europe. Churchill made it clear to him that the British saw themselves as a global power, with their eyes fixed more firmly on the British Commonwealth and Empire and on their relationship with the United States than on Europe. I am not going to go into the troubled period in which Harold Macmillan's government tried to ward off what it saw as the threat of continental European integration, initially by trying to torpedo the EEC and then by deciding to join it. Suffice it to say that Macmillan's policy, which one historian of the period, Martin Schaad,[24] has described as 'bullying Bonn', was both unsuccessful and unhelpful to Anglo-German relations. By the time Macmillan and Adenauer retired within weeks of one another in the autumn of 1963, they were barely on speaking terms.

In October 1964 Harold Wilson's Labour government took over in Britain. The Labour Party had always been largely opposed to membership of the EEC, although some individual Labour leaders, such as Roy Jenkins and George

Brown, were strongly in favour of it. Wilson himself was no enthusiast for the European Community, but within three years of attaining office the steady deterioration of Britain's economic position convinced him that she should renew her bid for EEC membership. In a famously fatuous remark that epitomised British attitudes to their European neighbours, the Foreign Secretary, George Brown, told his German counterpart, Willy Brandt: 'Willy, you must get us in, so we can take the lead'.[25] This initiative was as fruitless as Macmillan's earlier attempt to join the Community, and in November 1967 the French President vetoed British entry for the second time. However, the British application remained on the table, and when de Gaulle left office on 28 April 1969 there seemed to be some hope that the blockage against British entry would be removed. Willy Brandt strongly supported British entry, as did the Free Democrats and most of the CDU.

From then on, into the summer of 1970, Labour ministers repeatedly assured the West Germans that they were entirely committed, not only to the economic, but also to the political objectives of the Treaty of Rome. This was important for the Germans because they hoped that the British would help them achieve some of the integrationist objectives which the Gaullist regime in France, with its commitment to 'l'Europe des Etats', had been blocking during the 1960s. In particular, they wanted progress to be made on monetary union, an objective that was only to be finally achieved in January 2002, and then *without* British participation.

The Labour government had appointed George Thomson as a cabinet minister without portfolio to further negotiations for British entry, and throughout the first half of 1970 he was stressing the need for urgency in processing Britain's accession to the EEC. The image presented to the outside world was of a consensus accepted by all major

parties in Britain that the United Kingdom should join Europe. After the Königswinter Conference held in Cambridge in April 1970 the German Ambassador sent a glowing despatch to Bonn about the enthusiasm expressed for British membership of the EEC by British as well as German participants. In June, however, as I mentioned above, the Conservatives replaced Labour as the governing party, and Edward Heath became Prime Minister. Heath was one of the few British politicians whose commitment to the European Community was unequivocal, and his government pressed ahead with application for entry. Labour, on the other hand, veered away from its position in government, and Wilson showed himself quite ready to oppose entry if it this would weaken the Conservatives. When Brandt visited London in early May 1971, he asked Wilson to explain a recent speech in Birmingham criticising the Heath government's efforts to join the EEC. Wilson assured Brandt that his views on joining Europe had not changed, and that he was just trying 'indirectly' to attack the Heath government's industrial relations bill. It was unlikely that this lame excuse cut much ice with the German Chancellor. He had been assured of the absolute commitment of men like Wilson to the cause of European integration; now he found Labour politicians encouraging a growing public backlash in Britain against EEC membership. From then on the West Germans seem to have pinned their hopes on Roy Jenkins becoming the next Labour leader, hopes that were also unfulfilled.[26]

Heath's government was successful in persuading the House of Commons to adhere to the Treaty of Rome, but not without creating splits in the Conservative and Labour parties, particularly the latter. There was certainly no great enthusiasm for explaining to the British people the full significance of the EEC as a supra-national organisation.

The White Paper published by the government in July 1971 stated: 'There is no question of any erosion of essential national sovereignty'. This statement was the object of considerable scorn when the matter was debated. At one point in January 1972 a Labour MP upset the Speaker of the House of Commons by carrying into the chamber 42 volumes weighing half a hundredweight and containing 2500 EEC regulations which would automatically apply to Britain once she acceded to the Treaty of Rome.[27]

Brandt and his colleagues could feel that they had contributed greatly to British success in finally gaining entry. They had unswervingly supported the British under Wilson and Heath. Brandt gave Heath useful advice about how to negotiate with Pompidou, and reinforced this with strong personal representations to the French President.[28] Personally Heath and Brandt got on better than most other British and German politicians, but once again the British government did not last very long. In March 1974 it called a general election and was narrowly defeated. A minority Labour government took over, committed to renegotiating the terms of British entry to the EEC and to holding a referendum on whether the United Kingdom should stay in the Community it had just joined.

After a few minor concessions had been obtained, the issue was put to a referendum. For the first, and so far the last, time the British people were asked their opinion about Europe. The response was impressive; on a respectable turnout 67% voted to stay in the Common Market, a far better result than any single party could expect at a parliamentary election. Yet the supporters of the campaign to stay in avoided the issue of supra-nationalism. The mood of the country was perhaps best captured by a mini-cartoon in *The Times* showing a bored blonde woman at a dinner party saying to her earnest male neighbour: 'Don't tell me. You'll say Yes to Europe — but without much

enthusiasm'.[29] It was precisely this lack of enthusiasm about the European project that distinguished many British politicians, and most British people, from their German counterparts.

The whole affair had a devastating effect on the Labour Party. Rank and file and members of the trade union movement, as well as Members of Parliament, were furious with pro-European colleagues such as Roy Jenkins for their perceived treachery in helping Heath's government win the crucial votes on EEC membership. By 1983 the Labour Party was fighting elections on a platform which included taking Britain out of the European Community. Roy Jenkins and others had left the party and set up the more moderate, and pro-European, SDP. The fragmentation of the left helped secure a long period of power for the Conservatives, led by Margaret Thatcher.

Her elevation to office in the election of May 1979 did not, however, lead to improved Anglo-German relations. This was not because Thatcher was particularly anti-German, as some accounts suggest. She was sturdily patriotic, but she respected Konrad Adenauer as a staunch opponent of Communism, and she admired Ludwig Erhard, the apostle of the free market who had presided over West Germany's economic transformation after 1948.

But once again, European issues clouded relations with Bonn. Thatcher had been a member of Heath's cabinet that had taken Britain into the EEC, but she was not enamoured of supra-national organisations. Furthermore, the British experience of life in the EEC had been unhappy. Whereas in the case of the Six core members, integration had coincided with a period of relative prosperity from 1957 until 1973, the new British entrants found themselves facing stagflation as the Western World was hit by an oil crisis. It also became clear that the British were paying what seemed to be an unreasonably large amount into the

Community budget without having made the economic gains forecast by enthusiasts for entry from 1961 onwards. Indeed, the impact of the most important area of European policy, that relating to agriculture, had been overwhelmingly negative. One study estimated the welfare loss to Britain caused by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 1980 to have been £1.6 billion.[30] The United Kingdom was the second largest contributor to the finances of the CAP, despite being one of the poorer countries in the European Community. Mrs. Thatcher therefore fought a fierce battle for a reduction in Britain's contribution to the EEC budget and in 1984 achieved an annual refund of 66% of the amount by which UK contributions to Community schemes exceeded its own receipts from the EEC.[31] This was an early example of a special concession to Britain rather similar to the later 'opt-outs' over social and monetary policies achieved by John Major at Maastricht in December 1991. Although in themselves justifiable, they created the impression that the United Kingdom was a 'semi-detached' member of the European Community.

Furthermore, Thatcher viewed the European Community from a very different perspective to that of her German colleagues. Whereas she was keen to implement the free market aspects of the European agenda, the Germans wanted to press on with European integration, including economic and monetary union and the granting of increased powers to the European Parliament. Until October 1982 Thatcher got on fairly well with Helmut Schmidt, the Social Democratic Chancellor, but his successor, Helmut Kohl, was a more enthusiastic believer in European integration. In June 1985 a meeting of the European Council held in Milan agreed, much to Thatcher's dismay, on a reform of the Treaty of Rome in the direction of closer union. The upshot was the Single European Act, signed by Thatcher and the other heads of Government in December

1985. Whereas the British Prime Minister saw this as implementing the single European market, Kohl told the Bundestag that it would take the political and institutional development of the Community a decisive step forward.[32] The atmosphere grew even frostier when, in August 1988, the French President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, told the European Parliament that within ten years 80% of all decisions on industrial and economic matters would be taken in Brussels. The fact that he was welcomed as a speaker at the annual Conference of the British Trades Union Congress the following month was hardly likely to endear him to the Prime Minister. She soon made her own position clear in a speech to the College of Europe at Bruges in which she famously declared: 'We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them reimposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels'.

This is a well-known passage, but attention should also be paid to the sentences before it. Thatcher reminded her audience of the other Europe: 'We shall always look on Warsaw, Prague and Budapest as great European cities'. She spoke of the strong and principled reaction by the Community's Eastern neighbours to the dreadful experience of Soviet domination.[33]

That comment is of relevance to Anglo-German relations because it helps to explain Thatcher's reaction to German unification from November 1989 to the summer of 1990. This episode has been rehearsed many times and I do not wish to deal with it in any detail in this lecture, but I think it worth pointing out that Thatcher did have a point when she urged caution and restraint in moves towards German unification. Her objective, as she put it quite openly in her memoirs, was to encourage the democratisation of the GDR but to slow down its reunification with West Germany. Above all, she was worried that pressure

for unification might derail the whole movement towards liberalisation elsewhere in Soviet-dominated Europe. Given the growing opposition within the Soviet Union to Gorbachev's reforming policies, this was not an irrational fear.[34]

It was, of course, easy to attribute the Prime Minister's policy to her supposedly anti-German attitude. Such suspicions were reinforced by the gaffes that followed in the summer of 1990: the *Spectator* interview with Nicholas Ridley and the provocative version of Thatcher's discussion with a group of historians about united Germany that leaked out shortly afterwards. But it should be remembered that Ridley's strictures were as much directed against the European Community as they were against German unification, and that the background to the whole incident was a struggle within the cabinet between the Prime Minister and her more enthusiastically *communitaire* colleagues. It was that struggle, and the domestic crisis created by the so-called poll tax, which precipitated her fall from power in November 1990.[35]

This was the beginning of a deep conflict within the Conservative Party, which continued until the end of the period I am describing, and it would be a brave person who said it was over today. It intensified as the European agenda moved on more rapidly towards genuine economic and monetary union, qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers, increased influence for the European parliament, and an intensification of European Union activities in fields such as foreign and security policy, border controls and labour relations. The humiliating exit of the United Kingdom from the European exchange rate mechanism in September 1992, and the remarkable recovery that the British economy experienced once the pound sterling was free to float, seemed to justify Thatcher's warnings against Euro-federalist experiments.

There followed the bitter row over the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty which poisoned the atmosphere in John Major's administration. Despite his claim that he would put Britain at the heart of Europe, and his personally good rapport with Helmut Kohl, Major constantly had to demonstrate his national credentials to the Eurosceptics in his party. Anti-German rants in the British press, from the *Spectator* to the *Sun*, provided an ugly background to relations between the two countries.

In January 1993, for example, an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* noted with outrage a reception organised in Kensington by the German and French ambassadors to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Franco-German Elysée Treaty. The author stressed the supposedly anti-British character of the treaty, and said he would as soon celebrate the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact in August 1939. This was an illustration of how far the atmosphere between Britain and Germany was actually deteriorating in the 1990s. Nearly twenty-five years earlier the *Daily Telegraph* had commented on a Gallup survey of British attitudes towards West Germany and approvingly noted that it 'confirms the consistent trend in the direction of an honourable acceptance of Germans as friends and allies'. But it complained that there were still too many old prejudices in Britain and too many people fixated on the war. Efforts should be made to point out that West Germany was not like pre-war Germany, but had become the 'best Democrat in Europe'.[36] Such sentiments were hard to find in most of the British press in the 1990s.

The root cause of this hostility was the notion that Germany was the main motor behind European federalism, a policy personified in the generous figure of Helmut Kohl. By the mid-1990s, therefore, both the major parties in Britain had revealed the volatility of their views on the European Union and their lack of a genuinely *communitaire*

spirit. When John Major's Conservative government went to the polls in May 1997 its campaign was marked by attacks on the European Union, and once again, the Germans were a target. A Conservative Press advertisement headed 'Labour's position on Europe' showed a grinning Chancellor Kohl with a small puppet on his lap — who was of course, Tony Blair.

But this Euroscepticism cut little ice with the electorate. Labour, by now the more pro-European of the two major parties, romped home with a large majority. Overnight, so it seemed, the atmosphere between Britain and Europe had changed. Certainly the tone of official statements became warmer and the new government stressed its commitment to Europe. It even indicated that it might at some point in the future join the common European currency, after a referendum. The British were also interested in creating an effective military element in the European Union, if it were appropriately embedded in NATO.[37] But the atrocities in New York and Washington in September 2001 reactivated the traditional British commitment to the 'special relationship' with the United States of America. Today acceptance of the Euro looks farther away than ever. The proposed constitution for the European Union has aroused widespread opposition and would almost certainly be voted down if a referendum were held soon. In the summer of 2004 much of the British press gave remarkably full and positive coverage to the activities of the UKIP, a party that wants to take Britain out of the European Union altogether.

So far as government policies and diplomacy are concerned, I have no doubt that the two countries will continue to rub along as good neighbours. But there is still a problem that has existed since the beginning of the Cold War. Neither country is so crucial to the other as to demand the highest priority. For the Germans, as well as for the

British, relations with the United States have always been more important. But the Germans have also given their relationship with France precedence over that with Britain, precisely because it epitomises the goal of a European union in which they can achieve equal status with their neighbours and create lasting European peace. Since few British political leaders have shared this vision, and since it was not explained to the British people, the two governments could rarely operate on the same European wavelength. This is a problem that still dogs us today.

I have tried to suggest in this lecture that Anglo-German antagonism is not a natural state, but is stimulated by government policies that bring our two countries into unnecessary conflict. But we should also be aware that the public in both countries is less well informed than it used to be. Despite the efforts of institutions like the German Historical Institute, the opportunities for people who are not professionally concerned with Anglo-German relations to be informed about each other's countries have diminished. Most newspapers carry little hard news about Germany in Britain or Britain in Germany. For a British reporter to persuade his editors to publish an article on Germany it needs to feature something sensational like cannibalism, or the absurd story that the Chancellor was dying his hair. Serious political or social analysis stands little chance. Recent *Land* elections in the Federal Republic have reminded us that the only German political parties certain to get coverage in the British press are those on the extreme right. I should stress that this is not just a British problem. German journalists have told me they experience the same difficulties when it comes to reporting on Britain. In this marvellous building [German Historical Institute, 17 Bloomsbury Square, London], which is itself a tribute to the efforts of our German colleagues who have worked so hard for Anglo-German friendship, we need have no doubt that

such friendship exists. Unfortunately it is not as widespread as we would like, and that is why we should continue to do all we can to defend those institutions which disseminate information and understanding between our two countries. Every step towards the dumbing down of radio or television for example, is a threat to the public appreciation of the need for good relations with our European neighbours. Every reduction in the quality of foreign language teaching in Britain distances us from our fellow citizens in the European Union. Every cut in the budgets of bodies like the British Council or the German Academic Exchange Service makes it easier for populist myths to gain credence in both our countries. As someone who has gained enormously from my experiences of life in Germany, I can only be optimistic about our future relationship; nevertheless things could be better than they are, and that is a pity.

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[3] See Unterlagen für die Überreichung des Beglaubingungsschreibens des neuernannten britischen Botschafters Sir Roger Jackling, 21 March 1968, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (hereafter PAAA) B31 370.
[4] 'Germany. Annual Report for 1969', sent from Bonn, 1 January 1970, PRO/FCO33/1010.
[5] Ambassador Hase, London, to Auswärtiges Amt, 5 March 1970 and Wickert in the London Embassy to Auswärtiges Amt, 19 March 1970, PAAA/B31 370.
[6] Hase to Auswärtiges Amt, 15 April 1970, PAAA/B31 372.
[7] Egon Bahr, *Zu meiner Zeit* (Munich, 1996), p. 276. See also Roger Morgan, 'Willy Brandt's "Neue Ostpolitik". British Perceptions and Positions, 1969-1975' in A. M. Birke et al., *An Anglo-German Dialogue. The Munich Lectures on the History of International Relations* (Munich, 2000), pp. 179-80.
[8] Letter of 16 April 1970 from Evan Luard to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and comments by J. K. Drinkall, 24 April 1970, PRO/FCO33/1015.
[9] See the reports of discussions between Bahr and the Western diplomats in Moscow on 4 August 1970: Allardt to Auswärtiges Amt, 4 August, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (hereafter AAPBD), 1970 Bd. II, Dok. 364, p. 1383; and of Scheel's talk with the same group on 6 August, AAPBD, 1970 Bd. II, Dok. 372, pp.1405-6.

[10] The German phrase was: 'frisch, wie aus dem Ei gepellt'. Paul Frank, *Entschlüsselte Botschaft. Diplomat macht Inventur* (Stuttgart, 1981), p. 300.

[11] Diplomatic Report on the Soviet-German Treaty of 12 August 1970, p. 6, para. 14, sent on 25 August 1970 by R. H. G. Edmonds in Moscow to the FCO, PRO/FCO33/1028.

[12] See Frank, *Entschlüsselte Botschaft*, pp.299-301. See also Pauls in Washington to Auswärtiges Amt, 6 August 1970, AAPBG 1970 Bd. II, Dok. 377, p. 1419, fn. 1. Frank makes it clear that Edmonds had telephoned beforehand to announce that he was coming. For Edmonds' account, see letter from Edmonds, British Embassy Moscow to D. V. Bendall, FCO London, 8 August 1970, PRO/FCO/1026.

[13] Edmonds to Bendall, 8 August 1970, ibid.

[14] Richards (British Embassy in Bonn) to the FCO London, 13 August 1970, PRO/FCO/1026. The *Stern* was dated 16 August but was on sale on 13 August.

[15] See letter from Edmonds to Bendall FCO, 8 August 1970, PRO/FCO33/1026.

[16] Brimelow to Frank, 15 August 1970, PRO/FCO33/1027.

[17] McCluney (FCO) to Daunt, 19 August 1970, referring to comments by the permanent Under-Secretary of State, Sir Denis Greenhill, PRO/FCO33/1028.

[18] Bahr's satisfaction that West Germany did not appear as a 'vassal' of the Western powers over this issue is expressed in his memoirs: *Zu meiner Zeit*, p. 330.

[19] This is reflected in a conversation Sir Thomas Brimelow had with the French Chargé immediately after the announcement of the treaty. Brimelow to Palliser, 10 August 1970, PRO/FCO33/1O26.

[20] Peter Moon to N. J. Barrington, FCO, 12 August 1970, PRO/FCO33/1027.

[21] Report by Edmonds on the meaning and consequences of the German-Soviet Treaty, 24 August 1970, p. 8, PRO/FCO33/1028. The 'half a loaf' comment related to a conversation between the German ambassador and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 21 August.

[22] See, for example, Hannfried von Hindenburg, 'Die Einhegung deutscher Macht. Die Funktion der Alliierten Vorbehaltsrechte in der Ost- und Deutschlandpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945/49-1990', in Helga Haftendorn and Henning Recke (eds), *"...die volle Macht eines Staates..." Die alliierten Vorbehaltsrechte als Rahmenbedingung westdeutscher Außenpolitik, 1949-2000* (2nd edn, Baden Baden, 1999), pp. 96-9.

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[25] Willy Brandt, *Begegnungen und Einsichten. Die Jahre 1960-1975* (Hamburg, 1976), p. 202.

[26] Hase to Auswärtiges Amt, 6 May 1971, PAAA/B31 370. For hopes in Jenkins, see Hase to Auswärtiges Amt, 21 July 1971, PAAA/B31 372.

[27] *The United Kingdom and the European Communities,* HMSO, Cmnd. 4715, p. 8. Also *Parliamentary Debates,* 20 January 1972, vol. 829, cols. 678-80.

[28] An example of the strong diplomatic support Heath received is a powerful despatch sent by the German Ambassador in London to Bonn in March 1971 urging his government to help British entry as being in the interests of Europe and the Federal Republic, AAPBD 1971, Bd. I, Dok. 107. Hase to Auswärtiges Amt, 24 March 1971, pp. 499-

502. The document was produced in preparation for Prime Minister Heath's visit to Berlin and Bonn, 4-6 April.
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[30] Cited in David Colman, 'Agricultural Policy' in S. Bulmer, S. George and A Scott (eds), *The United Kingdom and EC Membership Evaluated*, (London, 1992), p. 35.
[31] Ibid., p.34.
[32] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London, 1993) p. 556.
[33] Ibid., p. 744.
[34] Ibid., pp. 813-4.
[35] For a fuller discussion of the Ridley affair, see A. J. Nicholls, 'Fifty Years of Anglo-German Relations', *The 2000 Bithell Memorial Lecture* (Institute of Germanic Studies, London, 2001) pp.14-16.
[36] 'Albany at Large' by Kenneth Rose. 'Diplomatic Gaffe in Kensington' in *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 January 1993; *Daily Telegraph* Weekend Supplement, 14 February 1969, reported on by Wickert, German Embassy London to Auswärtiges Amt, dated 13 February 1969, PAAA B31 370.
[37] For an example of optimism about the future of Anglo-German relations in the two years after Blair's victory see: Anthony Glees, 'Großbritanniens "Zweiter Beitritt" zu Europa: Tony Blairs Neue Politik', in R. C. Meier-Walser (ed.), *"Stille Allianz"? Die deutsch-britischen Beziehungen im neuen Europa* (Munich, 1999), pp. 29-42.