

Chancellor Kohl's role in reunification

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Chancellor Kohl's role in reunification

During the swift process of German reunification in 1990, the Chancellor of the FRG, Helmut Kohl, was to play a key role, both at inter-German level, with the incorporation of the GDR into the FRG, and at international level, securing the agreement of the four former Second World War Allies and assuaging the anxieties of neighbouring countries.

The West German Government was initially doubtful as to the possibility of forthcoming reunification. The Government, like the people of West Germany, overestimated the solidity of the GDR. The West German Government was convinced that the Soviet Union, despite imposing reforms on the Communist regime in the GDR, would oppose the fall of the regime. Consequently, relations became more intense between the two German States. At this point, the situation began to develop rapidly. On 13 June 1989, during his first official visit to the FRG, Mikhail Gorbachev signed a joint declaration with Helmut Kohl confirming their good relations and their willingness to 'work to overcome the division of Europe'. He assured the Chancellor that he had ruled out any intervention by Soviet troops in the GDR. It was, above all, the scale of the demonstrations in East Germany, the fall of Honecker and the flight of East Germans towards the West that proved that reunification was becoming possible and even necessary. For the FRG, the most important thing was to stop the influx of refugees, whom it was having insurmountable problems in accommodating, by providing East Germany with the economic and financial aid which it required to retain its workforce.

Chancellor Kohl, however, remained cautious. On 28 November, without having consulted other West German politicians or the Allies, he put forward a ten-point plan to restore German unity. Although 'a unified German State remained the Federal Government's objective', it would be attained only gradually. In response to the proposal put forward by Hans Modrow for a 'contractual community' between the two German States, Kohl deemed that it was first necessary to develop inter-German relations. The FRG would aid the GDR in all areas, provided that the latter moved towards a system of pluralist democracy and the liberation of economic structures. The first step, therefore, would be the establishment of a confederal union.

But events snowballed, and Kohl realised that he would have to speed ahead. He proposed monetary union to the GDR, a step that contributed to the victory of the Christian Democrats and their allies, who were calling for rapid reunification, in the East German elections of 18 March 1990. On 18 May, Helmut Kohl and Lothar de Maizière signed the German Treaty on the Creation of a Monetary, Economic and Social Union, which entered into force on 1 July. The strong Deutschmark was introduced in the GDR and replaced the weak East German mark. Despite opposition from the Bundesbank, which considered the strategy unrealistic and likely to lead to inflation, the currency was converted on a one-to-one basis. Kohl had imposed this parity as he deemed it the only way in which to encourage East Germans to stay where they were. Economic and monetary union was, moreover, the prelude to political unity.

Reunification then took place swiftly by the simple expansion of the FRG to include the territory of the former GDR through the application of Article 23 of the Basic Law, which provided for the accession of new *Länder*, an article already invoked in 1957 when the Saar became German territory again. This procedure avoided the difficulties involved in creating a new German State with a new Constitution. As early as 31 August 1990, the Unification Treaty was signed in Berlin. The political and administrative regime of the FRG was extended to the five *Länder* of the GDR, with some adjustments to the borders (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia), with Berlin as capital. The Treaty came into force on 3 October. The new *Bundesländer* elected their assemblies on 14 October. The elections to the Bundestag for the whole of Germany, which took place on 2 December, saw the success of the Christian Democrat-Liberal coalition and thus ratified the reunification of the country.