



✦ FUEL ✦ TO ✦ THE ✦ FIRE ✦

COUNTERBALANCING THE GERMANS

Living Together

Dominique Moïsi and Jacques Rupnik

An uprising in the GDR “would compromise the process of reform underway in Eastern Europe. The German question will not be resolved until the next century”, wrote former chancellor Helmut Schmidt in *Die Zeit* of September 22, 1989. He was not the only one who thought this way, and similar comments are quite numerous. No one had predicted the revolution of 1989, and in the beginning of the same year, the question of German reunification was not on the agenda of East-West relations. For the great majority of politicians and experts, possible reunification could only be conceived of as part of a long-term historical process.

Everyone was mistaken. And how can such an incapacity to foresee the event be explained, an incapacity even on the part of most Germans themselves? This error in judgement rested on three false premises: the stability of the GDR, the absence of any alternative to the little steps of *Ostpolitik*, and the conviction that Moscow would never accept loss of control (without some compensation) over the GDR.

The GDR, it was said, was the most stable element politically and the most prosperous one economically within the entire Eastern bloc. It had not experienced the great stirrings of 1956, 1968, or 1980, with the exception of a workers' uprising in June 1953, in Berlin. The regular, slow bleeding of the elements of contestation seemed to constitute a regulating mechanism or safety

valve. Were not the GDR and the FRG the prized students of their respective alliances? The idea of a popular upheaval in the GDR appeared imponderable.

A taste of freedom

In the Federal Republic, a consensus had been formed around former Chancellor Brandt's policy of little steps of the late 1960s. The master idea of this policy, which could be summed up by the formula *Wandel durch Annäherung* (change by rapprochement), postulated the recognition of the other German state in return for progress in the humanitarian domain. Thus "insured", the neighbours to the East would be more inclined to undertake reforms. It was merely a question of recognising the border between the two Germanys in order to render it more permeable and to diminish the human cost. And once in power, the Christian Democrats pursued this same policy during the 1980s.

If the first two premises were arguable, the third seemed absolutely unavoidably acceptable: the division of Germany corresponded to the division of Europe into two military and ideological blocs. No one could think that Moscow (independent of its internal political orientations) could re-examine a division corresponding to its interests, its prestige, and above all, its security. Certainly, during the 1950s,¹ Moscow on many occasions had envisioned putting an end to the division of Germany, but on its own conditions: no reunification without neutralisation. That Moscow accepted the dissolution of the GDR and the reunification of Germany within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance was simply unthinkable because for the Soviet Union it was tantamount to giving up its gains from World War II.

So widely taken for granted were these three ideas that the division of Germany itself, in spite of declarations of principle, was lived day-in, day-out in a rather comfortable manner by the greater number of Europeans, with the exception of the East Germans. Of course no one in the chancelleries (accept Mr. Andreotti) dared to repeat the famous formula of François Mauriac: "I love Germany so much that I prefer there to be two of them". But in fact, everyone had resigned himself to this fact, and without much worry. Even in the Federal

Republic, the majority of experts—either by conformity or by some unspoken fear of themselves—considered that the question of reunification was not on the order of the day. Numerous intellectuals, such as Günther Grass, in reaction to the Nazi experience, had denied prospects of a united German nation. Only the historian could not conceive of a great nation in the heart of Europe as resting eternally divided.

And yet the unforeseeable materialised. The regime in the GDR was destabilised by the simultaneity of a popular uprising - inspired by a chain-reaction crossing Central Eastern Europe - and of the Gorbachev era. But the fall of communism in the GDR had a specific nature to it with regard to its neighbours. Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary remained Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, even (and above all) if they ceased to be communist. Without communism, however, there was no more GDR.

An artificial creation born of the Soviet zone of occupation, the GDR never succeeded in forging its own identity, in spite of official attempts at creating a “socialist nation” or of making it the “Red Prussia”. It is this combined fragility of the East German state and brand of communism—and not, as in other countries, the collapse of the economy or the emergence of an opposition—that is at the origin of its revolution. The collapse was preceded by the conjunction of three complementary phases: the exodus, the democratisation, and the reunification.

In the beginning there was the exodus. If one had to find a turning point in the release of the East German popular movement, it was the “Hungarian betrayal”. The opening of the iron curtain between Hungary and Austria unleashed a massive departure of young East Germans, the first destabilising shock for the regime. “Without the lines of Trabants, the packed trains, the opposition in the GDR probably never would have become a popular movement”, as stated by Peter Schneider. In a second instance, the exodus was relayed by pacific demonstrations demanding the end of the political monopoly of the Communist Party and the introduction of democratic reforms. It was at this point that the “Soviet betrayal” came into play: Gorbachev’s desertion of Honecker on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the GDR. “Those who



Prince Friedrich Leopold

arrive too late are punished by life”, said Gorbachev in East Berlin in October of 1989; put otherwise “he who does not adapt to necessary changes is condemned to disappear”. Honecker, the man who had supervised construction of the Wall, was ready to try a solution *à la* Tienanmen. His successors, Krenz and Modrow, had to accept a solution after the example of Hungary, itself a temporary one. Faced with the irresistible dynamic to unite, the East German regime resigned November 9, and opened the Wall for the same reason as it had been built: to keep the people within.

Following the workers’ revolt in Berlin of June 17, 1953, Bertold Brecht wrote: “The secretary of the Writers

Union had leaflets distributed in the Stalin Allee in which you could read that the people had lost the government’s confidence which it could only regain by redoubled efforts. Would it not then be simpler if the government dissolved the people and elected another?”²

October 1989, appears as the revenge for the repression of June 1953, a date often forgotten abroad, but which has remained chiselled in the memory of East Germany and has become a national holiday in the Federal Republic.

In October, the demonstrators in Leipzig and Berlin chanted “We are the people”, answering in their own way to Brecht. After the opening of the Wall, they chanted “We are one people”. The democratic vindication had been transformed into a national one.

The no-man’s-land separated by a wall in the heart of Berlin symbolised the double European tragedy: war followed by division. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Berlin’s symbolical character was transformed: “Berlin became both the privileged place of the new link forming between free Europe and Europe on the road to freedom, and the possible future capital of a united Germany, the dominant, central power of an enlarged Europe.”³

Also collapsing with the Wall were not just the world of the Cold War and the division of Europe: in addition, there was the world inherited from Hitler. “Whether one likes it or not, the world today is the work of Hitler”, wrote Sébastien Haffner. “Without Hitler, no divided Germany: without Hitler, no Americans nor Soviets in Berlin”.

The end of this world, inherited from Hitler and Stalin, marks the reunion of Europe, but also the decline of Russia and the return of Germany.

The German skid

“Experience teaches us that a question does not cease to exist under the pretext that no one can find its answer”, wrote Richard von Weizsäcker.⁴ Since the nineteenth century, the German question has been the European question par excellence. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna put an end to the French question. From the Sun King to Napoleon, French ambitions and the rivalries between Prussia and Austria had plunged Europe into war. Through three centuries of war, the German question led Europe to suicide. Today, Europe is in the midst of a rebirth with, and perhaps around Germany.

French ambitions incarnated by Louis XIV, then by Bonaparte, translated into an excess of confidence in a country sure of its geography (natural frontiers), conscious of its unity as a state and of its demographic weight. German

ambitions were the product of an obsessive insecurity of a country conscious of its vulnerability due to a lack of unity, above all for a country situated at the centre of Europe. German *Angst* revealed itself to be even more destabilising for the balance of contemporary Europe than had been French hubris. Its roots drove throughout history. During the Thirty Years War, Germany was the preferred battlefield of Europe: holy wars and rivalling ambitions between Austria and Spain on one side, France, Sweden and the maritime powers on the other. Germany lost a third of its population. The Peace of Westphalia (1648), confirming and legitimising the atomisation of Germany into more than three hundred sovereign states, made the division and the impotence of Germany one of the "natural" conditions of the European order.

France and Germany have given to Europe two distinct conceptions of the nation. Born of the French Revolution was the conception of the nation as a sovereign people, "as a day-to-day plebiscite", according to Renan's formula. Germany was first of all a *Kulturnation* before it was a political nation. The nation since Herder defined itself by its *Volksgeist*, its own genius, inscribed in its language, its history and its culture. One can become French; one is German. Seen from Paris, the Strasbourgers wanted to become French. Seen from Berlin, they were German. It was in the aftermath of the defeat by the Napoleonic troops at Jena that Germany discovered the French conception of the nation with the "Speech to the German Nation" by Fichte. After having invited the nations to revolt and to disband, it was by invading them that France caused the birth of German nationalism. France in 1792, as Albert Sorel

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Among his books

***Crises et guerres au XXe siècle, Le système communiste and Le nouveau continent* (with Jacques Rupnik), 1991.**

of German foreign policy since 1871. Germany is too strong to be a state like the rest, and too weak to exercise for any length of time a hegemonic influence.

Since German unity, the place and the role of Germany in Europe has constituted the European question par excellence. It has had two answers. Starting from the idea that the Reich was "saturated" in terms of power, Bismarck proposed a policy of self-limitation which functioned by a subtle game of alliances and treaties. For Bismarck, the ideal configuration as he formulated it in the Kissingen *diktat* of June 15, 1877, was "a global political context in which all the States, with the exception of France, depend upon us, and by the very ties which unite them, would be deterred from forming an alliance against Germany". The Bismarckian system never won out because it did not survive its creator.

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Expansion succeeded the principle of saturation and the *Weltmachtpolitik* replaced the game of alliances. William II, in search of a new area worthy of German ambitions, turned first towards the East, to a Mitteleuropa which was to extend from Berlin to Baghdad (!), then developed a fleet capable of rivalling that of Great Britain. While for Bismarck, Germany was to integrate itself into a European system, his successors succumbed to hegemonic temptations. Hitler only prolonged this ambition for power, but by inscribing it into a horrific racial battle.

Was Hitler the culminating point of a German history that began with the unity accomplished by militarist and authoritarian Prussia? Or was it the departure of

Bismarck in 1890, that marked the beginning of the German "skid"? In the end, was not Hitler merely a monstrous detour produced by the accumulation of exceptional circumstances: the horrors of Verdun, the humiliation of Versailles, the economic crash of 1929, the congenital weakness of the Weimar Republic, the desperate search for a saviour? Continuity is easy to establish when it is a matter of geopolitical vision or international political ambitions. But this is not the case as far as the place of Nazism in German history is concerned.

In his work *The German Catastrophe*, the German historian Friedrich Meinecke asks himself, in the aftermath of the Second World War, how the same people could have produced both Goethe and Hitler, the apogee of the humanist tradition and the worst of barbarians. In a gripping piece, "Humanity-Nationality-Bestiality", he gave a fatalist answer: Nazism as the culmination of a destiny particular to Germany. Others in his footsteps queried: was German unity at the origin of this evil?

The debate resurfaced during the 1980s in the Federal Republic as the quarrel of the historians. Those like Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgrober played down Nazism, interpreting it as a reaction to Bolchevism or placing it on the same level "the destruction of the German Reich and the end of the European Jewish community".⁷ Others, such as the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, insisted on the singularity of the Auschwitz experience and saw in the attempt at its banalisation the danger of a derivation towards a new German *Sonderweg* (a separate path).

"I did that", says my memory. 'I could not have done that', says my pride and inexorable demure. In the end, the memory adapts". This mind quiz along the lines of Nietzsche's formula leads back to the problem of responsibility. Today, Germany is newly united, but only the Federal Republic has taken on an examination of its conscience. Austria, in the image of its president, claims amnesia, presenting itself as a victim of the Anshchluss, although approved in 1938 by the great majority of Austrians. The GDR quite simply has proclaimed itself innocent. The introduction of democracy in East Germany requires an end to the amnesia. Reunification must pass through the memory as well.

With Hitler, Germany destroyed Europe and destroyed itself. For forty years,

the German question was left in suspense. Yet how could one think of the continuity of German history after Auschwitz? Was Hitlerism a parentheses? Was not the unified German state between 1871 and 1945 a mere parentheses? Or was the parentheses the division which has just come to an end?

The right leader, the right time

This long parentheses was lived differently in West and East Germany. In the Federal Republic, there were three complementary phases each associated with the personality of a leader. It was the fortune of the FRG to have known in each turn of its history how to find the politician who best corresponded to the demands of the situation. Adenauer incarnated the "normalisation" of the Federal Republic with the West; Willy Brandt the normalisation with the East; Richard von Weizsäcker and Helmut Kohl represent the normalisation of Germany with itself.

Under Adenauer, the Germans made a rare choice in history: "they sacrificed the idea of the nation to the idea of freedom. The Federal Republic was not a nation-state, but a state founded on the rights and the freedoms that had been denied by Hitler's Germany and were denied by Communist Germany".⁸

With a mixture of idealism and of extreme realism, Adenauer understood that the integration of the Federal Republic within the concert of European nations required that Germany not be a nation-state like the rest. Certainly, it had benefited from the Cold War and the Marshall Plan and its territory would become one of the essential stakes in face of the danger of the Sovietisation of Europe. According to the formula of a memorandum of the foreign office of 1950, Germany had become "a pawn that the two camps hoped to transform into a queen." The Federal Republic also knew how to benefit from a double absence: that of Great Britain from the European Community, which allowed it to play a central role there by way of the Franco-German axis, and that of France, which in leaving NATO in 1966, allowed the FRG to appear on the continent as the head of the Atlantic class. Germany, as noted by Michael Stürmer, "was not a state in search of a foreign policy, but a foreign policy in search of a state".⁹



The beer drinker

In order to belong to the alliance of democracies, a country had to be democratic. Adenauer—and this is perhaps his most important contribution—demonstrated to the Germans that the stability to which they aspired was compatible with democracy. According to Gordon A. Craig, Adenauer was able to conquer the automatic tendency of his compatriots to consider that leaders could only be taken seriously if they wore a uniform. To “democratic normality”, Adenauer sacrificed the image of the unique character of the Germany way, the *Sonderweg* so dear to the nationalists.¹⁰

If Adenauer had preferred the idea of the nation to the idea of freedom, Brandt made two indispensable concessions for the success of his *Ostpolitik*: He accepted the Oder-Neisse border with Poland and above all, he recognised the other German state. The Germany of Adenauer was a mixture of prosperity, of



The drunkard

stability and also of a certain dose of amnesia. Willy Brandt, resistor from the start of Nazism, the man who bent to his knees at Auschwitz, could assume in the name of a tragic history the reconciliation with the East and accept the lasting division of Germany. In recognising the status quo, *Ostpolitik* aimed at making it tolerable on the human landscape. Borders had to be recognised in order to be permeable.

Thanks to this policy initiated by Brandt and pursued by Schmidt, the Federal Republic recovered an old role conforming to its geography: that of intermediary between the two parts of Europe.

Having normalised its relations with the West and then with the East, Germany now had only to “normalise” its relationship with itself. This was the work,

during the 1980s, of President von Weizsäcker and Chancellor Kohl. By words, Richard von Weizsäcker, the moralist, knew how to reconcile Germany with its history. By action, Helmut Kohl, the politician, knew how to reconcile Germany with its geography. Together, they appeared as the two complementary faces of German unification.

In 1985, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, President von Weizsäcker said in a speech to the Bundestag of the same date: "May 8 was a day of liberation. It freed us all from inhumanity and from the tyranny of the National Socialist regime... The nature and scope of the destruction may have exceeded human imagination, but in reality there was, apart from the crime itself, the attempt by too many people, including those of my generation... not to take note of what was happening. There were many ways of not burdening one's conscience, of shunning responsibility, looking away, keeping mum. When the unspeakable truth of the holocaust then became known at the end of the war, all too many of us claimed that they had not known anything about it or even suspected anything... We Germans are one people and one nation. We feel that we belong together because we have lived through the same past."¹¹

Five years afterwards, there is only one German history. Chancellor Kohl knew first how to capture the dynamic set off by the fall of the Berlin Wall, and then by his action at a hellish pace, he knew how to engage in a process of reunification reconciling the hopes of some and the fears of others.

The real *Oktoberfest*

For the GDR, the "parentheses" of the division corresponded with three phases: one recommending reunification by socialism and neutrality, one using the Wall to insure socialism's survival, and finally, one of detente, and the quest for East Germany's own identity.

In the beginning, the former Soviet zone proclaimed itself the "good" Germany, progressive, anti-Fascist, leaving the other Germany with the problem of assuming the heritage of the Hitlerian tragedy. It is in the name of

this ideological legitimacy and in the shelter of this good historical conscience that the German Democratic Republic strongly recommended reunification within socialism. The only genuine obstacle to German unity was the existence of capitalism in the FRG, and the Atlantic Alliance which acted as its buckle.

The second shutter to reunification seen from the East was neutrality. Since 1952, in the framework of the struggle against the Common European Defence, Stalin launched the idea of a united Germany, at a price of neutrality. On many other occasions in the 1950s, the Soviets repeated this theme.

At the Communist Party Congress (SED) of 1954, Walter Ulbricht stated: "We are for the unity of Germany, because the Germans in the West of our country are our brothers, because we love our fatherland, because we believe that the restoration of German unity has an incontestable legal foundation, and whomever dares to question this law will be destroyed." A few years later in the irony of history, it was the same Ulbricht, together with Honecker, who built the Wall: having not respected the "law" they had announced, they were "destroyed". The Wall gave them a thirty-year delay. It allowed them to stop the bleeding which was endangering the very survival of the GDR, and to isolate the country from all Western influence. But the Wall also signified the withdrawal into the fortress of the socialist state and the abandon of the national idea. The GDR's hidden motive rested on the dialectic of autarky and independence. It was the incarnation par excellence of the artificial and fragile character of the regime: a regime which in order to survive, had to build a Wall, condemning itself to a limited existence.

It is for this reason that, conscience of its vulnerability, the East German authorities tried throughout the last ten years to manufacture for the GDR an identity of its own and to inscribe it into German history. Benefiting from East-West detente and comforted by the recognition of the GDR by the FRG, the Honecker leadership, which followed that of Ulbricht, began a turning point in inter-German relations. In search of legitimacy in return, the East German communists undertook a selective reappropriation of German, and above all, Prussian history. From Luther to Bismarck, including on the way Frederic II, they set out to link all of the supposedly progressive traits of the great figures



Discussion at the Reichstag

of this Prussia, otherwise denounced for its authoritarian, militarist and anti-democratic tradition. This late-coming identity quest would turn on its initiators by underscoring the void left by official Marxism and the inconsistency of the nationalist equivalent proposed in its place. "Cut off from their history, torn between resorting to the Heimat and opening up towards the world, the East Germans asked themselves: 'Who are we, where do we come from, where are we going?'"¹²

Reunification, it had been said, was not on the order of the day. The international system made it impossible; the Germans themselves did not want it, settled as they were into the comfort of their respective systems. Some even wondered to themselves if the Wall were not the only thing left

that united the Germans. There was nothing to any of this, quite obviously. On both sides, the opening of the Wall was received with a mixture of joy and enthusiasm, like an enchantment. A peaceful revolution with all the allure of a folk festival, conforming so slightly with the stereotype (*Sturm und Drang*) with which one usually cloaks the Germans in periods of revolutionary change.

But once the euphoria of reunion had passed, political, economic and cultural fears and *quid pro quos* were revealed from the two sides of the former line of division. Politically, in the West, the major parties wondered what would be the impact of German unity on their respective electoral chances. On the left, the fear was of a counter-coup from the collapse of the socialist dream in the East, and from the triumph of the liberal economy. More precisely, the SPD was also and above all afraid of the political advantages that the conservative coalition in power would gain from the process of unification.

These worries were confirmed by the elections of March 18, 1990, in the GDR, and even more so by those of December 2 (the first free pan-German elections in fifty years). Among the conservatives, on the other hand, the fear was that the financial cost of unification would rapidly transform into an electoral handicap in the West, and that in no time Prussia would reappear as Protestant, Social-Democrat terrain. They feel more reassured today. The German electorate punished the SPD, and most of all those who did not believe in German reunification, like the Greens. On two occasions in forty years, the Germans ratified those great choices of society recommended by the conservative parties. In the beginning of the 1950s, they chose freedom over the unity of the nation. In 1990, they pronounced themselves for the unity of the nation against the maintenance of a frigid prosperity limited exclusively to the Federal Republic. Overly imprudent in 1950, the SPD revealed itself to be too "conservative" for 1990.

In the East, the collapse of communism leaves a political void that the new political forces which made the revolution have not known how to fill. In face of the success of the West German political buy-out offer, the fear has come to the surface that the political parties reconstituted in the GDR may become

simple branches of the great West German electoral machines. As the intellectuals warn, did they not just exchange oppression for alienation?

For a long time in the West, questions were raised as to the possible deviations of the FRG towards the East. Now, it is the GDR that has moved to the West, adhering to the FRG under article 23 of the fundamental law.

On the administrative and political landscapes, unification was accomplished by the integration of five new *Länder* corresponding to the territories of the former GDR. Without going as far as to suspect Kohl of being a Bismarck in power, the new local political elite of these territories—like the SPD—wished to strengthen the power of the regions vis-à-vis the central leadership. For them, reunification was to be realised thanks to the regions and not by the creation of a strong nation-state.

Alfred Herrhausen, head of Deutsche Bank, immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall (and shortly before he was assassinated by the RAF) had made an optimistic and voluntarist prediction: "The German Democratic Republic will take between five and ten years in order for its economy to catch up with the Federal Republic of Germany and to have a similar standard of living... Fifteen million persons want the same standard of living as we have. This brings on a gigantic boom in the demand which opens up enormous economic possibilities. And the co-operation with the GDR will be crowned with success much more rapidly than that with the other countries of the East: there is no language barrier, we have the same values and the same mentality!"

The fall of the Berlin Wall exposed the myth that the GDR with its economic dynamism was to the East what the FRG was to the West. It was not until after the "revolution of October" that measurements could be taken of the full extent of the economic, environmental and human disaster resulting from forty-five years of a communist system incapable of reforming or adapting.

Will economic unification bring about a Keynesian boom in the West and the transformation of the East into the *Mezzogiorno* of the new Germany? This alluring prospect encountered frequently in Western analyses does not take

account of an infinitely more complex reality. The cost of unification to the West is revealing itself—at least for the initial moment—to be much higher than had originally been estimated. Inversely, the GDR is the complete opposite of the Italian *Mezzogiorno*. With its strong industrial tradition, it is much more similar to the Nord-Pas de Calais or to the Lorraine, than to Sicily. Saxe was the cradle of German industry. In 1936, the GDP of East Germany was 8 per cent greater than that of West Germany, whereas today it is hardly the half of that of the West.

Worker productivity in the GDR is 6 per cent inferior to that of the FRG.¹³ The greater part of its industrial equipment is twenty-five years old, and some even dates from before the war. At the Ministry of the Economy in Bonn, the



Discussion in a bierstube

judgement is that less than a third of East German firms will be able to survive competition with the FRG. Unification under the West German mark, that is, the access to the goods of the FRG by citizens of the GDR, has translated into substantial unemployment, which according to research institutes in the West, could reach two to three million people in an active population of nine million.

The mere modernisation of the East German industrial apparatus will cost over 450 billion Deutsche marks. The total sum of investment necessary from now until the year 2000 surpasses DM 1000 billion, an amount largely in excess of the financing potential of Germany. Already its deficit is DM 33 billion, or nearly 11 per cent of the former West German budget and the supplementary expenses of around DM 100 billion to cover the social cost of reunification (social security, unemployment insurance, pensions). This considerable deficit must be considered together with the German trade surplus, which rose in 1989 to DM 130 billion. The deficit can only be financed by new loans or by an increase in taxes. Chancellor Kohl, in choosing the first solution, is making the future generations pay the cost of reunification, as well as the rest of the Community, which will have to suffer the consequences of higher interest rates. Sooner or later, he nevertheless will be forced to adopt the second solution and to appeal to German solidarity.

Faced with the risk of social tensions and paralysing strikes, Lothar de Maizières, the temporary prime minister from East Berlin, stated in 1990: "We hope for the spirit of community and solidarity. The division, in fact, can be surmounted only in sharing". Otherwise put, in the East there is the fear of becoming second class citizens; in the West, one worries that the reunion of the German nation will be very costly. In the long term, a new German "economic miracle" will materialise no doubt, but in the short term, the danger persists that these territories in the East will continue to lose part of their population, aggravating the imbalance between the two parts of Germany.

For the Federal Republic, notes Kurt Biedenkopf, to introduce a market economy was a constitutional decision. "The role assigned to social policy was to satisfy the population and thus to fortify its confidence in the new democratic order... The social policy had to serve as the legitimisation of the

young state".¹⁴ What was valid yesterday for the FRG is even more so for united Germany: the stake in the welfare state is to win over the East German masses lastingly to democracy.

Following World War II, in the FRG, prosperity in the eyes of the Germans represented a form of revenge on history. Today still, prosperity will be the best guarantee for the viability of democracy in reunified Germany. In the conclusion of his book on German identity, the historian Harold James wrote: "If there is a lesson from the past, it is this: the explosive character of new nationalism will be tightly linked to the economic performances of Germany".¹⁵

Politically, reunification has moved at a surprising pace. Economically, in time, nothing will resist the power of the West German machine. But this rapidity, this apparent facility must not obscure the difficulties and the divisions which are sure to be manifested in German society. The digestion of East Germany will take some time; decades of separate existence cannot be erased in one fell swoop. "Battles are being prepared between *Länder* and *Bund*, instead of between different *Länder*—West against East and perhaps even north against south".¹⁶

Split sentiments

Intellectually and culturally, reunification without a doubt will continue to be problematic. The intellectuals lived through the process of unification rather awkwardly with respect to the whole population. In the East, what dominates is the loss of a dream: that of the "third way". In the West, before everything else there is the fear of a return to the old demons of German history. Did not Günther Grass say in *Der Spiegel*, "with the best of intentions on our part, reunification will contribute to isolating us. And when Germany feels isolated we know the reactions of panic which often follow".

At the origin of this split, there is among German intellectuals (especially in the East) a sort of contempt for their people: a public contempt for the attraction that the society of consumption exercises over the East German masses after

forty-five years of scarcity. "We have freed ourselves from our political chains, let us not become re-attached by the ties of a false social interest which can be found at *Kaufhaus des Westens* (the Galeries Lafayette of Berlin)... We have know the opportunism of leadership, let us avoid the opportunism of freedom", wrote Volker Braun.

These intellectuals, who nevertheless had been at the forefront of the movement of autumn 1989, all of a sudden find themselves marginalised by the dynamics of unification. In a totalitarian regime, the intellectual enjoys a privileged position. Holder of truth and virtue in the face of the lies of the leadership, at times he wears the halo of a martyr. With the disappearance of the GDR and the prospect of an integrated cultural life in a market system, the East German intellectuals fear a loss in their status. Bitterly, they proclaim the primacy of culture over the market and vindicate the precedence in time of their revolt. As written—and not without arrogance—by Stefan Hermlin, former head of the Writers' Union: "Well before the popular movement, culture had conquered its freedom. Culture therefore owes absolutely nothing to the popular movement, but rather it is the contrary".¹⁷

Wolf Bierman, the dissident singer and poet who in the 1950s "chose freedom" in the GDR (from which he was expelled in the 1970s), experienced up close the methods of the Stasi. He *can* comment ironically on the last minute rebels: "the hate felt for the Stasi, it is the unadmitted hate felt for the little Stasi in each one of us, it is the hate of self with all of its contortions".

But the main reason for the disarray among the intellectuals is that along with the disappearance of the GDR, they also see that of the socialist utopia and the end of hope for a "third way". As written by Wolf Bierman once again, "there are only two minorities left who are still interested in a socialist experience: yesterday's officials and their preferred victims".¹⁸

Neues Forum, the movement most representative of the intellectual contestation of October 1989, made itself champion of the safeguarding of an East German identity of its own. But those who wanted the "third way" had only 3 per cent of the vote. "We did not want this", exclaimed Barbel Bohley,

the forward figure of *Neues Forum*, “that the petit bourgeois of the East and that of the West would only serve one another”.

Comparing with tenderness the two Germanys which resemble two twin brothers, the West Berlin writer Peter Schneider imagined the following exchange: “My dear brother is so satisfied,” wrote the East German, “that he never comes any more when I call him. He does not see what I lack. It would be enough for him to be more generous, including with his feelings, since incontestably he is the luckier for being in the West. Let it just be said that he did nothing to deserve this. He simply was living at the right time on the right side of the Elbe. But now his success has gone to his head. Instead of sharing—because it is not a question of giving, but of sharing—he pretends to work more, have more talent. Honestly, I have known him since he was little, he is neither more or less lazy than I. He has just become arrogant, even infatuated with himself. In reality—our propaganda was not completely wrong—he continues to live off the exploitation and the misery of the poor of this world. But he wants to know nothing. He could at least show a little more familiar sentiment, show some interest in the lot of his poor, less fortunate brother. Listen, it is not too much to ask him just the same. The years pass, he has gained a little weight, but he is still rich, has a good time, for me it is a different story.”

However, on the other side of the Wall, his twin brother grumbles as well: “things are not going very well for my poor brother behind his wall, I see this very well. But he really gets on my nerves in the end, with his reproaches. And his crazy habit of waiting eternally. After all, I am not the one who built this wall and one cannot say that he was truly opposed to it. God knows I love to give presents, but if there is no more surprise it’s no fun. He seems to believe that here coloured televisions, video cameras and Rolex watches grow on trees. But you don’t get a Mercedes at birth. It has to be earned. Debts, credit, leasing are terms that before my brother only knew from passing. I would really like to explain it to him, but he will not listen, he only speaks. Naturally, it is not his fault if he still has to wait in line for oranges, no one is criticising him personally, it is the planned economy that is the disaster. The icing is that he categorically contests my right to criticise his state despite its problems: ‘You



Old Prussians coming in

don't understand anything', he objects, 'it's my business.' And that's not all. When the discussion gets animated, he ends up treating me as a debilitated conformist and consumer, a compliment I take pleasure in repaying him, because his pretended social virtues were all inducted into him, I know this well. The gentleman takes for an idealist he who has not yet sold his soul! Sometimes I am relieved when the visit is over. Between us resentment has settled in, a feeling of deception about which one day we will have to decide to talk. When the time comes to leave, I hardly dare to glance at my watch out of fear of offending him. He has time, time, too much time, and does not know that people like me work weekends, as well, and have business lunches on Sunday. 'Bad excuse', he retorts. 'You're joking.'"¹⁹

European reflections

At the moment of its collapse, one could read the following slogan about the Wall: "Foreigners, don't leave us alone with the Germans!" If some Germans feared finding themselves amongst themselves, this fear is even more pronounced among Germany's neighbours, who ask themselves what a united Germany will mean for the future of Europe. Are we back to 1871? Disraeli, for whom German unification was an event more important than the French Revolution, considered that the proclamation of the united Reich "meant a total destruction of the balance of forces in Europe".²⁰ Today's risk is not the emergence of a new Bismarckian Reich, but the return, with a giant Germany at the centre of Europe, to a balance-of-power system that Europe has known since the eighteenth century and which led it to its ruin. It is the fear that the process of European integration will be compromised by the emergence of a super-powerful Germany. Between the delay in European integration in the West and the return to nationalism in East, could the Wall have tumbled down too soon?

The relationship between European integration and German unity is the central problem, but one must keep from searching for answers in history alone. Unified Germany causes fears and nationalist reflexes of different natures in the East as in the West. In the East, the fear is of being dominated; in the West, it is of being eclipsed.

In the East, it is asked whether or not Soviet dominance will be replaced by German dominance. The Czechoslovak ambassador to Washington gave a deliberately provocative formulation of this: "the German-speaking world (the two Germanys and Austria) now will accomplish what the Hapsburgs, Bismarck and Hitler could never realise: the Germanisation of Central Europe. By peaceful and respectful means, of course, and by the logic of trade more than by that of conquest."

It is not a question of conquest here, but of an economic *Lebensraum*, from which stems an ambiguity: the hope is that Germany will help in escaping from economic stagnation, but the fear is that in so doing, the saviour will crush the saved. For Central Europe, the dilemma is a classic one: Germany has always been perceived as both a source of modernisation—a port of access to the West—and at the same time, a threat to sovereignty and to national identity. Germany remains a model and a beacon for contrast.

Historically, the problem for the nations of Central Eastern Europe was to escape from German dominance without falling under Russian tutelage. The Hapsburg Empire fulfilled this function. After a period of ephemeral independence, then came Hitler and Stalin. Today, the refound independence of the nations of Central Eastern Europe once again places them in front of the old dilemmas of foreign policy. Should they, by reason of their weakness, count on the West and on collective security as in the inter-war period? Or are they condemned, as the Polish seem to be saying, to the historic choice between Germany and Russia? "Should it become the anti-chambre of Russia or the eastern bastion of Europe?"²¹

For more than forty years, the communist leadership in East Germany, sought its principal source of legitimacy in the German threat and the need for Soviet protection. The excesses of official propaganda on the theme of German "revanchism" had in the end rendered itself counter-productive. On his arrival to power, Willy Brandt, this irreproachable resistor, inaugurated his *Ostpolitik* by the recognition of the borders inherited from World War II. From adversary, the Federal Republic transformed into a partner for its neighbours to the East and healed them of a visceral form of anti-German sentiment.

German *Ostpolitik* had another dimension. In light of the preoccupation over a normalisation in East-West relations, the FRG gave precedence to relations between states at the expense of societies. His postulate was the following: inter-German rapprochement was a precondition to stability in Eastern Europe, and good relations with Moscow. This stability would preferably have to be accompanied by reforms, but the change could only come from the interior of the system and in order to succeed, it had to be practically imperceptible. Thus the German ambiguity is explained, with regard to the dissidence and the awakening of civil society of which Solidarity in Poland was the most explosive illustration. And the "weak consolation" of Schmidt and Honecker, meeting shortly after the military coup d'état of December 13, 1981, remains present in the Polish memory.

Today, dissidents now find themselves in the leadership. The true realism was not to cultivate Honecker, but to bet on the societies. The change in the East, beginning with the GDR, did not come from the party, but from society. Detente perhaps had favoured the success of Solidarity, but its success was perceived in Bonn as risking to compromise *Ostpolitik*. It was the birth of Solidarity in 1980, that announced the final crisis of the communist system. The Germans did not see that Solidarity represented the first breach in the Berlin Wall.

The reunification of Germany was accepted with mitigated feelings in Warsaw and Prague. In Budapest, on the other hand, it seemed only natural. Beyond the joy of seeing the symbol of the division of Europe disappear along with the Wall, there was also an element of unfairness mixed with envy, the impression that those who had contributed the least to the fall of communism were going to get out of it the fastest and experience the easiest transition to the market economy. East Germany, nomenklaturists or dissidents, had been the last true Marxist in Central Europe. It had not participated in the small "international" of dissidence with Solidarnosc, Charte 77 and the Hungarian democratic opposition. Without really having fought, the East Germans were going to know parliamentary democracy and even European integration thanks to the existence of the other Germany. In Warsaw, then, the real meaning of reunification was understood: West German funds would go to the ex-GDR first priority, rather than to the restructuring of the Polish economy.

But the speed of the FRG's absorption of the GDR's economy and the instantaneous integration of the latter into the European Community also served as a model and tangible proof that if there existed the political will on the Western side, than the transition was possible within the delays acceptable for the populations of the East. No one in Brussels seemed to realise that the fact of integrating the GDR so easily—formerly the most orthodox of regimes and the least dissident of Central European societies—meant that seen from Warsaw, Budapest and Prague, there were no viable arguments to oppose their requests for adhesion to the Community.

It is on the political landscape that reunification has revealed attitudes and stakes which will shape the relations between Germany and its Eastern neighbours in the years to come. Two approaches, two principal readings of the German problem arise, even if already an entire array of intermediary positions can be noted: the Czech approach, the Polish approach, the "benefit of a doubt" German-style, in the name of the future and the fear of a return of history.

The first approach is that of President Vaclav Havel. His first official trip as president was to Berlin and to Munich, symbolic places in the collective memory of the Czechs. His courageous sentences—diametrically opposed to Czech public opinion—on the expulsion from Czechoslovakia and the liberation of 3 million Germans of the Sudetenland took on the allure of a historic reconciliation that a special moment rendered possible. The reconciliation was even more easy since the Germans had followed after 1945, a policy opposite the one followed by the Arabs vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugees. They integrated them, instead of placing them in camps, which only nourishes the desire for revenge. The Havel-von Weizsäcker meeting in Prague on March 15, 1990 (date of Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939), was one between two heads of state, but also between two moralists in politics who attempted together to turn a page in the history inherited from World War II. Their speeches will remain as models of the meeting on the politics of ethics and of history. In a new historic situation, Vaclav Havel made a bet on the democratic future of Central Europe: of little importance is the size of Germany, as long as it is democratic.

A priori, this approach was not very different from those of the great Polish dissidents, like Adam Michnik. The latter declared himself favourable to the reunification of Germany in October 1989, even before the opening of the Wall. He gave three main reasons for his choice. A Polish nation which had experienced division for more than a century could not wish such a lot on anyone. There could be no reunified Europe without the reunification of Germany. And finally, anti-German sentiment is the last card the communists have to play, Jaruzelski first of all, in order to preserve some sort of anchorage in the east of Poland. But then the same Michnik writing hardly two months later stated in *Gazeta*: "the Polish minimum for German-Polish relations today must be formulated in the following manner: reunification is the Germans' own business, but is also that of all the nations who paid with their blood for



Young Prussians moving out

the defeat of the Third Reich. It depends on the guarantee that the Germans will not be able to be a threat to any one, no matter whom".²²

How can this change in tone be explained, this passage from hope for to fear of Germany, the reappearance of a Polophobic nationalism in GDR, but above all the hesitations of Helmut Kohl on the question of Oder-Neisse? His policy manoeuvres succeeded in rekindling in the Poles their old fears, and favoured a relapse towards the familiar Polish reflex: to balance the German threat by way of Russia and France. Thus the surprising scenario of Mazowiecki and his jail-keeper of the past, General Jaruzelski, side-by-side, asking President Mitterrand in Paris for France's support in order to obtain a Polish say in the Four-plus-Two negotiations on the status of Germany. This same convergence, for the same reasons, could also be observed in the lack of Polish pressure for the departure of the Red Army from Poland. In a few days, Chancellor Kohl had succeeded in doing what communist propagandists had failed at for over forty years: reviving the fear of Germany.

The Czech and Polish approaches reflect two readings of the German question, but also two visions of the international system. For Havel, reunited Germany implied the perishing in time of the rival alliances and the emergence of a new security system in Europe. The Polish attitude translated into a resort back to classic geopolitics: it was a question of balancing, by alliances with powers sharing the same fears, a Germany sure of itself and dominating. These two visions also lead back to an essential question about Germany's relations with Central Eastern Europe: will Germany be a bridge between the two Europes, a vector of integration for the other Europe into the expanded Community? Or instead, will Germany dominate economically and culturally an unstable and Balkanised Mitteleuropa, transformed into a German sphere of influence. Will the East be "Germanised", or better, Europeanised?

Making the bill

In the West of Europe, there is undoubtedly less fear, but less hope, as well, with regard to Germany. Dominating is the consciousness of a relative marginalisation: spectator to a unification of which it mastered neither the

circumstances nor the pace. Western Europe looks on the German rebirth with ambivalence. One could only celebrate at the collapse of the Wall, but what was really being celebrated? The return of Germany encourages a process of introspection which translates into a lack of self-confidence. All are finding themselves confronted by their own limits and all are united in one common query: are we really competitive? Will we carry our weight in the face of a united Germany?

It is in France where this interrogation is the most lively. After the war, the Franco-German "couple" was the pillar of European construction. In the beginning of the 1950s, while engaged in the colonial wars, would France still have placed its European bet on Germany's side if Germany had not been divided? Later, during the 1960s and 1970s, the Franco-German link rested on an equilibrium of imbalances between the French bomb and the German mark. Each possessed, in its own manner, a unique card which it loaned but did not give to Europe. Even prior to German unity, the balance progressively had been modified in favour of Germany. With the return of detente and the engagement of the two great powers onto the arms reduction path—in face of a rise in the delegitimisation of nuclear deterrence among the public opinion above all in Germany, and a similar tendency in France—the economy at least up until the war in the Persian Gulf seemed to be the strategic domain. Hadn't the evolution of the international system devalued the bomb and given new value to the Deutsche mark?

German reunification only reinforced this tendency. The worry is much more widespread among the French elite than in public opinion. More than 60 per cent of the French were in favour of the unification process. In 1989, 82 per cent considered the fall of the Berlin Wall the most important event of the year. French opinion, on the whole, was much more fearful of Moslem fanaticism than of the return of Germany.

For having condemned the bipolar world inherited from Yalta, France benefited largely from it. The Cold War and the division of Germany constituted *de facto* a productive situation for France. It had put everything into the nuclear field and into Europe. The end of the division of Europe and the

return of a united Germany caused it to discover the limits of its choices and of its real power.

The ambivalence of the French elite with respect to Germany results from the cross of a certain idea of Germany and a lack of self-confidence. The French see the Germans as a people who combine dynamism and economic efficacy with an unpredictable romanticism and an uncontrollable sentimentality which, when it has some power, does not know how to use it in moderation. But less concerned with the Germans themselves, the French elite is more wary of Germany. This caution towards Germany is revealing of a self doubt.

And this ambivalence appears in France's discourse. It salutes the triumph of freedom and sees in the collapse of the Wall the culminating point of the French Revolution's bicentenary. But at the same time, Mitterrand went to Kiev and to East Berlin, in December 1989, thus giving the impression that he sought to protect himself from what had just been celebrated. The triumph of freedom and/or alliance on the other side reflect the French ambivalence. On the German side, a certain degree of deception answered the French attitude. A poll published in 1991 in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* gave a surprising image of the German attitude. Among the friendly countries, the USSR was far in the lead with 59 per cent, followed by the United States, 44 percent, and France, with 36 per cent. In the same poll, one per cent of Germans aspired to the French model. For 60 per cent of Germans, the model to follow was that of Switzerland. Here one is far from the French fantasies of the dreams of German power.

Great Britain shares in the French preoccupations, but provides a different response. The French see European integration as an insurance policy against Germany. In England, the government of Margaret Thatcher saw in the liberation of Eastern Europe and in the unification of Germany the confirmation of a return to nations, the *Europe des patries*, and the end of the dream (in which Britain never shared) of a supranational Europe. Under Margaret Thatcher, London already practiced what it preached, which is to say, the diplomacy of the nineteenth century.

Meeting the challenge

In the East as in the West, those who are the most opposed to German reunification are those who oppose Europe and who fear Germany. This cleavage also exists within Germany, even if in 1990, the great majority of Germans, at least in the West, were for a European Germany and considered the option of falling back onto a nation-state platform as suicidal. For some, integration into the European Community remained as essential as ever for the German "psyche". The Social Democrat Oscar Lafontaine thinks similarly that German unification will be accomplished with the integration of the *Länder*, as European unification will be accomplished with that of the regions. The process of German unification presents once again a fundamental debate: Europe of the nation-states, or Europe of the regions? As spoken to Johannes Rau, vice-president of the SPD: "Reinforce the supranationality and regional diversity: there we have the two sides of the same coin... I am convinced that without strong regions, there can be no strong Europe".²³

If German unification can cause a re-examination of European construction, does it not risk leading as well to the disintegration of the Atlantic Alliance? According to the polls, the majority of East Germans and a third of West Germans are against the maintenance of NATO. For how long will the Germans accept the presence of foreign troops and weapons on their soil, once the Soviets will have withdrawn from the territory of the former GDR? For forty-five years the Germans were not the masters of their destiny in the decisive questions of security. The weight of the Hitlerian past and the reality of the Soviet threat made them accept this sacrifice which was also the price for their freedom. Now in a situation of peace and having recovered full sovereignty, as the guilt of the past is swept away, how will they accept what is not asked of any other European nation?

In the irony of history, it is the USSR that allows Germany to regain its sovereignty. After the agreement of July 1990, between Kohl and Gorbachev, the Soviets accepted a united Germany within NATO, while at the same time reducing its troops in return for considerable economic and financial aid (nearly DM 20 billion). But unity has no price.

The Federal Republic has without doubt been the best regime Germany has every known throughout its history: the most democratic, the most prosperous, the most stable, the most open to the exterior world. Will the new Germany know how to conserve the virtues of the Federal Republic? Will it also be democratic? As long as a taste of prosperity endures, the prospect for democracy remains unscathed. Reunited, will it be more nationalist? As long as European integration proceeds, German nationalism will not be a threat. And if nationalism there must be, it will be above all economic.

In regaining its unity, Germany regained its geography, which places it in the heart of Europe. From this central position, it can have two attitudes: first, to become the ideal bridge between the East and West of Europe, as the position of its new capital of Berlin invites it to be, or second, to take advantage of its superior relative position in order to crush the East with its weight or dominate the West. But in the dawn of the twenty-first century, at a moment when we are entering into a multipolar world, Germany by itself cannot pretend to become a great power. The well-understood interest of Germany is to proceed by way of Europe.

The danger lies in combining a weak and divided Europe with a united and strong Germany. An integrated and powerful Europe having confidence in itself could only be propelled by the dynamism in its centre of a reconciled Germany.

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Dominique Moïsi and Jacques Rupnik

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