

Gorby crashes Europe's love-in

“Gorby, we love you Gorby,” chanted delirious crowds here in this West German city that has grown prosperous making capitalistic Mercedes-Benzes and Porsches. The most popular man in Germany, Mikhail Gorbachev, kisses babies, works the crowd and basks in a frantic adulation that reminded me of the Beatles in their prime.

Much of this Gorbymania is no doubt due to the good cop-bad cop routine being put on by the Soviets. After 44 years of hearing growls from the Russian bear, Germans are now overflowing with affection for the likable, sensible Soviet leader. Anything is better than seeing their nation destroyed in another war.

Gorbachev took some pains to show official Soviet support for the united Europe that will come to be in 1992 and, reassuringly, for continued U.S. and Canadian presence on the continent. He also noted that his four-day visit to West Germany was more than just “feelings.” “This is about the great changes that are taking place,” Gorbachev said. He is most certainly correct.

As the old postwar order crumbles, Gorbachev and his key advisers are laying the groundwork for the next 20 years of Soviet foreign policy. After having sulked off in the wilderness for 70 or so years, the USSR has decided it will rejoin Europe. This prospect delights Europeans who sense both commercial advantage and the chance for a durable peace with a declared Soviet Union.

Beneath all this surface warmth, I suspect the Soviets have a far more profound strategy. The Russians are a highly educated people who know their history and geography. In spite of their cheery words about the advent of a united Europe in 1992, the Soviets are deeply worried by the prospect.

The last two times Europe was united, first under Napoleon and then under Hitler, the result was an inva-



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sion of Russia. An economically, politically and militarily united Europe next door is a prospect that gives the Soviets the willies. The Soviets would much prefer the present collection of independent states.

It's also clear that as Europe unites, and becomes yearly more powerful, Soviet influence in Eastern Europe will quickly decline. The process is already well under way. Once Poland, Hungary and other states develop more democratic systems, as they are now doing, their natural instinct will be to look west.

As European power grows, U.S. influence on the continent will decline sharply. Europe will no longer need America as its protector and big brother. In many parts of the world, European and American foreign policy will diverge sharply, as it's now beginning to do in the Mideast and Central America. Over the past five decades, Soviet foreign policy has focused on the U.S. From now on, Moscow's attention will be directed toward Europe, America will play an increasingly peripheral role in Soviet strategy.

If all goes well with Europe's plans for federation — and this still remains an open question — the Soviets will find the world's leading power, United Europe, right next door.

In my view, the Soviets will have to accept growing

European economic power as an unalterable fact. But they will seek through deft diplomacy to frustrate the development of a unified European foreign and military policy. The Kremlin will do so by quietly using its own economic influence to pry apart the Europeans. This process is already under way. Promises of enormous business for West German industry in the Soviet Union have already caused Bonn to edge away from its NATO partners over arms reduction policy, scaring the other Europeans and infuriating the French. Expect a lot more of such strategic chess.

Keeping Paris and Bonn on different wave lengths, and seeing that Britain remains odd man out in a united Europe, will form the core of Russia's diplomacy over the coming years. This strategy will be a lot easier than preventing the wholesale departure of Eastern Europe into the United Europe camp. Nor can Moscow discount the possibility that the Euro-infection of democracy and free enterprise might infect Soviet youth, as has happened lately in China. Mother Russia needs the Europeans but not, as yet, their dangerous ideas.

But such thoughts are for the year 2000. Meanwhile, the great European love-in continues. Europeans are feeling their oats and, suddenly, the prospect that the continent may soon again become the centre of world power and industry. Germans are waving “I love Gorby” banners and sending their children to study Russian. A few clear minds, though, are worrying where all this euphoria and new found power could lead.

One thing is certain: the West is entering a new era in which the ground is shifting. The old foundations are falling apart, the millennium is upon us.

In 1989 Europeans were convinced the next century would bring them peace, prosperity and unity. Let's hope today's Euro-optimists have better luck.