



03.10.1990

The Reunification of Germany

Not even one year after the fall of the Wall, the two German states are reunified. At midnight on 3 October, German reunification takes place when the former GDR joins the Federal Republic of Germany. Hundreds of thousands gather in Berlin, celebrating to fireworks and celebratory music. Germany regains its full state sovereignty with the Two Plus Four Treaty between the two German nations and the former occupying powers, coming into effect on 15 March 1991. October 3 is now celebrated as a public holiday, the “Tag der Deutschen Einheit” (“Day of German Unity”).



However, the act of reunification on 3 October, 1990, simply draws a line under a chain of events that have proceeded at breathtaking speed from the Autumn of 1989. Shortly after the fall of the Wall, the original demonstration slogan, “Wir sind das Volk!” (“We are the people!”) is transformed into “Wir sind ein Volk!” (“We are one people!”). Even though the civil rights activists and the Monday demonstrators were actually seeking improvements in the GDR, processions and gatherings see many people now pushing for reunification with the “Westdeutschland” (“West Germany”). They believe that the GDR can no longer be reformed, and so they want to unite that which has been divided for so long. Responding to this pressure at Round Table discussions, Hans Modrow (SED), the new Prime Minister of East Germany, and the revolutionaries agree to the first free elections in the GDR on 18 March, 1990. The West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl (CDU), recognises the opportunity to overcome the division of Germany and adds the reunification to his agenda. Kohl and his party intervene to a massive extent in the East German election. In the event of an election victory for the Alliance for Germany – an electoral alliance formed between the East-CDU, the German Social Union and the civil-rights oriented Democratic Awakening, a group that had only been established in 1990 – Kohl promises the GDR citizens reunification and the introduction of the German D-Mark. The Alliance for Germany does, in fact, win the election and installs Lothar de Maizière (CDU) as the last Prime Minister of the GDR. In the following months, de Maizière and Kohl, who will be later called the “Kanzler der Einheit” (“Chancellor of Unity”), work together to implement the end of the GDR. During lengthy discussions and accepting many concessions, the World War II victorious powers have to be won over, given their reservations concerning a German reunification based on a range of reasons. In the end, the polished communicator and tactician Kohl succeeds in overcoming all concerns, not least thanks to his very good personal relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev. On 1 July, 1990, monetary union



and economic and social union between the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR come into force, before the formal end of the GDR is decreed with its accession to the Federal Republic of Germany.



Willy Brandt lives to see his greatest political goal achieved in the reunification, before dying in 1992. He solemnly formulates the magnitude of this achievement, when he states, “Jetzt wächst zusammen, was zusammen gehört.” (“Now grows together what belongs together.”) In retrospect, his “Neue Ostpolitik” (“New Eastern Policy”) of the 1970s seems to be a stage on this way. However, over the following years the process of growing together proves to be extremely complex and, in parts, also painful. The uncompetitive GDR economy is largely “abgewickelt” (“liquidated”). As a result, hundreds of thousands of people lose their workplaces and their means of support. Many former GDR citizens believe that their old life and their professional qualifications and work experience are being devalued by the know-it-all and arrogant appearing “Wessis”. Likewise, the “blühenden Landschaften” (“flourishing landscapes”) promised by Helmut Kohl in the former GDR, are growing far too slowly for some “Ossis”, or citizens of former East Germany. In spite of vast financial expenditure being invested in the redevelopment of the economy and infrastructure in line with the Rebuilding of East Germany, full alignment of living standards for people in the former East to the levels in the West has not yet arrived. Having only a little democratic and inter-cultural experience, many individuals in the East of Germany seem to be more prone to populist political programmes and xenophobia.

While still existing differences, problems and sensitivities in East and West Germany continue to play an important role in the internal German discussion, from the outside, the reunification seems to be an incredible success story. And the truth is that sometimes one sees better from a distance.

Translated from German to English by Heather Rae, proofread by Maria-Philippa Wieckowski



Prof. Dr. Tobias Arand



References:

Literaturhinweise:

- Gorbatschow, Michail: Wie es war: die deutsche Wiedervereinigung. Berlin 1999
- Rödter, Andreas: Deutschland einig Vaterland. Die Geschichte der Wiedervereinigung. München 2009
- Teltschik, Horst: 329 Tage. Innenansichten der Einigung. Berlin 1991