

## The division of Germany

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The toll of the [Second World War](#) in terms of both human and material resources was the heaviest that mankind had ever known. Although the conflict had a global dimension that was even more pronounced than the 1914–1918 War, it was Europe that was the principal victim of this confrontation. The total number of victims is estimated at almost 40 million, more than half of whom were civilians. Following all the deportations and expulsions, there were, in 1945, nearly 20 million displaced persons awaiting repatriation. The unprecedented racial, religious and political persecutions and the mass deportations into [labour or extermination camps](#) had stirred up hatred among the peoples of Europe. The discovery of mass graves in the concentration camps appeared to shake the very spiritual and moral foundations of Western civilisation. The Germans were overwhelmed by a feeling of guilt, which fuelled an intense ethical debate and only added to the disarray of the defeated nation.

From 4 to 11 February 1945, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt met in [Yalta](#), in the Crimea on the Black Sea, to settle the questions raised by the inevitable German defeat. They first of all agreed on the arrangements for the occupation of Germany. Although France did not take part in the Conference, it was allocated an occupation zone in Germany, to be carved out in part from the British and American zones. They also adopted the principle of the dismemberment of German territory. As for Poland, they came to an agreement on new frontiers. Poland would extend more westwards, losing territory in the east, to be taken over by the Soviet Union, whilst gaining some eastern German provinces. That would involve the resettlement of several million Germans. The three heads of government also signed a ‘Declaration on the policy to be followed in the liberated regions’, a text which envisaged free elections being held and democratic governments taking office. Yalta seemed to be the final attempt to reorganise the world on a basis of cooperation and agreement.

The world was not yet divided into two hemispheres of influence, but the Western Powers were obliged to accept Stalin’s role in the territories liberated by Soviet tanks. Central and Eastern Europe were henceforth under the exclusive control of the Red Army. It seemed that Stalin took the view that each power would finish up by imposing its own political system wherever it exercised military control.

At the [Potsdam](#) Conference of Heads of State, which took place from 17 July to 2 August 1945, Harry Truman replaced Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had died on 12 April 1945. During the conference, Clement Atlee replaced Winston Churchill who had been defeated in the general elections of 26 July. Only Joseph Stalin had been personally present at all the Allied Conferences since Tehran in November-December 1943. The Potsdam Conference, held in the heart of Germany, was mainly concerned with the situation in Europe. However, it only decided the fate of Germany in the short term, determining, inter alia, the practicalities of its complete disarmament, the abolition of the National Socialist Party, the trial of war criminals and the amount of reparations. Negotiations also confirmed the need to dismantle German industry and the sequestration of the powerful ‘Konzerns’, which were to be broken up into smaller independent companies.

During 1945, the Allies began organising their respective [occupation zones](#) in Germany and Austria. The Americans occupied the South, the British the West and North, France the Southwest, and the Soviets Central Germany. The Eastern part was administered by Poland, except the town of Königsberg (renamed Kaliningrad) and its surrounding area, which were annexed by the USSR. On 30 August 1945, the Inter-Allied Control Council was founded. Berlin was placed under the control of the Inter-Allied ‘Kommandatura’. In 1946, the main war criminals were tried in Nuremberg by Allied judges. In the same year, the fate of the German satellite states and of Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Finland was determined in Paris by separate peace treaties.

On 28 July 1946, the United States proposed a [plan for economic unification](#) of the occupied zones. Faced with the refusal of France and the Soviet Union, the British and Americans decided to unite

their zones economically and, in December of the same year, created the Bizone. On 1 August 1948, the French occupation zone joined the Bizone, which then became the Trizone. Gradually, [relations](#) between the Allies deteriorated, and the quadripartite structures became unmanageable.

From 20 April to 2 June 1948, the three powers met in London to discuss the future of the country and decided to call a constituent assembly, the German Parliamentary Council. Its members were appointed by the parliaments of the federal states, the Länder. These federal entities were created by the occupying powers, on more or less historical lines. Whilst the State of Prussia was abolished by the Allies, Bavaria was retained. On 1 September 1948, the Parliamentary Council started work in Bonn. It elected a Christian Democrat, [Konrad Adenauer](#), to lead it and formulated the [Basic Law](#) which was promulgated on 23 May 1949. This Law became the provisional Constitution of the [Federal Republic of Germany \(FRG\)](#). Its adoption after a referendum gave rise to the first legislative elections for the entire Trizone. Bonn was chosen ahead of Frankfurt to be the provisional capital. The city of West Berlin became a Land but remained under Allied control. The aim was to show that West Berlin was part of the FRG, despite its special status.

Even if the right of supervision enjoyed by the Western Allied powers limited German sovereignty, the FRG was seen as the only rightful heir to the German Reich, dissolved in 1945 when Germany unconditionally surrendered. The election of the Bundestag in August 1949 confirmed the victory of the Christian Democrats (CDU) over the Socialists (SPD) led by Kurt Schumacher, whose Marxist tendencies scared the Western occupying powers. The Communists and the Liberals made few gains. The CDU, led by Konrad Adenauer, confirmed its role as the champion of a return to a free market economy. Adenauer, who was the [preferred partner of the Americans](#), became the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

As a response to the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in Bonn, in October 1949 the USSR encouraged the proclamation of the [German Democratic Republic \(GDR\)](#) in Berlin. East Berlin became the capital of the GDR. The West refused to recognise this State. [The Socialist Unity Party of Germany \(SED\)](#), a Stalinist party led by Communists, dominated the political scene in the GDR until the end of the Communist era in 1989.