

Reviewed by Stanley Hoffmann, Foreign Affairs

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American readers who do not read German should at least know about this impressive book on France and German reunification. Most strikingly, it shows how the U.S. perspective on the momentous events of 1989-90 differs from the European one. Accounts written by U.S. officials tell a triumphalist story of a wise American leadership that guided events and skillfully pushed the other actors in the directions that the United States favored. Schabert's story, needless to say, is far more complex. By focusing on French diplomacy, he not only shows how purposeful and largely successful Francois Mitterrand and his aides were but also demolishes the legend that Mitterrand was reluctant to accept German reunification. The French did pose certain conditions, he argues, the most important one being that a united Germany must be encased in Europe and devoted to European integration (including a single European currency). This book is by far the most impressively documented volume on this subject, based on extensive archival work and interviews with key actors on the French and German sides, and Schabert's delineation of their positions is incisive and subtle. (Never have the differences between Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher on Germany and Europe been more clearly described, nor the continuity of France's Germany policy between Charles de Gaulle and Mitterrand made more obvious.) One hopes this book will quickly find a translator and a publisher in the United States