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UNIFICATION OF GERMANY IN 1990*

CHAUNCY D. HARRIS

ABSTRACT. Unification of East and West Germany was achieved peacefully in 1990. Agreements on international problems of the eastern boundary, military alliances, size of military forces, and foreign troops were codified in a treaty signed on 12 September by the four post-World War II occupying powers and the two Germanies. Internal problems of unification were addressed by treaties between the two Germanies on 18 May and 31 August. These dealt with state boundaries, the capital, environmental pollution and costs, and a host of economic, political, social, and judicial factors. United on 3 October, the new Germany promises to play a significant role in international affairs.

A new Germany came into existence on 3 October 1990 (Fig. 1). This Germany had not existed previously, at least not in these boundaries with this population, society, economy, government, and international ties. With an area of 357,043 square kilometers, it is two-thirds the size of the Germany of 1871. It is much smaller than France but slightly larger than the United Kingdom or Italy. It has a population of 78 million, compared with 56–57 million for each of these other countries. It also has a stronger economy than any other country in the European Community. In a central position in Europe between east and west and north and south, it has more international boundaries than any other country in Europe: land boundaries are with France, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Switzerland.

The full geographical effects of unification will not be apparent until some time in the future. The economic geography of the new Germany cannot now be written adequately. Many enterprises in East Germany are so outmoded that their production is being sharply reduced or closed altogether. But if massive investments are made in state-of-the-art facilities, new factories in East Germany could become the most competitive not only in Germany but also in Europe. The fear in East Germany is of current unemployment; the hope is for massive investment and improved competitiveness. This article deals with the process of unification in 1990 and with the problems involved.

THE DECISION TO UNITE

The tide of political change in east-central and eastern Europe finally reached East Germany in summer 1989. Breathtaking events followed in

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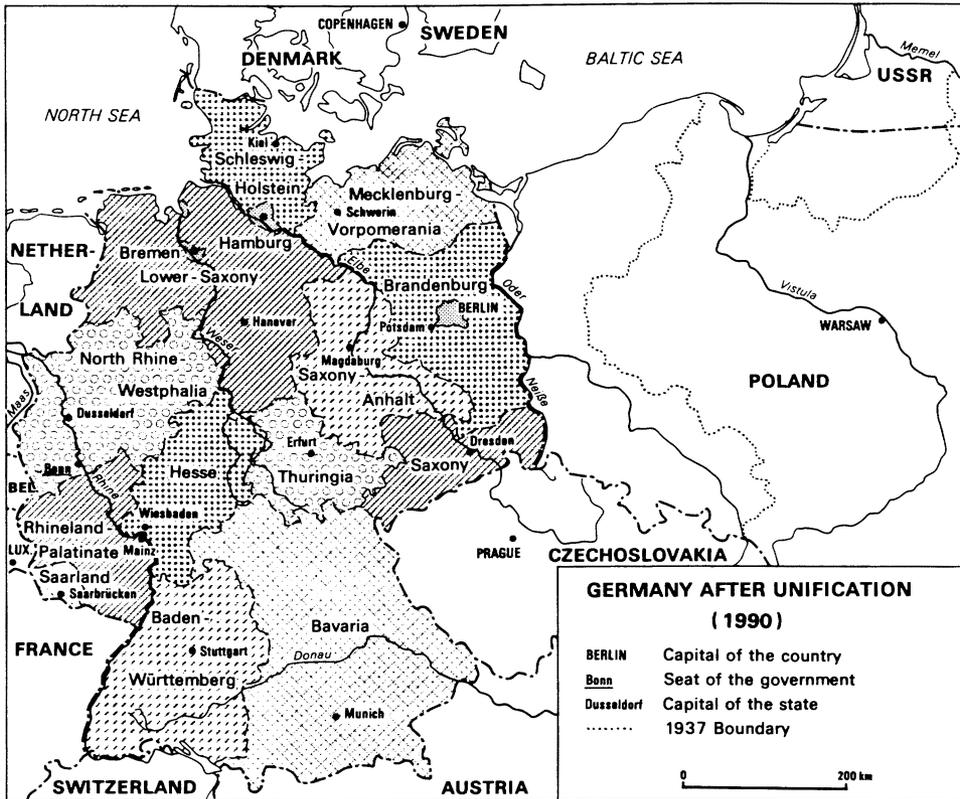


FIG. 1—Germany after unification 3 October 1990.

rapid succession: the flight of 344,000 people from East to West Germany in 1989 and another 190,000 in the first half of 1990; demonstrations and turmoil resulting in the removal on 18 October 1989 of Erich Honecker, the long-time, hard-line communist leader of East Germany; the opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989; free elections on 18 March 1990, won by non-communist parties in favor of unification with West Germany.

At a meeting in Ottawa, Canada, on 13 February 1990, the foreign ministers of the four major World War II allies and those of the two Germanies agreed on a framework for negotiating the unification of Germany. The dominant partner in the transaction was the Federal Republic, which had a population of 61 million, compared with less than 17 million for the Democratic Republic, a much greater national product in convertible currency, and a well-established, freely elected government. The proposals to unite the two Germanies faced formidable external and internal problems (Asmus 1990; Bertram 1990). In general, the two Germanies in concert with the four World War II powers dealt with the external problems; agreement about the eastern boundary of the new Germany involved Poland as well. Internal problems were within the competence of the two Germanies to decide.

EXTERNAL PROBLEMS

Major external problems were posed by the international boundaries of the new Germany and by its strategic alliances, the size of its military forces, and the continued presence of foreign troops in its territory. The German Democratic Republic had been a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). The Federal Republic was a member of the European Community, as is the newly united country. The economy of East Germany faces not only difficult, painful adjustments but also new opportunities.

The first problem was that of international boundaries. In the absence of a peace treaty ending World War II, no agreement existed about the boundaries of Germany. Indeed, the constitution of the Federal Republic specifically stated that the boundaries were those of 1937. The large number of residents in West Germany who had been expelled from former German lands now occupied by the Soviet Union and by Poland represented a political force of some strength within the Federal Republic. After initial hesitation and equivocation by the federal chancellor in January 1990, the Bundestag in the Federal Republic and the Volkskammer in the Democratic Republic on 21 June 1990 adopted matching resolutions that gave formal recognition to the new eastern boundary with Poland and explicit assurances to Poland (Unity of Germany 1990). Germany thus relinquished claims to 114,549 square kilometers of prewar territory east of the Oder and Neisse rivers.

At a meeting in Paris on 17 July 1990, the foreign ministers of the four wartime allies, the two Germanies, and Poland settled the boundary question. The united Germany would remove from its laws any language that suggested or implied that the Polish-German border is provisional. The newly unified country would comprise only East and West Germany and Berlin. The parliament of the unified Germany would confirm the Oder-Neisse line in treaty and would forswear any territorial claim. The wartime allies would serve as witnesses to these assurances.

On 14 November 1990, the German and Polish foreign ministers signed a treaty guaranteeing the current border between Poland and Germany. The prime minister of Poland then asked for the forgiveness of the German nation for the sufferings that were caused by moving Poland from east to west, as a result of Soviet annexation of the eastern portion of Poland, its compensation with prewar German territory east of the Oder-Neisse rivers, and the division of East Prussia between Poland and the Soviet Union.

These territories may now have less strategic significance than they once had for Germany. The German inhabitants were largely expelled in 1945. They and their descendants have lived for forty-five years in the postwar Germanies and have contributed to their economy and life. It is not known how many might have wished to return to their former homes and occupations had that been possible. Advanced industrialized countries produce agricultural surpluses for a larger population on a much reduced area with

far fewer farmers but with politically sensitive subsidies. Even the relative importance of the old centers of coal mining and heavy industry, such as Upper Silesia (Hartshorne 1934) and the Ruhr (Harris 1946), has been reduced in the modern era of high technology and the growth of the service sector. Some of the heavy-industrial areas that once formed the sinews of German power in both East and West Germany are now depressed, relative to new, rapidly growing industrial areas of high technology in southern West Germany (Lavrov 1989). Population; a well-educated, highly trained, hardworking, and motivated labor force; accumulated capital in the form of productive facilities; and a high level of technology, economy, and culture now appear to be far more significant than mere area.

Among the military problems that confronted the reunification effort, international alliances presented difficult questions. East Germany had been a member of the Warsaw Pact, which was dominated by the Soviet Union. West Germany was a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Numerous proposals were offered for continuing or modifying German participation in these alliances. Ultimately on 16 July 1990, the Soviet Union withdrew its opposition to NATO membership for the united Germany. At that time the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union reached an accord that, during the transition period, the military forces of NATO or German forces assigned to it would not be stationed in East German territory. It was also agreed then that the size of the military forces of the united Germany would be reduced to 370,000, less than the previous levels of 490,000 for the Federal Republic and 100,000 for the Democratic Republic. The 370,000 Soviet troops in East Germany would be withdrawn by the end of 1994. Withdrawal of NATO troops from Berlin would coincide with Soviet departure from East Germany. The new Germany would renounce nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

The Federal Republic had already agreed to provide financial and economic aid to the Soviet Union. It had pledged the equivalent of U.S.\$2.9 billion in credit and had assumed financial responsibility to support Soviet troops during the last six months of 1990. The latter liability, valued at U.S.\$750 million, had previously been paid by East Germany. Germany also agreed to sign a comprehensive economic pact with the Soviet Union.

In Moscow on 12 September 1990, the foreign ministers of the four wartime allies signed the Treaty on Final Settlement with Respect to Germany and relinquished their occupation rights over German territory, which had been established at the Potsdam conference of August 1945 (*Izvestiia* 1990; *New York Times* 13 September 1990; Stares 1990, 153-160). After forty-five years Germany regained its full sovereignty. Since the ratification by the governments or parliaments of each country would take some time, the occupying powers agreed to suspend their occupation rights on 1 October 1990. The foreign ministers of the two Germanies also signed the treaty. The West German government further agreed to pay approximately U.S.\$8 billion to the Soviet Union to resettle the repatriated troops. A sovereign

country enjoys the right to belong to alliances of its own choosing, and the new Germany thus is permitted to be a member of NATO. The actual text of the treaty resulted from intense but generally harmonious negotiations and ensured that no party was branded winner or loser by carefully addressing the concerns and sensitivities of each signatory. With the signing of this treaty, a fully sovereign Germany could formally unite on 3 October 1990.

The extraordinary and unanticipated speed in international agreement on the merging of Germany was based on the perception of all the major powers that the people of the two Germanies desired unification. The agreement was also a consequence of numerous bilateral and multilateral discussions and summit conferences among the heads of state and the foreign ministers of all involved countries. The number and frequency of these consultations resulted from rapid jet-airline travel and international communication networks, which enabled all the leaders to become well acquainted with each other and to understand the diverse viewpoints and concerns of each country. Thus the NATO powers were well informed about the special concerns of the Soviet Union and Poland and were willing and able to adjust policies to alleviate the concerns, for example, by issuing a statement that NATO no longer considered the Soviet Union an adversary. West German leaders on numerous occasions acknowledged German responsibility and regret for sufferings inflicted during the Nazi period.

Although the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union officially approved of German unification, individuals in each country, recalling former German military power and the inhumanity of the Nazi period, were uneasy about a united Germany. People in the Soviet Union, which had suffered heavy losses of life and property during World War II, were especially apprehensive. Larger numbers, especially government leaders, emphasized that the contemporary world involves different persons, different times, different attitudes, and a greatly changed international situation, with stress on democracy, free enterprise, social caring, rule of law, international cooperation, and European integration (Sommer 1990).

In contrast to external impediments, the two German governments dealt with the internal problems of unification. Economic, political, social, and judicial differences had to be reconciled in negotiations. Other problems included the high levels of environmental pollution and industrial hazards in East Germany.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

Among the economic and financial problems of unification were the differences in the value of the West German and East German currencies, dissimilar price levels, and contrasting competitiveness of industries and

agriculture. To make East German industry competitive, massive investments in modernization will be required; such investments will need secure property rights.

A treaty between the two Germanies on 18 May 1990 addressed economic and financial matters (Gesetz 1990; Unity of Germany 1990). Agreement was reached that on 1 July 1990 the Federal Republic would exchange, within certain limits, valuable, convertible West German marks for the less valuable, nonconvertible East German marks. This exchange represented a substantial subsidy to East Germany. The transaction was well planned and went smoothly. Fears of possible inflationary pressures proved unfounded, because East Germans, worried about high prices and possible unemployment, generally saved their new marks. The Federal Republic also agreed to assume responsibility for the financial and contractual trade obligations of East Germany. Thus the first stage of economic union was quickly achieved (*New York Times* 1 July 1990).

Profound differences in price levels also separated the two Germanies. On the one hand, some basic foodstuffs and housing were heavily subsidized in East Germany, so that prices were low. Removal of those subsidies posed the problem of price rises and accompanying hardship in East Germany. On the other hand, prices, quality, and availability of many consumer goods, such as television sets, refrigerators, and automobiles, were much improved in East Germany after the currency exchange. Formerly protected producers of low-quality, inexpensive consumer items in East Germany saw the market for their wares almost completely disappear. The East German economy, based on state ownership, directed by a national economic plan and government ministries, and oriented toward other members of COMECON under arranged exchanges or barter, faces the daunting problem of being competitive in the open-market economy of the Federal Republic, the European Community, and the world at large.

Agriculture also presented hurdles. Farmers in East Germany, forced against their will into collectives during the 1950s, had become accustomed to the regular working hours, vacation time, pensions, and social centers provided by the collectives. With economic union, better-graded and better-packaged West German products displaced many East German items in the markets. The East German farmers received the equivalent of approximately U.S.\$3.5 billion in subsidies from the former East German government. Now, faced with stiff competition, they are demanding higher subsidies. But the pending economic unification of the European Community could actually reduce both farm subsidies and the area under cultivation.

Widespread unemployment is anticipated in East Germany both during the transition period and afterward, but the Federal Republic has agreed to provide benefits to ease the consequences of economic change. The automobile industry illustrates problems of investment and employment. The

Trabant automobile factory, the prewar Audi plant in Zwickau that was nationalized after World War II, had 11,000 workers in 1989 and produced 146,000 cars with a motorcycle-size, twenty-six-horsepower, two-cylinder motor, with a maximum speed of sixty miles per hour, which is slow by West German standards, and with air-pollutant levels ten times higher than from western-made cars. In the absence of other available automobiles, there was a waiting period of fourteen years for customers to receive deliveries of new Trabants. With the introduction of West German convertible marks, the demand for Trabants has dropped precipitously. Volkswagen announced in March 1990 a joint venture with Trabant to invest U.S.\$1.9 billion to produce in a nearby plant at Mosel, East Germany, almost twice as many highly salable Volkswagens with only about half the labor force, but production is not likely to begin until 1993 or to reach full capacity until 1996. Meantime, workers at the Trabant factory face massive unemployment. To handle the huge losses, the management has asked for large governmental subsidies. Altogether, Volkswagen plans to invest U.S.\$3 billion in East Germany. Other West German companies planning large investments there include Daimler-Benz, which will spend U.S.\$600 million to modernize the largest truck factory; Siemens A.G., which will pay out U.S.\$625 million to employ 25,000 workers in telecommunications, computers, and related fields; and Deutsche Bank, which plans to invest more than U.S.\$500 million to establish 250 branches.

Massive investment in communications, railroads, highways, and utilities is also urgently needed. The ordinary tourist immediately notices the absence of computerized reservation systems for accommodations and the rudimentary, overloaded state of the telephone system. Only 7 percent of the homes in East Germany have telephones, compared with 98 percent in West Germany.

Basic to massive investments such as these is the need to secure property rights. East German lands and properties were confiscated during three different periods: under the Nazi regime in 1933–1945, by the Soviet Union under four-power occupation rights in 1945–1949, and by the communist government in 1949–1990. Who owns a house left behind by an individual who fled as a political refugee to the West during one of these periods?

The largest and perhaps the most controversial claim for former property rights in East Germany is by a successor concern of I. G. Farben, which was the largest chemical conglomerate in the world until 1945. Approximately 40 percent of its assets were in territory that became part of East Germany. During the breakup of the conglomerate after World War II into concerns such as Bayer, Hoechst, and BASF, residual legal claims, pensions, stockholder rights, and foreign assets were assigned in 1952 to a unit called I. G. Farben in Liquidation, which had been expected to cease operating by 1992. Now it is laying claim to 150 square kilometers of land, two huge chemical groups, and other assets in East Germany. This and other claims are to be evaluated by the Berlin-based Treuhandanstalt (Trustee Institute).

POLITICAL PROBLEMS

Political problems focused on the size and boundaries of the states in the territory of East Germany, the capital for the united Germany, the fate of former officials and the bureaucracy of the Democratic Republic, the effect of the addition of East Germany on the party balance in the united country, and the attitudes of the parties toward unification.

East Germany inherited five prewar states—Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony, and Thuringia—which were abolished in 1952 and reorganized into fifteen counties. Article 23 of the Federal Republic constitution provided a means for the former German states to rejoin the republic. East German political leaders agreed in June 1990 to abolish the fifteen counties and to reconstitute the five former states, in which elections were held on 14 October 1990. These states could then petition to join the Federal Republic. Added to the existing ten states in West Germany and Berlin, the five East German states bring the countrywide total to sixteen.

The size of the states affects the distribution of political power. The five reconstituted states, on average, have approximately half the population of the ten West German states. This imbalance gives the eastern states greater representation per capita in the Bundesrat, the upper house of the German parliament, which, like the U.S. Senate, is apportioned by state, albeit with some variation according to population. The East German areas, with about two-ninths of the population of the unified country, have three-ninths of the votes in the Bundesrat. The most populous West German state, North Rhine-Westphalia, alone has a population about as large as all of former East Germany. On the other hand, West Germany includes three very small states, the two city-states of Bremen and Hamburg and the Saarland. By the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the Saarland was placed under administration by the League of Nations, with the coal mines assigned to France; after World War II it was part of the French occupation zone and economically united with France until its return to Germany in 1957. The area became the tenth West German state in 1959.

In the treaty between the two Germanies signed on 31 August 1990 and the agreement of 18 September, Berlin was designated the capital of the unified country (Vertrag 1990). But will the city become the seat of government? The question will be decided by the all-German legislature. Arguments in favor of continuation of Bonn as the center of administration include the high cost of shifting the ministries and the approximately 100,000 civil servants now in Bonn who would have to be moved, the shortage of appropriate office buildings and adequate housing in Berlin, the enormous investment already committed to governmental buildings in Bonn, the better security for the government in a small center than in a metropolitan area, the symbolism of a relatively small capital for a democratic federal state (Laux 1990), the association of Berlin with the Nazi past, and the location of Berlin near

the eastern boundary of the country, only eighty kilometers from the Polish border.

Arguments in favor of Berlin include its historic role as the center of Germany, its symbolic value in integrating East Germany into the united country and providing a growth center for the ailing economy of former East Germany, its role as the largest city and cultural center of the whole of Germany, its position in the middle of central Europe and as a gateway to eastern Europe, and the need to counteract the economic effects of the loss of almost 180,000 jobs in the discontinued bureaucracy of the East German government in the city.

The problems of a divided Berlin have been especially acute, with the disruption of transportation and normal ties by the Berlin Wall and by the isolation of the city from West Germany (Hofmeister 1975; Elkins with Hofmeister 1988; Zimm 1988). A united Berlin faces other problems. East Berlin needs massive investment for rebuilding. Approximately one-half of West Berlin's city-government costs have been underwritten by the West German government to keep the city financially sound. Are these subsidies to be continued? Are the special tax breaks that have been given to businesses and residents of West Berlin justified under the new conditions? What of the subsidies given by the East German government to cultural institutions in its part of the city? The economies of the two Berlins are very disparate, with a booming West and a shrinking East. Wages are much higher in the former, but housing is cheaper in the latter.

What is to happen to the large numbers of former officials of East German governmental units, from armed forces to the security apparatus of the secret police, and the governmental bureaucracy of the Democratic Republic and its county organizations? What of the large number of professional members of the Communist Party? Some may be retired on pensions, but others will have to seek different employment.

In the voting on 14 October 1990 in the reconstituted five states, the right-wing Christian Democratic Party scored an impressive victory and won control of legislatures in four of the five states. The party also triumphed in the heavily industrialized districts of the south that before World War II had been traditional strongholds of the left-wing Social Democrats. Overall, in East Germany the Christian Democrats won 43.6 percent of the vote, compared with 25.2 percent for the Social Democrats. The vote was widely interpreted as support for a rapid completion of the process of unification.

SOCIAL FACTORS

Among the social factors involved in unification were differences in religious composition and in social-welfare systems. East Germany was predominantly Protestant: 80 percent in the 1950 census, in contrast with 11 percent Roman Catholic. (Later figures may not be reliable because of strong

governmental pressures against religious participation). In West Germany, the preference is almost balanced: 42 percent Protestant and 43 percent Roman Catholic in 1987. These differences did not appear to have any significant role in the unification process.

By virtually all indicators West Germans were much better off economically than were East Germans, but the social-welfare programs were more comprehensive for the latter than for the former. The programs included job security, old-age benefits, health care, maternity leave, and day-care centers. One expression of this was the success of East Germany in rapidly reducing infant mortality through the 1970s (Berentsen 1987). In the 1980s, however, this rate was again lower in West Germany. In 1987 illegitimate births constituted 33 percent of all births in East Germany, but the proportion was only 10 percent for West Germany (BRD 1989, 60; DDR 1989, 382). West Germany agreed to continue pensions and social-welfare obligations of East Germany.

West German civil and criminal law was to be applied in East Germany, except in cases where special rules or exemptions were decreed for a transition period. The 1,700 judges in East Germany were replaced, at least until their cases can be reviewed, by West German ones on 3 October 1990. The legal status of abortion was a difficult issue: it had been available on demand in East Germany but was restricted in West Germany. In spite of contrasting legal status, the rate of abortions in the two areas had not been strikingly different: about one pregnancy in four in East Germany in 1989 and an estimated one in five or six in West Germany (*New York Times* 19 July 1990).

POLLUTION AND INDUSTRIAL HAZARDS

Environmental pollution presents an intractable problem. West German environmental laws had been quite strict, but pollution in East Germany was virtually ignored in the drive for the highest possible industrial output. As a result, pollution by the lignite and chemical industries is horrendous. But antipollution measures are very expensive and may be difficult for a competitively weak industry to bear. Also, some food products in East Germany contain high levels of contamination by pesticides and other chemicals long since banned in West Germany.

Safety is a concern in some East German industries. In mid-December 1990, the German government decided to shut down five Soviet-built nuclear-power reactors in former East Germany. Four of them were at Greifswald on the Baltic Sea coast and one was at Rheinsberg. Each was a Soviet VVER model 230 with 440-megawatt capacity. They were designed in the 1960s and were built in the 1970s. The government concluded that the plants failed to meet minimum safety standards and cited poor maintenance, low-quality materials, inadequate fire protection, deficient cooling systems, and lack of a containment system (*New York Times* 21 October 1990).

UNIFICATION TREATY

The long document on unification of the two Germanies, signed 31 August 1990, covers a wide range of matters, including property, environmental quality, finances, culture, health care, education, science, postal and transportation systems, energy supplies, national debt, external commitments, income sharing with states, election procedures, and sports (Vertrag 1990). Essentially the treaty provides for the orderly incorporation of East Germany into the Federal Republic. All East German laws are to be consistent with the West German constitution, the European Community, or the treaty within five years. The constitution has been amended to declare that German unity has been achieved, thus ending German claims to former territories in Poland or the Soviet Union. The land reforms in East Germany between 1945 and 1949 have been recognized. Investors who buy land in East Germany are to be protected in a provision that claims made by former owners or their heirs should be compensated with cash under procedures to be determined later. The treaty has established substantial incentive for investment in East Germany. The East German states are to repay one-half of the East German debt that the united Germany was assuming. The near-bankrupt East German states have been put on a lower level of income sharing, which is need based, because it was feared that their needs might be so great as to absorb all the federal funds allocated for this purpose. Berlin was made the official capital, but the all-German parliament will decide on the seat of government. The secret files of the East German Ministry of State Security are to be placed under an administrator selected by East Germans. Amnesty has been granted to former members of the security police who have not already been charged or who would have been subject to a sentence of fewer than three years. East Germany will retain its liberal abortion-on-demand law until at least 1992. A clearinghouse has been created for hundreds of thousands of East Germans who will lose jobs in the former communist bureaucracy. The federal constitution, government, president, and chancellor have become those of the newly unified Germany. The German Democratic Republic passed from existence at midnight on 2 October 1990, and the new Germany came into being on 3 October. The first free all-German election in fifty-eight years was held on 2 December 1990.

OUTLOOK

The virtual collapse of the German Democratic Republic and the process of unification proceeded much more rapidly than had been anticipated. The economic conditions there are bleaker than had generally been realized. Factories, facilities, and infrastructure are outmoded and outworn. Environmental problems are more daunting than had been thought. Still, the peaceful, relatively smooth unification was a remarkable achievement. It was made possible by the willingness of the Soviet Union to release its hold on East Germany and by the political disintegration of the communist government

in East Germany. Yet the economic strength of West Germany had a significant role, as did its willingness and ability to pay a high price for unification by exchanging its marks for East German ones, by underwriting large expenditures in East Germany, and by assisting in the repatriation of Soviet troops. West Germans have residual concerns about the high costs of unification; East Germans worry about the disparities between the two former countries and the loss of security from an established, if inefficient, order.

The international position of the new Germany differs markedly from conditions in 1871, 1919, or 1945. By virtue of decades of effective political cooperation in NATO and the European Community, West Germany has become a fully integrated participant in European activities. The mood of the 1990s is not one of imperialism or strident nationalism, but rather one of cooperation and the urge to create a broad European association from existing structures such as the European Community or the Conference on Security and Cooperation, which, with thirty-five members, includes all European countries except Albania.

In the evolving association of the countries of Europe, the new Germany appears poised to play an important role. First, it has a central position. All principal west-east railroad lines north of the Alps cross German territory (Murphy 1991). Hamburg, long the leading port of central Europe, is likely to benefit greatly from the dropping of barriers that truncate its natural hinterland (Weigend 1956). Second, in this part of the world, Germany has by far the largest population of any country except the Soviet Union. Third, West Germany has emerged as the leading economic power in Europe and the deutsche mark as the strongest currency. The addition of East Germany brings not only the problems of an inefficient, noncompetitive economy but also the potential for increased productivity through capital investment, improved management, and a better-motivated labor force.

As unification moved rapidly, Germany began to assume a larger role in the European Community, in NATO, in the deliberations of the Group of Seven world industrial democracies, and in the Conference on Security and Cooperation. It appears that the new Germany will become the principal trading partner of the Soviet Union and that Berlin will once again be the cultural and economic hub of central Europe.

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