

'Make way for unity' from Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (12 February 1990)

Caption: On 12 February 1990, the German Conservative-Liberal daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung speculates on the consequences of the decision taken in Moscow to give the green light to the reunification of the two Germanies.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 12.02.1990, Nr. 36. Frankfurt/Main. "Der Einheit eine Gasse", auteur:Fack, Fritz Ullrich , p. 1.

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Make way for unity

Of the many historic days in the past few months, this must have been the most historic: Moscow has cleared the way for unification of the two halves of Germany which have been separated for over four and a half decades. The procedures have not yet been finalised, the political and military status of the future Republic of Germany have not yet been determined. But the Chancellor, who will go down in history as the Reunification Chancellor, seized the day, and the gates to German unity have burst wide open.

The past few weeks have made clear to the world that the Federal Government is at the mercy of the German issue rather than vice versa; that the GDR's development will head straight for catastrophe unless something is done very soon. This is the only possible explanation for the fact that the Four Powers' pronounced resistance, in December, to any thought of a future unification has now largely disappeared. In the end, this change of heart was again prompted by Mikhail Gorbachev, prophet of a new era of hope for humankind. But old friends of the Federal Republic in France and America have also been more and more outspoken in the past few weeks in their support for the Federal Government's position.

Undeniably, the many Germans waiting in the GDR with their suitcases packed, who take Moscow's opening-up as a signal for hope, will not be patient for long. But it is also quite right that the political and military status of a future united Germany first needs to be discussed with the Four Powers. There is still a disparity between the West German–American and the East German–Soviet positions. The Soviet Union may have declared the date and the path towards reunification to be the exclusive concern of the Germans, but this was subject to various requirements which would permanently change the political status of a unified Germany.

The only remedy is patient negotiation. The interests of the neighbouring countries may meet in their scepticism about a reunified Germany, and we should be careful of this. But their interests part company on the issue of the political status of a unified Germany. The Soviet demand for neutrality — they are now calling it 'non-participation in military alliances' — is felt more as a threat elsewhere, and that is precisely why even the Soviet Union does not seem to be pushing it particularly strongly.

The Soviet Union should, therefore, be able to accept the German Foreign Minister's proposal to allow Germany to keep its ties with NATO, possibly with a different status and certainly with a Western military presence, which would extend to the former internal German border. The Soviet Union would benefit from this in two ways: firstly, by maintaining stable relations with Central Europe, secondly, as a result of the new Germany's sense of moral obligation, at the very least, to act as a bridge and ally in relations between East and West. All this is closely linked to the advancement of the disarmament process.

Such considerations are, conceivably, sensible components of a workable compromise. A guarantee of borders should crown reconciliation and definitively render superfluous the further pursuit of the idea of a peace treaty, 45 years after the end of the war.

So much for the external conditions of the process of German Unification. The internal conditions, from now on exclusively in German hands, should be handled equally delicately. Here, the Federal Chancellor will again have to keep his wits about him and maintain a sense of reality. Despite the immense pressure bearing down on the reunification operation, he must on no account give the impression that the GDR is simply being annexed.

This relationship is a highly sensitive issue for the other side. The Germans in the GDR would like to determine their own fate, and the overwhelming majority refuse even to consider that their future belongs solely to a unified German state. But they would like to know under what conditions the fusion is supposed to take place; here, they are interested not so much in the constitutional as in the economic and social fields.

Both sides will have to make sacrifices; the Federal Republic, as the stronger of the two, will have to make more than will the dwindling remnants of the GDR economy. We need to think quickly and provide thorough help. A national sacrifice, in whatever form, is at the top of the agenda. Simply financing what is

necessary to cover the budget deficit will not be enough. Certainly, the bulk of the capital needed for reconstruction should come from private sources. But it is the Government's task to clean up the polluted environment and tackle the crumbling infrastructure.

In view of the run-down economy in the GDR, some blood drained away here and a bit of unemployment there appear to be no more than temporary hardships for Germany. Monetary union and reform, unity and reconstruction: everything must meet the standards of a socially committed market economy. This gives rise to the task facing German politics from tomorrow onwards, the fulfilment of which our fellow countrymen await: to share out fairly the opportunities, risks and victims of reunification.

Fritz Ulrich Fack