

DEUTSCHER BUNDESTAG

Wissenschaftliche Dienste  
Referat WD 1 / Fachbereich XI  
Geschichte, Zeitgeschichte und Politik

**The role of parliament in mastering  
situations of radical change:**

**The creation of a democratic Germany after  
World War Two and German reunification  
in 1990**

**Paper prepared for the UNDP workshop “Strengthening the  
Role of Parliaments in Conflict and Post-conflict Situations”**

Date of completion: 27 June 2005

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### **Preliminary remarks**

The following study, prepared with reference to the UNDP Conference on "The role of parliaments in conflict and post-conflict situations", begins by outlining the development of parliamentary democracy in Germany following the unconditional surrender of the Third Reich in 1945 and the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship. The second part covers the reunification of Germany in 1990 and the role played by the German Bundestag and the democratically elected People's Chamber of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in establishing and shaping German unity.

Clearly, this is a case of two situations which could not be more different in terms of the historical circumstances, the players and the conflicts that had to be overcome. It was therefore deemed important to describe the historical situation in each case and outline the conflicts and problems that had to be resolved since parliament's contribution can only be appreciated against this background.

For reasons of clarity, the bibliographies for the two sections have been inserted separately and in each case immediately following the section to which they refer.

## **The establishment of parliamentary democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany**

### **The general historical situation**

"Since its foundation on 23 May 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany, amidst the rapidly growing trust of its citizens in the system and its institutions, has developed into a stable parliamentary democracy. The German Bundestag has contributed significantly to this..."<sup>1</sup> In the light of the devastating state in which the country found itself in 1945, there was no guarantee that the situation would develop in this way. There was, nevertheless, a general consensus that, in view of the experiences of the past, the future Germany would have to have a different constitution from its democratic predecessor. "The particular characteristics of the parliamentary system of government in the Federal

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1 Wolfgang Ismayr: "50 Jahre Parlamentarismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland", in: APuZ, 20/1999, p. 14-26, here p. 14.

Republic of Germany can be largely traced back to the experiences of the Weimar Republic."<sup>2</sup>

In the following, reference is made to various pivotal historical moments in time which made this process possible. It is not always possible to focus the account on the actions of parliament. This is partly because of the close interconnection of parliament and government<sup>3</sup> and partly because the ultimate allocation of functions in relation to parliamentary procedures and institutions in the federal state was a gradual process which was far from complete by the end of the period under review (the mid 50s). The involvement of civil society – the first signs of which were visible in the period in question – is not considered. As a result of the country's total defeat and the breakdown of social life, the people were for the most part merely onlookers in the political process. For most Germans the priority was to get their own lives in order and ensure they could make a living as well as, later on, to share in the country's economic success.

### **Collapse and total defeat**

The Second World War in Europe, which originated in Germany, ended on 8 May 1945, following the unconditional surrender of the German Reich. The war claimed the lives of 55 million people, roughly half of them civilians. Between five and six million Jews were murdered. Nearly eight million Germans lost their lives, many of them, too, in Nazi extermination and concentration camps.

The defeat inflicted by the Allies on the fallen German Reich was absolute, not merely militarily but in other respects, too. As a consequence, Germany lost parts of its territory to the east of the rivers Oder and Neisse. By 1946, six million people had fled from the Red Army or were expelled by the new rulers<sup>4</sup>, and more than half the living space was destroyed.

Germany, which lost its sovereignty under international law on its surrender, was divided into four occupation zones, in line with a decision taken at the conferences of the Allies even before the war had ended. The victorious powers took complete control of public life within their spheres of influence, seeking to implement their four key goals of demilitarisation, denazification, decentralisation and democratisation.

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2 Gotthart Breit and Peter Massing (eds.): *Parlamentarismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Eine Einführung*, Schwalbach 2003, p. 6.

3 Cf. Gotthart Breit and Peter Massing, p. 7.

4 By the mid 50s, approximately 12 million people had arrived in the Federal Republic as expellees. Cf. Manfred Görtemaker: *Kleine Geschichte der Bundesrepublik*, Bonn 2002., p. 12.

In the Nuremberg Trials and proceedings at military courts held in the different zones as well as abroad, the victors put on trial the surviving members of the leadership of the Third Reich for crimes against peace and humanity and brought war criminals to justice. It is estimated that between 50,000 and 60,000 people were sentenced for Nazi crimes.

The so-called denazification programmes, which were implemented methodically with varying degrees of intensity and rigour in the different occupation zones, also aimed to bring to justice those who had advanced National Socialism on other levels and had supported or facilitated its crimes. The denazification process, which several million Germans were required to undergo, is generally deemed to have been a failure.

While a radical redistribution of land and property through expropriation and land reform was conducted in the Soviet-controlled areas, only in a few areas in the zones controlled by the western allies were economic enterprises nationalised or stripped of assets. Yet in terms of social history the losses caused by the war represented a significant break with the past: "The landowning aristocracy east of the Elbe ceased to exist. Heavy industry was expropriated in the east, while in the west it was first decartelised by the occupying powers and later, after the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany, required to accept worker participation in the form of parity co-determination. Thus none of these power elites... was able after 1945 to play a similar (i.e. fateful, ed.) political role as they had done in the Weimar Republic"<sup>5</sup>.

The great (socio-)political distortions which the end of the war brought with it endured well beyond 1945. The streets teemed with people who had been bombed out, with refugees and exiles, displaced persons and those who had been disabled by the war. Society found itself – literally and figuratively – on the move and in search of living conditions which offered some degree of security: "This was a 'society in breakdown', a society in a state of emergency. It spawned not a new order but a deep longing to return as rapidly as possible to any sort of 'normality'."<sup>6</sup>

### **The establishment of parliamentary democracy**

The path to the Basic Law

At the Six Power Conferences held in London, the heads of the *Länder* governments were presented by the Allies with proposals for the foundation of a west German federal

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5 Heinrich August Winkler: *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, Vol. 2: "Deutsche Geschichte vom "Dritten Reich" bis zur Wiedervereinigung", München 2000, p. 120f.

6 Winkler, p. 122.

state. As the division of Germany was already becoming apparent, it was clear that any future constitution for this state could only be provisional in nature. On the basis of the proposals submitted by the western allies, a Parliamentary Council was convened in 1948 to deliberate on the draft basic law submitted by the prior Constitutional Convention held at Herrenchiemsee: "The future federal state required a purely ceremonial head of state, a bicameral system and a federal government which could deal with negative parliament majorities; democracy was to be not plebiscitary but consistently representative; federalism was to be achieved through a general presumption of the competence of the *Länder*."<sup>7</sup>

To distinguish the new republic from the practices of the Weimar Republic, a strengthening of the role of the head of government was proposed: "As a constitutional consequence of this fundamental decision, there is a close link under the conditions of a pluralistic state characterised by a party system between the government and the parliamentary majority supporting it."<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the Weimar democracy, in which the strong position of the Reich president was a key destabilising factor, the role of the head of state was limited almost exclusively to the duties of a figurehead.

It was thus clear that the new state which was being established intended to distance itself clearly in legal terms from its democratic predecessor and learn the lessons from the latter's design faults: "Conscious of the political instability that characterised the Weimar period with its cabinet crises and the inability of parliament in the final phase of Weimar to carry a majority government, the Parliamentary Council designed the parliamentary system primarily to promote stability."<sup>9</sup>

This intention can be seen, among other things, in the provisions on voting rights which, by introducing a relatively high restrictive clause of five per cent (the minimum percentage of the popular vote a party must poll in order to be represented in parliament), sought to prevent a renewed splintering of the party spectrum.

The promulgation of the Basic Law on 23 May 1949 was an important and, in the historical perspective, successful step on Germany's path to becoming an internationally recognised and democratic state which, internally, could function and survive. It was, nevertheless, to be several years before the Federal Republic of Germany attained its full sovereignty under international law and the western allies, in the form of the newly established High Commission, renounced their far-reaching rights of intervention.

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7 Winkler, p. 132.

8 Ismayer, p. 15.

9 Gotthart Breit and Peter Massing, p. 7.

### Establishment of the political parties

Political participation was strictly regulated by the occupying powers and active politicians had to be vetted by the Allies. Despite these restrictions, it was only a short time before initial thoughts of founding new parties and re-engaging in party work took on concrete form. In view of the failure of the Weimar democracy, due in part to a lack of basic democratic conviction on the part of the population and the elites who supported the state, the activists focused initially on the past, anxious to prevent a renewed radicalisation and splintering of the party system.

It was this conviction, in particular, which informed ideas on the establishment of an cross-denominational Christian party based on democratic consensus which, in contrast to the Weimar Republic, sought elements that united rather than divided people in the denomination in question. As early as 1945, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) was founded and, under its chairman and subsequently federal chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, was to dominate politics in West Germany for many years.

The SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany), as the second popular party, which had lost a whole series of its prominent representatives in the Nazi era through oppression, persecution, murder and exile, was likewise already resuming its political work in 1945. To disassociate itself from the Communists, who had forced the Social Democrats in the Soviet zone into a union, the party under Kurt Schumacher developed a clear anti-communist profile and later renounced its former revolutionary rhetoric and agenda in order to appeal to middle-class sections of the population, too.

The Liberals also sought to unite the traditional dichotomy of national liberal and left-wing liberal ideas under the roof of one party. In the end, it took them until the end of the 1950s to achieve this goal amid heavy factional fighting among the various party tendencies and branches.

Despite the attempts of all the parties to establish greater integration, the party landscape in the postwar years remained fairly fragmented until roughly the mid 50s. Parties such as the Deutsche Partei (German Party), the Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten (BHE – Association of the Expelled and Disenfranchised) and the Niedersächsische Landespartei (Regional Lower Saxony Party), who all belonged in the (right-wing) conservative spectrum, were progressively integrated into the CDU/CSU. Anti-democratic parties such as the extreme right-wing Sozialistische Reichspartei

(Socialist Reich Party) and extreme left-wing KPD (Communist Party of Germany) were banned at an early stage. The Federal Republic had consciously transformed itself into a militant democracy which was willing to defend its values and used all the means of a constitutional state to counter the opponents of the basic free democratic order.

### **Important parliamentary landmarks in the early Federal Republic**

Considering the situation in 1945, the conditions under which the second democracy in Germany began life were far from favourable. Nevertheless, it rapidly developed functioning mechanisms which created the framework for the emergence of a stable democracy and the peaceful resolution of social conflicts, as well as securing international acknowledgement and economic success. It is impossible within the scope of this study to scrutinise all the many-sided interdependencies which these developments encouraged. For this reason, two examples are examined here which illustrate the key strategic political decisions which were instrumental in enabling this young democracy to develop as it did.

#### **Integration into the West and rearmament**

The main issue dominating the first years of the new republic was the division of Germany which had manifested itself since the end of the 1940s and, linked to this, the integration of the Federal Republic into the West, a policy driven primarily by the then federal chancellor, Konrad Adenauer. At this time, unlike in Weimar times, the ethos of the conservative forces in Germany was no longer dominated by ideas of the nation-state. The move away from nationalism on this side contrasted with the espousal by the Social Democrats under Schumacher of national ideas and thus the move away from the internationalism that characterised their thinking in the Weimar Republic. Thus both sides helped to stabilise political conditions both internally and vis-à-vis the outside world by searching for other ways forward in relation to the main prewar areas of conflict.

The debate about Germany's rearmament is symptomatic of this "U-turn" executed by the two main political blocs. Schumacher, as a representative of a pacifist-oriented party, was prepared to consider in principle the need for rearmament posited as a result of the Korean War. In the Conservative spectrum, large parts of which still clung to militaristic ideas during the Weimar Republic, there were fierce arguments about a West German defence contribution which culminated in the resignation from Adenauer's cabinet of Gustav Heinemann, who opposed rearmament and went on later to become Federal President.

A further key issue dominated parliamentary debates in the wake of the rearmament discussion: the question of whether a German army could be established while war crimes trials against members of the *Wehrmacht* were still being conducted and prepared by the Allies was answered with a clear "no" by Adenauer. The Chancellor devoted all his efforts – ultimately successfully – into ending the prosecution of members of the *Wehrmacht* for implication in the crimes of the National Socialists and was even quite prepared to make symbolic gestures, such as paying a visit to the interned SS General Meyer. The public almost unreservedly supported the Chancellor in his attitude: "It was impossible to determine exactly what effect these symbolic gestures had on the Bundestag election on 6 September 1953. Even at the time there was a general acceptance that they had played a part in the success of the CDU and CSU."<sup>10</sup>

#### Addressing the Nazi past

Both formally and rhetorically the Federal Republic had achieved a total break with its predecessor, the National Socialist state. In practice, however, there was still a need to struggle with the Nazi legacy at all levels. This applied in particular to the question of how to deal with those who were connected to a greater or lesser extent with the regime of terror.

The debate was still limited mainly, however, to the political sphere. The population comforted itself with the belief that a small Nazi elite around Hitler had deceived first the German people then the world and had caught the population unawares, plunging them into terror and war. Those who were responsible for the working of the relevant structures in the state, economy, society or the military, it was argued, had done so less out of conviction than out of fear of persecution and had, in any case, been unable to appreciate the scope of the crimes. This perspective contrasted with the conviction among those in the political community of the need for "reparations". The *Vergangenheitspolitik*<sup>11</sup> (policy with respect to the past) in the first years of the Federal Republic of Germany was characterised by this tension. Two laws which came into force on the same day illustrate this point: article 131 of the Basic Law provided the possibility of reinstatement for all those who had previously been excluded from public service by virtue of implication with National Socialism. At the same time, a law was promulgated to make amends to members of the public service for Nazi injustice.

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<sup>10</sup> Winkler, p. 168.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Norbert Frei: *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit*, München 1997 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), passim.

Concerning the recruitment of his administrations staff, Adenauer's policy was characterised by a clear rejection of those who consciously aligned themselves with National Socialist ideas. Those who had explicitly detached themselves from their past were able to count on being integrated in the new state. At times the consequences of this policy triggered intense public and parliamentary differences, as illustrated, for example, by the debate about Hans Globke, Head of the Federal Chancellery under Adenauer, who had been co-author of a commentary on the Nuremberg race laws.

But there were certainly also voices in the German Bundestag who spoke out against a general move away from denazification and re-education. In the German Party, the Association of the Expelled and Disenfranchised and in parts of the FDP (Free Democratic Party), in particular, there were vocal elements, including some in government, who advocated the rehabilitation of former National Socialists. Ultimately, however, the Chancellor successfully used his integrative approach to pacify society internally and, by including also those who had been very much implicated with National Socialism but now accepted the democratic order, to achieve social stability<sup>12</sup>.

The population at large, who approached the problem of dealing with their own past only randomly, if at all, had a need, in the words of the philosopher Hermann Lübbe, to "keep silent about the past", so that they could be transformed from the postwar population to the citizens of the Federal Republic. Individuals needed to suppress what had happened, to seek to deny their own role in the catastrophe of National Socialism in order to find a foothold in the new age which signalled a break with the past<sup>13</sup>.

#### Social policy as a means of internal pacification

In addition to the key political measures aimed at rebuilding a functioning political system, there was a further important component which ensured internal social peace in the young republic. Aided by an unprecedented economic upturn which was based on radical structural changes, the government pressed ahead with numerous socio-political measures aimed at re-integrating into society those who had lost everything in the wake of the war. Particularly notable in this context are the refugees and expellees who as late as 1949 accounted for a good 20 per cent of the population. The arrival of these displaced people in their "new homes" often provoked conflict with local residents. In the first years after the war, in particular, when daily necessities and living space were in very short supply, particularly in the towns and cities, the incomers were regarded as

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12 Cf. Winkler, p. 169-173.

13 Cf. Hermann Lübbe: "Der Nationalsozialismus im politischen Bewusstsein der Gegenwart", in: Martin Broszat et al.: *Deutschlands Weg in die Diktatur. Internationale Konferenz zur nationalsozialistischen Machtübernahme im Reichstagsgebäude zu Berlin. Referate und Diskussionen. Ein Protokoll*, Berlin, 1983, p. 329-349.

unwelcome competitors. It was clear to the political stakeholders that integration required a major commitment by the state. Numerous laws, for example, an ordinance integrating expellees into the farming sector (1948), an act to alleviate serious social emergencies (1949) and finally the Equalisation of Burdens Act (1952), were enacted by the German Bundestag to spread the unevenly distributed burdens of World War Two more equitably through the whole of society<sup>14</sup>. Reinforced by the economic upturn, these laws had such a major impact that by the end of the 1950s, if not before, the economic integration of the refugees and expellees was regarded as largely complete: "The peaceful integration of the expellees thus represents a political, economic and human achievement which can hardly be overestimated. It counts as one of the most important contributions to the safeguarding of peace in Europe since World War Two."<sup>15</sup> Just how successful this policy of internal social pacification was can be seen not least in the fact that the radical BHE, which regarded itself as a political mouth-piece, increasingly lost ground and was ultimately swallowed up in the CDU/CSU.

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14 Cf. Görtemaker, p. 102-105.

15 Görtemaker, p. 105.

## **Parliament and German reunification**

### **The end of the GDR: the end of SED rule and the Round Table**

With the fall of the Wall there was finally nothing to stop the end of the rule of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) and of the GDR as a state. At the same time, this historic event also represented a decisive landmark in the process of the reunification of the two German states. In the weeks following the opening of the Wall the GDR power structures crumbled rapidly. Hurriedly introduced reforms and radical changes of personnel in the state and party machinery in the GDR could do nothing to avert this. The new government of Hans Modrow, which came to office on 13 November 1989, announced far-reaching reforms in the political system, economy, education system and administration aimed at creating a new socialist society which allowed the people to lead their lives in the way they choose. On the issue of intra-German relations it unequivocally rejected all "dangerous speculation on reunification". At the same time, however, it announced its intention to strive for a treaty-based community with the Federal Republic in the form of "cooperative co-existence". On 1 December, the People's Chamber moved to strike the SED's claim to monopoly of power from the constitution. When the *Politbüro* under Egon Krenz resigned on 3 December under pressure from the continuing mass protests, the SED changed its name at a special party congress on 8 and 9 December to SED/PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) in order to signal its determination to break with its Stalinist past. Gregor Gysi became the new chairman of the party which was now dominated by reformers. Former leading SED politicians such as Erich Honecker, Erich Mielke and Willi Stoph were ejected from the party following revelations of abuse of power and corruption. Subsequently, preliminary proceedings were brought by the public prosecutor against nearly all the members of the old guard.<sup>16</sup>

These measures, however, were not enough to stem the continuing protest movement. The lifting of personal and political restrictions by the new government and the granting of long suppressed rights of political freedom seemed only to spur on the incensed population to step up their demands and protests. Citizens' forums were set up throughout the GDR to encourage open and intensive discussion of the past and to plan the immediate future. The civil movement and the newly formed parties used the new freedoms to communicate their political positions and agendas. Freed from state interference, the influence of the internal and foreign media, which were reporting the

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16 Lehmann (2002): *Deutschland-Chronik 1945 bis 2000*, Bonn 2002., p. 378-385; Bernd Lindner: *Die demokratische Revolution in der DDR 1989/90*, Bonn 2001, p. 111

progress of events ever more openly, was making itself increasingly felt. All these developments were helping to force a dialogue in civil society and the establishment of a critical democratic public at breakneck speed.<sup>17</sup>

After lengthy hesitation, Modrow's government made efforts to meet the civil rights and opposition groups, which had now established themselves as a political factor to be reckoned with, and to consult with them on further steps to introduce democracy to the GDR. Accordingly, on 7 December, the "Central Round Table" convened for the first time under the moderation of church representatives. Apart from representatives of the old GDR leadership system (SED, FDGB [Free German Trade Union Federation] and others) and the so-called "block parties" (CDU, LDPD [Liberal Democratic Party of Germany], NDPD [National Democratic Party of Germany] and others), which had by this time severed their close links with the SED<sup>18</sup>, other participants in the Round Table included members of key civil rights groups (Neues Forum [New Forum], Demokratie Jetzt [Democracy Now], Demokratischer Aufbruch [Democratic Awakening], Unabhängiger Frauenverband [Independent Women's League] and others) and the newly formed democratic parties (SDP, Green Party and others). The Central Round Table represents the first high point of a movement which had been apparent throughout the GDR since 11 November 1989. Not only were the people of the GDR beginning to speak out more frequently and with new self-confidence in public and to criticise the system, they also had the courage to challenge the pretensions to power of the old system and stake their claim to involvement in the political process, among other things by setting up local, regional and subject-related discussion forums and round tables.<sup>19</sup>

The work of the Central Round Table was conducted under what must have been difficult conditions. While there were dramatic falls in production in the GDR and strikes and work stoppages were the order of the day, the mass migration of people to the West continued unabated. Despite these processes of erosion which could be seen all around, the all-powerful state security service, renamed the Office for National Security, was still continuing to operate without restriction and was devoting itself with great zeal to establishing and/or maintaining spheres of influence and interest outside the established SED control machinery, as well as systematically covering up the past by destroying files and other traces of its own malevolent past.<sup>20</sup>

The Central Round Table was a forum for the democratic public which demanded the right to participate in all important political decisions and oversee the work of the

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17 Lindner, p. 114f.

18 Lehmann, p. 381f.

19 Lehmann, p. 383 and 390; Lindner, p. 115-126

20 Lindner, p. 126-129.

government until the holding of general elections. The central items of negotiation for this body were the dissolution of the Ministry for State Security, the holding of free elections and the formulation of a new constitution. In the course of the roughly three months of its activity, the Round Table was able to push through significant opposition ideas. At its last meeting on 12 March 1990, for example, it noted approvingly that the secret service machinery had been virtually completely dismantled. By the beginning of February the date for the first free elections had already been set for 18 March 1990.<sup>21</sup>

Although the Round Table was also able to press ahead with work on a new draft constitution which responded to the numerous demands of the opposition, these efforts came to nothing in the wake of the growing movement towards unity. By the end of the year 1989, it was no longer possible to ignore the call for German unity. By the end of November, those taking part in public protest events were demanding German reunification, an issue which from then on increasingly dominated the agenda of the protest movement. At demonstrations and protest events the battle cry of "We are *the* people!", calling for greater freedoms and an end to the rule of the SED, was increasingly frequently replaced by the slogan "We are *one* people!", a call for rapid reunification. This substantive change was a sign of widening differences in the opposition movement which, up to then, had maintained a united front: while the Central Round Table and the actual initiators of the protest movement from the church, peace, environmental and civil rights groups, including many academics, artists and intellectuals, advocated a "Socialist alternative" to the Federal Republic in an independent and sovereign GDR, the majority of the population wanted rapid unification. This attitude arose less from passionate national feelings than from the expectation that this was the quickest way for the people to improve their own living conditions.<sup>22</sup>

The civil movement which had initiated the peaceful revolution was still able in January 1990 to mobilise its supporters to protest openly against the machinery of the secret service, which continued to exist and operate, and against what were feared to be the restoration tendencies of the reform government. Yet it had already, despite the setting up of the Round Table, passed the high point of its influence since the fall of the Wall. After the opening of the Wall and the implementation of important freedoms, not only did their plea for an independent GDR no longer chime with the majority of the deeply disillusioned population, it was even at times abruptly rejected. Many disappointed civil rights activists withdrew from the protest movement and left the field clear for the proponents of unity. Increasingly the Federal Government and political parties from the

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21 Lehmann, p. 390; Lindner, p. 129

22 Lehmann, p. 384f. and 390; Lindner, p. 111.

West now started to intervene in political events in the GDR. The demonstrations which carried on into March gradually lost their original importance. In spring 1990, their function was in many cases altered by the transformed and/or new parties formed in the West German mould into campaign forums in the run-up to the forthcoming elections to the People's Chamber. In any event the number of those participating in the demonstrations fell steadily. Only roughly 30,000 to 50,000 people took part in the last big demonstration in Leipzig on 12 March 1990.<sup>23</sup>

### **The elections to the People's Chamber**

Following growing unrest among the population, the Central Round Table had already in February decided to bring forward to 18 March 1990 the first free elections to the People's Chamber, originally scheduled for May. Most of the debates in the election campaign related to the mode and tempo of the desired unification. It was apparent at this stage that the transfer of the structural and conflict patterns from the West German political system to the GDR was already well advanced. The new party system in the GDR which came into being at the beginning of the year, for example, showed great similarities with the party system in the Federal Republic. This was hardly surprising since the West German parties had been very involved in the founding of the GDR parties in an effort to win new political partners in the GDR. It was therefore only logical that politicians from West Germany played a key role in the campaign for the elections to the People's Chamber, influencing issues, organisation and strategy. The lack of influence of the main protagonists of the revolution in the churches and civil rights groups, by contrast, was only too plain. In comparison with the professional campaign machinery of the West German parties and their East German protégés, they had no chance of getting their political ideas across to the electorate.<sup>24</sup>

The clear victor in the election was the Allianz für Deutschland (Alliance for Germany), an alliance of the CDU (East), Demokratischer Aufbruch (DA) and the Deutsche Soziale Union (German Social Union – DSU), who won around 48 per cent of the votes. The SPD, by contrast, polled 21.9 per cent, the PDS 16.3 per cent and the Liberals in the Bund Freier Demokraten (Association of Free Democrats) 5.3 per cent. The civil rights activists merged together in the Bündnis 90 (Alliance 90), won only 2.9 per cent of the votes, indicating how their importance had waned, as officially attested by the voters. The election result was a clear vote in favour of the fastest possible unification with the Federal Republic and the rapid introduction of the social market economy. Thus the first free elections in the GDR had sanctioned the slogan "We are one people!"

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23 Lehmann, p. 391; Lindner, p. 111f.

24 Lehmann, p. 386-391; Lindner, p. 135-139; Günter Hindrichs: "Die Rolle des Deutschen Bundestages seit 1989", in: Rita Süßmuth (ed.): *Der Deutsche Bundestag. Parlament der deutschen Einheit*, München etc. 1991, p. 43.

and made it impossible to turn back from the path to German unification. From this point on, the West German politicians, notably the Federal Government, intervened increasingly in political events in the GDR and played a key role in developments.<sup>25</sup>

On 12 April 1990, the People's Chamber in East Berlin elected the CDU politician, Lothar de Maizière, to be the first Minister-President of the GDR to emerge from free democratic elections. He formed a broad coalition of the CDU, DSU, DA, SPD and the Liberals and pronounced himself unequivocally in favour of rapid reunification. In order to create the necessary conditions for this, de Maizière's policies focussed initially on rapid and far-reaching democratisation and liberalisation of the state, economy, society and public administration. The aim of his government policy was to conduct negotiations paving the way to the GDR's accession to the Federal Republic under Article 23 of the Basic Law and in the process to secure the rights and entitlements of the citizens of the GDR through binding provisions.<sup>26</sup>

According to the pertinent provisions of the Basic Law, there were two ways unification could be achieved: under Article 23 of the Basic Law unity could be established by the GDR acceding to the area of jurisdiction of the Basic Law; Article 146 of the Basic Law made unification contingent on a new constitution and the consent of the German people. Article 146 of the Basic Law stated: "This Basic Law [...] shall cease to apply on the day on which a constitution freely adopted by the German people takes effect." Under this provision, therefore, reunification could only have been achieved through the formulation and promulgation of a new German constitution. Article 23 of the Basic Law (old version), on the other hand, stated: "For the time being, this Basic Law shall apply in the territory of the *Länder* of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Bremen, Berlin, Hamburg, Hesse, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and Schleswig-Holstein. In other parts of Germany it shall be put into force on their accession." Thus accession under Article 23 offered a possibility to fast-track the unification of the new *Länder* to be created in the GDR with the Federal Republic. The ruling parties in the West and the Alliance for Germany in the East favoured this route to German unity, whereas the SPD advocated unification in accordance with Article 146. The PDS spoke out merely in favour of the creation of a league of German states, while the civil rights groups united in the Alliance 90 and the Greens in the West wanted a gradual, staged unification of the two states.

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25 Lehmann, p. 391f.; Lindner, p. 135.

26 Deutsches Historisches Museum, Lebendiges virtuelles Museum Online. Kapitel: Die deutsche Einheit – Wiedervereinigung. Internet at: <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/DieDeutscheEinheit/Wiedervereinigung/freieWahlenVolkskammerwahl1990.html> (as at 16 March 2004).

## **The Federal Government's reunification policy**

In the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the establishment of German unity on 3 October 1990, the Federal Republic's domestic policy was dominated by the pre-eminent role of the then federal chancellor, Helmut Kohl. Supported by a small circle of close confidantes from the cabinet and bureaucracy, Kohl, through his activities, initiatives and decisions, defined and shaped the course of events leading up to German unification.<sup>27</sup>

Initially, the Federal Government pursued an extremely cautious policy with regard to developments in the GDR which consisted in essence of admonishing the East German government to observe human rights and to refrain from using violence against the peaceful demonstrators. The fall of the Wall caught the politicians in the Federal Republic completely unawares; small wonder, therefore, that neither the government nor the opposition had any notions of how to react to the possible collapse of the SED regime.<sup>28</sup> After the fall of the Wall, a group of civil servants and state secretaries under Rudolf Seiters, the then Head of the Federal Chancellery, hurriedly drafted an operational concept at the end of November 1989 outlining how the government should proceed. While it contained no timetable, it already outlined proposals for a policy aimed at reunification. This concept came to be known as Helmut Kohl's Ten-Point Plan, which he presented to the public in his budget speech to the German Bundestag on 28 November 1989 without having first consulted the parliamentary groups supporting the government. In addition to a series of urgent measures in the humanitarian area, Kohl's plan even at this early stage sought reunification of the two German states as the culmination of a lengthy, multi-stage process within which the GDR's government and economic structures would be adapted to conditions in the Federal Republic, cooperation and contractual ties between the two states would be expanded and finally – as the prelude to unity – a confederation of the Federal Republic and the GDR would be established.<sup>29</sup>

The Ten-Point Plan, which provoked a great deal of controversy internally, also met with criticism from abroad, not only because Kohl failed to consult with the victorious World War Two powers – he notified only President Bush in advance<sup>30</sup> –, but also

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27 Angela Fischer: *Entscheidungsprozess zur deutschen Wiedervereinigung. Der außen- und deutschlandpolitische Entscheidungsprozess der Koalitionsregierung Kohl / Genscher in den Schicksalsjahren 1989/90*, Frankfurt a. M. etc. 1996, p. 283f.; Wolfgang Jäger: *Die Überwindung der Teilung. Der innerdeutsche Prozess der Vereinigung 1989/90*, Stuttgart 1998, p. 19-21.

28 Hans Jürgen Küsters: "Entscheidung für die deutsche Einheit", Digitale Bibliothek, Vol. 21: *Deutsche Einheit*, Berlin 2000, p. 146.

29 Küsters, p. 161; Lindner, p. 129; Glasnost-Archiv: "Von konföderierten Strukturen zu einer Föderation", Internet at: <http://www.glasnost.de/hist/verein/89zehnp.html> (as at 19 March 2004).

30 Voigt, Karsten: "Sozialdemokraten und deutsche Einigung", in: *Deutschland und Frankreich im neuen Europa: Referate - Berichte - Dokumente*, XIV. Deutsch-Französische Konferenz 1990, p. 33.

because of fundamental concerns about the principle of the unification of the two German states. For example, both the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the French President Mitterrand had reservations about reunification, fearing Germany could rise again to become a politically unpredictable and economically far superior hegemonic power on the continent.<sup>31</sup> The Soviet Union was also observing developments in Germany with anxiety; nevertheless, at a meeting with Kohl on 10 February 1990, President Gorbachev assured the Federal Government that Germany could determine the form and conditions of unity for itself.<sup>32</sup> Only the USA responded positively from the outset to reunification; it insisted, however, that Germany should remain in NATO and the western alliance structures, that existing borders should be inviolable and that the right of self determination must be recognised.<sup>33</sup>

It is important to mention here that in 1989/90 Germany was still not a sovereign state under international law and that unification therefore required the consent of the victorious powers. The four victor powers and the two German states therefore agreed to hold talks. The aim of the Federal Republic in these talks was clear from the outset: rapid national unity with full sovereignty in both domestic and foreign policy. The rapid and, from the German perspective, successful course of the "Two-plus-Four" negotiations was due in large measure to the fact that two main German participants in the talks, Federal Chancellor Kohl and Foreign Minister Genscher, were able to build up a personal relationship of trust with their key foreign interlocutors. This also helped considerably to resolve thorny issues such as the continued presence of a united Germany in the western alliance structures and the speedy and amicable withdrawal of Soviet troops from Germany.<sup>34</sup>

### **The role of the Bundestag in the unification process**

In contrast to the dominant role played by the executive, the Bundestag, parliamentary groups and parties, and similarly the non-institutionalised players in West Germany outside parliament had little influence over the agenda and landmark decisions.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the role of the legislature went beyond retrospective approval and ratification of decisions conceived and taken by the Federal Chancellor and those in his immediate circle. In fact the German Bundestag and its bodies took an active part in the

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31 Alexander von Plato: *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands - ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel*, Berlin 2002, p. 136 and 142; Thatcher, Margaret: *Downing Street No. 10, Die Erinnerungen*, Düsseldorf 1993, p. 1095.

32 <http://www.wdr.de/radio/studiomoskau/geschichte/flash.phtml> (as ast 18 March 2004).

33 Küsters, p. 163; Philip Zelikow/Condoleezza Rice: *Germany unified and Europe transformed. A Study in Statecraft*, Cambridge/Mass. 1996, p. 115

34 Fischer, p. 287-289.

35 Fischer, p. 286f.

events leading up to and following the peaceful revolution in the GDR and Eastern Europe and vigorously supported the policy of the Kohl government in this matter.

As well as providing formal democratic legitimacy for fundamental decisions conceived, presented and negotiated by the Federal Government, the main focus of parliamentary activities in this phase was on accompanying measures to support government policy, e.g. in relation to obtaining information and strengthening intra-German and international communication, later also dealing with the many varied facets and details of complex substantive issues.<sup>36</sup>

In this process, there was cross-party agreement that

- Germans in the West and East were linked in a special way,
- the obsolete authoritarian and repressive structures of the old GDR were to be transformed into a pluralist system which allowed free elections, freedom of movement and the assertion of human rights,
- there should hence be backing for the reform forces in the GDR,
- the freedom of the citizens of the GDR to decide their political future and the future of their state was to be respected unconditionally,
- the German question had to be resolved within the framework of the peaceful order in Europe.<sup>37</sup>

A section of the opposition, however, was sceptical about the goal of unification which had been propagated so early by the government and parliamentary groups in the coalition. The Greens, in particular, rejected reunification and advocated instead an independent, fundamentally democratic and ecological "third way" for the GDR based on the self determination of the people.<sup>38</sup> It is important to note, however, that even the great majority of the supporters of unity among the members of parliament initially reckoned in their planning games and models – in contrast to the Federal Chancellor's Ten-Point Plan – that the unification of the two states would be possible only after a lengthy process of mutual rapprochement and gradual convergence.<sup>39</sup>

Once developments started to gain momentum, however, and it was becoming increasingly clear that there was a one-off historic opportunity for rapid unification, the Bundestag and parliamentary groups were not content just to give their broad support to the government's policy at parliamentary level; they also sought with their own initiatives to actively influence the establishment of German unity. It proved to be a great advantage in this respect that many of the parliamentarians were already active in

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36 Hindrichs, p. 39f.

37 Hindrichs, p. 40.

38 Hindrichs, p. 40f.

39 Hindrichs, p. 42.

the GDR as a result of the growing involvement there of the federal parties, particularly during the elections to the People's Chamber, and were therefore already aware of the situation and had made many contacts. This gave them an edge over the government in some respects in terms of information and enabled them to exert an influence on the political opinion-forming processes in both German states, as well as to participate alongside the executive in parliamentary deliberations on the future shape of German unity as completely independent political partners who had a role in shaping the future.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the whole political decision-making process in relation to German unity on the federal German side was conducted in an extremely businesslike, constructive and trusting atmosphere and broad consensus was reached on many of the decisions made. It is also worth noting that the government engaged very intensively with the positions and views of the parliamentarians and was prepared to take into account their suggestions and proposed amendments in the deliberation of their bills and motions. All the parliamentary groups – even the Greens who were sceptical about reunification – accepted, for their part, the pressure of time created by the dramatic pace of developments and the resulting massive workload. The high level of cooperation displayed by the parliamentary groups, which grew out of a shared sense of national responsibility, even meant that the critics of the various treaties paving the way to German reunification were prepared, despite some reservations, to waive some of their parliamentary rights (including *Fristeinrede* – the lodging of a protest on the grounds of a failure to adhere to the statutory period for lodging an objection) in order not to jeopardise proceedings.<sup>41</sup>

The cooperation between the People's Chamber and Bundestag, which played a key role in the decision-making processes in the final phase of the unification process, in particular, was also businesslike, trusting and cooperative on all levels. This basic cooperative attitude on the part of the parliamentarians and their desire to achieve consensus was displayed to the outside world, too, particularly on the occasion of the joint commemorative celebrations of both parliaments on the Day of German Unity on 17 June 1990<sup>42</sup>, as well as the symbolic joint visit to Israel of both parliamentary presidents shortly after the constituent meeting of the People's Chamber in April 1990.<sup>43</sup>

The key institutions of cooperation between the People's Chamber and the Bundestag were the Committees on "German Unity" set up by the two parliaments which discussed all the questions and modalities of Germany's unification first separately and then in a series of joint meetings. The committees were particularly involved in intensive

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40 Hindrichs, p. 43f.

41 Hindrichs, p. 43-49.

42 Lehmann, p. 405; Hindrichs, p. 46.

43 Hindrichs, p. 44.

deliberation of the treaties governing the establishment of unity between the two states. The speed and success of the negotiations was due not least to the fact that the members of the committees chaired by the respective parliamentary presidents were drawn from the "parliamentary elites" of the two parliaments. The 39 members of the Bundestag Committee on "German Unity", for example, included all the members of the Presidium, all the chairs of the parliamentary groups and parliamentary secretaries, as well as the parliamentary group spokespersons for the specialised committees. The participation of members of parliament who played a key role in defining the policies of the parliamentary groups and committees guaranteed rapid voting and decision-making processes within and between the parliamentary groups and gave the decisions great political weight. This helped considerably to increase the acceptance of decisions inside and outside parliament.<sup>44</sup>

Without doubt, the work of both committees on German unity helped to ensure that the two parliaments were able to make a contribution of their own through their cooperation to the process of unification. The contribution of parliament can be seen particularly clearly in the identical resolutions passed by the People's Chamber and Bundestag on 21 June 1990 relating to the German-Polish border. In this declaration, based on a proposal by the then President of the Bundestag in December 1989 (and initially treated with caution by the government), both German parliaments announce their intent to continue in the future to recognise the existing course of the border between Germany and Poland and to renounce further territorial claims. The aim of this declaration, supported by both parliaments, was to guarantee, on the basis of the political weight of the democratically elected parliaments of both states, the peaceful disposition of the reunified Germany with respect to Poland and allay fears of possible territorial claims on Germany's part.<sup>45</sup>

### **Economic, currency and social union**

The Federal Government used the favourable foreign policy situation in spring 1990 to open negotiations on an economic, currency and social union as the first important step towards German unity. It also hoped, however, to stem the exodus of people from the GDR to the Federal Republic, which was continuing unabated.

Negotiations on the State Treaty were concluded by representatives of both German states in a very short time and the Treaty was signed by the two foreign ministers on 18 May 1990. The establishment of the economic union merging the two states together

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44 Hindrichs, p. 46-50; cf. Günter Hindrichs: "Der Ausschuss Deutsche Einheit", in: Rita Süßmuth (ed.): *Der Deutsche Bundestag. Parlament der deutschen Einheit*, München etc. 1991, p. 59-64.

45 Lehmann, p. 405; Hindrichs, p. 42 and 49;

was politically one of the most controversial issues in the reunification process: economic experts were not alone in fearing that East Germany's economy, with its much lower productivity, would not be able to withstand the pressure of the market economy and would very soon collapse. Oskar Lafontaine, the then chairman of the largest opposition party, the SPD, and candidate for federal chancellor also saw the Treaty as proof that the Federal Government had only the unification of the states in its sight and was prepared to accept that economic union would weaken the GDR as a production location on a prolonged basis.<sup>46</sup>

### **Establishment of new federal *Länder***

An important formal prerequisite for reunification was the establishment of federal *Länder* on the territory of the GDR, which since 1952 had been split into 14 districts. On 22 July 1990 the People's Chamber passed the *Länder* Establishment Act, paving the way for the establishment of five federal *Länder* on GDR territory as constituent states of the Federation. The formal establishment of the five new *Länder* of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia – East Berlin was annexed to West Berlin, already a federal Land – was effected simultaneously with the GDR's accession to the Federal Republic on 3 October 1990.

Because of the constitutional requirement (Article 72 (3) of the Basic Law) to establish uniformity of living conditions throughout the territory of the Federal Republic, the accession of the new *Länder* to the Federal Republic also ensured that solving the major problems inherited from the GDR, such as the modernisation of obsolete and inefficient economic structures, the cleaning up of contaminated areas, the repairing of damage to infrastructure and buildings and the structural mismatches in the economic and social areas of overall policy, became priority tasks. It was here that the requirement to make the forging of a common identity in Germany a paramount development goal of federal German policy found its constitutional basis.<sup>47</sup>

Under the provisions of the *Länder* Establishment Act, the new Land parliaments elected in October 1990 drafted constitutions for their respective *Länder* which were promulgated by the Land parliaments between May 1992 (Saxony) and October 1993 (Thuringia). Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Thuringia also held referendums to give additional legitimacy to their Land constitutions.

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46 Lafontaine, Oskar: *Deutsche Wahrheiten*, Hamburg 1990, p. 187.

47 Lafontaine, p. 187.

## **The Unification Treaty**

Negotiations on the Unification Treaty (Second State Treaty) for the accession of the GDR under Article 23 of the Basic Law began in East Berlin on 6 July 1990. After long and painstaking negotiations, both parliaments approved the roughly 900-page Unification Treaty by a large majority on 20 September 1990. The Bundesrat passed the Treaty unanimously. Prior to that, the People's Chamber, meeting in special session in the night of 23 to 24 August 1990, voted after a long and controversial debate to approve the accession of the GDR to the area of application of the Basic Law on 3 October 1990, with 294 votes out of 400 in favour. The voluminous treaty provides, inter alia, for the following:<sup>48</sup>

- The accession of the GDR to be executed under Article 23 of the Basic Law;
- Application of the Basic Law throughout the territory of the Federal Republic;
- Modification of the Basic Law, sections of which were now obsolete (e.g. the Preamble which included a call for achievement of unity);
- Validity of the old Federal Republic's constitutional rules governing public finances throughout the territory of the Federal Republic;
- Approximation of legislation in the five new *Länder*, except where transitional provisions allow exemptions;
- Extension of the validity of treaties and agreements under international law throughout the territory of the Federal Republic;
- Transfer of public administration and administration of justice to the Federal *Länder*, except with respect to matters of federal administration;
- Rehabilitation of the victims of the SED regime.

The Treaty also contained provisions requiring the areas of employment, social affairs, family affairs, women's issues, health care and environmental protection to be regulated uniformly as soon as possible by the all-German legislature.

## **The completion of German unity**

After 45 years of separation, the unity of Germany was accomplished on 3 October 1990 by the accession of the five new federal *Länder* to the area of application of the Basic Law under Article 23 of the Basic Law. On the following day, the Bundestag, now enlarged to include the 144 delegates from the dissolved People's Chamber, met for the first sitting of an all-German Bundestag in the Reichstag building in Berlin. Its task was to set in train politically the difficult business of forging a common identity before the Bundestag elections scheduled for December.<sup>49</sup>

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48 <http://www.bpb.de/wissen/BJPZYZ,0,0,Einigungsvertrag.html> (as at 18 April 2004).

49 Hindrichs, p. 50; Lehmann, p. 443.

The first all-German Bundestag elections in December 1990 endorsed the policy of the serving government alliance between the CDU/CSU and FDP, which wanted to bring about unity as quickly as possible. The SPD, which had initially favoured postponing unification until the end of a lengthy process of adjustment between the two German states, was punished by the voters for its hesitant attitude to German unification and polled only 35.3 per cent of the votes. The West German Greens, who were likewise against rapid unification, failed to receive the minimum five per cent of votes required to be represented in the Bundestag. However, the division of Germany into two voting areas with separate restrictive clauses enabled the Bündnis 90 – allied with the West German Greens – to enter parliament with their 6 per cent of the votes in the eastern voting area. Also represented in the Bundestag was the PDS, which received 11.1 per cent of the votes in the eastern voting area.<sup>50</sup>

### **Forging a common identity**

Despite the rapid end of German partition and the establishment of national unity on 3 October 1990, the process of unifying the two previously separated German states was, nevertheless, far from complete. Government, economy and society still faced the task of forging a common identity in Germany. The end of the forty-year partition and the establishment of parliamentary democracy with the necessary institutions, a functioning system of government and administration, an efficient federal system and a social market economy in the new federal *Länder* necessitated complex and difficult changes not only in the political, economic, financial and legislative areas, but also socially and culturally.<sup>51</sup>

The main political players at the time were accused by many contemporaries of making people, particularly in the new federal *Länder*, overly optimistic about the speed at which living conditions could be equalised. Nevertheless, closer scrutiny of developments in the first few years reveals that from the very outset the German Bundestag fulfilled its function as an organ to articulate and debate the concerns and problems of the people very effectively and, on the whole, was open about the huge scale of the tasks associated with forging a common identity between East and West. In fact the problems which faced the Federal Republic and, above all, the people in the East of the reunified Germany in their daily lives were too apparent to have been suppressed for any length of time by the politicians. It should also be noted that the

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50 Lehmann, p. 443; Hindrichs, p. 52; Deutsches Historisches Museum: *Lebendiges virtuelles Museum Online*. Chapter: Die deutsche Einheit – Wiedervereinigung. Internet at: <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/DieDeutscheEinheit/Wiedervereinigung/ersteGesamtdeutscheBundestagswahl1990.html> (as at 18 March 2004).

51 Rita Süßmuth: "Auf dem Weg zur inneren Einheit Deutschlands – der Beitrag des Deutschen Bundestages", in: Rita Süßmuth/Bernward Baule (eds.): *Eine deutsche Zwischenbilanz. Standpunkte zum Umgang mit unserer Vergangenheit*, München/Landsberg am Lech 1997, p. 21f.

people of the East demonstrated great confidence in the Bundestag, in particular, after reunification and had high expectations of its ability to solve the problems of unification. Between October and December 1990 alone, over 1900 petitioners from the East approached parliament for help. Indeed, for a long time the people in the new federal *Länder* regarded the Bundestag as an advocate for the East vis-à-vis the government. It was almost inevitable that later on these high expectations in parliament's possibilities would in part be bitterly disappointed once it emerged that it was an illusion to believe that living conditions could be equalised speedily. Nevertheless, even the greatest sceptics would have to concede that in view of the huge problems faced and the fact that the capacity of the political and social institutions to solve all the problems was stretched to the very limits, there were few alternative political strategies to speed up the process of forging a common identity.<sup>52</sup>

Organisationally, the Members of the Bundestag responded to the particular challenge of German unity by regarding the issues relating to unity not as a special task requiring the creation, for example, of a separate committee, but as a cross-sectional task for which, in principle, all the Bundestag's bodies were responsible. In view of the weight of the questions to be tackled, the all-German Bundestag, which had been elected in December 1990, decided to grant the Alliance 90 and PDS groups represented in parliament extended possibilities to participate in the parliamentary opinion-forming and decision-making processes with respect to the rules of procedure then in force. The purpose was to signal to the people of East Germany that the parties dominated by West German politicians were not intent on dominating the representatives of the people of the new *Länder*.<sup>53</sup>

A closer analysis of the activities of the German Bundestag in forging a common identity reveals that parliament set in train much that promoted and strengthened the establishment of democratic parliamentary, constitutional, social and market economic structures in the new *Länder*, as well as the peaceful convergence of the once separate parts of Germany. In this context mention should be made of:<sup>54</sup>

- the debate on the question of the capital and the decision in favour of Berlin as the seat of parliament and government;
- the many debates and resolutions relating to economic restructuring in the new *Länder* to prepare them for a social market economy (including clarification of questions of ownership, privatisation and restructuring of businesses);
- investigation of the work of the state security service (including safeguarding files);

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52 Cf. Hindrichs, p. 57; Süßmuth, p. 21f.

53 Hindrichs, p. 52f.

54 Cf. Süßmuth, p. 24-40.

- opening up of the possibility to prosecute former representatives of the unjust GDR regime and the rehabilitation of victims;
- the comprehensive revision of the constitution at the beginning of the 1990s;
- the setting up of two Bundestag study commissions to deal with the history and consequences of the SED dictatorship.

In fact the Bundestag, as the centre of all-German decision-making processes, strove and strives to encourage the forging of a common identity through its own initiatives as well. Even if this process is far from at an end, it is clear, despite what many in politics and the press proclaim, that the Bundestag has indeed played and continues to play an important and independent role in the process of establishing unity and forging a common identity in Germany and has hence appropriately fulfilled its constitutional mandate as an organ of articulation and decision-making.

### **Conclusion**

German unification was the culmination of a process comprising many succeeding phases which, towards its end, gathered dramatic momentum. During the individual phases the players and objectives dominating the action at any one time changed repeatedly. The start of the process was triggered by Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union, which would certainly have been unthinkable without an international climate of *détente* and (limited) cooperation. The policy of *détente* between East and West, which was ushered in after a phase of dangerous political tension and (military) rivalry between the two military blocs of the Cold War around the end of the Sixties, was a key factor in the Seventies and Eighties in the emergence and activities of the dissident and opposition movements. These groups initially operated clandestinely on a small scale and which then played a key role in driving forward political change in the various countries of Eastern Europe in the run-up to the peaceful revolution. Although for a long time the ideologically fossilised and inflexible leadership of the GDR believed it could resist these reform efforts, it was apparent even in the GDR at least by the beginning of 1989 that, despite stepping up propaganda, surveillance, disruption and sanctions, the regime could no longer suppress the calls for more political freedoms, human rights and better material living conditions. The mass exodus from the GDR, which began after the opening of the borders between Hungary and Austria in the summer of 1989, gave a powerful boost to the opposition movement, which up to then had consisted of many small, locally and regionally operating church, peace, environmental and civil rights groups. Despite the harsh reaction of the machinery of state to any criticism, fewer and fewer people could be deterred from voicing in public their dissatisfaction with existing conditions and their political and material demands. In this increasingly heated domestic situation, the opposition was able within a very short space of time to organise across the country and to exert an influence over subsequent

internal developments as an autonomous political player. To the surprise of everybody, the SED regime in the end proved too backward and lacklustre to be able to respond effectively to the ever more vehement demands for fundamental change.

When the disconcerted and confused state and party leadership opened the Wall almost by mistake on 9 November 1989, there was no longer anything that could halt the end of the 40 years of SED rule. Attempts to maintain the GDR as an independent socialist alternative through democratic, economic and constitutional reforms failed under the unyielding pressure of the majority of the population, who demanded a rapid reunification of the two partial states of Germany. Many citizens of the GDR saw this as the best way of quickly improving their material and political living conditions. Hence the West German political community started to gain more and more influence on events in the GDR. It was the Federal Government, first and foremost, who now seized the initiative. The first free elections to the People's Chamber in March 1990, won decisively by the "Alliance for Germany", an alliance of parties aligned closely with the Federal Government, gave the latter a mandate for this from the East German population.

While in the course of 1990, its policies were focused on forcing developments within the GDR in the direct of unification, at international level its attention was turned primarily to obtaining the consent of the four victorious World War Two powers. Despite a number of reservations and some resistance from both the British and French as well as the Soviet leadership, ultimately the German government was able to obtain approval not least on the basis of a clear commitment to European integration and a policy of détente and international cooperation.

With the consent of the former victorious powers secured, the Federal Government was able to set about the concrete planning and execution of the necessary steps to establish German unity. Taking advantage of the favourable international constellation and the impatience for rapid unification in the GDR, it set to work with all speed. Inevitably, therefore, elements of the Government's measures in this phase were not well thought through and were contradictory, provoking heated debate between the political parties. The rapid transfer of the West German economic and social model to the GDR effected with the economic, currency and social union on 1 July 1990, in particular, led to serious distortions which continue to be felt today and still preoccupy the policymakers in the Federal Republic. Various provisions of the Unification Treaty, negotiated in haste on a joint basis by the first freely elected GDR People's Chamber and the German Bundestag to create formal constitutional unity, also proved to be problematic and to contain loopholes.

Whatever the problems and however justified criticism of certain decisions may be, it is, however, apparent when examining events in retrospect that there was little alternative to the basic direction of the policy pursued at that time by the Federal Government and the majority of the German Bundestag. The same applies to the great haste with which the unification process was accomplished. The impatience of the people of the GDR for rapid unity and the distortions that were anticipated in the GDR in the event of a lengthy postponement of unification ruled out a gradual convergence of the two partial German states. Furthermore, the political stakeholders could not assume that the favourable international conditions for peaceful reunification would still be in place at a later point in time. These circumstances emerged increasingly clearly in the course of 1990 and caused more and more politicians, who initially had warned against an overhasty reunification, to give their basic backing to the Federal Government's course of action. Despite all the debates on the type and form of reunification, German unity was indeed accomplished with an overwhelming majority in both the East and West on 3 October 1990. As we know today, what was achieved on that day was merely the formal constitutional act of unification. The difficult process of the internal convergence of the two completely disparate parts of the new Federal Republic had only just begun and, fifteen years later, is still far from complete.

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