

July 16<sup>th</sup> 1990

Dear Prime Minister,

Please allow me to share with you some of my thoughts upon reading Charles Powell's memo on the Germans drawn up after your March meeting at Chequers. The document was published, as you know, both in The Independent on Sunday and in Der Spiegel.

1. I realise that the document was not written for general release, and was meant to throw a light mainly on the historical rather than purely on the current perspectives relating to Germany. None the less, I feel it offers an imperfect guide to policy-making. In addition, publication in full in Germany's top news magazine, with a circulation of 1 million, has, as you can imagine, added to the general cynicism here about Britain's policies towards Germany, already kindled by last week's interview in The Spectator by Mr Ridley.
2. The prominence given to the Germans' negative traits suggests a somewhat imbalanced and prejudiced view of Germany and the Germans. Despite the memories of two world wars, this may not be the best starting point for policy. Certainly, the stated attributes – Angst etc – are present in "the German character", if one may use that generalisation. The memo exaggerates the negative qualities however by failing to note that opposite traits do co-exist – assertiveness is accompanied by a certain lack of self-confidence, for instance – and by ignoring completely the "good" characteristics. Thrift, Precision, pride in doing a job well, capacity for hard work, organisational talent – virtues of which you, Prime Minister, are known personally to be very much in favour – are character traits which run through[sic] and influence German history, whether during the Third Reich, the post-war recovery, or the present drive to reunification.
3. Some of the observations in the memo about present-day Germany are false. The tendency for Germans to triumph about reunification or "to take credit for unification themselves" is in fact not very high. Apart from the revelry over Germany's World Cup victory, there have been no flags out on West German streets. In utterances by ordinary people or by political leaders such as Mr Kohl, it is above all Mr Gorbachev who gets the credit for making unity possible. It is wrong to suggest that the Germans have been unworried about Mr Gorbachev's position vis-à-vis East Germany. Far from proposing any move to "just shove the Russian troops out", the Bundeskanzleramt has been stressing for several months the need for a three to four year transition period for removing the Soviet troops. This was formalised in Mr Kohl's agreement with Mr Gorbachev today.
4. The reference in the Conclusion about British post-war policies on a united Germany is a central point, made belatedly and rather grudgingly. One awkward characteristic which goes unremarked in the memo is the Germans' attachment to legalism. They remember that Britain and other western powers gave binding support to a united Germany "with a liberal-democratic constitution[sic]...integrated within the European community" in the Deutschlandvertrag of 1955. Your government has on occasion acted as if this undertaking was valid only at a time when unification was plainly impossible.
5. I write, in a personal capacity, as a journalist who has recently published a book on Germany. I argue that unification – for which hardly anyone was prepared – will bring pitfalls as well as opportunities, both in Germany and abroad. Since you obviously have a great and growing interest in the subject, I enclose a copy in the hope that you will have time to read it.
6. I would add that my insight into the paradoxical ways of Germany have been heightened by the fact that my wife is German. We met in Brighton (my home town) in 1971, while she was

on a language course very similar to the ones attended by the German students who were attacked in the town recently after the England v. Germany football match. It is disappointing that so much anti-German prejudice persists in England. It would be tragic if, just at the time when barriers are coming down between East and West, such resentment should flare up again.

With best wishes,

David Marsh