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CHARLES DE GAULLE AND THE GRAND COALITION'S  
»OSTPOLITIK«, 1966–1969

»Kleine Schritte sind mehr als keine Schritte«  
Willy Brandt

The West German Grand Coalition, headed by Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger from the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) and Foreign Minister Willy Brandt from the Social Democratic Party (SPD) took office in November 1966 in the changing international context of *détente*. After the 1962 Cuba Crisis, the two superpowers entered into a dialogue designed to reduce East-West tensions, although it did not prevent the outbreak of serious regional crises such as the Vietnam War. From a Franco-German view point, relations had reached a low ebb at the end of Ludwig Erhard's chancellorship. Disagreements on *détente* and its implications had contributed to the constant degradation of the climate between Paris and Bonn. Erhard's and his Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder's reluctance to engage in political dialogue with Eastern Europe – despite the initiation of the policy of movement – convinced the French President to move forward alone with his eastern policy.

The arrival of the Grand Coalition positively altered the dynamics of Franco-German collaboration in Europe. The new German government revived the political dialogue with the French government. *Ostpolitik* was a key element of the new bilateral entente. Kiesinger and Brandt were the main architects of the rapprochement with Paris. Brandt, in particular, supported a bolder and more pro-active West German *détente* and eastern policy that showed similarities with de Gaulle's *détente-entente-cooperation* scheme. Also, the new Foreign Minister was aware that de Gaulle's Eastern overtures had opened a space, which his country could use to increase its leeway in Eastern Europe.

However, the Franco-German rapprochement on *détente*- and *Ostpolitik*-related issues raises a number of questions. Was Brandt's *Ostpolitik* really the continuation of de Gaulle's *détente* policy with other means<sup>1</sup>? Was it really »the daughter of the Gaullist policy«<sup>2</sup>, as French diplomat François Puaux pretends? To what extent did the Grand Coalition rely on French help for the implementation of its *Ostpolitik* strategy? Why did the French government agree to support it? Last but not least, was the German *Ostpolitik* really fulfilling de Gaulle's own Eastern and *détente* policy?

1 Reinhard KAPFERER, Charles de Gaulle. Umriss einer politischen Biographie, Stuttgart 1985, p. 245.

2 »La fille de la politique gaullienne«, in: François PUAUX, La conception gaullienne de la *détente*, 1964–1968, in: *Espoirs* (1996), p. 70.

These questions were partly addressed by scholars. Based on multi-archival research conducted in France and Germany, this paper reassesses Franco-German interactions and dynamics in the context of East-West détente. It argues that, despite a superficial rapprochement on détente, a common Franco-German *Ostpolitik*, as envisioned in the early days of the Grand Coalition, could not be implemented.

Firstly, the similitude(s) and difference(s) in de Gaulle's and the Grand Coalition's conception of détente and *Ostpolitik* will be considered. Second, the reactions of the French government and De Gaulle's reasons for supporting Brandt's attempts at laying the foundations for a new German policy toward Eastern Europe and for a new approach of Germany's reunification will be analyzed. Finally, this article illustrates the limits of Franco-German cooperation on these issues.

### De Gaulle's and the Grand Coalition's *Ostpolitik*

Scholars have already stressed the influence of de Gaulle's détente concept on the shaping of the Federal Republic's *Ostpolitik*, especially in the early phase of its inception by Brandt<sup>3</sup>. However, when looking at the *Ostpolitik* of the Grand Coalition, historians have to take into account that it was also influenced by the fact that the new German government had to accommodate the differing viewpoints of the two coalition partners.

The composition of the new German government was indicative of its foreign policy alignment and outlined the work division in the coalition. Chancellor Kiesinger, who had served as the representative of the federal government for cultural affairs within the cooperation framework of the Élysée Treaty, clearly stood for the reanimation and improvement of Franco-German relations. Foreign Minister Brandt symbolized the will to develop détente and relations with the East. His nomination implied that the 1963 Tutzing slogan could be implemented. Brandt was a good choice vis-à-vis the Eastern bloc since his historical record was free of any Nazi charge – contrary to Kiesinger – and, as the former Mayor of Berlin, he was used to dealing with the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The fact that the SPD held key ministers in the Grand Coalition – Foreign Affairs (Brandt) and Pan-German Affairs (Herbert Wehner) – was seen in Paris as an additional impetus for a more innovative and pro-active *Ostpolitik*. But the distribution of work was less simple than it appeared at first glance. Kiesinger did not want to relinquish all powers to Brandt on détente- and reunification-related issues, and the Chancellor and Foreign Minister often competed rather than cooperated. This rivalry was eventually detrimental to the intelligibility of Bonn's *Ostpolitik*. Given the limited scope of this article, the primary focus will be on Brandt who was a key player and the promoter of rapprochement and cooperation with Paris in this area.

At first sight, similarities between de Gaulle and Brandt are all but self-evident. Their age, their social background, their education, their political orientation, and

3 See for instance Maurice VAÏSSE, De Gaulle et Willy Brandt, in: Maurice VAÏSSE, Horst MÖLLER, Willy Brandt und Frankreich, Munich 2005, p. 103–114 ; Klaus HILDEBRAND, Willy Brandt, General de Gaulle und la grande Europe, in: Historische Zeitschrift 279 (2004), p. 388–408.

their conception of Franco-German relations seemed to separate them. What united them still was their common experience of resistance to national-socialism and of exile, and a shared non-conformism, as Maurice Vaisse suggests<sup>4</sup>. Brandt certainly admired de Gaulle but his admiration remained ambivalent throughout his life.

On the surface, Brandt's own conceptions of détente and *Ostpolitik* looked in many ways similar to those of de Gaulle. The French President had early on proposed a »Europe from the Atlantic to the Ural« that would be based on the states. This new European order, in which the German question would be ultimately settled, would only be achieved progressively; but France, with Germany's participation, was to play a key role. France would use détente to establish itself as a privileged interlocutor with the Soviet Union, who held the key of the German problem, and resume dialogue with Eastern Europe. Hence, France would be in a better position to promote what the French President summed up in his programmatic triptych of »détente, entente, cooperation« that defined the three stages that would govern France's relations with the East. German reunification would be the consequence, not the prerequisite of a détente across the blocs. Since it was the »European problem *par excellence*«<sup>5</sup>, it should be »Europeanized«, which meant solved within a pan-European framework.

Brandt's détente and eastern policy was shaped by his experience as Mayor of Berlin during the apex of the Cold War. Similar to de Gaulle, though in a more flexible and open way, Brandt attempted to build a general, long-term vision of Germany's role in Europe, designed to foster peace and trustful relations through dialogue, three essential prerequisites for Germany's unity. The concept of dialogue was therefore inherent to both de Gaulle's and Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. The premises of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* were a firm anchorage in and reliance on the West (both the EEC and the Atlantic Alliance), which represented the basis for diplomatic initiatives towards the East. On the contrary, de Gaulle aimed at diplomatic independence and strove to establish France as a third player between the two superpowers. Reunification remained at the heart of Brandt's détente policy, but it was necessary to achieve greater unity between the divided parts of Germany before it could be implemented. He consequently advocated a policy of small steps – such as the pass agreements with the GDR of 1963 and 1964 – that would gradually lead to structural and eventually political changes. Both de Gaulle and Brandt thus conceived *Ostpolitik* as a gradual process of normalization of relations between East and West.

Influential for the development of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* concept was also the recognition that the Western Allies were only willing to pursue Germany's interests to the extent that they overlapped with their own. They certainly paid regular lip service to reunification but did not do much to change the status quo. The failure of the Erhard-Schröder government's attempts to obtain concrete support had demonstrated to Brandt and Egon Bahr, his closest advisor, that *Ostpolitik* must be »a German initiative to change the German situation«<sup>6</sup>, with far-reaching implications. It first implied

4 Maurice VAISSE, *ibid.*, p. 103.

5 »Le problème par excellence«, CHARLES DE GAULLE, *Discours et Messages*, vol. IV, Paris 1970, p. 338.

6 Egon BAHR, *Zu meiner Zeit*, Munich 1992, p. 152.

a relative emancipation from the United States (US) and a rapprochement with Gaullist conceptions of national interest and independence. Certainly, Brandt did not intend to challenge the US leadership and presence in Europe as de Gaulle did; but his *Ostpolitik* was initiated independently of Washington. Second, it entailed a new West German self-confidence and a more assertive attitude when it came to the defense of national interests, of which reunification was the highest. While Brandt did not share de Gaulle's vision of Europe in many ways, he admired the French President for using the political room created by the nuclear stalemate between the two superpowers and demanded for his country the right to be a key player of the East-West détente process. Indeed, »why only de Gaulle«?

Rapprochement with Gaullist conceptions was not only visible in form but also in content. By the mid-1960s, Brandt emphasized the European dimension of his *Ostpolitik*. Its aim was to create a pan-European framework conducive to reunification through cooperation with the Soviet Union and to alleviate the fears and distrust of Germany's eastern neighbors. Bahr translated this idea into the Tutzing formula of »change through rapprochement«. But, if Brandt shared de Gaulle's idea that the German problem would only be solved within a European framework, unlike de Gaulle, he did not wish Europe to become a third superpower. Rather, he wanted to use de Gaulle's attempt of an independent policy with the East to pursue his own concept of »small steps«. Thus, de Gaulle's eastern policy formed the background, not the framework of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Brandt's emphasis on a pan-European peace concept was combined with an ever stronger linkage between progress in both *Ostpolitik* and European integration. This sheds light on his favorable position towards enlargement of the Community and, in particular, towards British membership, which, in his eyes, would strengthen the Common Market.

In fact, a strong Community was of the utmost importance for Brandt especially for the exercise of this newly-claimed self-confidence and a pan-European détente. He was aware that only with a firm anchorage in the West and in the EEC could Germany initiate its *Ostpolitik*, and he established a clear linkage between the Community's deepening and widening on the one hand and the development of his *Ostpolitik* on the other. The Community was called on to become a key feature of the détente process. This new orientation was transposed on paper in October 1967 by Ministerial Director Paul Frank:

»The German European policy needs to be harmonized with the long-term objective of a European peace order. This means that the current accentuation needs to be changed. Still it is about strengthening Europe both politically and economically. But, the strength conferred by integration must serve in the future to establish a dialog between West and East. This dialog would rest on national interests, it would develop across the political systems, and, finally, initiate cooperation between West and East<sup>8</sup>.«

7 »Vorwärts«, Nr. 22, 27.05.1964.

8 »Die deutsche Europapolitik muss mit dem langfristigen Ziel einer europäischen Friedensordnung harmonisiert werden. Dies bedeutet, dass die bisherige Akzentuierung geändert werden muss. Nach wie vor handelt es sich darum, dass Europa wirtschaftlich und politisch stärker wird.

As Andreas Wilkens makes clear, the specific role given by Brandt to the European Community as a political factor of the rapprochement between the two parts of Europe profoundly differed from de Gaulle's own approach<sup>9</sup>. Since the failure of the Fouchet plans, de Gaulle had lost interest in a politically united Europe<sup>10</sup>. On the contrary, he viewed its emergence as an obstacle to rather than as a facilitator of his independence and Eastern policy. In de Gaulle's détente-entente-cooperation vision, there was little room for the EC, except as a means of the French grandeur.

Hence, because of the specific situation of West Germany, Brandt's *Ostpolitik* did take in practice a form that deviated from de Gaulle's although both rested on unmistakable common ground<sup>11</sup>.

### Toward a common Franco-German *Ostpolitik*? France and the Grand Coalition's Early Initiatives, 1966–1967

Already toward the end of his mandate, Chancellor Erhard had evoked the possibility of a closer Franco-German cooperation, even a »common *Ostpolitik*«<sup>12</sup>. However, he left office before he could implement anything even though the Auswärtiges Amt had already started to study the possibilities<sup>13</sup>. Yet, the idea was not lost on his successors. Rapprochement with Paris was the first priority of the Grand Coalition since both Kiesinger and Brandt were aware that the restoration of the Franco-German dialogue and the French support were a prerequisite for any successful policy towards Eastern Europe.

Brandt summed up his *Ostpolitik* program as »to protect the right of our people, to build Europe and to secure peace by illusion-free détente«<sup>14</sup>. To protect the right of the German people had a twofold significance. It entailed both preserving the West

Aber die durch die Einigung erworbene Stärkung soll in Zukunft der Herstellung eines Dialogs zwischen West- und Osteuropa dienen mit dem Ziel, über die unterschiedlichen politischen Systeme hinweg einen auf nationalen Interessen beruhenden Dialog und schließlich eine Zusammenarbeit zwischen West und Ost einzuleiten«, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt [PAAA], B [Bestand] 1, Bd. 324, Aufzeichnung von Frank betr. Leitlinien für die deutsch Euro-papolitik, 4.10.1967.

- 9 Andreas WILKENS, Willy Brandt, Egon Bahr et la naissance du concept d'un ordre de paix européen, in: Gérard BOSSUAT (ed.), *Inventer l'Europe – Histoire nouvelle des groupes d'influence et des acteurs de l'unité européenne*, Bruxelles 2003 p. 278–279.
- 10 See Carine GERMOND, *Les projets d'union politique de l'année 1964*, in: Wilfried LOTH, *Crises and Compromises. The European Project 1963–1969*, Baden-Baden 2001, 109–130.
- 11 Klaus HILDEBRAND, Willy Brandt, General de Gaulle (as in n. 4), p. 120.
- 12 Archives nationales [AN], 5AG1/164, *Compte rendu de l'entretien entre de Gaulle et Erhard*, 21 juillet 1965. See also Horst OSTERHELD, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard 1963–1966. Ein dokumentarischer Bericht*, Düsseldorf 1992, p. 332.
- 13 PAAA, B 2, Bd. 132, Vermerk von Carstens betr. Möglichkeiten der deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit, St.S. 2015/66, Bonn, 16. Oktober 1966; Bundesarchiv Koblenz [BAK], NL [Nachlass] Carstens, N 1337, Aufzeichnung von St.S. Lahr betr. Möglichkeiten und Aussichten einer verstärkten deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit, St.S. 2473/66, 7.11.1966; PAAA, B 150, Bd. 89, Klaiber an das AA betr. Verstärkung der deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit–Möglichkeit und Grenzen, Paris, 5.12.1966
- 14 Frank FISCHER (Bearb.), Willy BRANDT, *Ein Volk der guten Nachbarn: Außen- und Deutschlandpolitik 1966–1974* Bonn 2005, p. 104.

German *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* and facilitating relations with the East German government in order to improve and ease the life of the Germans on both sides of the Iron Curtain. To secure peace through the easing of tensions was directed toward the Soviet Union and the rest of Eastern Europe with the main objective of normalization of relations, force renunciation, trade, culture and science. Also important was the commitment of the SPD to abandon any pretensions to co-possession of nuclear weapons – the SPD supported a German signature on the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) whereas the CDU was more reluctant to append its signature on the document. In de Gaulle's eyes, this was an indispensable precondition of any progress towards détente and reunification<sup>15</sup>. Finally, building Europe implied to deepen Franco-German cooperation and, for this purpose, to revive the Élysée Treaty on the one hand, and to strengthen the European community and push forward the United Kingdom's bid for EC membership on the other hand.

Brandt's first trip to Paris hardly a month after his nomination was considered auspicious. French officials gave Brandt personal credit for the noticeable evolution of Bonn's position vis-à-vis détente and noted the obvious rapprochement with French conceptions<sup>16</sup>. Despite the conciliatory ton and the overall prudent content of Kiesinger's governmental declaration, Paris interpreted it as a new sign of the Grand Coalition's dedication to innovative *Ostpolitik* initiatives.

Meeting with de Gaulle, Prime Minister Georges Pompidou and Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville in mid-December 1966 on the fringe of a NATO-Council meeting, Brandt stressed his government's desire to restart and develop bilateral cooperation and presented the main lines of the future federal *Ostpolitik*. De Gaulle cordially welcomed Brandt and stressed his willingness to offer help to the Federal Republic in her détente and eastern policy, provided Bonn would take the necessary steps<sup>17</sup>. But this support was not unconditional as the French President made also clear. In his memoirs, Brandt interpreted this first meeting as a success and he believed he had forged a close agreement with France on *Ostpolitik*<sup>18</sup>. Couve de Murville expressed a more cautious, if not skeptical opinion and speculated whether »a dialogue between Paris and Bonn on détente could possibly acquire a real signification«<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, the Auswärtiges Amt started investigating the potential of Franco-German cooperation on détente<sup>20</sup>.

Concrete possibilities materialized in January 1967 as the Grand Coalition begun to implement its *Ostpolitik* program. During the first Franco-German summit meeting within the framework of the Élysée Treaty on 13 and 14 January 1967 the

15 Archives diplomatiques du Ministère des Affaires étrangères [AD/MAE], Pactes, vol. 294, TGA de Seydoux à MAE a/s programme gouvernemental du SPD, Bonn, 14.11.1966.

16 AD/MAE, Pactes, vol. 294, TGA de Seydoux à MAE, Bonn, 21.12.1966 ; AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1530, Note a/s des conceptions politiques de Willy Brandt, Paris, 12.12.1967.

17 AN, 5AG1/163, Entretien entre le général de Gaulle et Willy Brandt, 15.12.1966.

18 Willy BRANDT, *Begegnungen und Einsichten. Die Jahre 1960–1975*, Hamburg 1975, p. 158.

19 Maurice COUVE DE MURVILLE, *Une politique étrangère, 1958–1969*, Paris 1971, p. 275.

20 PAAA, B 150, Bd. 90, Drahtbericht betr. Vorstellungen über künftige Aspekte der deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit, 22.12.1966, Aufzeichnung von Jung betr. Verstärkung der deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit/Möglichkeiten und Grenzen, Bonn, 30.12.1966.

means to improve bilateral cooperation and coordination were extensively discussed between both governments. Kiesinger and Brandt detailed their *Ostpolitik* agenda that largely subscribed to de Gaulle's »détente-entente-cooperation« vision despite certain essential restrictions. Brandt, in particular, proved particularly enterprising. He insisted on close Franco-German coordination of *Ostpolitik* initiatives, informed his French interlocutors of the progresses of bilateral talks with Czechoslovakia and Romania and pointed out how France could concretely support their efforts, for instance, by preventing third countries to establish diplomatic relations with Pankow if Bonn was to resume diplomatic relations with Eastern European countries or to act as Bonn's spokesperson in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe<sup>21</sup>. Brandt also proposed to develop bilateral economic and cultural cooperation in Eastern Europe. All of the Grand Coalition's overtures met with the French approval. The Quai d'Orsay visibly appreciated the Gaullist accents of the new language spoken by the Grand Coalition:

»It is in the field of relations with the East that the positions of the FRG seem to draw most clearly inspiration from the French views. Chancellor Kiesinger [...] declared that he fully accepted the three phases of the evolution envisioned by General de Gaulle: détente-entente-cooperation<sup>22</sup>.«

The positions of the two governments thus appeared »largely concordant«<sup>23</sup>.

The French backing of *Ostpolitik* was doubly profitable for the Grand Coalition. It eased bilateral rapprochement, which was an essential prerequisite of the implementation of the federal government's European program<sup>24</sup>. Domestically, it made *Ostpolitik* more palatable for the Christian Democrats, who were still reluctant to fully commit to détente<sup>25</sup>.

Paris soon had the opportunity to demonstrate its concrete support. Meeting with Soviet Ambassador Zorine on 22 January 1967, General de Gaulle expressed his confidence in the new West German leadership's policy and asked the Soviet government to be more forthcoming with Bonn<sup>26</sup>. The visit of Poland's Foreign Minister

21 AN, 5AG1/163, Tête-à-tête entre le général de Gaulle et le chancelier Kiesinger et entre les ministres Couve de Murville et Brandt, 13.01.1967, entretien en tête-à-tête entre de Gaulle et Kiesinger et entretien élargi, 14.01.1967. See also Willy BRANDT, *Begegnungen und Einsichten* (as in n. 18), p. 150–156.

22 »C'est dans le domaine des rapports avec l'Est que les positions de la République fédérale d'Allemagne paraissent s'inspirer le plus nettement des vues françaises. Le chancelier Kiesinger a d'abord déclaré qu'il acceptait pleinement les trois phases de l'évolution envisagée par le général de Gaulle«, AN, 5AG1/163, DAP, Europe, TGD circulaire de Pau, Paris, 21.11.1967.

23 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1608, Note de la S/DEC a/s de la détente en Europe, Paris, 19.01.1967.

24 Archiv der christlich-demokratischen Partei [ACDP], NL Kiesinger, I–226–306, Pressekonferenz Kiesingers am 16.10.1967.

25 Philip GASSERT, *Kanzler zwischen den Zeiten. Kurt Georg Kiesinger 1904–1988*, Munich 2006, p. 506.

26 The French encouragement bore little results as one week later the Soviet government sent an aggressive note to the three Powers, which denounced the resurgence of national-socialism in Germany. Its obvious objectives were to discredit the leaders of the Grand Coalition and the



Adam Rapacki on 25 January offered another opportunity for Paris to plead Bonn's cause. Before Rapacki's arrival, Brandt had taken care to write to Couve de Murville and describe in full the positions of his government with regard to Poland and Czechoslovakia. He manifestly expected Couve to back his *Ostpolitik* in front of his Polish interlocutor. His government being, moreover, on the verge to resuming diplomatic relations with Romania, Brandt requested to »thwart any misinterpretation, if we were to establish diplomatic relations with Eastern European states«<sup>27</sup>.

Paris proved a reliable ally. A few days after receiving the letter, on 30 January, the Quai d'Orsay sent a series of three telegrams to countries in the Near and Far East, North and Central Africa as well as to Asia. The telegrams contained detailed instructions for the French diplomatic missions and expressed the French support of the Grand Coalition's efforts to normalize its relations with Eastern Europe<sup>28</sup>. Couve confirmed the so-called »shielding operation« (*Abschirmungsaktion*) in an additional letter to his German homolog<sup>29</sup>. Franco-German coordination and the French diplomatic intervention were successful as the resumption of diplomatic relations between Bonn and Bucharest was not followed by a modification of the relations between East-Berlin and any of the countries that had received the telegrams. It even allowed the Federal Republic to reaffirm its right to be the sole legitimate representative of the German nation (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*). For the Grand Coalition, this diplomatic success was an encouragement to go further down the road of détente and *Ostpolitik*.

Kiesinger's declaration of 13 December 1966 had seemingly disarmed the hostility of some Eastern European satellites towards Bonn for a short while, but Moscow soon organized the counter-offensive. Despite French requests, the Soviet government remained uncompromising vis-à-vis Bonn and made sure to restore the ideological discipline. During the spring 1967, the stiffening of the Eastern bloc stalled the Grand Coalition's programmed initiatives toward Warsaw, Prague and Yugoslavia. Despite French assurances, Moscow's stance toward the FRG remained as inflexible as ever and the Soviet government refused any normalization of relations with Bonn.

Confronted with these difficulties, Brandt and Kiesinger were hoping that Paris would help disarming Soviet critics<sup>30</sup>. The upcoming bi-annual summit meeting within the framework of the Élysée Treaty was seen as an occasion to restate the Franco-German community of views in *Ostpolitik* and strengthen bilateral cooperation in

- German chancellor in particular on the one hand, and to act as a warning for the Eastern European satellites that would be tempted to normalize their relations with Bonn on the other hand.
- 27 »Empêcher certains pays du Tiers Monde de mal interpréter notre politique orientale, au cas où nous établirions des relations diplomatiques avec des États d'Europe orientale«, AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1611, Réunion des directeurs politiques à Paris le 17.02.1967, Paris, 20.02.1967.
- 28 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1652, TGD pour Prague, Paris, 30.01.1967, TGD a/s établissement de relations diplomatiques avec certains pays de l'Est (pour l'Afrique centrale), Paris, 30.01.1967, TGD a/s établissement de relations diplomatiques avec certains pays de l'Est (pour le Proche et Moyen Orient, Le Caire et Alger), Paris, 30.01.1967.
- 29 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1652, Lettre de Couve de Murville à Brandt, 30.01.1967.
- 30 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1608, PAAA, B 24, Bd. 607, Brandt an Couve de Murville, Bonn, 30.06.1967.

this area. For Paris, the stalemate of the German *Ostpolitik* was problematic too, albeit for different reasons. The French diplomacy had reckoned that a more pro-active policy of Bonn towards the East would second the French détente policy and speed up the disintegration of the blocs. Yet, it seemed to have the reverse effect as the Soviet leaders had demonstrated that they still commanded their sphere of influence. Paris thus had a major interest in helping the Grand Coalition to improve relations with the East. As German diplomat Hermann Meyer-Lindenberg noted, »the French and German interests are here parallel«<sup>31</sup>.

The July 1967 Franco-German summit was largely dedicated to institutional improvements of bilateral cooperation within the Élysée Treaty<sup>32</sup>. The reanimation of the Franco-German tandem had been a priority of the Grand Coalition since its arrival. Brandt was convinced that the improvement of cooperation between Paris and Bonn was a necessary prerequisite for the federal government to recover its capacity to act in Europe. But, contrary to Chancellor Kiesinger, the reactivation of Franco-German relations was for Brandt a means rather than an end. He considered improved regular consultations within the cooperation treaty of 1963 as a tool to foster bilateral consensus on *Ostpolitik* and détente-related issues. Brandt's efforts to involve France in the Grand Coalition's *Ostpolitik* were therefore not limited to secure French backing, but primarily embedded in the Grand Coalition's broader attempt to improve bilateral relations. *Ostpolitik* was thus a key element of the cooperation program presented by the Grand Coalition.

At the end of the summit, a number of institutional improvements were agreed and new consultations mechanisms created. In an effort to harmonize geo-strategic conceptions over the long term, the creation of a Franco-German study committee for security and defense in Europe in the 1970s, which had been already evoked during the January summit, was created as part of the general attempts to revive and broaden cooperation between both capitals<sup>33</sup>. It was charged with the elaboration of common studies on the long-term geopolitical evolutions – including the German question – that would affect Europe's security and defense in the next decade. In the minds of Bahr and Brandt, the committee should study not only the military aspects but also the political problems and was designed to foster bilateral consensus on the future pan-European security system<sup>34</sup>.

The improvement of bilateral relations and the apparent West German debtor position presented both challenges and opportunities for the French government. It seemingly placed France in a position of force, whereby the French government believed it could pressure Bonn in other areas, namely enlargement. Paris knew that

31 »Die deutsche und französische Interesse laufen hier parallel«, PAAA, B 24, Bd. 607, Thesen zum deutsch-französischen Verhältnis, 22.06.1967.

32 AN, 5 AG1/163, Tête-à-tête entre le général de Gaulle et le chancelier Kiesinger, 12.07.1967 and 13.07.1967.

33 AD/MAE, Secrétariat général – Entretiens et messages [SG-EM], vol. 31, Relevé des décisions prises en conclusion des réunions franco-allemandes les 12–13.07.1967.

34 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung/Willy-Brandt-Haus [FES/WBA], NL Bahr, Mappe Nr. 341, Tageskopien, Aufzeichnung von Bahr betr. Konsultationsrunde mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten, Bonn, 7.07.1967; AD/MAE, Pactes, vol. 294, TGA de Seydoux à MAE a/s entretien avec Brandt, Bonn, 7.07.1967.

the Grand Coalition was not willing to provoke a showdown with de Gaulle on the British application and would not do anything that might jeopardize French support of their *Ostpolitik*<sup>35</sup>. For instance, Couve attempted shortly after the summit of July 1967 to bully German officials into either forcing the British EC adhesion or aligning themselves with de Gaulle's policy of détente<sup>36</sup>. But, France's margin of action both in the West and in the East was more limited than the French government assumed, as de Gaulle's trip to Poland highlighted.

At the summit of July 1967, General de Gaulle's had promised to Kiesinger to use the trust that existed between Paris and Warsaw to lobby in favor of the Grand Coalition's *Ostpolitik* and to urge Polish leaders to adopt a more conciliatory attitude<sup>37</sup>. The General's declaration anticipated German wishes. Indeed, a few months earlier, the Auswärtiges Amt had suggested using de Gaulle's visit in this country to back the Grand Coalition efforts<sup>38</sup>. Bahr also advocated

»some sort of French guarantee for the reliability of the German stance or a Polish reassurance by France [that] could remove the Polish barrier [...]. Such a reassurance by de Gaulle would do more than our previous requests to explain our policy in Eastern European countries; it would encourage an action that would not prejudice us but could flatter de Gaulle and the idea he has of his role<sup>39</sup>.«

In the weeks preceding de Gaulle's trip to Poland, German officials lobbied repeatedly the French government. In this case again, the French were receptive to the German demands for a French »*caution morale*«<sup>40</sup>.

35 See Carine GERMOND, The »recalcitrant partner« and the »honest broker«: France, Germany and Britain's second application to the EEC, 1966–1969, IEHC, Helsinki, session 82, August 2006, <http://www.helsinki.fi/iehc2006/papers3/Germond.pdf>.

36 Garrett MARTIN, Grandeur et dépendances: The Dilemmas of Gaullist /Foreign Policy, September 1967–april 1968, in: Piers LUDLOW (ed.), *Ostpolitik-Westpolitik: European Integration and the Cold War in Europe, 1965–1973*, London 2007.

37 FES/WBA, NL Brandt, Mapped Nr. 10, Aufzeichnung betr. Gespräch zwischen Stefan Thomas und Christian d'Aumale am 9.08.1967, 17.08.1967.

38 PAAA, B 42, Bd. 982, Aufzeichnung betr. Beziehungen zu den osteuropäischen Staaten, Bonn, 24.04.1967. The idea came apparently after a meeting between de Gaulle and Kiesinger on the fringe of the burial ceremony of Konrad Adenauer (see AN, 5AG1/163, entretien entre le général de Gaulle et le chancelier Kiesinger au Guerzenich, 25.04.1967). See also PAAA, B 21, Bd. 705, Aufzeichnung betr. Stand und Fortentwicklung unserer Beziehungen zu den osteuropäischen Staaten, Bonn, 16.06.1967.

39 »Eine Art französischer Garantien für die Verlässlichkeit der deutschen Haltung oder der polnischen Rückversicherung durch Frankreich könnte [...] die polnische Barriere abtragen. Eine derartige Rückversicherung durch de Gaulle wäre mehr als unsere bisherige Bitte der Erläuterung unserer Politik in osteuropäischen Staaten; sie wäre die Ermutigung zu einer Aktion, die uns nicht schaden, de Gaulle und seiner Rolle schmeicheln könnte«, FES/WBA, NL Bahr, Mapped Nr. 341, Aufzeichnung von Bahr betr. Konsultationsrunde mit dem französischen Staatspräsidenten, Bonn, 7.07.1967.

40 PAAA, B 150, Bd. 108, Fechter an das AA betr. Polen-Reise de Gaulles, Paris, 24.08.1967, Schütz an die Botschaft Paris betr. Interpretation des Begriffes »Rückversicherung der deutschen Politik durch Frankreich«, Bonn, 31.08.1967.

The French President's journey to Poland from 6 to 12 September 1967 nevertheless unraveled a serious Franco-German controversy. If de Gaulle vouched for the Grand Coalition's *Ostpolitik* during his discussions with Polish leaders and incite them to adopt a more conciliatory tone towards the FRG, his declarations on the »Polonity« of Zabrze (formerly Hindenburg) in Silesia or on the »well justified and well determined«<sup>41</sup> borders of Poland provoked an outrage in Bonn where few understood that, by showing support on some Polish claims, de Gaulle vainly hoped to obtain in exchange more flexibility on the German question and more independence from Moscow.

Even though the federal government and the Auswärtiges Amt had a more nuanced interpretation than the German press or refugee organizations, de Gaulle's declarations forced them to face the internal contradictions of their *Ostpolitik*, which still tried to reconcile the (mainly Christian Democrat) supporters of the Hallstein doctrine with the (largely Social Democrat) proponents of a more flexible and audacious policy toward the East<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, the controversy about de Gaulle's declarations reactivated the hesitations and doubts of part of German public opinion about the *Ostpolitik* line of the federal government. The moment was particularly untimely as the attempt to establish a dialogue with the East German authorities at a low administrative level – the so-called Kiesinger-Stoph correspondence – did not bear the expected results and, on the contrary, strengthened the critics of those who refused any official contacts with Pankow<sup>43</sup>. The gap between the coalition partners was further widened by a series of administrative reshuffle at the Chancellery and the Auswärtiges Amt, which seemingly tipped the power scale in favor of the »hardliners«<sup>44</sup>.

French *Ostpolitik* seemed to be losing its momentum as well. After the semi-failure of the Poland's trip, France's attempt to foster East-West détente had little positive echoes in the Soviet Union. The Soviet leaders largely ignored de Gaulle's calls for greater flexibility on the German problem and refused to improve relations with Bonn. On the contrary, the Soviet stance towards the FRG noticeably hardened toward the end of 1967, and even took the form of a true propaganda campaign. Moscow denounced again the rise of neo-Nazism in West Germany in a note in December, and kept adding conditions to the signature of a German-Soviet declaration banning the use of force or condemned Bonn's policies towards West Berlin.

Furthermore, de Gaulle was dissatisfied with the increasing tendency of the Grand Coalition to fall back on old habits in the face of the difficulties posed by Pankow's or Moscow's unwillingness to engage in dialogue<sup>45</sup>. The General was forced to ackno-

41 Charles DE GAULLE, *Discours et Messages*, vol. V, Paris 1970, p. 212.

42 PAAA, B 1, Bd. 336, *Aufzeichnung betr. Staatsbesuch General de Gaulle in Polen vom 6./12.9.1967/Vorläufige Analyse*, Bonn, 14.09.1967; AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, *Statut de l'Allemagne*, vol. 63, *Note a/s des réactions allemandes au voyage du général de Gaulle en Pologne (6–12.09.1967)*, Paris, 12.10.1967.

43 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, *s/s RFA*, vol. 1653, *Note a/s de la politique de Bonn à l'égard des pays de l'Est juillet–octobre 1967*, Paris, 13.10.1967.

44 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, *s/s RFA*, vol. 1531, *TGA de Seydoux à MAE a/s remaniement à l'Auswärtiges Amt*, Bonn, 31.10.1967.

45 FES/WBA, NL Willy Brandt, *Mappe Nr. 10, Aufzeichnung von S. Thomas betr. Gespräch mit*

wledge the limits of Brandt's Eastern and détente policy, but the lack of concrete results of Bonn's *Ostpolitik* was partly imputable to his own failure to successfully alter the negative attitude of the Soviet Union. Couve complained to Brandt about the rigidity of Soviet policy and the general stagnation of the East-West détente process<sup>46</sup>, but there was little he could do to change the situation. France thus remained in the expectancy of a more favorable context for détente.

From a Franco-German perspective, stagnation in *Ostpolitik* was also problematic. In fact, France risked losing her strategic importance for the German *Ostpolitik*. In light of the polemics after de Gaulle's trip to Poland, some in Bonn were indeed starting to question the usefulness of the French backing since it had brought little results. But, it also implied that France might no longer be in the position to bully Bonn into cooperation in other EC issues. For these reasons, some in Paris felt a sense of powerlessness, which Hervé Alphand, General Secretary of the Quai d'Orsay, expressed in his diaries:

»Everything is in a dead end: West Germany is not accepting either the postwar borders or the existence of East Germany, the Soviets prefer the status quo and Brandt still persists with the search for détente with Eastern Europe<sup>47</sup>.«

The mood was hardly more optimistic on the other side of the Rhine. With the exception of the resumption of diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia in January 1967, the signature of a trade agreement with Czechoslovakia and Brandt's visit to Romania, Bonn's *Ostpolitik* initiatives were stalled. The Auswärtiges Amt recognized a few concrete Franco-German realizations such as the constant exchange on *Ostpolitik*, the shielding operation of January 1967 or the constant defense of the West German policy by the French government<sup>48</sup>; but it admitted at the same time that »a closer Franco-German cooperation with a view to common détente efforts towards Eastern Europe is only possible in a limited fashion at the moment«<sup>49</sup>. They rightly noted that a Franco-German cooperation in *Ostpolitik* was only possible to the extent that the Germans were ready to follow de Gaulle's *Ostpolitik* or that their *Ostpolitik* coincided with the French President's<sup>50</sup>.

This was an unlikely event, however. First, there remained persistent disagreements between the French and German government on Western European integra-

d'Aumale, 20. Dezember 1967; PAAA, B 24, Bd. 630, Klaiber und das AA betr. deutsche Ostpolitik in französischer Sicht, Paris, 17.01.1968.

46 AN, 5AG1/163, Entretien Couve de Murville-Brandt, 17.10.1967.

47 »Tout est dans l'impasse [...] l'Allemagne n'acceptant ni les frontières, ni l'existence de l'Allemagne de l'est, Moscou préfère de beaucoup le statu quo; Brandt persiste cependant dans sa recherche de la détente avec l'Est«, Hervé ALPHAND, L'Etonnement d'être: journal 1939-1973, Paris 1977, p. 494.

48 PAAA, B 21, Bd. 726, Aufzeichnung betr. Gebiete der wesentlichen Fortschritte der deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit im Jahre 1967, Bonn, 11.01.1968.

49 PAAA, B 24, Bd. 630, Aufzeichnung betr. praktische Möglichkeiten für die deutsch-französische Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Entspannungspolitik, Januar 1968.

50 PAAA, B 42, Bd. 982, Aufzeichnung betr. deutsch-französische Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Ostpolitik während des Jahres 1967, Bonn, 27.12.1967.

tion policy, which in Brandt's eyes formed the basis for a successful *Ostpolitik*. Second, the German government still did not possess a coherent plan of the role Germany should play within a European security system, which it could collectively stand for with France and the other Western allies and, on the contrary, appeared irresolute. Finally, the international independence de Gaulle had asserted for his country, which he believed gave him a preferential position in the East-West dialogue, constituted another obstacle. If there was little practical prospect for a systematic Franco-German cooperation, there only remained symbolic gestures that would suggest the permanence and closeness of contacts between both governments vis-à-vis the East.

Another obstacle to a common Franco-German *Ostpolitik* was the reorientation of the German policy that relied more and more on economic, commercial, technological and cultural rather than political means to bypass the hostility of the Eastern European countries<sup>51</sup>. Bonn hoped that their desire to develop economic, commercial and technological exchanges with the West would eventually bring about political concessions. However, this reorientation diminished the importance of the French backing. First, it involved bilateral relations between West Germany and her Eastern European Partner, which Bonn could develop without having to rely on Paris. Second, the French support was primarily political. This change worried the diplomats at the Quai d'Orsay, who feared that Germany would definitively outdistance France in Eastern Europe economically. They observed: »If [the Federal Republic] would decide on systematically carrying out these measures, her exchanges – already twice as high as ours – would be considerably stimulated«<sup>52</sup>.

### Setbacks and Disillusions, 1968–1969

At the start of 1968, disappointment about the possibilities of a common approach to *Ostpolitik* and disillusion about its prospects were perceptible on both sides of the Rhine. The beginning of the year was also marked by the return of the German question since the German division more than ever appeared as the greatest obstacle to the pursuit of détente and the establishment of a lasting peace on the European continent. Manfred Klaiber, German ambassador in Paris, reported that de Gaulle showed a renewed interest in the German question, in his mind a key problem, which unless removed, would impede the implementation of his *grand dessein*<sup>53</sup>. French diplomacy believed that the prospects of the German *Ostpolitik* would remain limited as long as Bonn would refuse to compromise on key issues such as the Oder-

51 PAAA, B 43, Bd. 796, Duckwitz an alle Vertretungen betr. Arbeitstagung über Ostpolitik im Auswärtigen Amt; 8.12.1967; FEW/WBA, NL Bahr, Mappe Nr. 40, Thesen zur Osteuropapolitik.

52 »Si [la RFA] se décidait à mettre systématiquement en œuvre de tels moyens, ses échanges – déjà fort importants dans ces pays puisqu'en moyenne ils sont deux fois supérieurs aux nôtres – pourraient se trouver considérablement stimulés«, AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1546, note a/s des relations de la République fédérale avec les pays de l'Est, Paris, 26.01.1968.

53 PAAA, B 150, Bd. 117, Klaiber an das AA betr. deutsch-französische Konsultationsbesprechungen, Paris, 18.01.1967.

Neisse Line or the *Alleinvertretungsanspruch*<sup>54</sup>. French diplomats thus wondered »whether more important concessions from Bonn [on the German question] would free the road for new progress of the German *Ostpolitik* and indirectly that of the French Eastern policy«<sup>55</sup>.

In December 1967, the Centre d'études de politique étrangère, a think tank known to be close to the Quai d'Orsay, published a study on European security models<sup>56</sup>. The study, though not strictly speaking a Franco-German publication, was presented as a preliminary study of the Franco-German study committee for security and defense in Europe in the 1970s that was created after the July 1967 summit. It detailed three alternative scenarios – détente, entente and cooperation – for a reorganization of Europe, which all had the question of German reunification at their core. The study repeated well-know French positions, but it also proposed innovative options and raised the question of how France and Germany could act in concert to push forward German reunification<sup>57</sup>. The study was manifestly read with great interest by Bahr. His top secret note on European security of June 1968 shows an obvious similarity with the French proposals<sup>58</sup>.

Brandt was sending positive signals, too. In a speech held at the SPD congress in March 1968, he embedded German reunification within the establishment of a European peace order, acknowledged the »realities« of two separate German entities and declared that the recognition of the existing borders, in particular the Oder-Neisse, even before the conclusion of peace treaty was an indispensable prerequisite for a successful West German *Ostpolitik*<sup>59</sup>. But Brandt's declarations met with a fierce opposition of the Christian Democrat partner. His observations nonetheless showed that the SPD was determined to move beyond the traditional West German fundamental juridical positions and was, in this respect, more in accordance with French views than the Christian Democrats. They also demonstrated that the rift between the coalition partners was widening.

Brandt's step towards France did not prevent the end of the Franco-German »honeymoon«<sup>60</sup> that ensued from some of his (as it appeared later wrongly reported) declarations a month before at a social-democratic rally, in which he seemingly insulted the French President. The Ravensburg episode, which came close to creating a diplomatic incident<sup>61</sup>, also gave de Gaulle an opportunity to put the Grand Coalition

54 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1641, note a/s des relations de la République fédérale avec les pays de l'Est, Paris, 26.01.1968.

55 »Si des concessions plus importantes de la part de Bonn ne permettraient pas de dégager la voie à de nouveaux progrès de l'Ostpolitik allemande et indirectement celle de la politique orientale française«, PAAA, B 24, Bd. 630, Klaiber an das AA betr. deutsche Ostpolitik in französischer Sicht, Paris, 17.01.1968.

56 Published respectively in: *Politique étrangère*, 6 (1967), p. 519–541 and *Europa-Archiv* 23 (1968), p. 51–64.

57 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s Statut de l'Allemagne, vol. 27, Extrait de la FAZ, La France et le problème allemand, 30.01.1968.

58 AAPD, 1968 II, Dok. 297.

59 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1532, TGA de Seydoux à MAE a/s discours de Brandt à Ravensburg, Bonn, 8.02.1968.

60 Hervé ALPHAND, L'étonnement d'être (as in n. 47), p. 500.

61 The dispatch reporting Brandt's declarations was given to Maurice Couve de Murville during a

on the defensive, especially since Kiesinger and Brandt were expected to pressure France to stop vetoing British membership during the traditional bilateral summit in February 1968.

At the biannual Franco-German summit, the question of British membership and discussions over a Franco-German trade arrangement scheme largely eclipsed *Ostpolitik* issues as the Grand Coalition was decided to find a way out of the deadlock created by de Gaulle's second veto of December 1967. Only between the foreign ministers was the topic discussed more extensively, but it remained within a general presentation of the state of relations for both countries<sup>62</sup>. As the Auswärtiges Amt rightly concluded the bilateral exchange »did not produce new significant standpoints«<sup>63</sup>. About a month later, de Gaulle nonetheless pledged Soviet Ambassador Zorine for the Soviet Union to adopt a »more positive attitude«<sup>64</sup> toward the Federal Republic and underscored that this would be a determinant progress in détente.

But the USSR had other preoccupations, namely the situation in Czechoslovakia where Alexander Dubček had initiated a liberalization movement. The Czech liberalization represented a potentially dangerous evolution for both Pankow and Moscow. Not only did the »Iron Triangle« threaten to fall apart if Czechoslovakia was to eventually abandon its uncompromising position on the Munich Treaty and resume diplomatic relations with Bonn; but the Czech example could further amplify the centripetal forces inside the Communist block and undermine its cohesion. Moscow thus faced the dilemma to either maintain the discipline within its sphere of influence or hold on to détente. For Bonn, the Czech example seemed to confirm the *Ostpolitik* line adopted late 1967 and the assumption that increased economic exchanges would lead to political progress with Eastern Europe.

On 21 August 1968, Soviet troops and their Warsaw Pact allies invaded Czechoslovakia. The Prague Spring was a heavy setback for both the French and the German détente policy as it confirmed the Soviet determination to maintain its sphere of influence. The different reactions to and analysis of the Czech events on both sides of the Rhine profoundly affected bilateral relations. Michel Debré, who had succeeded Couve de Murville as French Foreign Minister weeks earlier, dismissed the Soviet invasion as a mere »course incident«<sup>65</sup> that should not cast doubt on the rightness of the détente policy. The Germans, however, were deeply preoccupied by the Soviet aggression and the following surge of East-West tensions. As a result, they demanded with a renewed force the strengthening of the European Community through further integration progresses and enlargement to include Britain, and of the Atlantic Al-

ceremonial banquet at the Palace de Beaulieu, which had been the official residence of German ambassadors until the Second World War. Profoundly offended, Charles de Gaulle canceled the luncheon invitation of two German ministers scheduled the following day.

62 AN, 5AG1/164, Entretien entre Couve de Murville et Brandt, Paris, 15.02.1968, entretien entre le général de Gaulle et le chancelier Kiesinger, 16.02.1968.

63 PAAA, Bd. 150, Bd. 120, Runderlass betr. Konsultationstreffen Bundeskanzler Kiesinger-General de Gaulle am 15./16.2.1968, Bonn, 19.02.1968.

64 PAAA, B 150, Bd. 122, Aufzeichnung von Frank betr. deutsch-französische Konsultationen am 13.03.1968, Bonn, 14.03.1968.

65 Michel DEBRÉ, *Trois Républiques pour une France. Gouverner autrement, 1962–1970*, Paris 1988, p. 259.



liance, both of which would reinforce western solidarity and cohesion. The French government, on the contrary, expressed scepticism at a reinforcement of NATO, which, Paris believed, would only further solidify the blocs and therefore not serve the purpose of détente. But there was another reason for the French negative reaction. General de Gaulle also resented the pro-Atlantic and, therefore, pro-American reorientation of the Grand Coalition that had until then managed relatively well to conciliate privileged relations with Paris and close contacts with Washington. In Paris, it was interpreted as a rupture of the preferential Franco-German links<sup>66</sup>.

The Czech events largely overshadowed the Franco-German summit of September 1968. The Grand Coalition expected to obtain the French government's support to offset Soviet accusations that Bonn had provoked the invasion with its *Ostpolitik* activism<sup>67</sup>. Yet, de Gaulle did not provide the »psychological support«<sup>68</sup> sought by the Germans and, on the contrary, echoed Soviet remonstrations. He blamed German activities in Czechoslovakia for the Soviet invasion and, at the same time, reproached Bonn its lack of solidarity with France: »We don't have the impression that you have done much in practice to make France and Germans more interdependent above all on their existence, their feelings and their activities«<sup>69</sup>. Some twenty years later, Rheinhard Schmöckel, a close collaborator of Chancellor Kiesinger, described this summit »as the tensest of the overall six consultations between Kiesinger and de Gaulle«<sup>70</sup>. Kiesinger was »broken down, appalled and in an almost pitiful state«<sup>71</sup> and faced »the ruins of his French policy«<sup>72</sup> as Bahr informed Brandt. But, through Kiesinger, Brandt, towards whom suspicion had grown in Paris, was also a target of the Gaullist ire. Statements by both Kiesinger and Brandt on the importance of a preferential Franco-German cooperation could not hide any longer that *Ostpolitik* had become an issue on which accord between Paris and Bonn no longer existed. The events in Czechoslovakia thus put an end to bilateral *Ostpolitik* efforts.

De Gaulle's harsh accusations were more an indication of weakness than of force. The economic and monetary difficulties, which France faced after the social unrests of May 1968, had brought to light the ever-more obvious German power in these areas and the waning French *Grandeur*. Between the lines of the French President's reproaches to Kiesinger, the sense of an increasing German economic and financial superiority was clearly perceptible. From the French viewpoint, this threatened to tip the balance of power within the Franco-German couple in a fashion detrimental to France's senior position. The unwillingness of the Federal government to re-evaluate the German mark during the November monetary crisis, along with a failed Franco-

66 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1533, Note a/s du problème allemand, Paris, 19.02.1969.

67 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1532, Note a/s de l'évolution récente de la politique étrangère allemande, Paris, 11.09.1968.

68 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1532, Seydoux à MAE a/s déclarations de Rainer Barzel, Bonn, 18.09.1968.

69 AN, 5AG1/164, Entretien en tête-à-tête entre Charles de Gaulle et Kurt Georg Kiesinger, 27.09.1968 ; *AAPD*, 1968 II, Dok. 312.

70 ACDP, NL Kiesinger, I–226–A312, Vermerk betr. Deutsch-französische Spannungen im Herbst 1968, Bonn, 30.11.1984.

71 FES/WBA, NL Bahr, Vermerk Egon Bahrs an Willy Brandt, Vermerk, Bonn, 1.10.1968.

72 Ibid.

German cooperation attempt in the oil industry, had reinforced French angst in front of a more powerful, independent and self-confident Federal Republic. Also, even though de Gaulle was reluctant to admit it, his Eastern and détente policy had been discredited by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and France was largely isolated in Europe as a result of her opposition to Britain's membership of the EEC. But, more fundamentally, de Gaulle realized that West Germany was slipping away from his control. All this contributed to the atmosphere of crisis of bilateral relations at the end of 1968, which the Soames Affair of February 1969 had only deepened.

The Grand Coalition was quick to acknowledge that its efforts to normalize its relations with the East were temporarily put on hold and subsequently re-orientated its foreign policy priorities westward, although it still officially reaffirmed the continuation of its policy of détente. The Prague Spring also hastened a strategic reorientation of the German *Ostpolitik*. While its main objectives had been to gradually normalize relations with the Eastern European bloc thanks to »small steps« but at the same time bypass the GDR, the German diplomacy recognized that the key to reunification was not to be found in Prague, Warsaw or Belgrade but in Moscow. As a result, Bonn's roadmap for the future was not to do anything further in Eastern Europe without first sounding out the Soviet government's positions rather than by buying reunification with economic and commercial concessions.

By contrast, the French government intended to pursue its détente and entente policy on the hitherto defined line<sup>73</sup>. The French government was preoccupied with avoiding anything that might lead to a »strengthening of the policy of the blocs«<sup>74</sup> or putting further obstacles in the way of East-West contacts. It furthermore required the federal Republic to carry on with its *Ostpolitik*, and therefore it did not wish for a strengthening of the NATO or of the WEU<sup>75</sup>. The French dislike of the WEU was reinforced by the intermingled problem of the British adhesion. Since 1967, Brandt had promoted contacts between the Six and the applicants in and through the WEU, but, after the Prague Spring, he believed this institution would offer an ideal framework for political consultations between western Europeans and therefore attempted in September 1968 to convoke an extraordinary session of the WEU in order to examine the situation created by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, Brandt's initiative met with a fierce opposition from the French. Beyond de Gaulle's well-known dislike of the WEU, the French rejected any institutionalization of consultations in the WEU which they considered as a Trojan horse designed to advance Britain's EC bid<sup>76</sup>. Therefore, they believed that this offensive for a reinforcement of the WEU structures because of the Czech affair was in part inspired by the desire to indirectly revive the problem of Great Britain's membership to the Communities<sup>77</sup>.

73 PAAA, B 150, Bd. 140, Von Braun an das AA betr. Fortsetzung der französischen Entspannungspolitik, Paris, 8.11.1968.

74 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1979, s/s RFA, vol. 1642, TGD de Alphand a/s conversations Kiesinger-de Gaulle, 16.10.1968.

75 FES/WBA, NL Schmidt, Box. Nr. 7512, Vermerk für H. Schmidt betr. Grundzüge der Außenpolitik Frankreich, Bonn, 18.09.1968.

76 Charles de GAULLE, Lettres, notes et carnets: vol. 11, Paris 1980, p. 297.

77 AD/MAE, EU 1961–70, s/s RFA, vol. 1654, Note a/s du rôle de l'UEO, S/DEC, Paris, 5.09.1968.

French Ambassador François Seydoux perfectly resumed the troubled state of Franco-German relations at the beginning of 1969: »The truth is that we entered into a period of disenchantment, also probably of expectancy. Grand designs were not fulfilled; nothing is however compromised«<sup>78</sup>. Kiesinger was somewhat more categorical when he declared to two journalists of the newspaper »Die Welt« late January 1969 that »as long as de Gaulle rules, there is not much to do with France«<sup>79</sup>.

In fact, Franco-German cooperation in *Ostpolitik* seemed to offer few perspectives during the last months of de Gaulle's presidency. The negative attitude of both Pankow and Moscow rendered all détente efforts pointless and encouraged the CDU, the more-than-ever reluctant *Ostpolitik* partner of the SPD, to return to more orthodox positions<sup>80</sup>. For the German chancellor in particular, it was impossible to continue with France on the same *Ostpolitik* line, although he made clear that his government would move forward as soon as circumstances would allow it<sup>81</sup>. German Ambassador Sigismund von Braun also took a critical stock of de Gaulle's *Ostpolitik*, which in his eyes left little room for a true Franco-German community of interest and only aimed at establishing France's preeminence. According to him, this also explained why the French President took care to measure his relations to Germany and regularly document his distance, dissatisfaction and discord with the German partner<sup>82</sup>. The Quai d'Orsay also acknowledged that France and Germany differed on *Ostpolitik*. They, moreover, observed the gradual emancipation of West Germany from the political constraints and its ability to translate its economic prowess into political power. They also noticed Bonn's increasing readiness to not solely rely on its western allies.

The last summit meeting between de Gaulle and Kiesinger in March 1969 brought about a noticeable amelioration of relations, also because it coincided with the appeasement of the bilateral disputes that had poisoned relations since the fall 1968 and of international relations. During the meetings, French and German analyses of the Soviet policy and of *Ostpolitik* perspectives appeared relatively similar<sup>83</sup>. De Gaulle and Kiesinger acknowledged persistent differences, notably on the issue of Community enlargement, but agreed that only détente would bring about a solution to the German problem. About a month before de Gaulle's departure from power, Franco-German relations were back on track. His resignation in April 1969 closed a chapter

78 »La vérité est que nous sommes entrés, ici, dans une période désenchantement, probablement aussi d'expectative. Les vastes desseins n'ont pas été accomplis. Rien non plus n'a été compromis«, AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970n, s/s RFA, vol. 1533, TGA de Seydoux à MAE a/s RFA au début de la nouvelle année, Bonn 4.01.1969.

79 »Solange de Gaulle regiere, ist, was Frankreich angeht, also nicht viel zu machen«, ACDP, NL Kiesinger, I-226-A008, Hintergrundgespräch mit Herbert Kremp und Lothar Rühl (Die Welt) im Bundeskanzleramt, 23.01.1969. Two weeks later, Kiesinger made a similar statement in a different discussion with two Swiss journalists. See ACDP, NL Kiesinger, I-226-A008, Hintergrundgespräch mit Fred Luschinger und Dr. Wiesner (Neue Zürcher Zeitung) im Bundeskanzleramt, 4.02.1969.

80 AD/MAE, Pactes, vol. 295, TGA de Seydoux à MAE a/s congrès CDU-programme d'action, Bonn, 8.11.1968.

81 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1610, TGA de Seydoux à MAE, Bonn, 30.11.1969.

82 PAAA, NL von Braun, Bd. 131, Aufzeichnung betr. französische Ostpolitik (o.D).

83 AD/MAE, Pactes, vol. 295, TGD de Tiné a/s entretiens franco-allemandes des 13–14.03.1969.

in Franco-German relations but détente and *Ostpolitik* remained at the core of bilateral cooperation between his successor, Georges Pompidou, and Chancellor Brandt.

### Conclusion

The arrival of a Grand Coalition, eager to resuscitate the Paris-Bonn axis and to implement a more practical, French-inspired *Ostpolitik* had revived de Gaulle's hopes for an independent Europe with the Franco-German tandem at its core in order to kick start the reorganization of the European system he strived to achieve. But the noticeable amelioration of Franco-German relations under the Grand Coalition proved more climatic than substantial and the disputes and misunderstandings, notably on détente, *Ostpolitik* and enlargement, accumulated over the years. As under the previous government, reconciling French and German foreign policy interests remained an attempt to »squaring the circle«<sup>84</sup>.

Nevertheless, there was a noticeable, if only superficial rapprochement between the French and the German détente policy. Exemplary was Bahr's combination of the Tutzing slogan of 1963 with de Gaulle's triptych in »rapprochement, entente and cooperation«, a manifest proof of the Gaullist influence on German *Ostpolitik* thoughts<sup>85</sup>. This rapprochement was undermined by several ambiguities, however. Certainly, both Brandt's and de Gaulle's versions of *Ostpolitik* aimed at the gradual establishment of a new pan-European order; they assumed that it was first necessary to improve relations with Moscow and then with the satellites; both also acted on the assumption that bilateral contacts were more effective than multilateral contacts and endorsed a policy of bridging of East and West<sup>86</sup>. But the Auswärtiges Amt was well aware of the different premises of the French and German *Ostpolitik*. While Germany faced distrust in the East and used de Gaulle's France as a moral caution, the French President presented himself as the classic warrant of Europe's security against Germany and reserved for himself the role of principal intermediary between both parts of Europe. Whereas Germany reserved the final settlement of its border to the signature of a peace treaty, de Gaulle described the Oder-Neisse Line as definitively settled. Germany proclaimed the Munich Agreement void after Hitler's aggression against Czechoslovakia; de Gaulle affirmed it had never been valid. Germany's *Ostpolitik* rested on the cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance; de Gaulle pursued a policy of independence that aimed at a loosening of the alliance. Indeed, as a German diplomat concluded, »the area of cooperation is narrow«<sup>87</sup>. Despite his admiration for de Gaulle, Bahr himself was as early as January 1967 aware of the operational limits set to common Franco-German initiatives in the East and thus recommended that Germany should take the decisive steps alone<sup>88</sup>. Couve de Murville, while clearly over-

84 François SEYDOUX, Dans l'intimité franco-allemande. Une mission diplomatique, Paris 1977, p. 25.

85 FES/WBA, NL Bahr, Bd. 400, Thesen zur Osteuropapolitik, Dezember 1967.

86 PAAA, B 42, Bd. 982, Aufzeichnung betr. deutsch-französische Zusammenarbeit im Bereich der Ostpolitik während des Jahres 1967, Bonn, 27.12.1967.

87 Ibid.

88 FES/WBA, NL Bahr, Mappe 441, Aufzeichnung betr. Konsultation des Herrn Bundeskanzlers mit dem französischen Präsidenten am 13./14.01.1967, Bonn, 11.01.1967.

estimating France's possibilities in the East, also acknowledged the radically different circumstances under which France and Germany could implement their détente policy<sup>89</sup>.

Furthermore, Paris and Bonn disagreed on the function of bilateral cooperation for the implementation of the *Ostpolitik* of the Federal government. For Brandt and Bahr, Paris's role was limited to a moral and political support that should prevent isolation of the German government and to facilitate its move in the East<sup>90</sup>. Brandt also did not hesitate to instrumentalize *Ostpolitik* as a federative theme since it was one of the rare areas on which France's and Germany's viewpoints did not clash fundamentally.

On the contrary, de Gaulle saw the Grand Coalition's *Ostpolitik* as the fulfillment of his détente policy<sup>91</sup>. De Gaulle knew that the implementation of his détente-entente-cooperation scheme largely depended on the FRG's ability to normalize its relations with Eastern Europe. By supporting Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, he wanted first and foremost to promote the German *Ostpolitik* that suited him best. This implied that »Bonn should fully subscribe to the fundamental principles of the Eastern policy of France«<sup>92</sup>. For the Federal authorities, »a common *Ostpolitik* could only be possible insofar as it was a compromise between equal partners«<sup>93</sup>.

This discrepancy explains some of the ambiguities of the French attitude. For instance, if the French government actively supported the Grand Coalition's *Ostpolitik*, he also distanced himself from certain German thesis, notably on the Oder-Neisse border<sup>94</sup>. Moreover, de Gaulle regularly refused Kiesinger's or Brandt's proposal of common activities in Eastern Europe because what was important for him was not so much the realization of common projects but the political community of views. The French diplomacy thus appeared as a tightrope walker, trying to balance both independence and interdependence.

Therefore, the French and German approach to *Ostpolitik* was different. Moreover, if bilateral political cooperation on *Ostpolitik* worked relatively well – it was extensively discussed at each Franco-German meeting – , economic and cultural rivalry in Eastern Europe increased, most of the time in favor of the Germans. Franco-German political rivalry towards the Soviet Union also tended to augment as Paris was afraid of losing its status of privileged interlocutor vis-à-vis Moscow to the advantage of a more self-confident Germany. Thus, while encouraging German *Ost-*

89 AD/MAE, Pactes, vol. 294, TGD de J. De Beaumarchais, 28.02.1967.

90 PAAA, B 21, Aufzeichnung betr. Entwicklung des deutsch-französischen Verhältnisses, Bonn, 30.03.1967.

91 PAAA, B 42, Bd. 982, Klaiber an das AA betr. Auswirkungen der neuen deutschen Ostpolitik in französischer Sicht, Paris, 13.03.1967.

92 »Bonn doit souscrire sans réserve aux principes fondamentaux de la politique orientale de la France«, AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1608, note a/s entretien de Toffin et Puaux avec Markscheffel, Paris, 13.12.1966.

93 »Eine gemeinsame Politik ist nur möglich, wenn sie das gemeinsame Produkt gleichberechtigter Partner ist«, PAAA, B 150, Bd. 88, Aufzeichnung von Meyer-Lindenberg betr. Voraussetzungen und Möglichkeiten der deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit, Bonn, 18.11.1966.

94 AD/MAE, EU 1961–1970, s/s RFA, vol. 1608, Note schématique sur les rapports franco-allemands, Paris, 22.11.1967.

*politik*, de Gaulle was undermining France's – often illusory – mediator position between Eastern and Western Europe on the one hand and between Germany and its Eastern European neighbors on the other. By pursuing a pro-active *Ostpolitik*, the FRG was no longer a mere object of the Cold War but had become henceforth a full player. In fact, the slow rebalancing of power relations within the Franco-German couple also limited bilateral cooperation in *Ostpolitik*-related issues.

The year 1967 marked both the apex and the decline of Franco-German cooperation on *Ostpolitik*. It coincided with the revitalization of the spirit of the Élysée Treaty and of bilateral collaboration but largely failed to translate into concrete realizations. The increasing irresolution of the Grand Coalition's *Ostpolitik*, constantly torn between the more conservative Christian Democrat and the more audacious Social Democrat approach, also made it difficult for the French to fully identify with Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Thus, a *common* Franco-German policy toward the East remained by the end of de Gaulle's presidency was, at best, a remote possibility and, at worst, wishful thinking. In August 1969, Kiesinger concluded, with a hint of dejection, »we hoped we could do something concerted with the French, but unfortunately not much got out of it«<sup>95</sup>.

95 »Man habe gehofft, etwas mit den Franzosen gemeinsam zu machen, doch sei daraus leider nichts geworden«, AAPD, 1969 II, Dok. 257, 896.