

# Canada and the “Two-Plus-Four” Process

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German unification is an important piece of twentieth century history. The powers that negotiated the external aspects of German unification, included France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and West and East Germany. The diplomatic discussions involving the respective six countries were known as the “Two-Plus-Four” talks. While some other countries (for example, Poland) were granted special status at the talks, it was purposely designed to be a conference for only six delegates in order to ensure that the process would not be drawn out. Canada was not invited, nor had no special status in the “Two-Plus-Four” discussions. However, it was in Canada at the Open Skies Conference in February 1990 that the “Two-Plus-Four” process was first introduced to the rest of the world. The first part of this paper will examine Canada’s role as host of the Open Skies Conference. In the second part of this paper it will be discussed whether the Canadian government could have had a role in the “Two-Plus-Four” talks, and if so what could they have brought to the negotiating table?

## Canada and the Open Skies Conference

In 1989 with the reforms quickening in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the Canadian government proposed an initiative to the Americans to discuss international aviation policies, specifically the concept of an Open Skies Agreement. The concept of an Open Skies Agreement was initially first launched by American President Eisenhower in 1955, but was rejected by the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Canadian diplomat, John Noble, he argues that it was Prime Minister Brian Mulroney who resurrected the Open Skies Initiative. Noble states that it was in April 1989 that Mulroney wrote a letter to George Bush Sr., proposing the conference with an invitation to hold it in Canada.<sup>2</sup> One month later, Mulroney and Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark were in Washington for the opening of the new Canadian embassy and while there, they met with Bush and Foreign Minister James Baker. Noble stated that Mulroney told Bush that “he should recommend Open Skies and the main reason was ‘if you don't do it, Gorbachev may’.”<sup>3</sup> Once it had been brought to his attention, Bush

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 191.

<sup>2</sup> John Noble, interview by Alexander von Plato, Chris Clements, and Hayley Caldwell, 25 January 2013.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

agreed that it was a possibility that the Soviets would suggest a similar kind of meeting. This propelled him to take the offensive, and three days after his meeting with the Canadians, he announced the initiative at a speech at Texas A&M University. Noble states, “it sort of went over like a lead balloon... there was no reaction to it.”<sup>4</sup> The Open Skies proposal generated little talk amongst the world’s foreign ministers. Yet, the conference would come to play an integral role in the process of German unification.

The first Open Skies Conference was held in Ottawa, Canada in February 1990.<sup>5</sup> Twenty-three foreign ministers from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Warsaw Pact countries gathered together to begin negotiations on an Open-Skies agreement intended to enhance cooperation between East and West. Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice argue that Open Skies was a way to see if the Soviet commitment to a real openness was sincere or not.<sup>6</sup> However, the talks were quickly overshadowed by the questions surrounding the future of Germany. The Four-Power foreign ministers together with the German ministers used every possibility at the Open Skies Conference to discuss the German issue. The western ministers entered into intense diplomatic meetings on short notice with the Soviets who had little time to prepare or receive official wording from Moscow.<sup>7</sup> Eventually an agreement was reached and it was announced to the press on February 13 that the external aspects of German unification would be decided in a “Two-Plus-Four” process amongst the six respective countries. Ministerial meetings would begin after the East German elections that were scheduled to take place on March 18.

The foreign ministers’ announcement was met with firm criticism at the conference. Some western ministers were angry they had been left out of the negotiations. Dutch foreign minister, Hans Van den Broek was disturbed by the plans, as well as Italian Minister Gianni De Michelis. De Michelis complained, “We have worked together within the Alliance for forty years.” Luxembourg, Norway, Belgium, and Spain shared these sentiments.<sup>8</sup> Canadian historian, John Halstead argues that Canada was also angry with how the consultations had been made, and that they had been excluded from the German unification talks.<sup>9</sup> The Four Powers attempted to pacify the heated discussions between the allies, but

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Ursula Lehmkuhl, “The ‘Ottawa Formula’ and Transatlantic Relations: Politics and Diplomacy of the ‘Two-Plus-Four’ Negotiations,” *Eurostudia-Transatlantic Journal for European Studies* 5/2 (2009): 1.

<sup>6</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 191.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>9</sup> John Halstead, “A New Order in Europe: Evolving Security Systems,” in *Canada Among Nations 1990-1991: After the Cold War*, ed. Fen Osler Hampson and Christopher J. Maule (Ottawa: Carlton University Press, 1991), 146.

eventually in a moment of frustration the Foreign Minister of West Germany, Hans-Dietrich Genscher turned to the Italians and retorted, “You are not part of the game.” The bold remark stunned the ministers, and in an attempt to keep order, the Canadians swiftly ended the meeting after Genscher’s comment.<sup>10</sup> In the days that followed, the Canadian media was also critical of the “Two-Plus-Four” announcement, noting that it was especially insulting since the Canadians had introduced the idea of Open Skies and hosted the conference.<sup>11</sup>

The Canadians had been the initiators and hosts of the Open Skies Conference. However, the conference had been overshadowed by the discussions over German unification, and Canada along with several of its Western allies had been excluded. There is no record of Mulroney pushing to be included in the “Two-Plus-Four” talks at the Open Skies Conference, even though the Mulroney government had close relations with several of the major powers. It was clear that the Four Powers and the German states did not want the talks to be determined by the entire Western alliance. Thus, the Canadian government saved their concerns for ongoing discussions within the North Atlantic Council. In the end, it was at the Ottawa Conference where it was decided that the “Two-Plus-Four” was the platform to determine the external aspects of German unification.

### **Canada and the “Two-Plus-Four”**

The Canadian government was not directly involved in the “Two-Plus-Four” process, but what if it had been? Most of the Canadian politicians that were interviewed for this publication believed that Canada had no place at the proceedings, but how would the “Two-Plus-Four” talks have been different if Canada had been present? Although Canada is considered a political “middle power”, often on the outskirts of major international decision making, they could have contributed to the talks by playing a mediating role. Canadian politicians could have helped the other countries look past the preconceptions of the Cold War to create a favourable outcome for all those involved, while at the same time increasing their influence on the world stage and assuring that their national needs were being met. Canada was not included in the German discussions, but should have attained special status in order to play a role.

According to interviewee Robert Fowler, Canada has a history of not being aggressive enough in international politics.<sup>12</sup> During the creation of the United Nations (UN) after the Second World War, Canada promoted France as a

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<sup>10</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 193.

<sup>11</sup> Lehmkuhl, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Fowler, interview by Alexander von Plato, Amanda Kotowicz, Natalie Bartmes, and Holly McElrea, via Skype, 18 March 2013.

permanent member of the UN, as opposed to itself.<sup>13</sup> Fowler cites another historical example, where the Italian Prime Minister helped Italy get into the G5: Prime Minister Aldo Moro went to the Château de Rambouillet, where the G5 was being held, and demanded to be let into the meeting, thus ensuring Italy's position. However, Canada's passivity kept itself from entering the meetings. Fowler hoped that the Canadian government could be more like Prime Minister Moro in regards to the "Two-Plus-Four" process: confident and self-assertive.<sup>14</sup> One of the reasons that Canada was not a part of "Two-Plus-Four" could have been its lack of aggressiveness in international politics. Whether political aggression is a legitimate argument, remains to be seen; there may, however, have been less forceful ways to get Canada's voice heard. As it stood, the aspects of German unification were decided amongst the six involved, and shared little with the world until the process was complete.

Britain, France, the U.S., and the Soviet Union had a monopoly over the fate of Germany since the end of the Second World War. The four powers divided Germany amongst themselves after the war, which they did not relinquish until the signing of the German unity treaty on September 12, 1990. Although Genscher harshly retorted to his allies that they were "not in the game", in some ways he was correct. The Four Powers were the only countries to still have rights and special responsibilities over the German nation. However, many countries, including Canada, had helped defeat Nazi Germany in 1945. Canada also had troops stationed in Germany since 1951 during the height of the Cold War. By the late 1980s Canada had a military force of 84 600 active personnel and a primary reserve forces numbering 23 700 in the Federal Republic. From 1988-1989, the total defense budget totaled \$C11.20 billion.<sup>15</sup> Yet, these Canadian commitments were not considered in the decision as to who should be involved in the "Two-Plus-Four" talks.<sup>16</sup> In theory, there were more nations than just the Four Powers that held legitimate claims to be included in the German discussions and Canada should have been consulted due to their long-term contribution to NATO and German security.

One central complaint with the "Two-Plus-Four" process was that the major players were deciding amongst themselves about events that concerned the security of the entire European continent. The diplomats needed to reach a

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> David S. Sorenson, "Canadian Military Forces in the Federal Republic of Germany," in *Canada and NATO: Uneasy Past, Uncertain Future*, ed. Margaret MacMillan and David S. Sorenson (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1990), 69.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Heinbecker, interview by Alexander von Plato, Karen Brglez, and Chris Clements, Ottawa, 21 January 2013. Although Canadian troops stayed in Germany for many years after the war, Canadian military spending began to decrease shortly after; troop reductions in Germany were one result of those budget cuts.

consensus on NATO membership, troop reductions on German soil, and the issue of weapon controls for a united Germany. These aspects of the treaty had implications for the security of Europe as a whole. It appeared that the members of the “Two-Plus-Four” deliberately minimized the importance of these discussions in order to keep the deliberations within their inner circle and away from international scrutiny. Canada was forced to watch from the sidelines as pivotal discussions surrounding the external aspects of German unification and European security were being decided.

It was simply a matter of opportune timing that the “Two-Plus-Four” forum was decided in Ottawa. The major powers took advantage of an ideal situation: all the six foreign ministers who needed to be at the German discussions were present at the Open Skies Conference.<sup>17</sup> Interviewees John Noble and Paul Heinbecker agreed that it was mere coincidence that the “Two-Plus-Four” discussions were brought up at the Open Skies Conference.<sup>18</sup> However, Noble was still proud that it was at the Canadian conference that the momentous event of “Two-Plus-Four” was determined.<sup>19</sup> Yet this view was not shared by all. Robert Fowler saw no pride in hosting the launch site for the German forum and referred to Canada’s role in the occasion as mere “hotelkeepers.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Voices from the Canadian Perspective**

Nearly all of the Canadian politicians interviewed for this publication agreed that it was not Canada’s place to be present at the “Two-Plus-Four” negotiations. Perhaps, the interviewees did not realize, or merely disregarded, the immensity of the “Two-Plus-Four”, or maybe they truly believed that Canada did not deserve a place within the proceedings. Some of the politicians cited Canada’s military reductions in Germany over the years as the reason for which Canada was not included,<sup>21</sup> while others noted that Canada was usually a spectator in international affairs,<sup>22</sup> or that it was simply the job of the major powers.<sup>23</sup> Interviewee Jeremy Kinsman recalled Mulroney and Clark believing that putting the “Two-Plus-Four”

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Heinbecker interview.

<sup>18</sup> John Noble interview; Paul Heinbecker interview.

<sup>19</sup> Although this is only speculation, this sentiment was inferred by listening to and analyzing the transcripts of the interviewees.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Fowler interview.

<sup>21</sup> Jeremy Kinsman, interview by Alexander von Plato, Chris Clements, Stephen Spence, and Karen Brglez, via Skype, 29 April 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Lloyd Axworthy, interview by Alexander von Plato and Karen Brglez, University of Winnipeg, 2 November 2012; Bill Blaikie, interviewed by Alexander von Plato and his students, 25 March 2013; John Fowler interview; Paul Heinbecker interview.

<sup>23</sup> Gaetan Lavertu, interview by Alexander von Plato, Hayley Caldwell, and Stephen Spence, Ottawa, 22 January 2013; Jeremy Kinsman interview; Paul Heinbecker interview.

into an open forum would have complicated matters on a grand scale and dragged out the discussions.<sup>24</sup> Their main position was keeping NATO united, and the decision to not involve Canada in the discussions was uncontested.<sup>25</sup> Interviewee Bill Blaikie notes that Canada, as a political entity on the international scene, is often lumped together with the U.S.; the decisions are made by the stronger U.S. power and Canadian politicians watch on the sidelines.<sup>26</sup> Both Paul Heinbecker and Robert Fowler thought it was not abnormal that Canada had been excluded and cited similar historical examples of exclusion, such as in Reykjavik and the Québec Conference.<sup>27</sup> The main point, which nearly all of the Canadian politicians communicated, was that Canada was not invited into the “Two-Plus-Four” process because there was simply no reason for Canadian politicians to be there; they had nothing to offer to the German negotiations.

However, interviewee Robert Fowler disagrees with his counterparts. Although, some of the politicians did agree that it would have been appealing to have been included; Fowler, goes further arguing that not only should Canada have been invited, but that it was an insult to be kept out of the proceedings.<sup>28</sup> Fowler provided his thoughts on the “Two-Plus-Four” proceedings in a passionate and forthright way. He referred back to the manpower and Canadian dollars that had gone into the fight against Nazi Germany and German resettlement after the war, saying that Canada had played a tremendous role at the time and continued to do so for another fifty years.<sup>29</sup> He argued that Canada’s willingness to help its allies in the past has received little international-acknowledgement or appreciation in the present. Not including Canada in the “Two-Plus-Four” process was an affront to the nations’ past service in Europe and a belittlement of Canada in international politics.<sup>30</sup> Fowler was the only Canadian politician interviewed that offered such strong views regarding Canada’s exclusion from the “Two-Plus-Four” process; the others maintained the notion that Canada had little to offer in the discussions.

### **Canadian Claims for Inclusion**

Despite assurances from the interviewed politicians that Canada had no place at the “Two-Plus-Four” proceedings, there is evidence that suggests otherwise. In 1990, the Canadian government issued a report whose findings were put together

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Kinsman interview.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Bill Blaikie interview.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Fowler interview; Paul Heinbecker interview.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Fowler interview.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

by a committee designed to examine changing events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> The members of the committee travelled to the designated regions and met with high-ranking officials such as Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. The report provides an important basis to assess Canada's legitimacy to be involved in the "Two-Plus-Four" process. The published findings reveal Canadian ingenuity and potential for increased involvement on the world stage.

Although, the report states that the committee members endorsed the position that Canada did not have a place in the "Two-Plus-Four" forum, they recommended that the Canadian government should be more aggressive in regards to international policies.<sup>32</sup> They suggested that the government must learn to analyze world politics on a multi-dimensional level; national security is affected by political, economic, ecological, and cultural values, not merely one or another.<sup>33</sup> Interviewee Bill Blaikie also argued for a similar method when evaluating the behaviours and attitudes of the Cold War. Blaikie argued the need for the Canadian government to transcend the tendency to look solely at ideological, military, or geopolitical interests, particularly in regards to the Cold War.<sup>34</sup> He urged Canadian politicians to look at the whole multi-lateral picture. He argued for a pan-European security system that would include the Soviet Union, Europe, and North America. This would allow for a more productive and inclusive security system, unlike the competing systems of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This forward thinking approach could have helped ease international tensions with the creation of a new security structure. Although, this opinion was not fully adopted by the Canadian government, it reveals the liberal idealistic view purported by some Canadian camps in Parliament. It could have been the role of the Canadians at the negotiating table to help the other powers see beyond the confines of the Cold War era and the traditional rhetoric that defined the conflict.<sup>35</sup>

If Canada had been a part of the "Two-Plus-Four" discussions, they could have helped bridge the mass differences between the negotiating partners. Although Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's relations with the Soviet Union were not as close as the Trudeau government had once been, Canada could nevertheless have been a voice to speak for all sides. They could have helped ease the East-West conflict by using their past history of positive relations with the Soviet Union since Trudeau times, combined with their close political and economic

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<sup>31</sup> Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade, *Report on the Committee's Visit to the Soviet Union and the Germanies, April 20- May 5, 1990* (June 1990), 35-6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Bill Blaikie interview.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

relationship with the United States. Canada could also have argued that they need to be at the negotiating table to represent the interests of their large Eastern European population. As a mediator, Canada could have acted in a similar fashion as Poland: not within the sphere of the major powers, but given special status to help aid the talks.

Another way in which Canada could have aided the “Two-Plus-Four” process could have been to promote economic stability in a united Germany by revealing their readiness to increase foreign investment, trade, and diplomacy.<sup>36</sup> It would have been beneficial for Canada to be at the negotiating table to push its own trade and diplomatic presence with a united Germany to take advantage of the changing developments. If they had shown their willingness to help create a strong, unified Germany they could have further strengthened ties between North America and the European Economic Community.

In addition, Canada could also have propositioned to be at the talks due to its Arctic position. The security risks that were involved with questioning the future of German security allegiance had implications for the international sphere. The Canadian arctic had been a significant military aspect throughout the Cold War era, and any adjustments to international security affected the Canadians defense of the Arctic region. The Canadians could have advocated being at the negotiating table in order to be dynamically engaged with the security questions involving NATO’s members and NATO’s interests.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the persistent belief that Canada could not have played a role in the “Two-Plus-Four,” there is evidence that Canada could have positively contributed to the discussions. Though it is only conjecture, Canada's inclusion in the “Two-Plus-Four” discussions could have led to positive repercussions that would still be felt today. By working cooperatively with both East and West, Canada could have provided a meditating voice for the interests of everyone involved to help ease tensions, and provide a fair assessment of global politics. By endorsing a pan-European security system, Canada could have helped to create a more dynamic balance of power and help eliminate the strained relations between NATO and the Soviet Union. Increased political aggression, combined with an understanding of international politics on a multi-dimensional level would have made Canada an important and strong partner in the discussions. By including Canada in the “Two-Plus-Four” process, international politics as we know them today, could have looked remarkably different, a difference which could have led to positive consequences for the future.

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<sup>36</sup> Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade, 4, 21.