

'The European Parliament approves German unity by a large majority ' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (15 February 1990)

Caption: On 15 February 1990, the German Conservative-Liberal daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung describes the European Parliament's decision on the reunification of the two Germanies.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 15.02.1990, Nr. 39. Frankfurt/Main. "Das Europäische Parlament befürwortet mit großer Mehrheit die deutsche Einheit", p. 4.

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The European Parliament approves German unity by a large majority

Reservations about economic weight / Agreement on an extraordinary summit / Delors cites the Commission's right of scrutiny / Greens criticise Bonn

Ho. Strasbourg, 14 February. With the exception of the Greens, the Members of the European Parliament voted in favour of German unity by a large majority on Wednesday. In a debate on the rapprochement between the two German states and the as yet incalculable effects it may have on Germany's partners in the European Community, most speakers from the ten political groups in the Strasbourg Parliament were now agreed that there could be no contesting the right of the Germans to self-determination in deciding freely whether they wanted to live together in one state. In the debate, however, reservations were also voiced concerning the economic weight of a unified Germany. The risks for the neighbouring countries could best be minimised, it was thought, if the now unstoppable process of German unification were to be firmly integrated into Europe.

The proposal made by the President of the Brussels Commission, Jacques Delors, that an extraordinary summit meeting of the 12 Heads of State or Government of the EC should be called shortly after the elections to the GDR Parliament met with wide approval. For the current Irish Presidency, the Junior Minister for European Affairs, Maire Geoghan-Quinn, pointed out that the 'historic events' affected not only the Germans but all Europeans. It was becoming increasingly evident that Europe was now a unit that no one could divide into East and West. Delors added that although the EC authorities did not have responsibility for all aspects of German unification, they had to consider all the resultant political and economic problems from the hypothesis of the probable accession of the GDR to the Community as part of a unified Germany. The agreement on intra-German economic and monetary union alone would have far-reaching effects on the structures of the Community.

On behalf of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Kirsten Jensen, a Danish MEP, warned against becoming isolated from the rest of Europe as they grew closer to each other. The fear of a 'Greater Germany' among its smaller neighbours had to be taken seriously, she said. Although no one should put up an 'imaginary wall' between the German states, the unification process had to be kept within the framework of the objective of a European peace settlement as part of the CSCE and had to respect the existing borders. Along with other speakers, Mrs Jensen challenged the Federal German Government to guarantee the Oder-Neisse line as the final western border of Poland. The Danish Member then tabled a resolution on behalf of her political group to appoint a special parliamentary committee to deal with German unification issues. The German SPD member, Fritz Walter, added that the EC bodies would have to be prepared for negotiations on German unification immediately after the elections to the East German Parliament; the Council of Ministers should therefore entrust the negotiating mandate to the Commission as soon as possible. In view of the rapid acceleration of events in Germany, many MEPs seem to have the impression that an important part of European politics is passing them by; they are therefore very anxious to exert influence on the changes that are emerging by setting up a committee.

Criticism of the action taken by the Federal German Government was expressed by the leader of the Liberal Group in the European Parliament, the former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. In his view, not only the EC Commission and Council of Ministers but also the European Parliament in Strasbourg should be kept better informed and consulted more often by the German Government about intra-German economic and monetary union. The German version of monetary union would have to fit smoothly into the European plans based on the Delors model. Because of the threat from the predominance of the mark, which, under the present rules governing the European Monetary System (EMS), represented 35 % of the basket of currencies, the ecu would have to be introduced as the Community currency more rapidly than had previously been envisaged. In addition, efforts must be made to strike a new balance between the richer North and the poorer South in the Community. In his role as the chief spokesman for the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), the former Italian Prime Minister, Emilio Colombo, called for a governmental conference to be held at an early date with a view to amending the Rome Treaties; German unification, he said, was forcing the Community to step up the pace towards integration, especially in economic and monetary policy.

The speakers for the United Left joined with the Greens in voicing criticism, although their standpoint was not as fundamental as that put forward by the speaker for the Greens, the German member, Birgit Cramon-Daiber. Mrs Cramon-Daiber accused the German Federal Government of wanting to engineer union with the GDR 'at no cost'. The collapse of the GDR was quite simply being 'brought about by talk', she said. The Italian member of the United Left, Luigi Colajanni, also regarded the policy of the Bonn Government as less than convincing, even though all Germans would have the right of self-determination. Germany's partners in the EC were being confronted with a fait accompli. A united Germany would, after all, have to be neutral, he suggested, in order to limit the political risks to its neighbours. The chairman of the German Republicans, Franz Schönhuber, on the other hand, reacted by saying, 'We do not need to have the neighbours wagging their fingers at us; we are quite capable of making our own decisions.' Following a peace treaty, all foreign troops would have to leave German soil.