The 1989-1990 German Unification process in Dutch Government Perspective: An analysis of the response of the Dutch Government on the Unification process of East- and West-Germany in 1989-1990

Wolters, Sebastiaan Jacobus Gijsbertus

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

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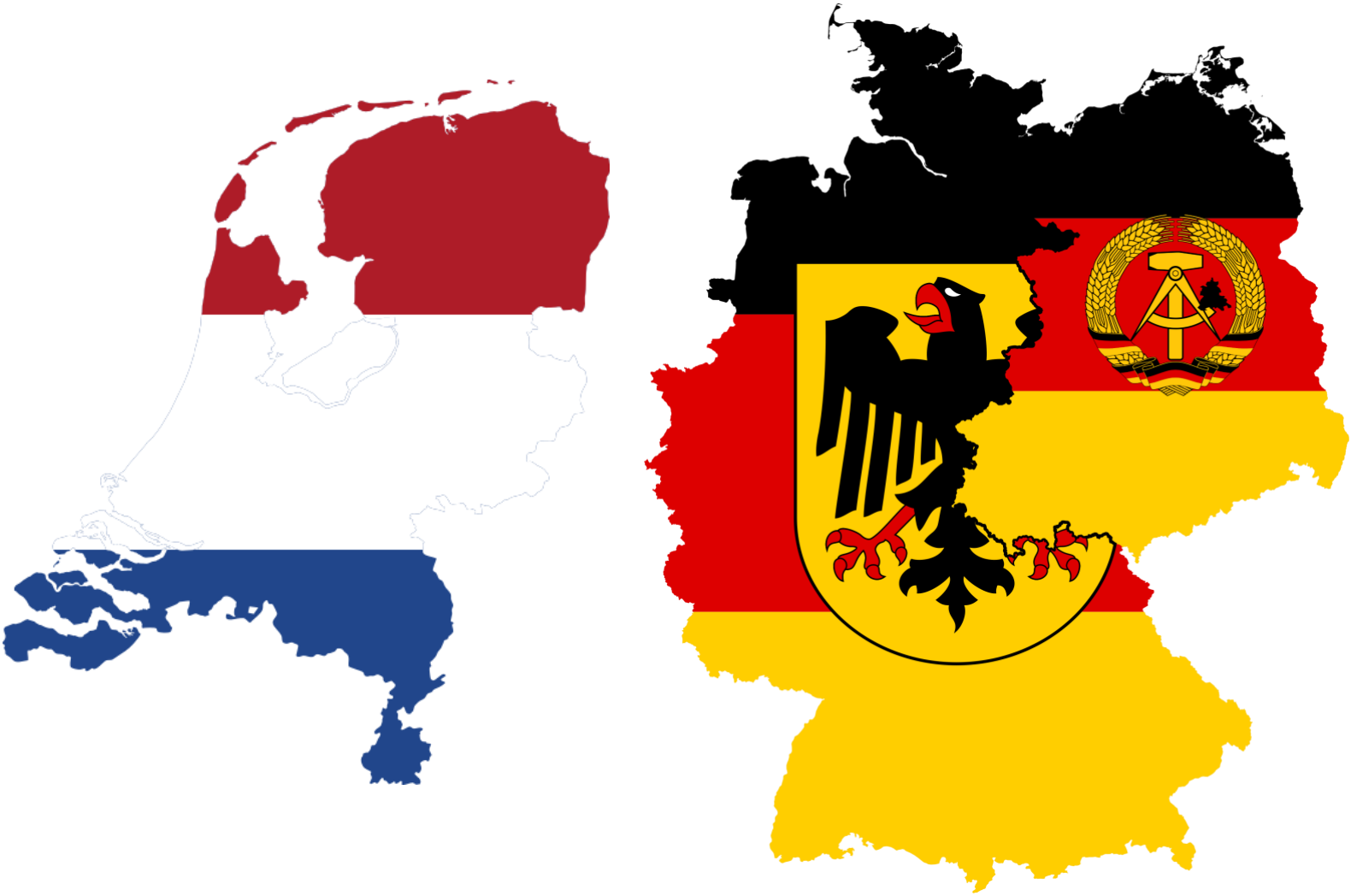

S.J.G. Wolters

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Illustration 1 (front page): Map of the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic shown with their respective flags. ('Flag-Map of the Netherlands/Germany' 2015)

Acknowledgements

Dear reader,

This thesis on the response of the Dutch government on the German unification process in 1989-1990 was written in the spring of 2024 to conclude the Master of Arts International Relations program, specialization Global Order in Historical Perspective, at Leiden University. This year the world will celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Although history is far from over, and sometimes it seems we have a new cold war today, with this thesis I would like to commemorate the optimism and positivity of those years.

The liberal world order, which 'won' the Cold War, is losing ground. It was in the late 1980's that the American hegemony was formed and took its place in the unipolar global order. The Dutch government, led by prime minister Ruud Lubbers at the time, was a keen supporter of this Atlantic course of international politics. It was in these years that the status quo was changed, which makes it such an interesting time to analyse and dive into. I chose this topic for several reasons. First, my interest in history and international politics. Combing through books, articles, archives and doing research is something I really enjoy. Reading documents which were classified for 20 years at the Dutch National Archive is a mesmerizing experience. Secondly, ever since I saw a parody of Lubbers by Dutch comedian Andre van Duin as a little boy, I was fascinated by Ruud Lubbers. Reading about him in the context of this thesis was someway a trip down memory lane.

Lastly, some words of appreciation and gratitude. Writing this thesis would not have been possible without the support of my girlfriend Merel Gorter, my parents and friends. I want to thank them for their support during the challenging and sometimes stressful period over the last six months. Furthermore, I express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor dr. Brian Shaev for his patience, guidance and help writing this thesis. Naturally, I alone bear the responsibility of the conclusion, all statements, claims and suggestions in this thesis.

Bas Wolters Lugdunum-Batavorum, May 22nd, 2024.

Contents

Abbreviations

CDA	Christen-Democratisch Appèl (Dutch Christian-democratic Party)
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
EC	European Communities
EPC	European Political Co-operation
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GEMU	German Economic and Monetary Union
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid (Dutch Labour Party)
SU	Soviet Union
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WEU	Western European Union
WU	Western Union

Introduction

In March 2023 the multifaceted history of international relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Kingdom of the Netherlands reached a milestone. During a bilateral ministerial conference, the government leaders, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the Dutch prime-minister Mark Rutte, affirmed the bond between their nations and *"the strong friendship between [their] peoples and countries"* (Rijksoverheid 2023). Scholz declared: "*Our bilateral relations cannot be closer than they already are*" [i](Scholz 2023). Rutte reiterated that: *"This cooperation has its roots in a deep friendship which has existed for a long time"* [ii](Rutte 2023). These declarations of cordial relations between Scholz and Rutte show that the bilateral relations between Germany and The Netherlands were tight during their conference in early 2023. However, as with any relationship, the German-Dutch cooperation has not always been as easy. This thesis focusses on one of the most remarkable events in the modern history of these two European neighbours: The Unification process of East- and West-Germany in 1989-1990 in perspective of the Dutch government.

On the 9th of November of this year, it is 35 years ago that the East-German party secretary for information and media, Günter Schabowski, announced the cabinet decision to allow citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to cross the border into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and West-Berlin ('Press Conference Held by Günter Schabowski (Berlin, 9 November 1989)' 1989). Within hours tens of thousands of East-Berlin citizens flooded through the checkpoints at the border into West-Berlin. Following a period of 28 years in which the city was divided by the Berlin Wall as an integral part of the Cold War division of Germany. Later that evening the West-German chancellor Helmut Kohl declared the opening of the border *"A historical moment."* [iii](*NRC Handelsblad* 1989a, 1). He further stated: "*We Germans will face the challenge. I am sure that he unity [of the two German states] will eventually be reached."* [iv](ibid.). With that statement Kohl immediately put the unification of Germany on the agenda.

Suddenly and dramatically the Iron Curtain between East and West had fallen. It was certain that Germany would play a central role in the geopolitical, military and economic landscape that was changing the status quo of the Cold War (Verheyen 2018, 6). The opening of the border between East- and West-Germany and their intended unification undermined all certainties of Germany of the previous forty years (Verheyen and Søe 2019, 11). It was, however, not the first time that uncertainties on German unity arose.

Since the first unification of Germany in 1871, the matter of how to incorporate the German state within the European balance of power became of great importance. Political scientist Dirk Verheyen argues in his book 'The German Question' that *"A united Germany is inevitably a powerful Germany."* (Verheyen 2018, 7). He defines the 'German Question' in four elements: German identity, unity, power and Germany's role and place in international affairs. Although all four are intertwined, the author argues, Germany's power in political, military and economic perspective, and role and place within international affairs are the most important for its partners and neighbours ibid., 7). In the period between 1871 and 1945 the 'German Question' had major consequences.

After two devastating world wars, over the hegemony in Europe and beyond, resulted in the occupation and division of Germany into four occupation zones, and subsequently into two states, the FRG (West-Germany) and the GDR (East-Germany) (Thomaneck and Niven 2001, 2). The division of Germany became the capstone of the postwar order in Europe. With the end of the Cold War and the prospect of German unity, the 'German Question' was back on the agenda. The uncertainty of the role and power of a united Germany within the existing Atlantic safety arrangements and European political cooperation projects, led to unease and anxiety among Germany's neighbours and partners in November 1989. Especially for the Netherlands, where lingering Second World War traumas and anti-German sentiments prominently resurfaced among Dutch politicians and citizens when the call for unification was heard (Verheyen and Søe 2019, 56).

These sentiments are illustrated by the comments of the Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek. He declared on the 10th of November that he was "*scared to death*"[v] if the developments in the GDR would proceed peacefully (*Algemeen Dagblad* 1989, 9). He added: *"reunification should be a result of further integration of the European Communities."* [vi](*De Volkskrant* 1989, 5). Other expressions of concern could be read in the country's newspapers in the days after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Columnist J.L. Heldring commented in 'NRC Handelsblad': *"Can the European Communities […] handle an even bigger Germany?"* [vii](Heldring 1989, 14). And in the 'Volkskrant' journalist Anet Bleich asked: *"What would be the democratic degree of the German state or states?"* [viii] before claiming the existence of *"the filthy nationalism which still lives between the Rhein and the Elbe."* [ix](Bleich 1989). In short, the events in East- and West-Germany reopened the debate on the German question and brought back feelings of mistrust and unease in the Netherlands.

In this thesis I specifically focus on the response of the Dutch cabinet on that 'German Question'. I answer the research question: What was the Dutch government's policy and how did it respond on the West/East German unification between November 1989 and October 1990? To answer this question, I will address several sub-questions. First, I analyse the broader historical context of Dutch-German bilateral relations. Next, I focus on the direct aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Were the Dutch prepared for the developments in Germany and how did they respond? The second chapter is dedicated to the search of an answer by the Dutch government on the question of German unity. In this phase the 'if'-question of the German unification stood central. If the GDR and the FRG were to unite what would the Dutch response be? Lastly, I analyse the response and policies of the Dutch government after the initial phases in late 1989 and early 1990. In this third phase the 'how'-question on German unification stood central. What was the response and policy of the Dutch government when German unity became a reality?

Relevance

Much scholarly work has been dedicated to the events prior to and following the Fall of the Berlin Wall, as to their impact on our world and international relations. By answering the research question and sub-questions, this thesis puts forward a new angle in the discussion on international politics and relations during the German unification process in 1989-1990. This thesis will also contribute to a greater understanding of the historical context in which the cultural and economic ties between the neighbouring countries are vital for the course of Dutch foreign policy.

This thesis contributes in an academic context to the ongoing debate on the 'German Question' among scholars and politicians. Even today there is discussion on the role of Germany within the European Union. This thesis contributes to the knowledge on the end of the Cold War and the behaviour of state actors in bilateral relations and within international organizations such as NATO and the EC. Analysing Dutch government foreign policy contributes in a societal way to the legitimacy, accountability and openness of the government. Answering the how and why, on Dutch foreign policy on the German unification in 1989-1990, is the goal of this research. It is thereby vital to consider the historical bilateral relations of the Netherlands and Germany.

Methodology

To answer the research question of this historical source-based archival research, I will use a broad set of primary and secondary resources. Firstly, the minutes of the Dutch cabinet meetings, which are classified for a period of 20 years, are a valuable source of new information ('Algemene Aanwijzingen Inzake Aangelegenheden van de Ministerraad En Onderraden - BWBR0005471' 1992). The minutes entail the entire scope of this thesis and offer a conclusive report of the internal discussions of the Dutch cabinet (Ministerraad 1989-1990). Secondly, the coded messages of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These messages are vital to grasp the extent of the information which was available for the Dutch cabinet and government throughout the unification process. They consist of the diplomatic traffic between embassies and the Ministry in The Hague and show

the direct communication between Dutch ambassadors and Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek (Inventaris van Het Code-Archief van Het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, (1961) 1985–1990 (1998)). These primary sources are available for research at the Dutch National Archive. These data sets have not been analysed on this matter before and provide new insides on the foreign policy of the Dutch government concerning this subject.

Additionally, I use primary sources such as newspaper articles, parliament minutes and television broadcasts to create a broader image of the subject. These sources are further complemented by wide variety of academic and non-academic secondary sources to embed this research in a strong literary framework. Complementary to the beforementioned sources I use the autobiography of Dutch prime minister Ruud Lubbers, the biographies of the Dutch minister of foreign affairs Hans van den Broek and of the German chancellor Helmut Kohl, television interviews, articles on Germany's history and unification process, several illustrations, and other books and publications to create a full framework. By analysing, combining and comparing these sources I formulate an answer to the research question and sub-questions of this thesis.

Terminology and scope

The period and terminology on Germany's path to unity have been a matter of great debate among scholars, historians, politicians and journalist. Professor of German history Bill Niven and scholar of philosophy Jurgen Thomaneck have formulated definitions and timeframes for the end of the Cold War in the book 'Dividing and Uniting Germany'. The merging of the two German states is often referred to as the German 'reunification'. However, Niven and Thomaneck argue the GDR and FRG were politically, geographically and demographically created after the second world war. The division of Germany was a product of the four allied victors on Nazi-Germany. Although the topographic borders of East- and West-Germany fall within the 1937 borders of Germany, it is "*an historically inappropriate implication*" to imply that the states were united before (Thomaneck and

Niven 2001, 69). Therefore, I will use the term 'unification' or 'unity' to refer to the merging of the two German states in this thesis. In quotes I will use the original term as used by the actor.

The term 'Die Wende' is often used as a synonym for the changes in the GDR, which culminated in the unification of Germany on October 3rd, 1990. When 'Die Wende' started and ended has been a matter of debate. Some argue that the changes in East-Germany started in 1985, when Gorbachev announced the new policies of openness (glasnost) and reform (perestroika). Others argue that the signs of changes in the GDR were visible in the winter of 1988-1989, when the first demonstrations appeared in East-German cities (Thomaneck and Niven 2001, 68). However, as this thesis analyses the response of the Dutch government on the German unification process, I will start my research on the 9th of November 1989. On that day the Iron Curtain was opened which suddenly brought the 'German Question' under attention of the Dutch public and politicians. The scope will range until the 3rd of October 1990, the date on which the constitutional and legal union of the East- and West-Germany entered force (Szabo 1994, xiv). From that date on the political unity of Germany was a fact.

Historiography

The German unification in 1990 is not an isolated event in the history of Germany and the Netherlands. The response of the Dutch government on the unification process in 1989-1990 cannot be seen separately from the historic, economic, and political ties that connect the countries. In this section I dive into the historical context of Dutch foreign policy regarding Germany.

Since the formation of the Dutch republic in the 16th century the Netherlands was surrounded by three main European powers: England, France and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The German eastern neighbours of the Netherlands were not of any particular concern for the safety of the Dutch republic, as the territories of the Holy Roman Empire were politically fragmented and not a continuous threat for the Netherlands. Unlike England with whom the Dutch fought several wars over the power of the seas and France, which occupied the

Netherlands during the Napoleonic era, and was an enduring continental threat to the Dutch territories. The fragmented Holy Roman Empire was, due to its lack of political unity and centralized government, more of a protector than an adversary for the Netherlands (Pekelder 2015, 59). This changed halfway the 19th century.

After the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, the European powers at the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) created a de-centralized German Confederation (Verheyen and Søe 2019, 10). The new German Confederation included the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and after 1839 the Dutch province Limburg. The Dutch king was the Grand Duke of Luxembourg and Duke of Limburg (Pekelder 2015, 65). The incorporation of these territories directly involved the Netherlands with the developments of Germany. The Dutch government was wary of involvement in the internal German struggles and feared growing Prussian expansionism. After the dissolvement of the German Confederation in 1866 the political and territorial connection of the Netherlands to the German nation came to an end (ibid.). However, in an era of geopolitical instability, growing nationalism, and rising powers the Dutch could not evade the rise of its eastern neighbour (Hellema 2010, 43). From the 1860's onwards European international politics was dominated by the expansion and unification of Germany (ibid.).

An awakened neighbour

After three wars of unification the German Empire was established in 1871. This new empire shook the balance of power in Europe and created rising concerns in its neighbouring countries (Verheyen and Søe 2019, 11). For the Netherlands this was a gamechanger in the German-Dutch bilateral relations. No longer was its eastern neighbour a politically fragmented confederation, but a strong centralized empire. Professor of new Dutch history at the University of Münster, Jacco Pekelder, argues that the idea that the existence of the Dutch Kingdom could be threatened from the east was a new and disconcerting feeling for the Dutch. The new Germany had become a Dutch problem and would remain that throughout the 20th century (Pekelder 2015, 60). Wedged

between Germany, England and France, the Netherlands adopted a strict foreign policy of neutrality, non-commitment and non-participation to maintain its independence and colonial empire (Mallinson 2010, 7). Preserving its neutrality in the complex arena of international politics became a proving task for the Dutch government.

In the years before the First World War (1914 - 1918) the Dutch economy had grown largely dependent on trade with the German hinterland. In 1913 76% of the goods processed in the Rotterdam harbour were either going to or coming from Germany. The Netherlands, with its strict policy of neutrality, was conflicted about the growing dependency on the eastern neighbour. The economic growth, wealth and trade were welcome, however, the implications of the economic dependency on Germany were feared (Pekelder 2015, 68). The strategic position of the Netherlands on the edge of the European continent made it Germany's lifeline. The Rhine River and harbour of Rotterdam were vital for Germany's access to the sea and the continuance of trade in case of war (Wielenga 2020, 78). When the First World War started the Netherlands remained neutral, however, the consequences of its economic dependency on Germany soon became clear.

Balancing neutrality

While the Dutch government was doing everything in its power to keep its neutral position in the balance between the adversary countries, the domestic economy felt heavy repercussions. The establishment of a naval blockade and laying of sea-mine fields by the British Navy and the following German submarine warfare effectively made it impossible for Dutch vessels to access the North Sea. The country, which thrived on trade, was cut off from the international markets and its colonies. In the summer of 1917 food shortages led to riots and the government had to do everything in its power to meet the needs of the population. The economic turmoil led to fierce anti-German sentiments in the Netherlands. By the end of the war 90% less vessels were calling at Dutch ports compared to the year before the conflict (Wielenga 2020, 178–80). The war led to social unrest and economic decline, but the country retained its independence and neutrality.

Despite the anti-German feelings among the population, the Dutch government plead for a full restoration of German independence after the war. For the Dutch a prosperous, politically stable and economically strong Germany was vital for economic recovery (Wielenga 2020, 206). If Germany was discriminated by the Treaty of Versailles, it would remain an unstable factor in the European equilibrium of power argued the Dutch government. However, the Netherlands was no party to the negotiations and did not get a say on the new conditions for Germany (Richard 2018, 99). In the 1930's when tensions in Europe again began to rise, the Dutch once again emphasized their neutrality (Wielenga 2020, 208). The Netherlands tried to keep politics and trade separate by not criticizing Nazi-Germany, but this time the quest for neutrality was in vain. On the 10th of May 1940 Nazi-Germany invaded the Netherlands. The country surrendered five days later (Wielenga 2009, 138–42). Dutch neutrality, which had lasted since the Napoleonic era, did not keep the Netherlands out of a war this time.

During the Second World War the Dutch government in exile changed their stance on the neutrality policy. In a radio speech on the 25th of November 1942 the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Eelco van Kleffens announced that the time of strict independence politics was over. He argued that "*the Netherlands can greatly contribute to the founding of a regional organization with the universal goal of indivisible peace."* [vii] (van Kleffens 1942). On May 5th 1945 the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi-Germany ended. The war-torn country had suffered greatly from acts of war, food shortages and looting. Its economy, which thrived on trade with Germany and the Dutch East Indies before the war, was crippled by blockades, destruction, inundations, mine-fields, a trade deficit and soaring state debt (Wielenga 2009, 191). The German invasion was a catalyst of change for Dutch Foreign policy. No longer would the country pursue a policy of strict neutrality. To ensure its safety and interests, the Dutch government started to actively take its place on the stage of international politics.

Dutch foreign policy after 1945

The postwar foreign policy of the Netherlands was dominated by two main issues, according to political scientist and historian of international relations Friso Wielenga. First, the country involved itself in the independence struggle of its colony, the Dutch East Indies. Second, the country was in dire need of economic recovery. Both factors took up a major part of the state's financial resources (Wielenga 2020, 229). As the prewar sources of revenue and trade had diminished, the Dutch government faced a dilemma. To restore the economy and increase export the Netherlands needed to revitalise its economic relations with Germany, its former invader and occupier (Pekelder 2015, 69). Among the civilian population and politicians, however, there was a strong resentment against Germany. The Dutch were traumatized by the hardship of the five-year occupation and wanted to make sure that Germany could never threaten its security and integrity again (Mallinson 2010, 17–20). Balancing between economic interests and emotional resentment was a core element of the 1946-1947 postwar foreign policy of the Netherlands on Germany.

Historian and political scientist William Mallinson, the author of the book 'From Neutrality to Commitment', defines the issues faced by the Dutch government as the "*Dutch dilemma*" (Mallinson 2010, 43). The government demanded as many reparations, capital goods, resources and as much territory from Germany as possible. However, the Dutch soon realized that they needed a strong and economically viable Germany for its export and trade, due to its strong commercial interests in, and economic dependency on Germany (ibid.). Two main factors changed the Dutch foreign policy on Germany, argues scholar of international politics Amry Vandenbosch in the book 'Dutch Foreign Policy since 1815'. First, the growing notion that the German hinterland was important for the economic recovery and vitality of the Netherlands. Second, the growing tension between the four allied victors over Germany made the Dutch realize that the newfound collective security under the UN rule was ineffective. The Dutch government rapidly recognized that Russia was a greater threat to the preservation of peace in Europe than Germany

(Vandenbosch 1959, 301). By the end of 1947, the Dutch government found another way to protect its interests.

Recognizing the growing division of Europe into a capitalist and communist influence sphere, the Netherlands joined the Western Union (WU), a European military alliance, to guarantee its security and integrity. With the signing of the Brussels Treaty on the 17th of March 1948 the neutrality of the Netherlands came to a definitive end (F.C. Spits 1954, 24). A year later with the foundation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Washington on the 4th of April 1949, the United States, Canada and 10 European countries were firmly involved within the European safety structure ('The North Atlantic Treaty' 1949). The Dutch, however, did not end their century long policy of neutrality and abstention just because of the Soviet threat.

Despite several attempts, the small nation did not get a seat at the table of the allied powers when discussing the 'German Question'. Mallinson argues that the Dutch government agreed to join a military co-operation in Western-Europe to get a foot in the door on the decision-making process on Germany (Mallinson 2010, 63-65). Wielenga also argues that the Dutch joined the WU and NATO to gain influence among the Great Powers (the USA, UK and France). This way the Dutch could join the discussion on military, political, and economic cooperation within Europe (Wielenga 2020, 229). Finding a solution for the Dutch dilemma was for the government inherently a question of managing Germany's economic power. Being a frontrunner of European integration opened the door for the Netherlands to promote the controlled reconstruction of the German economy and the integration of West-Germany in a western alliance (ibid.). Through the political and economic integration in Europe and in the Atlantic security alliances, the Dutch government exerted its influence and found a solution for the Dutch dilemma and the 'German Question'.

When West-Germany joined NATO in 1955, the Atlantic course of the Dutch government stood firm (Wielenga 2009, 226). Balancing between NATO and European integration the Dutch government made sure it could sail its own course between Atlanticism and continentalism. The

security of the Netherlands was now guaranteed through the Atlantic alliance. Its economic prosperity through free trade and European integration. These two pillars became the core of Dutch foreign policy until the end of the Cold War.

The same principles defined the bilateral relations of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands. The Dutch government no longer had to balance between the country's security and economic interests with regards to its eastern neighbour. West-Germany had become an ally against the Soviet bloc and once again became the Netherlands most important economic partner. The anti-German sentiments and historical fear of German power and expansionism which had existed in the Netherlands since the 1850's seemed to fade. The core of the West-German/Dutch bilateral relations remained stable throughout the Cold War. It was the talk of German unity in the fall of 1989 which brought the 'German Question' back into the heart of Dutch politics.

The 'German Question' revisited

The heart of Dutch politics at the time was a newly elected administration, which had been installed on the 7th of November 1989 and was only in office for two days when the opening of the GDR borders was announced. It consisted of the Dutch Christian democratic party (CDA) and the labour party (PvdA) and was led by prime minister Ruud Lubbers (*NRC Handelsblad* 1989c). Van den Broek and Lubbers, both members of CDA, were long serving members of the Dutch cabinet. Lubbers was Minister of Economic Affairs from 1974 until 1977 and became prime minister in 1982, which he remained until 1994 (Steinmetz 2018). Hans van den Broek first became state secretary of Foreign Affairs for European integration in 1981 and later became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1982, which he stayed until 1993 (Rusman 1999). In November 1989, both ministers had the responsibility to represent the Netherlands in the international political arena. Therefore, in this thesis on the Dutch government's response on the process of the German unification process in 1989-1990 I will mainly focus on these two cabinet members. Additionally, other contributions of members of the Dutch cabinet are analysed and considered.

Although many scholars have written about German unification in 1989-1990, only some have discussed the role and behaviour of the Dutch government in this period. In this section I summarize and analyse the key elements of the academic debate on the response of the Dutch government on the German unification process in 1989-1990.

Historian Duco Hellema argues in his book 'Nederland in de Wereld' that the Dutch government initially responded with great reservations on the German unification plans. Especially the matter of the Oder-Neisse border between East-Germany and Poland let to unease and mistrust among the Dutch cabinet. Chancellor of the FRG, Helmut Kohl, initially provided no clarity on his position regarding the recognition of the Polish western border. Dutch prime minister Ruud Lubbers publicly reacted with great animosity on the German plans. In January 1990 the Dutch foreign minister Hans van den Broek presented the Dutch terms for support of the German unification. Integration of a united Germany in NATO and the EC were necessary for Dutch support. It was not until July 1990 that the concerns of the Dutch government were resolved, and that the cabinet accepted the terms of the German unification (Hellema 2010, 353). The Dutch government responded on the German unification plans with great restraint but eventually supported unification under terms which reflected the two pillars of Dutch foreign policy since the 1950's.

Pekelder mentions the position of the Dutch government on the 'German Question' in his article 'Nederland en de Duitse kwestie'. He argues that the Dutch government was positive about the developments in the GDR, but that they wanted a seat at the negotiation table on the development of the united Germany. When this was refused the initial positivity was replaced by reservations and mistrust (Pekelder 2015, 71). Professor of European history and integration Mathieu Segers confirms the disapproving position of the Dutch government in his article 'Nederland en de Europese integratie'. When the British prime minister Margaret Thatcher told Helmut Kohl at an EC summit in Paris on the 18th of November 1989 that a revision of the post-

war European borders, including the inter-German border, was not a matter of discussion, Lubbers openly agreed with his British colleague. The rejection of German unity by his allies was a shocking experience for the German chancellor, argues Segers (Segers 2015, 101).

In December 1989 at the Strasbourg European Council meeting Ruud Lubbers once again rejected the idea of German unity. The Dutch prime minister told Kohl that the German chancellor should not speak about German self-determination and 'one German people' (Metze 1995, 259). Journalist Marcel Metze recalls the initial negativity in Lubbers' reaction on the German unification plans in November and December 1989. He argues that Lubbers thought it was dangerous of Kohl not to clarify his position on the Order/Neisse matter, as it reminded Lubbers of the German expansionism of the Second World War (Metze 1995, 259). In short, in the last months of 1989 the Dutch prime minister had created a negative and mistrusting image of the Dutch policy on German unification.

Mathieu Segers further reiterates that the political Dutch position on European integration and German unity were closely related to British policies. In economic and financial perspective, however, the Dutch were far more dependent on the continental German integration and policies (Segers 2015, 104). The Dutch dependency on the German economy dominated the Dutch vision on the unification of the FRG and GDR argue political scientists Dirk Verheyen and Christian Søe in 'The Germans and Their Neighbours'. The German unification plans were received with passivity in the Netherlands, and the debate soon focussed on the economic challenges and opportunities which German unity would bring for the Dutch. The authors further argue that it was unlikely for the Dutch government to sail its own course on German unification due to its economic dependency on Germany and lack of influence in international politics. Therefore, the policy of the Netherlands on German unity relied on two pillars: NATO and the EC (Verheyen and Søe 2019, 57–58). The Dutch government saw the 'German Question' as a matter for all

European nations. Fully integrating the new united Germany in NATO and the EC prevented the return of the German problem.

Scholar of modern German history and Dutch-German relations Friso Wielenga argues that the demands for integration of the united Germany in the Atlantic security system and the European Communities were not a result of anti-German sentiments. Rather, the Dutch government aimed to protect the achievements of the Western cooperation and integration of the past 40 years. It foresaw risks for Europe as the end of the Cold War could lead to (ethnical) tensions in Middle- and East-Europe. The security of the Netherlands and Europe would best be served if the United States of America remained involved in the European security and safety structure (Wielenga 2009, 311). Germany needed to be a fully integrated, equal partner in NATO and the EC to ensure peace and security in Europe.

Wielenga discusses in his book 'Van vijand tot bondgenoot – Nederland en Duitsland na 1945' the response of the Dutch government on the German unification process. Wielenga argues that from late January 1990 the Dutch policy on German unification was much more positive. The Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek had replaced the prime minister as spokesperson for Dutch policy on German unity and represented a more nuanced positive position on the matter. If the new united Germany would become a full member of NATO and the integration of Germany within the EC would be guaranteed, the Dutch government would not stand in the way or delay the unification of the FRG and the GDR (Wielenga 1999, 209–11). In the jubilee book of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wielenga further argues that the FRG had gained the trust of the Dutch government to remain in NATO and EC after 40 years of democracy. The 'German Question' in Dutch perspective was in the eyes of Wielenga not one of German unity, but the concerns regarding the inevitable political involvement of the united Germany with unstable countries in Eastern-Europe. Involvement of Germany in a common West-European approach for Eastern-Europe would be more effective and strengthen European security (Wielenga 1998,

223–24). Despite the created image of a negative position on German unity, the Dutch supported unification under Western terms.

To summarize, the academic debate on response of the Dutch government on the German unification has been addressed from different angles. Hellema, Pekelder, Verheyen & Søe and Segers argue that the Dutch government responded with reluctance, passivity and restraint on the German unification plans. Wielenga agrees that the Dutch government initially responded with a negative attitude on the German unification plans, but, starting in January 1990, the Dutch government adopted a more constructive and pragmatic course. The Dutch supported the German unification plans, under the condition of Atlantic incorporation and an enhanced European integration. These conditions, as described by Hellema, Verheyen & Søe and Wielenga, reflected the longstanding Dutch foreign policy on Atlanticism and European integration.

The image of the Dutch policy on German unity in 1989-1990 is diffuse. Even though the abovementioned scholars have discussed the response of the Dutch government on the German unification process in 1989-1990, their work is often dated and show an incoherent image. Furthermore, none of the beforementioned authors have used the cabinet minutes of the Dutch government as a primary source. The incoherent image of Dutch foreign policy on German unification in 1989-1990 and the availability of new sources justify a renewed analysis of this subject.

Structure

To answer the research question: What was the Dutch government's policy and how did it respond on the West/East German unification between November 1989 and October 1990? I use a chronological approach. Political scientist Stephen F. Szabo included in his book 'The Diplomacy of German Unification' a contemporary overview of the chronology of events concerning German unification (Szabo 1994, ix–xiv). I use this chronology as a guideline throughout my thesis.

In the first chapter I focus on the events in the first weeks after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. The scope of the chapter begins on the 9th of November 1989 and ends on the 30th of November 1989. In this period the Dutch government sought an initial response and policy on the events in Germany. Was the Dutch government prepared for the developments and how did they respond?

Central in the second chapter is the question: How would the Dutch government respond if the FRG and GDR would unify? The end of this period is symbolized by the statements of minister Van den Broek on the 25th of January 1990. In a debate with the Dutch House of Representatives the statesmen for the first time expressed the terms on which the Netherlands could agree on the unification of Germany (*Algemeen Dagblad* 1990b). The Dutch government had found its answer to newly resurfaced the 'German Question'.

In the third chapter I focus on the period between the 1st of February 1990 and the 3rd of October 1990. The Dutch government had accepted that Germany would unify, the question remained how the unification of Germany and the integration in NATO and the EC would take place. What was the response and policy of the Dutch government when German unity became a reality?

In the conclusion I start with a summary of the three chapters and the historical context. Next, I contemplate on the value of this thesis for the debate on the 'German Question', and the longstanding Dutch foreign policy pillars: Atlanticism and European integration. Lastly, the answer to the research question is formulated and suggestions for additional research will be provided.

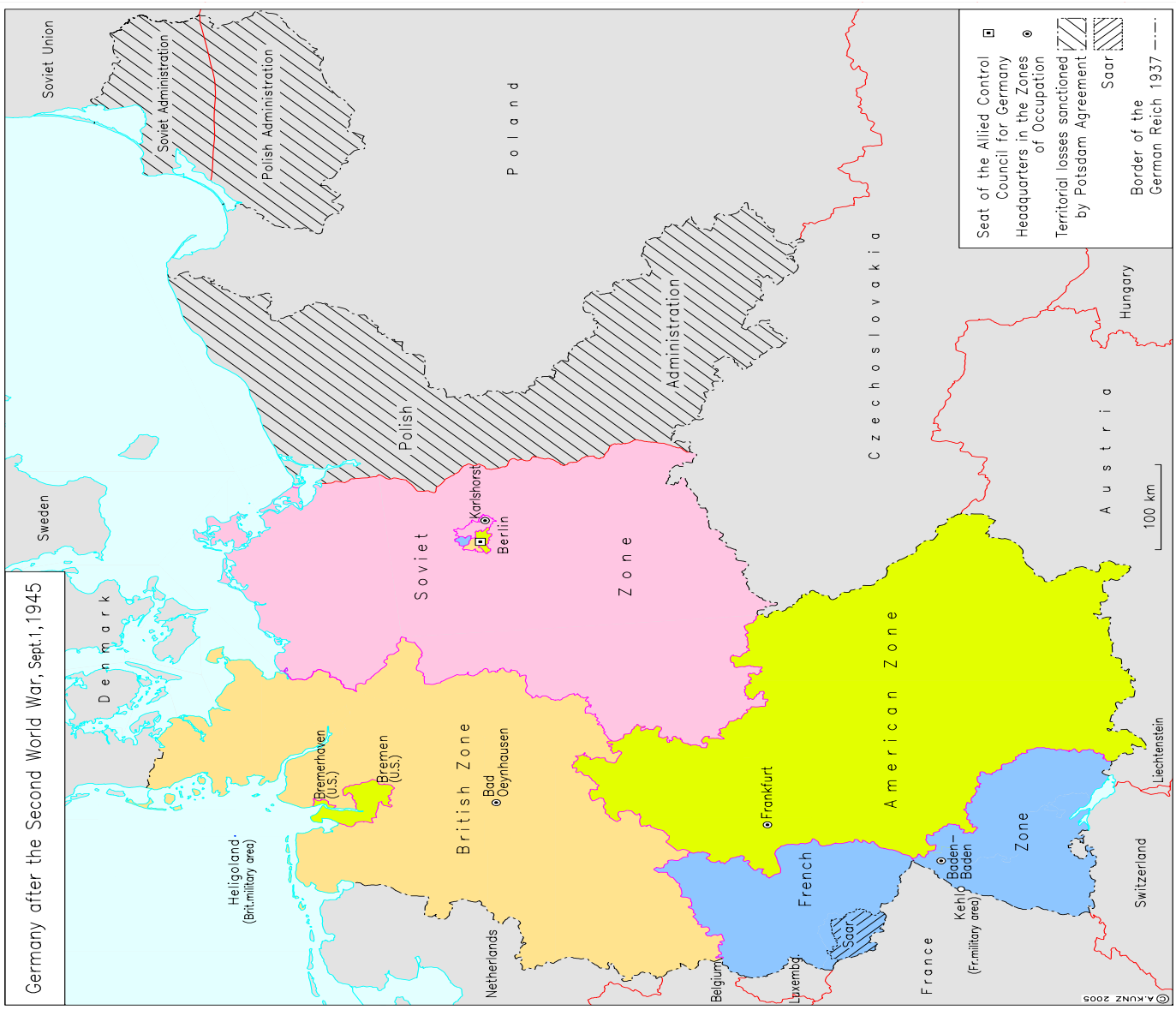

Illustration 2: Map showing the division of Germany in four occupation zones and the lost territories in the East, as established in August 1945 at the Potsdam Conference (Kunz 2005).

The American, British and French zones formed the Federal Republic of Germany in May 1949. The Soviet zone became the German Democratic Republic in October 1949. (Thomaneck and Niven 2001)

"A complete surprise"

Throughout the Cold War, the call for German unification had been nothing more than lip service to the 1949 FRG's constitution, which, in its preamble, called upon *"The entire German people […] to accomplish, by free self-determination, the unity and freedom of Germany."*('Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (23 May 1949)' 1949). Sociologist Manfred Kuechler even argued in his 1992 article 'The Road to German Unity' that unification became a hypothetical issue for scholars and politicians and that most countries favoured the status quo (Kuechler 1992, 56). Szabo argues that even though all governments saw the political changes in the Soviet Union, the Fall of the Berlin Wall was completely unexpected (Szabo 1994, 32).

According to diplomat and political analyst Ronald Asmus there are three assumptions on the status of Germany in East and West that made the unification of Germany so unexpected. First, the assumed relative political stability of the GDR. Second, the strong consensus in the FRG on the step-by-step approach towards the GDR. And lastly, the assumption that the Soviet-Union would never allow the German division to be ended (Asmus 1990, 63–64). By the end of 1989, all those assumptions were refuted. The unification of Germany was suddenly back the international political agenda. No-one had foreseen the end of the communist rule in the GDR, and the following unification of Germany in 1990. Especially not the newly elected Dutch administration, which had been busy with the formation of the new cabinet and the division of government seats.

In this chapter I focus on the response of the Dutch government on the German reunification plans in the period directly after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Central to this chapter is the question: Was the Dutch government prepared for the developments in Germany and how did it respond? The chapter starts with the opening of the GDR borders on the 9th of November 1989 and ends on the 30th of November 1989. In this period of three weeks the Dutch government sought a course to respond on the developments in the GDR and FRG. Following the course of events, I analyse crucial moments and sources which formed the policy of the Dutch government.

"Die Wende"

The Fall of the Berlin wall was in the words of Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek: *"a complete surprise."* [x](Beeld en Geluid 2007). In a press statement released on the 10th of November 1989 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the Dutch government declared to share the feelings and emotions of the East-German people who finally saw their dreams and desires of freedom come true. When asked about German unification the Dutch foreign minister responded that he had "*less concerns on the German matter."* [xi] The citizens of the German Democratic Republic had the right to choose their own path in freedom and self-determination, stated the minister, and German unification would be a product of a closer relationship between East and West in Europe (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5095). On the same day Van den Broek sent a coded message to the Dutch embassy in London on the 'German Question'. He argued that the support for German unification among the East-Germans was unclear and that it was better to speak of German rapprochement instead of unification (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5708).

In a television interview on the night of the 13th of November 1989, the minister declared that the changes in Eastern-Europe would be irreversible, and that the Dutch government supported the reforms in Eastern-Europe. He added that the Netherlands did not have decisive influence on the progress of the reforms, but that the Dutch wanted to help ease the pain of the economic transition from a communist plan economy to a capitalist market economy with material and financial aid (Bremer 1989). The response of Van den Broek on the developments in Eastern-Europe and the GDR was two-sided. In public, he responded with support, sympathy and joy, whereas behind closed doors he responded with far more restraint. This ambiguity in the first response on the developments in the GDR reflect the state of uncertainty on the developments in the perspective of the Dutch government.

In a cabinet meeting on the 17th of November 1989 the Dutch cabinet discussed the 'German Question' for the first time. Prime minister Ruud Lubbers argued that the Netherlands

had to show restraint in the discussion on German unity and emphasised the importance of the efforts of the EC. According to Lubbers, the Western governments should, to prevent being sidelined by the United States and the Soviet Union, be directly involved in the talks on the developments in Eastern-Europe and establish a common policy on the matter with the US (Ministerraad 1989, 5561).

Minister Van den Broek added that the SU had repeatedly expressed to be against a unification of Germany and that it was difficult to predict the speed of the process. If Germany were to be united, it would be neutral, in his view. He further explained that the geographical and political borders and principals of peaceful self-determination, as established by the Helsinki accords, were leading for the policy of the Netherlands. Being a neighbour of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands was to support and show trust regarding the country, as its government had made clear that integration in NATO and EG remained a priority (ibid.). German Chancellor Helmut Kohl had stated in a government declaration a day earlier: *"we [the FRG] are and will remain a part of the Western community"* [xii], he added that the answer for the 'German Question' was inherently linked to the end of the division of Europe (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5693). Thereby, indicating the FRG's willingness and dedication to European integration and NATO.

Several other ministers expressed their concerns on the consequences of the opening of the inter-German border. The talk of German unity, and the easing of East-West relations led to questions on the position of NATO, uncontrolled immigration of East-Europeans, financial and economic risks, and the position of the FRG within the European project. Although the cabinet thought that a unification of Germany would probably occur in the long term, it argued that preserving peace and stability in Europe should have priority now (Ministerraad 1989, 5561). In conclusion, the Dutch cabinet agreed with the framework on the policy of German unity as proposed by Van den Broek. It would support and show trust in the FRG, while emphasizing the role of the EG in the finding of a solution. However, the 'German Question' in itself, was not an

urgent matter for the Dutch. Rather, maintaining stability and peace in Europe, in collaboration with the EC and the US, was top priority and goal for the Dutch government.

The framework that the Dutch cabinet created on the policy regarding German unity as discussed above, conflicts with the image of the passivity and aloofness that Hartleb, Lippert and Wielenga painted of the response of the Dutch government on the German unification plans in their article on 'Dutch perspectives on German unity'. They argued that in November 1989, Dutch politicians responded with extreme inertia on the developments in the GDR and FRG. Only in late November started the government to form its opinion on the 'German Question' (Hartleb, Lippert, and Wielenga 2022, 183). Other scholars have repeated that image. According to Verheyen and Søe the initial response of the government on the German unification plans *"was characterized by considerable passivity."* (Verheyen and Søe 2019, 58). Additionally, Hellema argues that it took quite some time for the Dutch government to realize the pace of the developments in Germany (Hellema 2010, 352). The minutes of the cabinet meeting, however, show that a week after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the Dutch cabinet discussed the matter of German unity and came up with a policy for the foreign minister. Admittedly, the government did not deal with the 'German Question' with the utmost urgency. The unification of Germany was arguably seen as a matter for the long-term.

Europe accelerates

It soon became apparent that the long-term prospect on German unification became a lot shorter. On the 18th of November, prime minister Ruud Lubbers attended an informal meeting of the EG government leaders. Even though the 'German Question' was not on the agenda, 'the Twelve' extensively discussed the matter. During the meeting Lubbers joined the British prime minister Margaret Thatcher in criticizing chancellor Kohl on the idea of German unification (Schwarz 2012, 279). Despite the cabinet policy of support and trust regarding the FRG, which was discussed in the cabinet meeting the day before, Lubbers had responded *"remarkably cold"* said Kohl (Hellema 2010, 352).

The outcome of the informal EG meeting was sent by Van den Broek to the Dutch ambassador in Paris a few days later. Remarkably, he reported that Lubbers had said that there was no concern on German unity in the Netherlands, despite Lubbers' criticism on Kohl. The twelve leaders reached consensus on six points concerning the developments in Eastern-Europe. First, the changes are historical and permanent. Second, the speed of the developments is dangerous for the stability in Europe. Third, the twelve nations will supply aid to assist reforms towards democracy, market-economy and human rights. Fourth, to ensure stability both NATO and the Warsaw-pact shall be maintained with respect to current borders. Fifth, the developments in the GDR are uncertain and lastly, whatever happens, the FRG must remain a member of NATO and the EC (Code Archief MINBZ November 20, 1989, 5099). These six statements are closely in line with the first Dutch policy framework of November 17th and left the impression that the issue was settled.

The next step in the policy of the Dutch government on the question on German unification was taken on the 27th of November 1989. Prime minister Lubber delivered a government statement of policy on taking office. In his speech he explained the basis of the foreign policy of the Netherlands regarding the developments in Eastern-Europe. Firstly, Lubbers stated that NATO would remain the basis of Dutch peace and security policy. Secondly, the prime minster announced that the new government wanted to support the positive political and economic developments in Eastern-Europe through the 'Helsinki process'. The support must be multilaterally coordinated and reflect the importance of a quick integration process in the EC, said Lubbers ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 27 November 1989' 1989, 303). Noteworthy was the statement of Lubbers that the Western support to the SU and Eastern-Europe can offer perspective to work on a European collaboration "*with respect to the territorial borders as there are present*" [xiii], which is in essence a rejection of the idea of German unification (ibid.). Once again, the prime minister deviated from the cabinet policy of support and trust of November 17th.

The 'German Question' was not explicitly mentioned by Lubbers in the government statement (Wielenga 1999, 181). Even when the first messages of the German newspaper Bild arrived that Kohl would announce a three-phase plan to unify Germany on the 27th of November, German unification was not an issue at present, a MP of the Labour coalition party declared (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5708) ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 28 November 1989' 1989, 359). During a cabinet meeting later that day, Minister of Foreign Affairs Van den Broek argued that the cabinet and the House of Representatives faced the same problem. Both could not foresee the scope, nature and speed of the developments in the FRG and GDR. Prime minister Lubbers reiterated the importance of the EC and argued that the FRG would eventually realize that the solution for the 'German Question' could be found only through European cooperation, instead of a unilateral approach. Van den Broek added that all 12 member states of the EC had agreed that no new members, including the GDR, would be allowed to join the EC before 1993 (*Ministerraad* 1989, 5561). The Dutch cabinet faced a volatile situation and fell back on its existing strategy of keeping a close eye on the developments while promoting a European solution.

In a response on questions of MPs on the 29th of November, the Dutch prime minister did digress on the 'German Question'. Lubbers explained that the government had not mentioned the matter in its statement before, because it did not want to create the impression of mistrust regarding the matter. Primarily, the government focussed on the end of the division of Europe through integration in the EC, and collaboration with NATO, as an integral part *"a healing process of those two German states"* [xiv], stated Lubbers ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 29 November 1989' 1989, 394–95). These statements were in line with the cabinet policy of November 17th, 1989.

In conclusion, on the question: Was the Dutch government prepared for the developments in Germany and how did they respond, there is no straightforward answer. On the one hand the Dutch cabinet responded positively on the developments in the GDR, and it discussed the matter of German unification relatively quick after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. The by several scholars

assumed passivity of the Dutch does not do justice to the response of the Dutch government. On the other hand, the Dutch government did not come up with a comprehensive response on the 'German Question'. After discussing the matter internally in the cabinet, a first policy was drafted which was closely in line with the outcome of the EC meeting a day later. To the cabinet it seemed that, for now, the matter was dealt with. The Dutch government at that point, did not recognize the urgency of the 'German Question' and focussed on a long-term solution through further European and Atlantic integration. Meanwhile in the FRG, the German unity process picked up its pace.

Kohl's call for unity

On the 28th of November 1989, FRG Chancellor Helmut Kohl proposed a ten-point plan for the unification of East- and West-Germany. He argued that after free elections in the GDR the FRG was willing to form confederative structures with East-Germany with the eventual goal of creating a federation. Although the chancellor was unsure what a reunified Germany would look like, he was certain that the German people, in free self-determination, would regain their unity. Kohl also stated that overcoming the German division was linked to overcoming the European division. German state unity would therefore only be possible if it coincided with further European integration and a new overarching security structure in Europe. Furthermore, the German chancellor emphasized that *"Reunification – that is, regaining Germany's state unity"* was the main political goal of the FRG government (Kohl 1989). Kohl had set out a course for unification. The 'if'-question of German unity was answered by the FRG government, to them a future united Germany was certain. Now, only the 'how'-question remained.

For the Dutch government, however, the 'if'-question of German unity was still an undecided matter. Central in this chapter is that Dutch question on German unification. If German unity were to take place, would the Dutch government support or reject it? The chapter starts with the abovementioned presentation of Kohl's ten-point-plan and ends on the 25th of January 1990, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs in a debate in the House of Representatives presented the Dutch policy on the 'German Question' (*Algemeen Dagblad* 1990b). In this chapter I follow the steps taken by the Dutch cabinet in the process of forming that policy.

In the days after Kohl's speech minister Van den Broek received word through diplomatic channels that the French president Mitterrand was not consulted and felt discontented on Kohl's plan. Furthermore, the Dutch ambassador in Bonn reported that within the FRG government there was discussion on the way the German chancellor presented his plan. He even suggested that FRG foreign minister Genscher was not informed until the last minute (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5708).

In the GDR the responses on the ten-point-plan were also received with great reservedness. The new opposition party 'Demokratischer Aufbrug' stated that it was too early to talk of unity, and that the issues in the GDR should be settled first (Bik 1989b). In the West-German parliament, however, the responses were supportive, reported NRC Handelsblad (*NRC Handelsblad* 1989b).

In a departmental memo on the 28th of November 1989, it was suggested to Van den Broek that Kohl did the only thing which could be expected of him in the current situation. It advised the minister to support the FRG government in its ambitions. Unification through self-determination had always been the policy of the Netherlands, Kohl's plan made it a feasible reality. However, the memo suggested to the minister to remain vigilant on the western integration and conditions of German unification. *"Nobody wants a 19th century German"* [xv] argued the civil servant. Therefore, the Dutch government should remind the FRG of its promises to remain imbedded in the EG and NATO (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5708). Minister van den Broek reflected on these messages in a cabinet meeting on the 1st of December 1989.

Prime minister Lubbers opened the discussion by stating that the unexpected Kohl proposal was well received and carried broad support in the FRG. "*There seems to be a national sentiment"* [xvi], he argued (*Ministerraad* 1989, 5562). Van den Broek recognized the positive sentiment. However, he expressed his concern regarding the internal discussion in East- and West-Germany. A pressing issue for the minister was the status of the Oder-Neisse border, which Kohl did not mention in his speech. He further reiterated that the Dutch government and the Western allies must show solidarity with Kohl and keep supporting the FRG but remain vigilant on the western conditions for the German reunification. The cabinet agreed on the by Van den Broek proposed course (ibid.). Compared to the policy framework of the 17th of November 1989, the Dutch government had a more concrete idea of German unity on the 1st of December. This was reflected in its more critical approach to the FRG when discussing the conditions of the unification of Germany.

Lubbers' "courage"

The refusal of the German chancellor to be clear on the Oder-Neisse border led to tensions at the Strasbourg European Council summit on the 8th and 9th of December 1989. During the heads of government dinner Lubbers confronted Kohl on the unclarity. He told the German chancellor that he should not create false hope and expectations for the "*Ostvertriebenen*", a German minority group which had been forced to leave former German territories, which belonged to Poland since the end of World War Two (Metze 1995, 259). Lubbers feared that the new united Germany might claim these former German territories and argued that these old expansionistic tendencies were a danger to the stability and safety in Europe (ibid.). He continued by stating that there were risks in talking about 'one German people' and its right to self-determination, because who are 'the German people' asked Lubbers (Thatcher 1993, 797).

Chancellor Kohl was agitated and responded that Germany paid for the Second World War with the loss of one-third of its territories. He thereafter refused to discuss the Oder-Neisse border (Schwarz 2012, 281). British prime minister Margaret Thatcher commemorates the discussion at the council meeting in her biography. Although she also had her reservations on the German unification plans, she commented that Lubbers' statements *"required some courage"* (Thatcher 1993, 797). Lubbers had been vigilant on the border matter, as discussed in the cabinet meeting on December 1st 1989, he wanted to make sure that Germany would adhere to the western conditions on German unity. Including the preservation of the current borders of NATO and the Warsaw pact, which the EG leaders had agreed upon during the informal meeting on the 18th of November.

In the presidency conclusions of the Strasbourg EC summit, it is therefore remarkable that Kohl agrees to the 'Declaration on Central and Eastern-Europe', which states that the unity of the German people should take place in accordance with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act (European Council 1989, 15). The Final Act recognized the principle that borders could be

changed: *"in accordance with international law, by peaceful means and by agreement."*, but affirmed the inviolability of the borders of all European states ('Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe Final Act' 1975). As Poland had declared their western border non-negotiable, and Kohl recognized the principles of the Final Act, why would he not clarify his position on the Oder-Neisse border (Morgan 2018, 249)? According to Wielenga, Kohl kept questioning the Oder-Neisse border to satisfy a small part of the German population, but in doing so he damaged the reputation of the FRG. At the Dutch ministry of foreign affairs and in the cabinet, there was no real doubt that the FRG would recognize the western border of Poland, but Kohl's refusal led to great irritations in Dutch and international politics during the German unification process (Wielenga 1999, 192–94).

In 1995 Ruud Lubbers reflected on the discussions at the EC summit. The recognition and acceptance of this Oder-Neisse border was crucial for the safety and stability in Europe, he argued. *"All concerns of a great-German idea, …, must be taken out of this world."* [xvii], he said (Brinkel and Lubbers 2020, 311). In a debate in the Dutch House of Representatives on the 12th of December 1989, Lubbers explained the necessity of achieving consensus on the definition of the 'German people'. Would that nation entail all Germans wherever they live, or only the Germans living in the GDR and the FRG? The answer to this question is crucial when speaking of the unity of the German people, argued Lubbers, as the first definition would dramatically change the matter. At the EG summit consensus was reached on the latter definition. A united German people would consist of Germans living in the GDR and the FRG ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 12 December 1989' 1989, 706) . Minister of Foreign Affairs Van den Broek later added that by embedding the German unification in the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, the western border of Poland would no longer be questioned (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5709). Two issues of the German unification process had been clarified by the EC summit in Paris.

Ruud Lubbers was glad that he had pressed hard on the matter. It was clear now when discussing the unity of 'the German people' it concerned the people and borders of the FRG and GDR. The concerns on the German eastern border and the integration of the new united Germany in European structures, which were expressed by the cabinet in the meeting on December 1st, 1989, seemed settled in Paris. The urgency to respond on the 'German Question' was gone. However, just days after the EC summit Helmut Kohl stated that the FRG position on the Oder-Neisse border had not changed (Bik 1989a). Van den Broek wrote in a coded message to the Dutch embassy in Bonn that Kohl had de facto recognized the western polish border in Strasbourg, and that his statements saying otherwise created political damage (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 1457). The statements of the German chancellor made clear that the matter of German unity would not be settled soon. In the beginning of January 1990, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs started to prepare for an adequate Dutch response on German unification (Wielenga 1999, 186)

It was in this climate that Lubbers once again felt the need to emphasize the importance of the inviolability of the existing European borders, this time publicly, at a speech in Tilburg on the 16th of January 1990. He expressed his concerns on the still existing fear of territorial expansionism at the cost of other nations. To take away that fear, Lubbers argued, it was better to *"continue with the states and the borders between states in Europe as they are."* [xviii] (*NRC Handelsblad* 1990). Implicitly the prime minister hereby rejected the idea of German unification. A standpoint which he denied in the Senate a week later ('Handelingen Eerste Kamer 1989-1990 24 Januari 1990' 1990, 330).

Dutch awakening

A day later, on the 25th of January 1990, foreign minister Hans van den Broek presented the Dutch response on the idea of German unification during a debate in the Dutch House of Representatives. In the weeks before his ministry had prepared a comprehensive policy for the Dutch government. Among the civil service there were concerns that a united Germany would be too powerful in political and economic perspective. This meant that the Germans would dominate the EC.

However, in the last 40 years the Dutch had always supported the unification of its eastern neighbour. Rejecting it now could be seen by international partners and specifically Germany as obstructive and hypocritical. Besides, the process had already begun. The ministry judged that it would be unwise to resist the inevitability of German unification (Wielenga 1999, 190). All in all, the Dutch ship of the 'if'-question on German unity had sailed, the question remained: how?

The Dutch answer to that question was presented by Van den Broek in the beforementioned debate. The minister started by arguing that his assumptions on the GDR, concerning its stability and importance to the Soviet Union, had been proven untrue. Additionally, he stated that the developments in the GDR had surprised him most of all changes in Eastern-Europe ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 25 Januari 1990' 1990). These assumptions of the minister were in line with what Asmus considers the consensus among contemporary observers of the GDR (Asmus 1990, 63). The minister reiterated that the question of German unity was never a 'yes' or 'no' question for the Dutch government. It was, therefore, a question of how and when, argued Van den Broek. He continued to say that the Dutch government accepted German unification if it adhered to three basic principles.

First, the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border by the FRG, second, the unification must be a democratic process and reinforce the democracy in the new united Germany, and lastly the new Germany must be a member of the European Communities and NATO ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 25 Januari 1990' 1990, 1586). After almost three months the Dutch government had formulated and publicly expressed its intended policy for the unification of Germany. It was a turning point in Dutch policy on the matter, which had been ambiguous and critical in the initial phase after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Especially, the negative balance between showing support and trust towards the FRG and Lubbers' attitude on the Oder/Neisse border had left the impression that the Netherlands was against German unity. The third condition, as discussed by Van den Broek, was arguably the most important one. The incorporation of the new

united Germany in the European Communities and in NATO became the baseline of the Dutch response and policy regarding the German unification.

In summary, Kohl's ten-point-plan was not a wakeup call for the Dutch government. The declaration by the FRG government that unification was their main political aim had not led to a concrete response by the Dutch government. The cabinet still did not recognize the urgency of the German question and, therefore judged it unnecessary to formulate a policy. The call for extra vigilance by the foreign minister satisfied the cabinet and settled the matter. After the EC summit, having dealt with the issues of the Oder-Neisse border and the 'German people', the prime minister was content and thought that the matter would rest for a while.

Chancellor Kohl, however, would not rest and kept the 'German Question' on the international and Dutch political agenda. It was Lubbers who repeatedly reacted with historical anti-German sentiments, unease and animosity on the unification plans of the Germans, thereby creating an image of an unsupportive Dutch government. The response and the policies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its minister, however, were based on rational political and economic arguments.

In January 1990, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs eventually formulated a response and policy on the German question. From the 25th of January 1990 onwards, the Dutch government set its conditions for the unification of the two German states. Embedding the new Germany in the Atlantic alliance and integrating it in the existing framework of the European Communities became the cornerstone of Dutch policy. How the Dutch government employed its policies when German unity became reality is the subject of the next chapter.

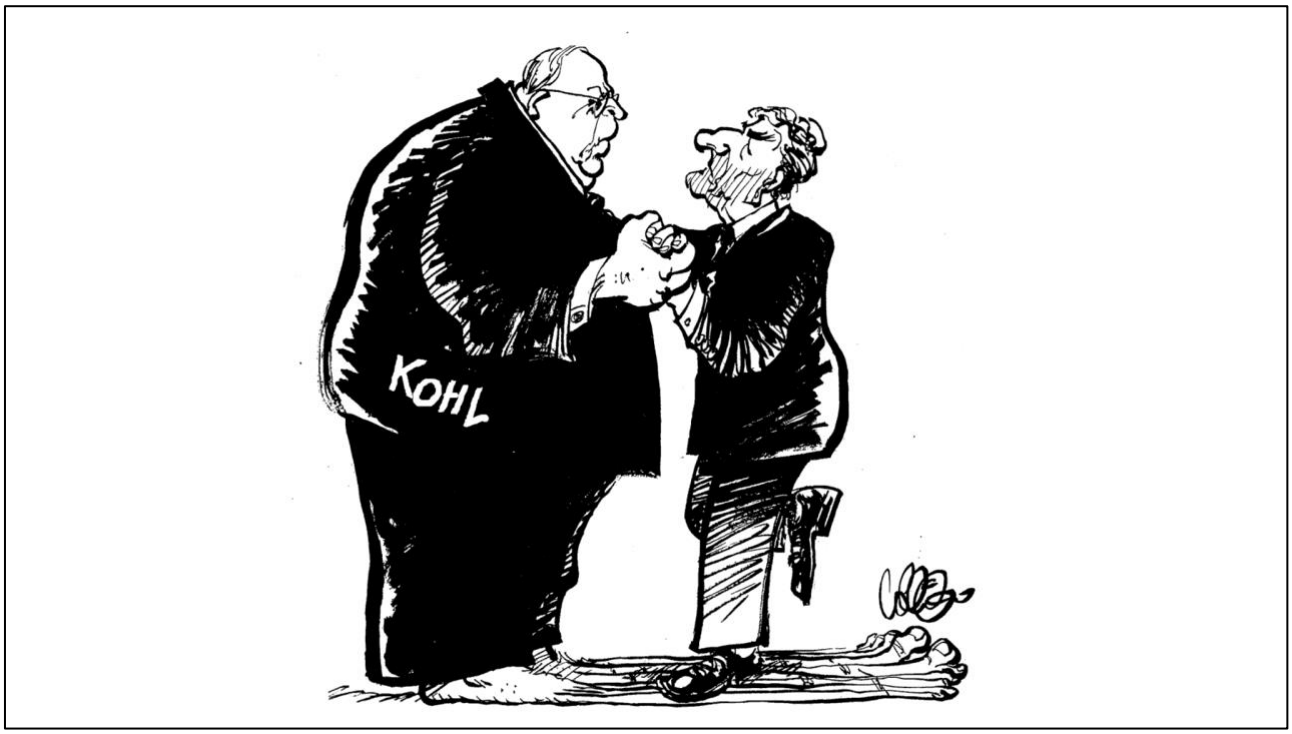

Illustration 3: Political cartoon of artist Jos Collignon showing Dutch prime minister Ruud Lubbers stepping on the long toes of German chancellor Helmut Kohl.

According to the artist Lubbers did not show the appropriate amount of support for the German reunification in the eyes of Kohl (Collignon 2018).

A *"Fait accompli"*

Once the Dutch government had accepted that German unification was going to take place and had formulated the conditions on which it would accept German unity, the focus of the Dutch government shifted towards the question of how the unification process would be shaped. The unity of the German people would have major implications for the European integration process, migration, defence and the economy. Central in this chapter is the question: What was the response and policy of the Dutch government when German unity became reality? The scope of this chapter reaches from the 26th of January 1990 until the date of the constitutional and legal union of Germany, October 3rd 1990 (Szabo 1994). The Dutch governments involvement in the proceedings on the process of German unification is presented step-by-step in this last chapter.

Foreign minister Hans van den Broek had made clear in the debate of the 25th of January 1990 that the role of the Netherlands would not be proposing plans and ideas for the future political and security structure of Europe. He did, however, see a role for the Netherlands in formulating criteria and principles to guide the European integration process. The minister reiterated the importance of NATO and the EC and presented several conditions, including the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border, to which the new pan-European order should adhere ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 25 Januari 1990' 1990, 1590–91).

In a letter to the House of Representatives, Van den Broek stated that for the Dutch government it was clear that as a neighbour, partner, and ally of Germany it would always express its opinions on the negotiations of German unity (Van den Broek 1990). At the same time Van den Broek emphasized in a cabinet meeting on the 9th of February 1990 that the Netherlands must not create any impression of being against the unification (*Ministerraad* 1990, 5816). The Dutch government was balancing between support of the German unification on the one hand, and on the other hand wanted to make sure that its political and economic interests were guaranteed. Van den Broek was walking a fine line between a wilful supporter and a nosy neighbour. The difficulty of that position became clear at the Ottawa 'Open Skies' summit on the 12th of February 1990.

Allied exclusivity

The four allied powers of World War Two, the US, SU, UK and France, announced together with the GDR and the FRG at the Ottawa summit that they would start to work together in a '2+4'-framework on the *"external aspects of the establishment of German unity, including issues of security of the neighbouring states"* (Wielenga 1998, 222). This meant that states bordering on the new united Germany would not have a say in its unification process. The foreign ministers of Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands immediately objected to the idea that neighbours and NATO allies would be excluded from the negotiations but were told that they had no legal rights for a seat at the negotiation table (Szabo 1994, 65). The German foreign minister Genscher added: *"You are not part of the game"* (Hellema 2010, 353). German unity involved the two German states and the four allies, no one else. In a separate meeting Van den Broek reached a compromise on the matter. It was made public that the term 'neighbouring states' did not entail NATO allies (Wielenga 1999, 195). The exclusion of the Dutch in the unification process was a disappointment for Van den Broek.

Despite the heated discussions and the exclusion of Germany's neighbours on the discussions on the establishment of German unification, the prime minster reported to the cabinet that the summit in Ottawa had proceeded in a pleasant atmosphere (*Ministerraad* 1990, 5816). A week later at a debate in the House of Representatives, minister Van den Broek repeated that positive image of the summit. He admitted that he had been surprised by the announcement of the '2+4'-framework for the establishment of German unity but argued that the Netherlands would still be able to involve itself in the matter through the EC and NATO fora. He reiterated the importance of the shared border of the Netherlands with Germany and the interwovenness of the economy, security and politics. The special relationship with Germany and the direct Dutch interests in a solution of the 'German Question' would surely justify a position for the Dutch to join the discussions on the conditions of a united Germany within the EC and NATO, the minister argued ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 22 Februari 1990' 1990, 2666). Despite the ministers attempt to mitigate the loss of Ottawa, the press and parliament reacted with irritation and concern.

The newspaper 'Algemeen Dagblad' concluded that the Dutch, the EC and NATO had been brushed aside. The solution of the 'German Question' would be an Allied/German private affair, which led to concern among Germany's neighbours, especially Poland as Kohl still refused to clarify his stance on the Oder-Neisse border (*Algemeen Dagblad* 1990a). In parliament MPs argued that the Dutch government had once again been presented with a fait accompli. Kohl's ten-point-plan, the '2+4'-framework, and the inter-German economic and monetary union (GEMU) had been a surprise for the Dutch government each time. The MPs wanted consultation and participation of the Dutch government in the international political framework of German unity ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 22 Februari 1990' 1990). Van den Broek had no intention of demanding such a position of his international colleagues and resented approaching them in a moralistic and critical manner (Wielenga 1999, 196). However, the Dutch wish of being consulted had not past silently.

FRG foreign minister Genscher visited Van den Broek on the 27th of February 1990. They discussed the integration of the new united Germany in NATO and the EC, the Polish western border, the external effects of German unity and the process of German unification. Genscher declared that it was hard to predict the proceedings of the process at this stage, but expected that the GDR would join the FRG through article 23 of its constitution by the end of the year. On the polish border the FRG minister commented that the German people accepted the current borders and that the issue would also be resolved later in the same year (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 1458). All in all, the FRG had consulted and informed Van den Broek. The incident at the Ottawa summit was soon forgotten. The Oder-Neisse border however, remained a returning issue.

Kohl's faux pas: Oder-Neisse

In the beginning of March 1990, the matter led to great internal tensions in the FRG government. Kohl refused to recognize the border and came heads to heads with his foreign minister Genscher. Eventually, after great internal and external pressure, the chancellor buckled and the cabinet accepted the Oder-Neisse border (Szabo 1994). In the Dutch cabinet the matter was discussed on

March 9th 1990. Van den Broek had visited Poland and argued that the mistrust regarding the FRG on this matter was fundamental. He applauded the steps in the right direction of the FRG but reiterated that only a Treaty between a unified Germany and Poland would settle the matter (*Ministerraad* 1990, 5817). On the 17th of July such an accord was reached. One of the core principles of the Dutch policy, recognition of the Oder-Neisse border, had been achieved.

In the following months the discussion on the 'German Question' is sporadically addressed by the Dutch cabinet. In early May, Van den Broek sends a coded message to the Dutch embassy in Bonn, that he is very interested in the ongoing '2+4'-framework discussions. The minister requests the ambassador to provide all and as much information as possible on the negotiations. However, the ambassador should not directly request more information as this could give the impression that the Netherlands government is not content with the consultation as provided by the FRG (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 1458). The course of the Western partners negotiating German unity was clear. The US and FRG steered towards a NATO membership and European integration for the new united German state, therefore, despite its limited influence, the conditions of the Dutch government were slowly being met (Wielenga 1999, 197). Also, in economic perspective, the 'German Question' was progressing in line with Dutch interests.

After the first free elections in the GDR on the 18th of March 1990 the newly elected government chose to form an economic and monetary union with the FRG (Thomaneck and Niven 2001, 65). This union was established on July 1st 1990, and was of particular interest for the Dutch government as the Netherlands had considerable economic interests in Germany and saw risks, but even more opportunities in the GDR (Verheyen and Søe 2019, 59). The cabinet discussed the GEMU on May 23rd 1990. The ministers discussed the great urgency of the establishment and the need for additional legislation. Van den Broek argues that the established of the GEMU is all but sure, he suggested to wait until the policies of the two German states were clarified. Prime minister Lubbers adds that both waiting and acting had benefits (*Ministerraad* 1990, 5819). The GEMU is deemed an internal German matter, and the Dutch cabinet decides to wait. The Dutch

government also awaited the results of one of its main goals regarding the unification of Germany. The position of the new Germany in NATO.

On the 10th of June 1990, Hans van den Broek delivered a speech in Noordwijk on the future of Europe. He fulminated against the refusal of the SU to let the unified Germany join NATO. Germany within NATO is much more stable and controllable than a neutral uncoupled Germany, the minister argued (van den Broek 1990). On the 16th of July 1990 the Gorbachev conceded NATO membership for Germany. Two months later the four allied powers reached an agreement with the two German states. The '2+4'-Treaty was signed in Moscow (Thomaneck and Niven 2001, 66). Van den Broek reported to the cabinet on the 23rd of August that the legal and political unification date had been made public. On the 3rd of October 1990 the two German states would become one (*Ministerraad* 1990, 5822).

To conclude, when German unity slowly became a reality, the Dutch government did not actively seek a role in the formulation of strategies and plans. The cabinet did however formulate thorough guidelines and conditions which it upheld firmly. When the interests of the Dutch were at risk or their rights were infringed upon, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs rejected the exclusion of the Netherlands. As a neighbour, ally and partner the Dutch government judged it its inalienable right to be involved on the negotiations of the 'German Question'. Van den Broek made sure that he was informed on the latest details and actively promoted the three pillars of Dutch policy for German unity. By October 1990 all three goals were achieved. The new united Germany would recognize the Oder-Neisse border, it was a reliable ally in NATO and was embedded and integrated in the European Communities. When the unity of Germany had become reality, it was Minister of Foreign Affairs Hans van den Broek who sent this coded message to the new Berlin embassy: "we are once again presented with a fait accompli" (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 1458). A small quip signalling the end of the German unification process in the perspective of the Dutch government.

Conclusion

The Fall of the Berlin Wall and the following developments on the unification of Germany was a shock for the Dutch government. It initially responded with feelings of joy and relief regarding the newfound freedom of the peoples of Eastern-Europe, but the Dutch government did not recognize the momentum of the developments in the GDR. Prime minister Ruud Lubbers and foreign minister Hans van den Broek initially came up with a short-term response of support and trust but figured that German unity would take years. Their long-term answer for the 'German Question' was reiterating the importance of integrating the new united Germany in the Atlantic alliance and the European Communities. However, the matter appeared sooner on the international political agenda than they had expected.

Especially Lubbers did not recognize the rapidity in the German unification movement. He approached the matter of German unity in a bureaucratic and legalistic way. The prime minister thought that in the EC meeting and summit of November and December 1989 the 'German Question' was dealt with. The EC leaders had constructed a framework and the FRG chancellor Kohl agreed, so there was no more doubt on the conditions. When Kohl did not want to provide clarity on the borders of the new united Germany, Lubbers repeatedly used emotional, anti-German arguments with a foundation in the historical expansionism of Germany, to prove a rational point. Lubbers himself, however, argued that his statements did not stem from anti-German sentiments of resentment. He just wanted to maintain the peace and stability in Europe, so it had to be clear that the existing borders were inviolable. By insisting on clarity on the definition of the German people and the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border the prime minister early on created an image of an unsupportive, and unwilling Dutch government stance on the matter of German unity.

Minister Van den Broek however, responded with much more nuance. By the end of January 1990 his ministry had prepared a comprehensive approach for the Dutch government on

the 'German Question'. This marked a turning point in the response of the Dutch government on the unification of Germany. The ministry had formulated clear, rational arguments and conditions on which the Netherlands could agree with German unity. These conditions reflected the longstanding foreign policy of the Netherlands since the end of the Second World War, which was based on two pillars: Atlanticism and European integration.

Since the establishment of the German empire in 1871 the question of German power had dominated Dutch politics. After a long period of neutrality, the Dutch government sought its interest best represented in a collective Atlantic security alliance and the European economic integration project at the end of the 1940's. In the beginning of the 1990's the Dutch government once again faced with the question of German power. Although it relied on the resilience of democracy in the FRG, the potential economic power of a united Germany and the fear of a unilateral German course, once again led the Dutch government to rely on the complete integration of a united Germany in the existing Atlantic safety structure and the European Communities. This way Dutch interests in economic, political and safety perspective was safeguarded and this policy befitted the friendly bilateral relations of the Netherlands and the FRG after the Second World War.

The Dutch government wanted to actively support and contribute to the negotiations on German unity. However, the neighbour, ally and partner of Germany was excluded from the talks between the allied powers and the two German states. Minister Van den Broek actively requested that NATO allies be consulted and informed on the matter of German unification, but the Dutch government did not have an active role in the matter. While being informed the Dutch government stood back and awaited the developments on German unity. Its goals were closely related to the policy of the US and the FRG and by the end of July 1990 the three Dutch conditions of German unity were met. When the political and legal union of Germany came into force on the 3rd of October 1990 the Dutch government had moved on to the question of European integration.

To answer the research question of this thesis: What was the Dutch government's policy and how did it respond on the West/East German unification between November 1989 and October 1990? I have divided the Dutch government's response into three phases. In the first phase, from November 9th until November 30th 1989, The Dutch government's response on German unification is characterised by the term 'crisis management'. The Dutch were no prepared for the developments in the GDR and FRG and did not respond with the required urgency. In the second phase from December 1st 1989 until the 25th of January 1990 the Dutch government slowly realized, and came to terms with, the idea of German unity. The resulting formulation of an integral policy for German unity symbolizes the end of this period. In the third phase the Dutch government wanted to involve itself but could only wait by the sideline on the results of the '2+4'-framework negotiations. Once the Dutch conditions were met, the government focussed on the implications of the project of European integration.

It was the first phase that coloured the negative perception of the Dutch government's stance on German unity. The diffuse image on the Dutch response on the German unification process which has been painted over the years finds it origine in the diverse range of cabinet decisions in the period between November 9th 1989 and October 3rd 1990. By analysing the internal discussions and background information of the cabinet decisions a more nuanced image appears. The implications of this new image in the broader historical context show that an integral approach when analysing government behaviour is necessary to be able to fully understand the underlying notions, concerns and considerations. Such an integral approach is often impossible in the short term due to restrictions on government information. It goes to show, however, that historical research on the behaviour of state actors can lead to new insights. This archival based research thesis offers new angles in the debate on the 'German Question' and the end of the Cold War. Subjects such as economic considerations of the Dutch government or the discussion on the 'ownership' of foreign policy by the foreign minister of the prime minister are fields of research with broad possibilities.

In short, the response of the Dutch government on the German unification process in 1989-1990 can not be explained in a short sentence. The variety and depth of the internal discussions and considerations of the Dutch government is too great to discard as simply a negative attitude. In this thesis I have shown that nuance and an integral approach is key to understand and explain the process of German unification in perspective of the Dutch government.

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Notes

All quotes were translated by the author of this thesis. The notes contain the original quotes.

[i] "Unsere bilateralen Beziehungen könnten gar nicht enger sein, als sie schon sind." (Scholz 2023)
[ii] "dat deze samenwerking geworteld is in een diepe vriendschap die al heel lang bestaat." (Rutte 2023)
[iii] "een historisch moment." (*NRC Handelsblad* 1989a, 1).
[iv] "Wij Duitsers zullen de uitdaging aannemen. Ik weet zeker dat de eenheid [van de twee Duitslanden] uiteindelijk zal worden bereikt." (*NRC Handelsblad* 1989a, 1).
[v] "we hielden ons hart vast." (*Algemeen Dagblad* 1989)
[vi] "hereniging moet het resultaat zijn van verdere Europese integratie." (*De Volkskrant* 1989)
[vii] "Kan de Europese gemeenschap […] een nog groter Duitsland aan"(Heldring 1989).
[viii] "Wat zal het democratisch gehalte zijn van de Duitse staat of staten?"(Bleich 1989).
[ix] "het smoezelige nationalisme dat tusen Rijn en Elbe nog steeds leeft."(Bleich 1989).
[x] "een complete verrassing." (Beeld en Geluid 2007).
[xi] "heb ik zelf minder zorg over het Duitse vraagstuk" (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5095).
[xii] "wir sind und bleiben Teil der Westlichen Wertegemeinschaft." (*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5693)
[xiii] "met respectering van territoriale grenzen zoals die er zijn" ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 27 November 1989' 1989, 303)
[xiv] "een helingsproces van die twee Duitse staten." ('Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1989-1990 29 November 1989' 1989, 395)
[xv] "Op een herschepping van een 19e eeuws Duitsland zit niemand te wachten"(*Code Archief MINBZ* 1989, 5708)
[xvi] "Er lijkt sprake van nationaal sentiment." (*Ministerraad* 1989, 5562).
[xvii] "alle zorgen over een groot-Duitse gedachte, …, de wereld uit moeten." (Brinkel and Lubbers 2020, 311).
[xviii] "Voort te gaan met grenzen met de staten en dat de grenzen tussen staten in Europa blijven zoals die zijn." (*NRC Handelsblad* 1990)