

The issue of a divided Germany

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The issue of a divided Germany

The collapse of the Communist bloc facilitated not only the emancipation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe but also the reunification of Germany, which had been divided for nearly half a century.

The unconditional surrender of the defeated Nazi Germany took place on 7–8 May 1945. The Allies had jointly taken over internal and external German sovereignty and divided its territory into four occupation zones, with the Soviets in the East and the Americans, British and French in the West. Berlin was also divided into four zones. Whilst awaiting the completion of the Peace Treaty, the Allies decided to pursue a '4-D' policy aimed at demilitarising, denazifying, decentralising and democratising Germany. The Allied Control Council was given responsibility for governing the whole of Germany, but its decisions had to be unanimous, and each occupying country was autonomous in its zone. No decision had been made to divide Germany up into more than one State, but differences of opinion between the Soviets and the Western Allies regarding Germany were heightened by the start of the Cold War. The blockade imposed from 24 June 1948 to 12 May 1949 by the Soviet Union around the western sectors of Berlin, following the extension of monetary reforms and the introduction of the German mark (DM) in the western sectors of the city, forced the Allies to supply their sectors using an airlift. In 1949, the East-West rivalries led to the division of the area into two States: the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the West and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East. Both German States secured only limited sovereignty, each being integrated into a bloc of other countries: the West with the Atlantic Alliance and the European organisations, and the East with the Warsaw Pact countries and Comecon. The two German States had developed opposing political regimes: liberal democracy in the West and Communist collectivism in the East. The Peace Treaty had not been signed, but, as victors, the former Allies of the Second World War retained their exclusive decision-making powers over German borders, German unity and the fate of Berlin.

The issue of reunification was raised when these two States were formed. In order to avoid the rearmament of West Germany, the Soviet Union proposed, several times, that Germany be reunified and neutralised — an idea which the West approved on condition that free elections be held, a condition which Moscow found unacceptable. In the West, Chancellor Adenauer deemed that reunification should take place by absorbing East Germany into the FRG, a free and prosperous country supported by the West, which could put pressure on the USSR. In the East, on the other hand, the GDR, with the support of the USSR, wanted to reunify Germany in accordance with the Socialist model. Opinions on reunification were further divided by the construction of the Berlin Wall, on 12–13 August 1961, to prevent Germans from the GDR from fleeing to the FRG. Although Adenauer and de Gaulle, President of the French Republic, had wanted to react forcefully to this violation of Berlin's status, Kennedy, President of the United States, and Macmillan, British Prime Minister, deemed that the 'balance of terror' created by the presence of nuclear arms in the East as well as in the West did not allow for policies of violence and that détente with the USSR should not be compromised by opposing the consolidation of the GDR. This became the status quo in Germany and had to be accepted by all. For his part, de Gaulle sought to align himself with the USSR and to distance himself from the United States.

In these circumstances, the West German Government was also compelled to normalise its relations with the East, no longer to seek reunification which would benefit the FRG but to accept the division of Germany and to establish normal relations with the GDR. This resulted in the *Ostpolitik* (Eastern Policy) developed by the Social Democrat Willy Brandt, Foreign Minister and Vice-Chancellor from 1966 and Chancellor between 1969 and 1974. The *Ostpolitik*, which put an end to the Hallstein Doctrine that advocated breaking off the FRG's diplomatic relations with any country that recognised the RDA, aimed firstly to appease the FRG's relations with Eastern Europe and the USSR and then to seek rapprochement with the Communist bloc. Even though the *Ostpolitik* caused much controversy in West Germany, especially among the Christian Democrats, the Brandt Government signed the Moscow Treaty with the Soviets on 12 August 1970, confirming the renunciation of force and the inviolability of borders; then, on 7 December 1970, it signed the Warsaw Treaty with the Polish, giving de facto recognition to the Oder-Neisse Line, imposed by Stalin to the benefit of Poland and to the detriment of the German peoples expelled from Silesia, Pomerania and East Prussia. Reconciliation between the FRG and the GDR was facilitated by the agreement of the four major powers on Berlin (3 September 1971), confirming their authority over the city and making relations

between East and West Berlin more relaxed, despite the continued existence of the Wall; it was then concluded with the Basic Treaty (21 December 1972) aimed at establishing mutual recognition of both German States. The division of Germany was confirmed by the simultaneous admission of both the FRG and the GDR to the UN on 18 September 1973. The inviolability of borders was confirmed by the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) on 1 August 1975. From that moment on, the division of Germany seemed definitive.

With a view to improving international détente, there was a resurgence of the national ideal in the 1980s in both the FRG and the GDR. The development of trade and cultural relations between the two Germanys helped strengthen the feeling of belonging to a single nation. In the FRG, some intellectuals began to allude to an image of a reunified Germany at the centre of Europe which might act as a bridge between East and West. On 15 March 1984, Chancellor Kohl recognised this aspiration to unity and the need to find a solution. However, he later made it clear that Germany must remain in the Atlantic camp, the guarantor of democracy. He condemned anti-Western neutralism. The GDR's view was that reunification would take place when Socialism had triumphed in West Germany.

In May 1980, the Western powers confirmed that their objective was to see a reunified Germany with democratic institutions integrated into the European Community. But the debates in Germany on reunification caused anxiety among its European neighbours, who feared the strength of a unified German State and the renaissance of pan-Germanism. They would have preferred the two German States merely to develop good relations, at most in the form of a confederation. The French were acutely afraid that Gorbachev's policy of glasnost would persuade the Germans to accept neutralisation as the price of reunification.