

Statement by Helmut Kohl at the signing of the treaty between the FRG and the GDR (Bonn, 18 May 1990)

Caption: On 18 May 1990, at the signing of the Treaty establishing an economic, monetary and social union between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Chancellor Helmut Kohl emphasises the historic impact of the agreement.

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Statement by Helmut Kohl, chancellor of the federal republic of Germany, on the occasion of the signing of the treaty, Bonn, 18 may 1990

This is a historic moment in the life of the German nation.

We are here today to sign a treaty which, after 45 years of painful separation, constitutes the first significant step on the way to the restoration of Germany's national unity. It is a happy moment which sees the hopes and longings of the people of Germany fulfilled. Decades on, a dream is about to become reality: the dream of a united Germany and a united Europe.

In a peaceful revolution last autumn, the people in the GDR broke the chains of the unjust regime through their love of freedom. We share their pride and happiness in view of the success of this revolution and are indebted to the hundreds of thousands who brought about this change by dint of their courage in adversity.

This revolution marked the end of a phase of German history which brought suffering, misery and despair to many people, some of whom sacrificed their lives.

It was the end of a period in which people in the middle of Germany were tortured and killed in the Stalinist camps, in prisons and penitentiaries and in which people lost their lives trying to surmount the wall and barbed wire.

Like the victims of 17 June 1953, they wanted to live in freedom and human dignity. They fought for truth and against falsehood, against oppression by a regime that had been forced upon them by others. They gave their lives for freedom, our precious possession.

We must never forget, efface from our memories or play down their fate. The crimes committed by Germans against Germans, even after the Second World War, are an exhortation to us all; they must never be repeated.

The signing of this Treaty is a memorable event for all Germans and all Europeans. What we are witnessing here today is the birth of a free and united Germany; before the eyes of the world the representatives of the freely-elected Governments of the two parts of Germany are expressing their intention to shape their future jointly as one people, one nation, in a liberal and democratic state.

This historic day of the signing of the Treaty establishing a Monetary, Economic and Social Union also heralds a new phase of European history. At the same time, therefore, we face a tremendous task of rebuilding and reorganization, the success of which is of the utmost importance far beyond the boundaries of Germany for the future of Europe as a whole.

The transition from the Socialist command economy to a social market economy in the GDR is a truly formidable venture. In many respects we are breaking new ground and, as partners with equal rights, we had to seek solutions for a host of new problems; indeed we were faced with an unprecedented challenge.

I should like to convey my cordial thanks to the two delegations and their chairmen, State Secretary Günther Krause and Hans Tietmeyer, Member of the Board of the German Bundesbank, and everyone else involved, for their untiring work over the past weeks. Without their expertise, their great personal commitment and their cooperation in a spirit of true partnership, this Treaty could never have been formulated. We can all be pleased with the result.

The Treaty establishing a Monetary, Economic and Social Union is the first decisive step on the way to unity. For the people in Germany it will make unity tangible in many areas of their day-to-day lives.

After a transitional period which will be far from easy, our compatriots in the GDR will have the opportunity for rapid, extensive improvements in their living conditions. In this context, too, today is for them a day of hope and joy.

The signing of the State Treaty conveys yet another message, however: it is a clear indication of intra-German solidarity. Through the Treaty, the fates of the Germans in the Federal Republic and the GDR become inseparably linked. From now on it is clear: we are approaching a common future in a united and free Germany.

National solidarity will also be required in the future. I am confident that the Federal Government and the Länder have found a good solution with their agreement on the fund to finance German unification.

I am aware that the road to unity will be a difficult one - but in the end our efforts will be rewarded. Achieving the unity and freedom of Germany is a tremendous task in which everyone must cooperate. I realize that many people, both here in the Federal Republic and in the GDR, wonder what these unprecedented developments will mean for them personally - for their jobs, their social security, their families. I understand such concerns. But I should like to ask my compatriots in the Federal Republic one thing: when - were we ever better equipped, economically speaking, for this joint national task of establishing German unity than today?

And to my compatriots in the GDR I say: the introduction of the social market economy means there is every chance, indeed a guarantee, that Mecklenburg/West Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia will soon become flourishing areas of Germany once again, where it will be a pleasure to live and work.

We Germans must now stand together and shape our common future with confidence. I therefore ask the people in the Federal Republic to continue to show solidarity with our fellow countrymen in the GDR. Let us never lose sight of the fact that for forty years the people in the GDR were forcibly prevented from living the kind of life we enjoyed here in the Federal Republic.

I also have a request to make of the people in the GDR: please remember that the prosperity of the Federal Republic is the result of much hard work. Millions of people contributed to it through many years of industriousness and diligence. They did not get anything for nothing.

We are not talking about free gifts for the GDR either, but rather about help for self-help. We must not place excessive demands on one another.

And no one must be left by the wayside on the road towards unity. The people in East and West can rely on that. No one will be subjected to undue hardship.

A further aspect of German unification is the coming together of the people in mutual understanding. Everyone has something to contribute here: in the case of the Germans in the Federal Republic, not merely their hard currency and successful economic system, but other things as well - above all a proven liberal constitution and the democratic ideals which we have been able to test for forty years.

The GDR, for its part, contributes the diligence, ideas and hopes of its people, not to mention the self-assurance of all those who had the courage to overturn a dictatorship in a peaceful revolution. And perhaps our compatriots in the GDR, with their genuine appreciation of the value of freedom, can make some of us here more keenly aware of the preciousness of a German democracy in a united fatherland.

Germany is increasingly growing together. National unity has drawn closer, and it is now for us to accomplish it soon. In so doing, we are fulfilling the desires of the people in Germany. They have never ceased to believe in unity, and they have always realized that unity means more than is reflected in the word "cultural nation". Throughout these last forty-five years, the desire for national unity lived on in the hearts of the Germans. Now it can become reality.

At the end of this century which has brought people so much suffering, we Germans are offered a unique opportunity "to achieve in free self-determination the unity and freedom of Germany" and "to serve the

peace of the world in a united Europe". This is the mandate of the Basic Law. And this is what our neighbours expect from us. We want to be German Europeans and European Germans.

Let us seize this opportunity, let us do our duty. I appeal to the Germans in East and West: let us create a united Germany within a united Europe. Let us go together into a happier future for all Germans. Today is a milestone along this road.