

# Breakthroughs in Bonn: West German Politics in German Reunification

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The reunification of Germany on October 3, 1990 ushered in the end of the Cold War profoundly reshaping the center of Europe. The once most stable member of the Soviet bloc, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was absorbed by the western capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) unifying the German state after more than forty years of separation. The unification of Germany- together with the peaceful end of the Cold War drastically transformed the political and security structures on the European continent. The Warsaw Pact collapsed and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was extended to the East.<sup>1</sup> The Western democratic world had sealed a major victory over Soviet communist ideology.

The road to German unification was achieved with profound political speed over the course of a single year. Numerous extraordinary developments initiated by different actors all had to come together at a politically opportune time to achieve unification. It was a rapid, but complex and multifaceted process. At the center of the process were the actions of the FRG steered by the Kohl government during this tumultuous period in German history. In the early months of 1989, Chancellor Kohl acted cautiously, carefully observing the economic and political changes taking place in the East. As revolutionary conditions developed into the fall he decisively made his move. Bonn's central goal became unification and the government was able to achieve it by Kohl's convincing offer both home and abroad of a humbled German nationalism that balanced a strong federal state with the promise of being fully committed and integrated into the European community and the western military alliance of NATO.

## A Short History of the Division of Germany

The division of Germany began with the end of the Second World War. Unsure of how to deal with the "enemy," wartime conferences transferred sovereignty to an Allied Control Council made up of the four victors: Britain, France, The Soviet Union, and the United States.<sup>2</sup> To facilitate occupation the council divided the country into four separate geographical zones, but with the common adversary

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<sup>1</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 197.

<sup>2</sup> Condoleezza Rice and Philip Zelikow, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 43.

defeated relations between the four powers administrations quickly deteriorated.<sup>3</sup> Disagreements over economic rebuilding plans between the three western capitalist zones and their Soviet socialist allies led to the outbreak of the Cold War. Four power cooperation officially ended when the Soviets walked out of the Allied Control Council in 1948 situating the country into two opposing ideological camps. Successive crisis such as the Berlin Blockade of 1948 and the currency reform that was implemented in the western zones further exasperated the conflict. In the fall of 1949, Britain, France, and the US sponsored the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany with its government centered in the western city of Bonn. While in the east the Soviets followed by backing the formation of the German Democratic Republic ruled by the Socialist Unity Party (SED).<sup>4</sup> Supported by its western allies, the FRG was given the authority to make law without needing outside approval and was recognized on an international scale.<sup>5</sup> The West German constitution, the Basic Law, set the FRG on a democratic, western oriented system of governance. The first free elections in August 1949 elected Konrad Adenauer of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) who would be chancellor for the next fourteen years. Adenauer placed West Germany on a pro-Western path that sought democracy and favoured a market oriented economic policy. The goal of reunification with the East was placed behind the FRG's goal of national rebuilding and western state making.

From the beginning the odds were in favour of the FRG. According to Lothar Kettenacker, "West Germany was in a much more privileged position than its poor Eastern neighbour. It encompassed more than twice Germany's post-war territory, more than three times its population as well as the industrial heartland, and the coal and steel plants of the Ruhr."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, its Western allies actively assisted with economic reconstruction – they stopped Dismantlement, they helped with the Marshal Plan and they kept the Soviets out of the Ruhr Region. As the FRG began to experience an "economic miracle", the GDR aligned itself closer to Stalinism.<sup>7</sup> A Stalinist system was installed under the cover of an antifascist "Educational Dictatorship." There was no economic help by the Soviet Union, just the opposite: a strong dismantlement weakened the economy of the Eastern part of Germany. All early attempts at reunification failed as the Adenauer government had no plans to destabilize the FRG during the 1950s. Adenauer favoured reunification in the long run, but he believed the FRG's initial national

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<sup>3</sup>Jarausch, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 51.

<sup>6</sup> Lothar Kettenacker, *Germany 1989: In the Aftermath of the Cold War* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2009), 32.

<sup>7</sup> Jarausch, 8.

needs were democracy and stability.<sup>8</sup> Adenauer's national intentions in the Cold War period can be summed up in his most successful election campaign slogan, "Keine Experimente" (meaning, No risk-taking, safety first!).<sup>9</sup> By 1955 talks of reunification were lessening as the Germany's joined opposing military alliances, the FRG in the pro-western NATO and the GDR in the pro-eastern Warsaw Pact.<sup>10</sup> Reunification was further pushed off the negotiation table when the ideological partition materialized in 1961 with the East German's construction of the Berlin Wall.

West Germany in the 1970s entered a period of political change that turned out to be necessary preconditions for German unification. In October 1969 Willy Brandt was elected to be the chancellor of the FRG through a coalition of the Social Democrats (SPD) and the centrist Free Democrats (FDP).<sup>11</sup> Brandt, the first Social Democrat to govern West Germany in over forty years introduced *Ostpolitik*; a shift in policy on dealing with the East. His social-liberal coalition switched to conciliation proposing the formula "two states within one German nation."<sup>12</sup> The first agreement was over access rights to Berlin which provided practical agreements over administration arrangements in the city, while the second was the signing of the Basic Treaty in 1972 that formally recognized each state's existence, a repeal of the 1950s Hallstein Doctrine.<sup>13</sup> Similar treaties in this time were also signed with the Soviet Union and with Poland. Moreover, tensions were softened when both German states signed the Helsinki Act of 1975. In exchange for recognition of the current European borders, the communists agreed to new standards for humans rights. *Ostpolitik* helped to normalize relations between East and West, but the West's official recognition of the GDR cemented the notion that territorial unification was not an option for the two internationally legitimate German countries.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Year 1989 – The First Signs...**

However, the political landscape of Europe began to shift in 1985 when the newly appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced his innovative reforms of glasnost and perestroika. Open opposition was beginning to challenge communist rule in places like Hungary and

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<sup>8</sup> Kettenacker, 36.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 57.

<sup>11</sup> Mathias Siekmeier and Klaus Larres, "Domestic Political Developments II: 1969-1990," in *The Federal Republic of Germany Since 1949: Politics, Society, and Economy Before and After Unification*, ed. Klaus Larres and Panikis Panayi (London: Longman, 1996), 100.

<sup>12</sup> Jarausch, 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 61.

Poland, and in neighbouring East Germany dissident movements were emerging over demands for economic and political reforms. In the FRG, Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the CDU party had been elected to power in 1982. Kohl represented the first postwar generation as he was the first chancellor that had been too young to fight in the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> He was a conservative politician who held a doctorate in history, and had an unquestioned sense of German nationalism.<sup>16</sup> He believed that the East and the West were not equivalent systems and he desired the attainment of a unified Germany fully aligned with its western allies. To help navigate the politics of his time he relied on a highly dedicated team of individuals that shared similar nationalistic goals. The entire chancellery was headed by Rudolf Seiters, who was a key advisor on both domestic and foreign issues, but it was well known that Kohl's principal adviser on international relations was his analytical aid, Horst Teltschik. The foreign ministry was held by the experienced politician, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. He had held this position since 1974 and came to symbolize West German foreign policy, as many Germans couldn't remember a time before he held the post.<sup>17</sup> Genscher belonged to the coalition, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and relied on two key aides in his ministry, Frank Elbe and Dieter Kastrup. Similar to Kohl, Genscher supported preserving strong ties with the West, but as a former East German himself he was more inclined to take a centrist position for dialoguing with the East. According to historian Alexander von Plato, "He had an early strategic concept for European security, with a feeling for the concerns of the smaller East European states as well; a man with the sense of the need to act openly and who knew where he stood with Helmut Kohl and could make use of the East's opposition to the Chancellor."<sup>18</sup> With Kohl firmly looking West, Genscher acted as a bridge to the East which greatly strengthened the FRG's negotiation efforts in the process of unification.

In 1988 this team of West German politicians flew to Moscow to discuss current German-Soviet relations. Nobody was thinking about unification at the time. For Kohl the German question could be solved within the context of an undivided Europe. If abiding by the Helsinki Act of 1975 and the right of self-determination it had to be accepted by the Bonn government that the East Germans could decide their own fate. For Gorbachev, self-determination did not mean giving people the right to vote to join the capitalist West. When he introduced his reforms he had no intentions of abandoning neither the Soviet Union nor the Eastern bloc. Yet by the late 1980s Gorbachev had discarded the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands – ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel*, (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2003<sup>2</sup>), 362, 370.

<sup>17</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 79.

<sup>18</sup> von Plato, 411.

Brezhnev Doctrine which justified military intervention in defense of socialist principles and he kept dropping hints that the Soviet Union was not going to interfere in the internal affairs of the Warsaw Pact countries.<sup>19</sup> Directions from the Central Committee were changing, but the East German government misread these signals. Instead of moving with the tide of reforms they chose to ignore domestic problems at home and interpret Gorbachev's message as an invitation to steer their own hard lined course.

The turbulent year of 1989 would signal the beginning of German unification. Hungary's decision to open its border to Austria on May 2 initiated a flood of East German refugees attempting to flee to the West catching politicians by surprise. By the end of September some 30,000 East Germans had fled their homes through Hungary's borders.<sup>20</sup> The consulate of the FRG closed in East Berlin due to overcrowding of desperate refugees hoping to leave. In Prague, over three thousand people set up camp on the grounds of the West German embassy. Embarrassed by the situation, the Soviets pressured Honecker to let the FRG intervene. After secret negotiations between the Soviets and the foreign ministry of the FRG both parties agreed to have prepared trains take the East German refugees to the west. On September 30, Genscher flew to Prague with Seitz to deliver the message to the refugees. He explained in his memoir, "It was an unforgettable moment for me as well as for those gathered at the embassy - the thaw had originated in Prague - how long I had waited for that moment."<sup>21</sup> By the fall of 1989, the mass exodus and the growing demonstrations in the GDR were stirring strong nationalistic emotion in Kohl, and that was not all. According to Zelikow and Rice, Kohl was aware that he had an election coming up in the following year with a possibility of a loss in leadership.<sup>22</sup> This combination of election anxiety and mass discontent in the east prompted Kohl to refocus his energy on the divided German agenda.

Kohl had been aware of escalating rhetoric surrounding the subject of unification since spring 1989. The American government under the Bush administration had been discussing as early as March 1989 to initiate a new European policy with German unification as a central feature. Uncomfortable with growing Soviet influence in Europe, the Americans discussed strategies to stem its influence and further its own involvement in European affairs. Security advisor, Brent Scowcroft wrote a memorandum for President Bush in March that stated, "Today the highest priority of American European policy should be the destiny of the Federal Republic of Germany. Bush should help to strengthen Kohl,

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<sup>19</sup> Kettenacker, 131.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>21</sup> Hans-Dietrich Genscher, *Rebuilding a House Divided: A Memoir by the Architect of Germany's Reunification* (New York: Broadway Books, 1995), 12.

<sup>22</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 79.

who at present is behind in the opinion polls, behind an opposition which gives too little consideration, both to the nuclear deterrent and conventional defense.”<sup>23</sup> The Americans wanted to propose a “commonwealth of free nations”, as an alternative to Gorbachev’s “common European house.”<sup>24</sup> They wanted to support a unified Germany under NATO that would extend NATO’s influence throughout Europe. Advisor Condoleezza Rice admitted, “It is true that the United States really had only one concern – and that was that German unification not destroy NATO. Because NATO was the force for peace in Germany, it was America’s anchor in Europe.”<sup>25</sup> In May of 1989 Bush gave a speech in the Rheingold-Halle in Mainz where he proclaimed, “Let Germany be whole and free, and let Berlin be next.”<sup>26</sup> He also sent a private letter to Kohl that same month stating there is a “historic opportunity” to change the German relationship.<sup>27</sup> In retrospect, FRG politicians from this period are uncomfortable to suggest that the Americans were ahead of them in their foreign policy, but in spring 1989 it was Bush that was convincing Kohl to take the offensive.<sup>28</sup>

In September, as the East German government scrambled to gain control of their loss of authority, Kohl began to test the waters in the west. He deviated from the traditional *Ostpolitik* approach and created new objectives for dealing with the massive problem of East German emigration. The objectives were: “1. Help East Germans reach the West, even in defiance of East German Laws. 2. Press the GDR to solve problem with far-reaching reform of travel laws, as well as political and economic reforms. 3. Try to avoid publicly embarrassing or provoking the government of the GDR.”<sup>29</sup> Kohl was moving in a new direction, but acting very cautiously in an effort not to provoke foreign reaction which he knew would also have an impact on domestic politics at home. Feeling the full support of the United States Kohl stressed two critical points in the Bundestag (German Parliament) on November 8. He promised West German financial aid to the GDR if the East implemented economic and political reform, and he referred to the possibility of unification. He stated, “Our fellow Germans, if they get an opportunity, they will decide in favor of unity. We have less reason than ever to be resigned to the long-term division of Germany into two states.”<sup>30</sup> However, no one was prepared for how to deal with the circumstances that would unfold in the next twenty-four hours.

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<sup>23</sup> von Plato, 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Condoleezza Rice, interview by Alexander von Plato, Stanford University, September 17, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Kettenacker, 131.

<sup>27</sup> von Plato, 27.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 66.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

## After the Fall of the Wall

On November 9, 1989 the Berlin wall was opened. Amongst the excitement, Bonn was completely caught off guard and recognized it had no official plan for how to deal with the historic moment. Kohl and Genscher were away on a state visit to Poland to meet with the new Prime Minister Tadeusz Masowiecki when the wall was breached. To the Prime Minister's dismay, Kohl abruptly cut his visit short and flew to West Berlin on a chartered American flight to give a speech at the Schöneberg City Hall. Filled with emotion Kohl addressed the crowds, "In this spirit I say to all of you in the GDR: You do not stand alone! We stand at your side! We are and remain one nation, and we belong together."<sup>31</sup>

Realizing that the circumstances were both electrifying and frightening for the leaders of the Four Powers, Kohl made contact with each of them over the course of the next couple days reassuring them that the situation would move forward calmly.<sup>32</sup> When Kohl spoke with Gorbachev on November 11 he emphasized that he did not want to destabilize the GDR and would help with current economic reforms. Enthused over the conversation, Teltschik wrote in his diary, "No threat, no warning, only the request to show caution."<sup>33</sup> However, when the French foreign minister Roland Dumas arrived in Moscow for a state visit a few days after the wall had fallen he reported back to the West Germans that Gorbachev and his team of Soviet officials were greatly concerned and increasingly agitated about the German situation.<sup>34</sup> The confusing messages coming from Moscow pushed Kohl to take the offensive.

## Kohl "Ten-Points" and the Consequences

The opportunity came on November 21 when Soviet scout Nikolai Portugalow handed Teltschik a non-paper outlining the range of issues that needed to be examined before unification could be made possible, such as a peace treaty and determining military alliances. Bonn interpreted this paper that Moscow was already thinking about unification, when in actuality it had been a Soviet misunderstanding.<sup>35</sup> This piece of information pushed Teltschik to begin drafting the "Ten Point Program" which Kohl presented to the Bundestag on November 28. The document was kept top secret as President Bush had been the only person

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<sup>31</sup> Speeches at the Schöneberg City Hall in West Berlin, November 10, 1989 in *German Unification and its Discontents: Documents from the Peaceful Revolution*, ed. Richard T. Gray and Sabine Wilke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 66.

<sup>32</sup> Kettenacker, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 108.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>35</sup> von Plato, 418.

briefed. Even Kohl's foreign minister, Genscher had been excluded from the inside circle. The gradual plan outlined for two confederative structures to become one eventual federal system closely linked to the European community.<sup>36</sup> No timetable was officially proposed, but Kohl envisioned somewhere between five to ten years. The plan was written in such a way that it appealed to the tradition of German state-building. According to Pekka Hämäläinen, "It was fitting that as a former student of history, he sought to legitimize and validate his vision in this fashion, but although national historical experiences provided a base and guidance for unification, it was the will of the Germans that would have to make it a reality."<sup>37</sup> Kohl also spoke to an audience beyond the German borders. He emphasized that the unified Germany would be further integrated into the European community, and that the EC could move into Eastern Europe. He stated, "The EC must not end on the Elbe, but must remain open to the East."<sup>38</sup> However, there was no word about NATO and no word about the German-Polish border.

Although it was an attractive and powerful message some of Kohl's western allies were struggling with the idea of a united Germany in Europe. The Thatcher government in Great Britain had strong reservations about unification. Prime Minister Thatcher had trepidations about Germany that dated back to her early memories from the Second World War. She believed Germans had a national character that was inclined to be both authoritarian and militaristic.<sup>39</sup> Great Britain also worried that a united Germany would create an overly dominant European continent. France was more open minded towards unification, but desired a stronger European community and was anxious that German unification would stall those plans. Kohl had also strategically avoided the delicate subject of military alliances in his "ten-points" speech. Yet the Americans gave no doubt as to the security plans they supported for a united Germany. According to President Bush, he stated, "I had no fears about unification. Some in Europe were concerned about a strong united Germany in the heart of Europe. I was not one of them."<sup>40</sup> This view was ratified when Bush announced his "Four Principles" in Washington only one day after Kohl's speech. The American government made it clear from their points that they envisioned and accepted a united Germany in NATO. Von Plato argues that because of these principles, "Reunification was in a way validated by Washington, which left the West European critics little room to differ; since for varying reasons the Western European heads of government who ranged from tentative to diffident, were made

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>37</sup> Pekka Kalevi Hämäläinen, *Uniting Germany: Actions and Reactions* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 73.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>39</sup> Sir Thomas of Swynnerton, interview by Hans-Christoph Blumenberg, London, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> George Bush, interview by Alexander von Plato, Washington, September 18, 1999.



to see NATO reasoning by Washington.”<sup>41</sup> It was difficult for the western allies to argue against a plan that would strengthen NATO, their own military alliance. Only a few weeks later at the NATO summit in Brussels, Kohl publicly pledged his unwavering loyalty to the security organization.<sup>42</sup> By the end of November, Kohl’s western-aligned and European integrated unification plan had become his central agenda.

The Soviets were not impressed with Bonn’s bold plans as politics in the GDR were unraveling rapidly. On December 1 the entire Politburo and Central Committee in the GDR resigned. Hans Modrow, a reformer within the SED was vaulted to the position of party boss to replace the incompetent Egon Krenz. Modrow struggled to gain control of the situation as civil authority throughout the country began to break down. He accepted some of Kohl’s “ten points” program, but rejected the offer of unification.<sup>43</sup> In Moscow, Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze had dropped their conciliatory tones towards the FRG. Genscher experienced this change of attitude on a state visit to the USSR in December. He loyally defended Kohl’s “ten-points” program even though he held reservations himself and had felt left out of the planning. Although he explained in his memoir, “I had not the slightest interest in letting inter-coalition frictions debilitate me during this crucial phase in German politics and history.”<sup>44</sup> Genscher tried to reassure the Soviets by reminding them that it was a proposal, not a demand. Gorbachev responded angrily saying, “Never mind all of that, the German chancellor was treating citizens of the GDR as if they were his subjects”. Shevardnadze dramatically added, “Even Hitler didn’t permit himself this.”<sup>45</sup> The visit concluded on tense terms. Bonn was further put in its place when the Four Powers held a meeting in Berlin on December 11 to discuss the current developments, purposely excluding the FRG. According to American foreign minister, James Baker, “We needed to have that meeting to bring the Soviets along, because there were four-power rights that needed to be dealt with...rights and obligations that applied to Germany, but that excluded Germany.”<sup>46</sup> Over breakfast the next day, Baker also advised Kohl to be more sensitive in the handling of the Soviet, France, and Britain sentiments.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless as December came to close, Kohl continued to press forward in spite of the strained atmosphere. Genscher and Kohl appealed to German national emotion when both

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<sup>41</sup> von Plato, 418.

<sup>42</sup> Kettenacker, 138.

<sup>43</sup> Chronology of Significant Events in *German Unification and its Discontents: Documents from the Peaceful Revolution*, ed. Richard T. Gray and Sabine Wilke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), xxxvii.

<sup>44</sup> Genscher, 301.

<sup>45</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 136.

<sup>46</sup> James Baker, interview by Alexander von Plato, Houston, September 19, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 144.

made emotional visits to East Germany. Genscher visited his hometown in Halle and visited Nikolai Church, which had been the center of dissident demonstrations, and Kohl gave a dramatic speech in Dresden to cheering crowds met with chants of unification.<sup>48</sup>

In the early weeks of 1990 the rapidly deteriorating economic and power structures in the GDR forced accelerated diplomacy. On January 25, in a meeting with his closet staff members, Gorbachev gave up the hope of preserving a separate East German state and decided to shift the Kremlin's energy to influencing the impending course of events. At this meeting the Soviets also discussed how they could do this, coming to the conclusion it would be best to negotiate with the four victors, and both German states, thus a four-plus-two format.<sup>49</sup> According to Zelikow and Rice, James Baker and his team of American diplomats believed they had initiated the two-plus-four format to further talks,<sup>50</sup> but Genscher said it came from meetings between German and US-diplomats.<sup>51</sup> It shows that both camps recognized this as the most pragmatic approach to moving forward and it was adopted as the strategy for how to deal with the German question.

In the FRG, Kohl and Genscher's differences were bubbling to the surface. The foreign minister busied himself with trying to determine the appropriate security organization for a united Germany. Without consulting the chancellor, he suggested to the western allies that the former GDR should not be incorporated into NATO's military structures.<sup>52</sup> The chancellery on the other hand was more closely aligned to American interests, who did not favor Genscher's proposal. They had set up a separate working group that excluded the foreign ministry to deal with the questions of military alliances under the leadership of Rudolf Seiters.<sup>53</sup> Divisions persisted amongst the leadership in the FRG yet they presented a united front when they met with the Soviets on a state visit to Moscow in February. Kohl convincingly described to Gorbachev the alarming economic and political situation in the GDR while reassuring him he was going to help meet Soviet security concerns. Kohl's persuasive argument led Gorbachev to announce that it was up to the German people to decide their own fate.<sup>54</sup> However, the breakthrough came already some days before during the meeting of the US State Secretary James Baker with Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow.<sup>55</sup> Gorbachev was beginning to publicly disclose a shifting attitude toward the

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>49</sup> Advisory Meeting with Gorbachev on January 26, 1990.

<sup>50</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 167.

<sup>51</sup> Hans-Dietrich Genscher, interview by Alexander von Plato, Lüdenscheid, April 25, 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 175.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>54</sup> Kettenacker, 146.

<sup>55</sup> Von Plato, 236.

German issue. Kohl revealed in a communique after his discussion, “Gorbachev and I agree it is the sole right of the German people to decide whether they want to live together in one state. Gorbachev promised to me unequivocally that the Soviet Union will respect the decisions of the Germans and that the Germans themselves are responsible for determining the timing and manner of unification.”<sup>56</sup>

### **The Elections on March 18, 1990 – The Speed Increased in the Direction of Unification**

The situation was deteriorating so rapidly in the GDR that democratic elections scheduled for May had been pushed up to March 18. Modrow had no solutions to the national economic problems, roundtable talks were inconclusive, and angry citizens had stormed the hated secret police headquarters. Kohl’s government was hoping that the elections would sweep the SED out of power. By mid-February Kohl took another drastic leap forwards towards unification. He began to advocate for the takeover of the GDR by the FRG according to Article 23 of West German law, not Article 146 which outlined that a new constitution be drafted for the merger.<sup>57</sup> The East German CDU political party, the Alliance for Germany, supported Kohl’s proposal. On March 18 East Germans in the GDR voted in their first free elections and produced a spectacular result for Kohl’s coalition.<sup>58</sup> The GDR had voted for unification. Alliance for Germany attracted 48.1% of the vote, over twice the percentage cast for the nearest rival party.<sup>59</sup> For Kohl, the elections infused him with renewed confidence and he adjusted his timetable hoping to invoke Article 23 by the summer of 1990 or early fall.

### **The Internal German State Treaties**

The West Germans wanted to stop the mass exodus of refugees that were still crossing the border, and an economic partnership could do just that. The GDR was heading towards bankruptcy and drastic measures needed to be taken. Kohl’s government believed that introducing the Deutsche Mark in the East would be the first concrete step needs towards forging unification. It would not only help ease the burden of the GDR, but would also help buy Moscow’s agreement to a

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<sup>56</sup> Communique by Helmut Kohl after his discussion with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow, February 10, 1990 in *German Unification and its Discontents: Documents from the Peaceful Revolution*, ed. Richard T. Gray and Sabine Wilke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 130.

<sup>57</sup> Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 243.

<sup>58</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 230.

<sup>59</sup> Hämmäläinen, 143.

unification plan.<sup>60</sup> Kohl had convinced the East German electorate that he foresaw “blooming landscapes” once the market economy had been planted in the East raising the hope that a postwar economic miracle might be repeated.<sup>61</sup> On February 13 Modrow had met with Kohl in Bonn and together they agreed to negotiate a currency union. Although it was overwhelmingly supported in the GDR, the details of the union sparked major controversy in the FRG. Financial experts like the head of the Bundesbank Karl Otto Pöhl and Economics Minister Helmut Haussmann argued that a gradual approach needed to be taken.<sup>62</sup> Too quick of a merger could raise inflation in the west and threaten bankruptcies in the GDR. The unofficial currency ratio of 10:1 led the majority of westerners to support a 2:1, while easterners fought for a 1:1 exchange rate. Kohl persuaded his government to support a path that would encourage East Germans to support unification. After much deliberation the Bonn government agreed on April 23 that wages would be converted 1:1, savings less than 4000 at 1:1, and larger amounts at 2:1.<sup>63</sup> The State Treaty was signed in May and went into effect on July 1. Kohl had successfully navigated the currency union by appeasing the East Germans without jeopardizing the west’s economic growth. At the signing of the treaty Kohl confidently remarked, “What we experience here is the birth of a free and united Germany.”<sup>64</sup>

A second state treaty was required for a complete transition to unification. According to the March elections the East Germans had voted for the fast-track solution of joining the FRG based on Article 23 of West German law. It was not a merger, but a takeover, and western legislation needed to be introduced into the East. Negotiations over the treaty details had started as early as February and were concerned with the deconstruction of a twentieth century state including legislation, administration, state assets, treaty obligations, culture, and social questions.<sup>65</sup> The unification talks needed to bring together two incompatible political systems under one roof. The Western spokesman for the difficult process from the FRG was Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, and from the East, State Secretary Günter Krause. When the two parties met for official negotiations in July, the East Germans hoped for a “shared” approach, but we’re quickly corrected by Schäuble, “This is the accession of the GDR to the FRG, not the reverse. We do not want to trample coldly on your wishes and interests. But this is

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<sup>60</sup> Maier, 236.

<sup>61</sup> Irwin L. Collier, “A Splendid Failure: Reflections on Two Decades of East German Economic Reconstruction,” in *German Unification Expectations and Outcomes*, ed. Peter C. Caldwell and Robert R. Shandley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 122.

<sup>62</sup> Jarausch, 143.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>65</sup> Kettenacker, 174.

not the reunification of two equal states.”<sup>66</sup> After the confrontation had been cleared the first round of negotiations were completed successfully.

However, over the course of the summer months the discussions became rife with political clashes and controversies. The East Germans struggled to be credible bargaining partners as their coalition broke down in late July. Conflict over western interference and differences in political ideologies divided the Easterners, seriously endangering the path to unity. In the West, CDU legislators had included the opposition SPD in the talks complicating maneuvers from their end.<sup>67</sup> Amongst the many issues that needed to be sorted out the three most contentious were: the abortion laws, the question of property, and what to do with the archive of the Stasi files.<sup>68</sup> After difficult compromises had been reached, Kohl invited the leaders of the major parties to the chancellery to discuss the prepared draft of the treaty. SPD chairman, Hans-Jochen Vogel demanded improvements, sending the working groups back to the negotiating table. On August 31, agreements were met, and the massive Unification Treaty with its 1000 pages, supplements, and appending notes was signed formally integrating the GDR into the FRG.<sup>69</sup> Kohl’s governing party had kept the transition orderly while orchestrating the most important bureaucratic document in postwar Germany.

## **Two-Plus-Four**

In foreign, as opposed to domestic policy, was where the real convincing arguments for unification needed to be completed. The West Germans and the Americans had to fight for the acceptance of the two-plus-format. At an international meeting for the foreign ministers of the NATO and the Warsaw Pact in February, the Dutch and the Italians vocally expressed their displeasure at not being included in the talks. A frustrated Genscher dramatically exclaimed, “You are not part of the game.”<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, a fear of a putsch against Gorbachev by hard lined Soviet generals convinced Kohl they only had a “short window” to accomplish their goal,<sup>71</sup> though Soviet leaders including Gorbachev himself denied later such a danger.<sup>72</sup>

Reactions were quick resulting in the first two-plus-four meetings in Bonn that were held in early May. Moscow presented their stipulations for unification

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<sup>66</sup> Jarausch, 170.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Kettenacker, 178.

<sup>69</sup> Peter H. Merkl, *German Unification in the European Context* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 224.

<sup>70</sup> Rice and Zelikow, 193.

<sup>71</sup> von Plato, 416

<sup>72</sup> Cernaev in Von Plato, 180, 186 and in a very sharp form 203; Gorbachev *ibid.*, 200.

surprising their colleagues with their receptive attitudes towards the process. Shevardnadze asked Kohl for financial credits suggesting to Bonn that financial aid was a condition for the acceptance of German unification. He also proposed a new security structure for Europe based on the 35-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and he shocked those at the meeting when he proposed to Kohl to move forward with domestic issues at home, before the external questions of Germany were solved. This was a clear change in Soviet policy.<sup>73</sup> Genscher welcomed Shevardnadze's comments about moving forward with domestic issues, but Kohl disliked that they implied that the four powers would retain rights in Germany indefinitely until a solution was found. In general however, the West Germans were pleased with the Soviets progress. Kohl and Bush derived from the meetings that if the structure of NATO were to change, the Soviets would be open to a unified Germany in the western military alliance. They jointly discussed new strategies for NATO that would be presented at the summit in July.<sup>74</sup> Kohl decided his next crucial move would be to send representatives to Moscow to deal with the delicate subject of financial credits.

The Soviet Union was experiencing a deep financial crisis. They were struggling to repay foreign debt and they needed immediate finances to maintain their reforms. Kohl recognized that if he opened the wallets of the FRG and offered economic assistance to the Soviets it would be difficult for them to oppose the unification process. Without telling his cabinet, he secretly sent Teltschik and two head German bankers on May 14 to Moscow to offer Gorbachev 5 billion Deutsche Mark.<sup>75</sup> The Soviets accepted the offer. Teltschik returned to Bonn the same day convinced that Kohl was appropriately navigating the Soviets towards unification.<sup>76</sup> However, just days before the official unification treaty was signed Gorbachev haggled Kohl for a financial increase totaling the final settlement to 12 billion Deutsche Mark and a 3 billion interest free loan.<sup>77</sup>

The NATO summit in July turned out to be extremely advantageous for Kohl. The idea was to put proposals forward that would reassure Gorbachev and strengthen him against the Soviet hardliners in Moscow, in order to advance their acceptance of German unification. Hosted by the Thatcher government in London, the NATO meetings proposed significant changes. A declaration was stated that the Warsaw Pact and NATO were "no longer adversaries", new disarmament measures were put in place, changes were made in strategic doctrine, and it was agreed upon to include the Soviet Union more closely in the

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<sup>73</sup> Hämäläinen, 163.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Kettenacker, 151.

<sup>76</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 259.

<sup>77</sup> Kettenacker, 158.

security structures of Europe.<sup>78</sup> The summit suggested that Europe was moving closer to Gorbachev's vision of a "common European house."<sup>79</sup> The NATO promises signalled a change in the German-Soviet friendship which became further evident during Kohl's visit to Moscow a week later.

The summit in Moscow and the Caucasus on July 15 and 16 proved the willingness of the Soviets to cooperate with German plans for unification. The West Germans were accepted warmly and at the beginning of the visit Gorbachev mentioned to Kohl that the 5 billion Deutsche Mark had been a "chess move" that had been played at just the right time.<sup>80</sup> Kohl's and the Americans insistence on a united Germany in NATO had swayed Gorbachev by mid-summer that this was the only last option worth pursuing. Over the course of the next couple days Gorbachev and Kohl agreed on: complete closure of four power rights, Germany's free choice of a security alliance, Soviet troops would be withdrawn from the East within four years, no authority in NATO during those four years, Germany's promise to never own nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons, and a promise to reduce their troops to 370,000 soldiers.<sup>81</sup> The German-Soviet deal overcame the last major hurdles that had been slowing down the unification process. The Americans, British, and France were all a little irked that they had been excluded from the diplomacy that had settled the German question forty five years after the war.<sup>82</sup> In addition, neighbouring Poland bitterly resented the marginalization of their border issue by the Germans.

In his "ten-point" speech Kohl had neglected to mention the issue of Germany's Eastern frontiers with Poland. In March 1990 he shocked the international community when he suggested that a final border treaty be signed only after unification and it would be conditional on the renunciation of Polish claims for war reparations.<sup>83</sup> Historian von Plato argues that Kohl's nationalistic beliefs over the Oder-Neisse line was his weakest political move in the process.<sup>84</sup> Kohl was aware that Poland was incensed over the issue, but he was worried that if he signed the treaty he would lose a significant amount of conservative voters. Genscher, the more sensitive to Eastern concerns supported ratifying the border treaty before unification. With some persuasion Kohl eventually backed down. In a speech to the Bundestag he explained, "Either we affirm the existing border or

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<sup>78</sup> Hämäläinen, 204.

<sup>79</sup> Kettenacker, 156.

<sup>80</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, 1993), 352.

<sup>81</sup> Kettenacker, 157.

<sup>82</sup> Ash, 353.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>84</sup> von Plato, 412.

we forfeit our chance to achieve German unity.”<sup>85</sup> The resolution was passed, and on September 12 the West Germans agreed to sign a final accord over the border issue, which they complied on November 14, 1990.<sup>86</sup>

After the Soviet-German breakthrough in the Caucasus the final two-plus-four talks began to wind down. The officials worked to put the agreements into proper legal phrasing for the “Treaty on Final Arrangements in Relation to Germany” which was arranged to be signed on September 12. The treaty marked the restoration of German sovereignty by the cessation of the allies’ authority. A last minute setback by the British delegation on the night before the signing threatened the success of the entire treaty. The British demanded the rights of NATO to maneuver in East German territory following the red army’s retreat in 1994.<sup>87</sup> Having already given in to numerous concessions the Soviets announced, “there would be no treaty” if the British did not back down. Genscher was furious and going outside of normal diplomacy woke up Baker in the middle of the night to convince the British to remove their demands.<sup>88</sup> The British agreed. In a Moscow hotel on September 12, the six foreign ministers signed the document that gave up four power rights allowing for unification. The treaty went into effect on October 3, 1990 ending the German division.

## Outlook

The West German government succeeded in its objective to achieve reunification for the two German states that had been separated for more than forty years. In the early months of 1989 the Bonn cabinet carefully observed the democratic awakenings that were undermining the legitimacy of the communist state in the East. As the civil movement revolutionized, Kohl decided to strike. He appealed to the East German’s discontent convincing them that their desires for a better life could be attained only through unification with the West. He consistently appealed to German nationalism, but offered a humbler version of a united Germany that was fully integrated into the European community. Kohl felt confident to push German unification because of the strong support of his American allies who wanted to see a NATO expansion in Europe. The Americans were uncomfortable of Gorbachev’s increasing reforms and acceptance in the European community, and encouraged Kohl to take the offensive. Kohl and Genscher displayed striking accomplishments as powerbrokers on the

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<sup>85</sup> Günter Mächler and Klaus Hofmann, *Helmut Kohl: Chancellor of German Unity* (Bonn: Press and Information Office of the Federal Government), 196.

<sup>86</sup> Kettenacker, 152.

<sup>87</sup> Hämläinen, 221

<sup>88</sup> Zelikow and Rice, 361.



international scene as they skillfully depicted a divided Germany as an obstacle to Europe's success. A united Germany in NATO won over the western allies, and their most powerful negotiating tool with the Soviets were West Germany's economic strength and financial reserves. Bonn used its payments and democratic promises to persuade the Four Powers that German reunification was both inevitable and desirable.

Nevertheless, most of the dissident groups in the GDR were not content with the policy of the Kohl government: They hoped for a longer process of democratization of the GDR and of unification according to Article 146, which outlined that a new constitution should be created before the merger. However, which chance could they have facing the decline of the Soviet Union, the clear politics of Bush, Kohl, and NATO, the crash down of the GDR economy and – last but not least – the will of the majority of the voters in the election of March 18, 1990?