

'Security' and 'Cooperation': Now, More Than Just Words

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PARIS — The nations of Europe, joined by their North American offspring and their Soviet neighbor, vowed Monday to put a millennium of war and conflict behind them and to move together into a new European future of peaceful political competition and cooperation.

It is a measure of how far Europe has come after igniting two ravaging world wars in this century and fighting hundreds of other national conflicts before then that such soaring ambitions were taken seriously by all speakers in the opening day of the 34-member Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Although many pointed to serious problems that remain, the pres-

idents and prime ministers gathered in Paris also seemed to think that this time there was a chance their words might come true. No one derided the peaceful vision unveiled in the speeches, conference documents and the sweeping arms control agreement formally signed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact in a side ceremony.

The three-day pan-European summit meeting revealed itself on Monday to be less than a peace conference but more than an excuse for pomp and circumstance and self-congratulation by the members of the world leadership club.

Europe set its goal Monday as abolishing national conflicts without abolishing the existence of nations.

Running through the speeches,

including the one given by the Soviet president, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, was the idea that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet empire have given Europe the chance to take charge of its

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future and to again be the subject of history rather than the object.

By setting out a schedule for regular meetings at the summit and ministerial levels, the 34 conference states took on the burden of reviewing their progress toward the lofty ambitions that are being codified here.

But unlike the Congress of Vienna of 1815, where two emperors, four kings and dozens of lesser statesmen redrew the boundaries of Europe and divided the spoils left by Napoleon's defeat, this confer-

ence has no decision-making powers. The conference host, President François Mitterrand, pointedly declared the Paris conference "the anti-Congress of Vienna."

That historic gathering, dominated by Austria's Metternich and France's Talleyrand, "ignored the people and their aspirations," Mr. Mitterrand said in the day's opening speech. The purpose of the Paris conference, he added, was to underscore the spread of democracy and the rule of law throughout Europe.

Mr. Mitterrand also appeared to want to draw distinctions between this gathering, which has been styled as the formal ending of both World War II and the Cold War, and the Versailles peace conference that ended World War I.

"There are no winners and no losers sitting around this table," he

said, eschewing any show of vindictiveness toward the retreating Soviet Union.

But the breaking up of the Soviet empire, which now threatens to strike the Soviet state structure itself, and the re-emergence of fragile nation-states with complex ethnic balances in Central Europe, pose many of the same problems for the continent that confronted the Congress of Vienna and the Versailles Conference after clear military victories by the dominant powers at those two meetings.

The ambitions of the Paris conference and the follow-up meeting that will be held in Helsinki in 1992 involve nothing less than breaking the chain of wars, revolutions and repressions that have exploded from Europe's cultural and political diversity with regularity.

By agreeing to meet at the sum-

mit every two years and more often at lower levels, the conference leaders have promised to review their progress toward this goal periodically.

Soviet concern over establishing the permanence of the results of World War II and Western concern over the lack of human rights and democratic freedoms in Eastern Europe led to the convening of the first summit meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Helsinki in 1975, which included all the nations of Europe except Albania, plus the United States and Canada, key members of NATO.

Originally proposed two years ago by Mr. Gorbachev and agreed to by the United States on condition that the Conventional Forces

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in Europe arms treaty be signed here, by the time it convened the Paris conference dealt with the consequences of World War II less directly and explicitly than had once been expected by diplomats in both blocs.

The rapid reunification of Germany, achieved on Oct. 3, and the signing of the Polish-German border treaty earlier this month removed what would have been central elements of a conference that would have taken up a de facto World War II settlement. Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany, who presided over the afternoon session, offered an uncharacteristically low profile at the opening ceremonies.

President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia termed the Warsaw Pact "an outdated organization" that he will work to transform into a disarmament agency.

Speaker after speaker underscored the contrast between the hopeful outlook for Europe in putting aside war as an instrument of national policy and the threat of conflict in the Gulf. President George Bush, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain, Mr. Gorbachev and others specifically denounced Iraq's aggression, while Mr. Mitterrand offered only a general reference to "the Gulf crisis."

In one of the day's most energetic interventions, Mr. Gorbachev warned that peace was not yet at hand in Europe. Proposing that new negotiations on short-range nuclear missiles begin in a month, the Soviet president said further progress had to be made quickly on arms control.

He said that only if new conti-

nental structures and institutions capable of providing help for economic, ecological and technological problems were created would it be possible to avoid "implosions" that would destroy the progress toward democracy that has been made.