

THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY

or

THE ANATOMY OF A PEACEFUL REVOLUTION

by

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Thus, the East and West German governments were under pressure to produce a positive outcome in a reasonable period of time.

III. THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY

A. The Problems Surrounding the Unification

Germany's unification raised both internal and international questions. The important internal question was how to put together two states that over forty years had developed very different political, economic, and social systems and whose living standards were far apart from each other.

West German politicians advanced two models for the unification. Oskar Lafontaine, the chancellor candidate of the SPD, wanted the two German states to remain in existence for an indefinite period of time, until they became slowly linked together by common political institutions that would gain weight with the passing of time.¹ He argued that although both states were democratically ruled, they had very different economic and social systems that should be brought together slowly. He expected that both states should give up some of their characteristic features and through adaptation create a new system, one somewhere in the middle between capitalism and socialism. The so-called "third way" should finally emerge. Basically, Lafontaine wanted to use East Germany as a lever to change West Germany into a society where solidarity would gain the upper hand over competition.

In other words, the old socialistic dream remained strong. The socialist had never stopped distrusting the market forces and the discipline of a competitive system. Solidarity among people and a state which cared for all eventualities of life were the still cherished socialistic goals.

Lafontaine also argued that West Germany should support East Germany financially until the gap between their living standards narrowed. Since time would be required to merge the economic and social systems and to narrow the gap in living standards, unification would have been postponed indefinitely. Lafontaine wanted the unification

to coincide with the creation of a greater Europe, one that encompassed the European community and the East European states. He believed that in such a larger entity a unified Germany would be less likely to have the leading position that its size and economic power would otherwise command. Lafontaine opposed nationalistic sentiments in Germany, arguing that the time for the emergence of an European identity and feeling had arrived. Because of its burdened past, Germany, he felt, should be the first nation to give up narrow, nationalistic attitudes.²

Lafontaine was convinced that in the March election the East Germans, coming from a communist system, would vote for a socialistic rather than a bourgeois government. He also hoped to beat Chancellor Kohl in the December 1990 West German election. With social democratic leaders in place in both states, Lafontaine felt sure he could transform the capitalistic system in the West and the communist system in the East into a mutually compatible system, closely resembling the Swedish socialist model.

Lafontaine's model was eagerly embraced by other leftist forces and by a large number of left-leaning intellectuals. The Greens passed a resolution opposing the outright unification of Germany.

But in the SPD itself, Lafontaine's vision was not universally accepted. Willy Brandt, for example, argued that the unification should not be artificially delayed and believed that the German people were entitled to a reasonable degree of nationalistic feeling—like any other European nation. He and many other social-democrats were torn between party discipline on the one hand and, on the other, their recognition that the bourgeois model for unification was much closer to their personal convictions than the model presented and defended by their own chancellor candidate.

The bourgeois model for the unification of Germany was based on the conviction that the West German economic and social system had proven its superior merits, while the East German system was demonstrably corrupt and ineffective.³ Therefore, the disappearance of the East German state would not be a loss to the East German people and the world. The East Germans would become part of West Germany, and the West German system of government would be introduced in its place with as little adjustment and as few transitional regulations as possible. The bourgeois goal was unification on West Germany's terms as soon as possible. The pressure to more rapidly unite was caused by the continuing economic deterioration in East

Germany. The bourgeois parties also rejected support payments to the reform communists, for those payments would only fortify communist power and postpone the necessary transformation to political and economic freedom.

These two models competed for acceptance not only in both Germanies but also in the world at large. Within Germany, they became part of the election campaign that divided the country into two unequal camps. The world at large, the European neighbors of Germany in the East and West in particular, would have preferred Lafontaine's approach. But in the Spring of 1990, these countries realized that Lafontaine's fortunes were slipping while Kohl's were on the rise. Only the U. S. supported Kohl's position from the outset.

The unification of Germany posed three clusters of international problems. The first cluster entailed problems of future superpower relations. The second cluster entailed the questions arising from the fact that East and West Germany were the border states of the Warsaw Pact and of NATO respectively.⁴ The third cluster of questions dealt with the problem of how to fit a larger and more powerful Germany into the existing European institutions.

At the beginning of June, the foreign ministers of East and West Germany met in Bonn with the foreign ministers of the victorious allies of World War II—U. S., Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. At this first "two-plus-four meeting," Shevardnadze, then foreign minister of the Soviet Union, proposed separating the internal and the international questions from each other so that Germany could unite without the delays that waiting for the solution of the international questions might cause.⁵ West Germany's foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, liked this proposal, but Helmut Kohl did not accept it.⁶ Supported by U. S. Secretary of State James Baker, Kohl argued that the unification and the restoration of the full sovereignty of Germany had to occur together. On this issue, the East German government also backed Kohl's position. For East Germany, the lack of sovereignty remained a problem because Soviet occupation continued and people feared that the move to freedom could be aborted any time.

The internal and the international questions were not untied. As a result, a number of very different issues at very different levels needed to be addressed.⁷ The German unification remained imbedded in the larger issues mentioned above, and many believed that unification would emerge as the final achievement of undoing this Gordian

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The superpowers and all other involved parties foresaw a lengthy and difficult negotiation process. Kohl, for example, said that he did not expect the unification to occur before 1991. But the world leaders lost control over the speed of the process. The people of East Germany once again determined the timetable. East German economic conditions deteriorated very fast in the summer of 1990, and world leaders realized that East Germany would not survive as a viable entity for any length of time. The Soviet Union, in particular, suddenly had to confront the question of whether to allow the border region of its hemisphere to sink into chaos or to speed up the negotiations with the West. The West simultaneously faced growing German pressure to allow unification to take place. Kohl argued that otherwise a unification of another sort would occur: millions of East Germans would migrate into West Germany and cause enormous problems on both sides of the border. In essence, the people of East Germany enforced the unification according to the bourgeois model in 1990. In this sense, the revolution continued until Germany was finally united.

B. The Settlement of the International Questions Surrounding the Unification

World War II and the division of the world into communist and democratic zones of influence created the German question. Germans, their politicians included, believed that the division of Germany into a Western and an Eastern half could be overcome by peaceful means only if and when the global political situation would change. West and East Germany needed, in German eyes, to lose their frontier-state characteristic before any kind of unification could become feasible. And even then, they believed, the unification would pose a severe problem because the Soviet Union would not give up such an important economic asset without compensation. That the West would give up West Germany was never considered.

To the great surprise of the world, Gorbachev's reform movement loosened Soviet control over Eastern Europe and provided a chance for the division of the world, and particularly of Europe, to be brought to a peaceful end.¹ Since the Reykjavik Summit in October of 1986, Gorbachev had been pleading for an overhaul of the global political situation. It took the U. S. administration until the Malta Summit in December of 1989 to accept that the changes in the communist hemisphere were genuine and that the Western world should react positively.² There were several specific issues for discussion between Bush and Gorbachev: the role of the superpowers, the defense pacts in the East and West, the future of Europe, and the role of international financial institutions. Both leaders agreed in these discussions that one of the final arrangements would be a settlement of the German question. In essence, Bush and Gorbachev hinted in Malta that the division of the world into two hostile or competing camps had a real chance of ending, to make room for the emergence of a new order.

Over the years since 1945, leaders in the East and the West had shown a strong desire to maintain the status quo in Europe and elsewhere. Had not the division in Europe along the iron curtain brought about stability and peace for forty-five years? People in the West had

grown accustomed to the status quo. Their living standard had risen continually, and they enjoyed political stability and freedom. For the people under communist rule, the situation was quite different. They exploited the opening provided by *glasnost* and *perestroika*, toppled their communist regimes, and tried to install new governments they could trust. The East Germans went a big step further, demanding not merely a new government but the disappearance of their state and unification with West Germany. This made the German case unique and completely different from the revolutions in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.

The demand for unification created great emotional problems—particularly for the other European countries. An incident in July illuminated the severity of the problem.³ Margaret-Thatcher had summoned some of the best known Western historians for a private conference about Germany. These experts urged Mrs. Thatcher to give up her resistance to Germany's unification and to accept the fact that today's Germany was vastly different from the one in the past. Despite this advice, Nicholas Ridley, Thatcher's trusted trade and industry secretary, lashed out and bluntly expressed his opinion. Interviewed in the London-based *Spectator*, he argued that, "This is all a German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe." He compared Kohl with Hitler and called the French "the German poodles" for changing their minds and now supporting the German unification. Thatcher had to settle this embarrassment by dismissing Ridley, but German leaders were well aware that Ridley's sentiments were widely shared in European capitals.

Resistance to the unification of Germany was well entrenched. The current size of West Germany's population and its economic power were similar to those of the other large European countries. Adding some 16 million East Germans would create the largest and economically strongest country of Europe. Rome, Paris, and London were concerned that ambitious German politicians could translate economic strength into the political domination of Europe. In East European capitals, particularly in Warsaw, the fear was great that a united Germany might become so attractive to German minorities that they would want to discuss anew the Eastern border of Germany. Large parts of Silesia, for example, had been German territory for centuries, although most of the Germans were driven away after World War II. The economic data actually showed that a united Germany would have by far the largest economy in Europe and would be

the fourth largest in the world.

Germany in Comparison⁴ (1988 Figures)

	Population (millions)	Gross Domestic Product (\$ billions)
USSR	280	2,535
U. S.	226	4,864
Japan	121	1,758
United Germany	78	1,077
Britain	57	755
France	57	754
Italy	56	762

Kohl understood very well that he had to present "confidence-building approaches" to overcome the resistance to the German unification by the other European countries. He generally reacted to these concerns by pointing out that Europe had a way to harness the greater German economic weight. The European Community needed only to speed up the process of its own economic and political integration. To demonstrate his good intentions, Kohl, supported by Mitterrand, suggested a strengthening of political cooperation within the European community.⁵ Kohl also reiterated that decisions in Europe should be based on "one country, one vote," meaning that every member nation, whether large or small, should have the same weight.

Kohn and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, West Germany's foreign minister since 1974, were experienced enough not to overestimate Germany's political weight. They realized that alone, Germany's efforts would not suffice to overcome the open and hidden resistance in Europe and in the Soviet Union. They knew that they needed the support of the U. S., especially in their dealings with the Soviet Union. Germany chose and found in the U. S. its main support at the bargaining table with the other victorious allies.⁶ From the very beginning, Genscher established a close working relationship with Secretary Baker and convinced him that it was in the best interests of the U. S. to support German unification.

It was not easy to put the unification of Germany on the international agenda. The breakthrough occurred in Ottawa on February 15, 1990, where twenty-three foreign ministers from NATO and the

EC
could

Warsaw Pact nations gathered for their first joint meeting. Secretary Baker negotiated on behalf of the Germans. On February 16, the *New York Times* reported that:

Britain, France, and the Soviet Union preferred that the four Allied powers discuss the future of Germany among themselves—and not, at first, with the Germans—but Washington talked them into bringing the Germans in from the start. Once the Germans were brought into the process, Bonn insisted on excluding the other nations of the 16-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization from these discussions.⁷

Genscher even got assurance that the “formula” would be “two-plus-four” and not “four-plus-two” as the British foreign minister had requested. The two-plus-four formula was supposed to indicate that the two Germanies would first determine the nature of their unification and only then deal with the Allied powers who still had overseeing rights and responsibilities in Germany.

How interrelated and complex the global, European, and German questions really were can best be seen in the timetable for top-level political meetings in the summer of 1990:

May 31–June 1	Summit Meeting between Bush and Gorbachev in Washington
June 7–June 8	Two-Plus-Four Meeting in Bonn
June 22	Two-plus-Four Meeting in East Berlin
June 25	EC-Summit Meeting in Dublin
July 5	NATO Meeting in London
July 9–July 11	Economic Summit Meeting in Houston
July 15–July 16	Meeting between Gorbachev and Kohl in Moscow and Stavropol
July 17	Two-Plus-Four Meeting in Paris
September 12	Two-Plus-Four Meeting in Moscow
October 1	CSCE Meeting in Washington

Although the NATO meeting in Ottawa brought the issue of German unification to the bargaining table, German unification could occur only if other international issues were first resolved.⁹ The main players in these complex negotiations had basically the following interests:

1. Germany's interests were twofold. It wanted to:

- (a) Achieve unification and full sovereignty.
 - (b) Remain firmly anchored in the Western family of nations.
2. The U. S. had the following interests:
- (a) To continue to be an important power in Europe.
 - (b) NATO to survive and to keep U. S. troops on European soil in order to retain its image as the protector of a free Europe.
 - (c) To have a position in Europe superior to that of the USSR.
3. The Soviet Union had the following interests:
- (a) It had a genuine security-interest. The Soviet Union was in the process of losing the buffer zone between its national border and the West. It wanted assurances that the West would respect its border as immutable for the indefinite future.
 - (b) It wanted to establish itself as an important European power.
 - (c) It wanted both superpowers to have an equal standing in Europe. For that, the Soviet Union suggested that both defense pacts, the Warsaw Pact and NATO, be dismantled and replaced by a newly created security umbrella under the Helsinki accord (CSCE).
4. Poland asked to be included in the negotiations because of its border with Germany.
5. The other European countries also wanted to participate in these negotiations about Germany's future.

Serious negotiations started at the superpower summit in Washington at the end of May 1990, the beginning of two months of intensive negotiations at all levels. During this period, the pressure for success intensified because the economic and political situation in East Germany deteriorated so rapidly. When these meetings began, the involved politicians believed that unification could wait until 1991. In July, they knew that the unification had to occur in 1990 if chaos were to be avoided.¹⁰ During this period, the negotiators worked themselves almost to the point of exhaustion. *The Wall Street Journal* reported on July 18 that since May, Shevardnadze and Genscher had met ten times for a total of fifty hours at eight different locations to hammer out an amicable agreement.

At the end of May at the summit meeting in Washington, President Bush outlined the American position.¹¹ The U. S. insisted that a unified Germany had to be a member of the Western family of nations.

This meant that Germany had to remain in the European Community and in NATO. The U. S. supported by all Western nations, was unwilling to dismantle NATO simultaneously with the disintegrating Warsaw Pact.¹² But the U. S. was prepared to bend over backwards and to assure the Soviet Union that NATO's character was a defensive one.¹³ The U. S. was even willing to adjust the wording of NATO's mission accordingly. But Gorbachev insisted that NATO and the Warsaw Pact were both creations of the Cold War and should be dismantled simultaneously. New security arrangements for Europe should be created with both superpowers represented equally. But Gorbachev could not prevail in Washington. His negotiating position was relatively weak. The Warsaw Pact was already in a state of dissolution, while NATO was still on a firm footing. And time was working against him as the crisis in East Germany deepened almost daily.

When Gorbachev failed to eliminate NATO, he asserted that a united Germany could not continue to be a member of this organization. This position found no approval in East and West European capitals, for an independent German military establishment was regarded as less desirable than a NATO that kept German military might under control. Thus, it was only a question of time before Gorbachev had to give in to the U. S. and had to change his position yet again. This time, he requested the permanent reduction of German military might, and he prevailed.

Throughout these negotiations, the U. S. and its allies had a much better negotiating position than the Soviet Union. The relationship between the U. S. and Europe was based not only on military ties but first and foremost on a common heritage of freedom and democracy. This philosophical commonality endured when the need for military ties declined in importance. Europe did not forget that the U. S. had come as a liberator. On the other hand, the Soviet Union remained burdened with the image of having been an oppressor. Even Gorbachev's Western style could not gloss over this fundamental difference. Last, but not least, the Eastern half was on the verge of disintegration. The Soviet Union was under pressure to resolve an escalating problem at its Western border, while the West could afford to wait until Moscow offered the right conditions for a settlement.

The U. S. and its Western allies, Germany included, achieved their original goals. The Soviet Union did not, but managed to gain

a substantial number of concessions: On July 17, 1990, at the two-plus-four meeting in Paris, the Soviet Union agreed that a united Germany could remain in the Western fold, that NATO could remain as the security umbrella of the West, and that Germany could stay in NATO.¹⁴ In return, the door was opened for a reformed Soviet Union to become integrated into Europe and into the family of democratically oriented nations. The mission of NATO was newly formulated, stressing even more its defensive character. Germany's military power was permanently reduced. Large sums of economic aid were promised to the Soviet Union, from Germany in particular. A foundation was laid for the disappearance of the division of Europe into East and West. The iron curtain and the Berlin Wall became symbols of a past that should never be repeated.

The breakthrough in the negotiations between East and West came in a meeting between Gorbachev and Kohl in Moscow and Stavropol on July 15 and 16. In the private atmosphere of the Caucasus Mountains, Kohl was able to convince Gorbachev of the need to acquiesce to the Western position. In exchange, Kohl offered generous economic support, a limitation of Germany's military might, and the prospect that close economic cooperation between Germany and the Soviet Union might emerge.¹⁵ In essence, the Soviet Union gave up a bankrupt East Germany in exchange for the goodwill of the unified Germany.

West German obligations and contributions to this settlement were very specific. Germany obligated itself to maintaining only a small army, one that would allow the nation to defend itself but too weak to attack neighboring countries. The agreed limit of 370,000 men in the prospective German army makes it smaller than the Polish army of 500,000. No NATO troops will be stationed in the territory that was formerly East Germany. Soviet troops will be allowed to remain in East Germany until 1994. Germany has also agreed to spend up to DM 12 billion (\$7.75 billion) to construct housing and other non-military facilities in the Soviet Union for the returning troops.¹⁷

Germany and the Soviet Union also initialed a twenty-year "Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Partnership, and Cooperation". According to this agreement, Germany will provide generous financial and technical help for the reconstruction of the Soviet economy. Kohl was also one of the outspoken supporters of a \$15 billion "Marshall Plan" for the Soviet Union at the EC-Summit meeting in Dublin and at the

NATO meeting in London.

A very concerned party to these negotiations were the Poles. Their deepest concern was their border with Germany. Poland's worries were laid to rest at the Paris two-plus-four meeting in July 1990.¹⁸ It received assurances of the inviolability of its Western border, as well as some economic concessions. This removed the last obstacle to a settlement of the international questions surrounding the unification. Thus, on September 12, 1990, at the last scheduled two-plus-four meeting in Moscow, the six foreign ministers in the presence of Mr. Gorbachev signed the "Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany."

The U. S. had reached its goals, since the Warsaw Pact was dissolved and NATO remained intact. Germany had received international consent to unite in full sovereignty and solidly integrated into the West. The other Western European countries were assured by treaty that Germany would remain anchored in multinational institutions, thus diluting some of its potential economic power and political clout. Poland received international guarantees regarding its border. The world seemed to have succeeded in moving in an orderly, well-negotiated fashion from the period of superpower confrontation into a period in which the dividing line between East and West could disappear and a new global system for the post superpower era could emerge.

The "Treaty on the Final Settlement With Respect to Germany" was presented to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in New York on October 1, 1990, and endorsed. With this, an important chapter of the postwar history came to an end.

The treaty could not be ratified by the governments involved in time for the actual unification of Germany on October 3; but, in a well-received gesture, the four victorious Allies signed a document stating that they would no longer exercise their occupation rights. This cleared the way for Germany to unite in full sovereignty. Thereafter, the Allied troops that remained in Berlin were there by a special invitation of the German government.

The period from September of 1989 to October of 1990 presented a unique opportunity for the unification of Germany. At that time, no one knew whether this opportunity would remain open for a longer period of time; so it was important that the political leaders moved quickly to take advantage of this somewhat unexpected opening. Kohl and Genscher must be credited for their sensitivity in realizing that

the time had come to press for the realization of a goal envisioned by German politicians since 1949. The efforts of Kohl and Genscher were strongly supported by the East German people who made it clear to the world that they regarded unacceptable anything less than unification and that they were prepared to leave their country at the first sign that unification would be postponed. The victorious Allies, the Soviets in particular, were greatly influenced by this threat. Thus, the East Germans themselves made a large contribution to the final outcome and the rapid realization of the unification.