

**Nicolas Badalassi, Jean-Philippe Dumas (dir.),  
Reconstruire l'Europe 45 ans après Yalta. La charte  
de Paris (1990), Paris (Éditions du CTHS) 2020, 166 p.,  
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The year 1990 is considered the key year of the so-called »Wendezeit«, the epoch-making years of upheaval 1989–1992. With German reunification, the Two-plus-Four Treaty, the German-Polish Border Treaty and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty), the central course was set for a territorial, military, economic, and political reorganisation of Europe after the end of the East-West conflict. In view of their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, these events have received widespread attention in public and academic discussion, and the debate on the role of central political actors at the end of the East-West conflict has also been rekindled. Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to the Paris Charta, since it is the final document of the CSCE special summit conference on the reshaping of the European continent after the end of the Cold War. The »Magna Charta of Freedom«, as Chancellor Helmut Kohl called it, was an attempt by leading heads of state and government to overcome the East-West conflict at a normative level and to establish a forum for dialogue and cooperation between East and West after the end of the bloc confrontation. It was to enshrine democracy, human rights, the rule of law, economic freedom and cooperation as fundamental principles for the new European order.

This volume aims to lead the »Charter of Paris for a New Europe«, as it is called in full, out of its public and scholarly shadowy existence and, in doing so, also to subject the significance of the CSCE process for the reorganisation of Europe after the end of the Cold War to critical appraisal. The editors and authors, all proven French experts in the study of the history of the East-West conflict and the Helsinki process, aim to (re)place the Charter in the long lines of the East-West conflict on the one hand and to provide a historical analysis of the history of the Charter's origins on the other. The focus is almost exclusively on the role of the French government in the negotiation process and the ideas of the *équipe* Mitterrand for post-Cold War Europe. The account is based in part on academic analysis, with also a great deal of space taken up by oral history and the presentation of unedited files. An introduction that would acquaint the reader with the central questions and methodological premises of the volume is missing, as is a summarising conclusion.

Accordingly, the volume has a three-part structure. The first part consists of three essays that contextualise and substantiate the following oral history part. In the first, primarily descriptive essay, Pierre Grosser attempts to re-locate the Charter in the chronology of the end of the East-West conflict. He argues that



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the scant attention paid to the Charter does not do justice to its subject matter, because »elle éclaire également l'évolution des interprétations faites de ce tournant majeur de l'histoire contemporaine« (p. 5). The important normative contribution of the Charter in the reorganisation of Europe is underestimated, as is its contribution to the important institutionalisation of the CSCE/OSCE in 1991, as Grosser explains. The Charter could also be an important guideline for European policy for today's politicians.

In the second essay, Frédéric Bozo knowledgeably illuminates the »vision mitterrannique« for the reshaping of Europe after the Cold War. Mitterrand had always followed a »claire vision de comment dépasser ›Yalta«« (p. 18), which did not develop spontaneously in 1989/1990, but had been the central guideline of his foreign policy actions since 1981. This was based on de Gaulle's pan-European idea of a »Europe européenne«: a strong role for Europe as a mediator between the blocs in overcoming the East-West conflict. The expansion of European integration had always been the core of Mitterrand's vision.

The third essay by Nicolas Badalassi takes a closer look at the Charter itself, its contents and its origins. According to Badalassi, the Charter was not a product of 1990, but the result of »un double processus«: on the one hand, it was closely linked to the goals of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and perpetuated them; on the other hand, it was also a result of developments in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev from 1986 onwards, which, according to Badalassi, breathed new life into the CSCE process after years of standstill. It could therefore be seen as »un prolongement de la ›Nouvelle pensée‹ gorbatchévienne« (p. 34).

All three essays are at least of an appealing standard, and the reader is provided with clear and comprehensible theses. However, it is very regrettable that none of the essays is primarily based on the evaluation of archival files; new files on French attitudes to the creation of the Charter are not included, despite the direct involvement of the Archives du ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères. In addition, the selection of the essays and their topics seems somewhat arbitrary; the reference to the actual subject matter, the Paris Charter, is on the whole rather slight. One would also have liked to see more essays on the history of the Charter's negotiation, the French preliminary decision-making process or the history of the Charter's impact.

The second main part focusses on oral history and consists of a total of seven eyewitness interviews conducted by the two main editors Nicolas Badalassi and Jean-Philippe Dumas in June and July 2020 with direct participants in the French negotiating team. The selection is characterised by the clear intention to represent a variety of institutional perspectives and, above all, to allow central actors from the »second row« to have their say. Among others, Hubert Védrine and Sophie-Caroline de Margerie were members of Mitterrand's immediate entourage, whereas Jean Musitelli



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and Pierre Morel were senior staff members of the then Foreign Minister Roland Dumas.

The aim of these interviews is to open up new perspectives in the decision-making process »pour l'écriture d'une histoire au plus près des événements« (p. 46). This goal is certainly achieved. The conversations provide an exciting look behind the scenes of French diplomacy and its negotiating strategy in this decisive phase at the end of the East-West conflict. Above all, one learns a lot about the background and motivations behind Mitterrand's »European Confederation Project«, which he saw as closely linked to the Paris Charter. Moreover, the interviews confirm Bozo's theses, according to which Mitterrand's policy in the years 1989–1991 followed a long-term vision and a clear plan for a stable reorganisation of Europe, at the centre of which was the expansion of European integration.

The third part consists of a total of 19 documents from previously unpublished files. They provide a direct insight into the negotiation process and the different parts of the Vienna CSCE Conference on the preparation of the Charter, into the internal discussion process of the French government as well as into the different positions of their partners. They are a useful supplement to the oral history part.

This volume on the Charter of Paris makes an important contribution to a hitherto largely neglected topic: the role of the CSCE process in the reorganisation of Europe at the end of the East-West conflict. It expands previous explanatory approaches in a nuanced way. In addition, the reader gains new and exciting insights into the role and attitudes of the French government around President Mitterrand during the *Wendezeit*. The interviews with contemporary witnesses as well as the newly published files on the process of creating the Charter are a gain. At times, one wishes for a better substantial and methodological foundation, a greater thematic range and coherence; in particular, one may criticise the selection and the empirical foundation of the essays. Nevertheless, the volume can be recommended above all to those readers who are looking for new (French) perspectives and sources on the history of the end of the East-West conflict.



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