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Pilar Requena

Germany, year 30. The unity still unfinished

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Abstract:

On November 9, 1989, 30 years ago, the Berlin Wall fell. He did so without bloodshed on a night of madness and chaos. The East Germans' yearning for freedom brought it down. It meant the end of the division of Berlin, Germany, Europe and the Cold War. Less than a year later, on October 3, 1990, German unification took place. Despite the past decades, there is still a long way to go to achieve full unity. A considerable percentage of citizens of former East Germany feel second-class citizens and there are still differences in wages, unemployment or even in election results on either side.

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Introduction¹

On January 19, 1989, the leader of the former GDR (German Democratic Republic), Erich Honecker, assured that the Berlin Wall would remain for another 50 and 100 years, if the reasons for its existence did not disappear. History showed him months later how wrong he was. On November 9 of that same year that wall of shame that seemed eternal was torn down by the yearning for freedom of East German citizens. He did so without violence, on a night that has gone down in history as the end of the division of Berlin, of Germany and of Europe. And also, the end of the Cold War.

That November 9 was a Thursday, an ordinary day of an ordinary week for the rest of the world, but not for the Germans, because a fateful November 9, 1938, took place the Night of Broken Glass, the starting signal for the persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust. On November 9, 1918, the Social Democrat Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed the end of the monarchy from the balcony of the Reichstag in Berlin and gave way to the Weimar Republic, which ended the reign of William II. Only five years later, another November 9, Adolf Hitler launched his first assault on power, but the coup d'état orchestrated and led by him failed. All these dates reflect the lights and shadows of a country whose history marked by blood and fire much of the first half of the twentieth century.

November 9, 1989, was finally a magical day. No one could have imagined that the opening of the inter-German border -because that was basically the fall of the Wall- would take place the way it did.

Reforms had been going on for months in various Eastern European countries, on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The head of state of the former Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, with his policies of perestroika (restructuring or reform) and glasnost (transparency or openness), had loosened the pressure on his satellites in Central and Eastern Europe and allowed changes sponsored by their leaders in Poland or Hungary. The communist regimes of the GDR and Romania, Erich Honecker and Nicolae Ceaucescu, respectively, were the most resistant to the change that was already unstoppable and inevitable.

¹ Part of the declarations and of the content of this document are collected from the book of her author *La potencia reticente. La nueva Alemania vista de cerca*, published by Debate in May 2017.

Immediate antecedents

On 19 August 1989, German Conservative MEP, Otto von Habsburg, and reformist Hungarian State Minister, Imre Pozsgay, organized a so-called *pan-European picnic* in the Hungarian city of Sopron, right on the border with Austria. It was planned from 3 p.m. and for three hours to be able to cross the border at that point as a symbol of fraternization between the citizens of Communist Hungary and Austria. On 27th June Hungarian Foreign Minister, Gyula Horn, and his Austrian counterpart, Alois Mock, had already cut part of the border fence together as a gesture of peace in a further demonstration of the openness of the reformist regime in Budapest.

Although the *picnic* was intended primarily for Austrians and Hungarians, more than half a thousand East Germans came to the event to take advantage of the occasion and pass to the other side. On September 11, Hungary definitively opened its border with Austria. It was the first hole in the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain. Thousands of East Germans fled that way to the West. Some 6.000 more took refuge in the embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Prague, creating a serious crisis. Their departure for West Germany via the GDR was finally authorized on 30 September.

A few days later, on 7 October, the reformer Mikhail Gorbachev, during his visit to East Berlin to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the GDR, warned Erich Honecker: "If you arrive too late, life will punish you", in other words: "If you don't change course, history will punish you". The East German communist leader refused to listen to him and on 18 October he was removed from power and replaced by a grey Egon Krenz who, in the end, would also be overtaken by events.

The first demonstration against the communist regime took place in Leipzig on 4 September. It departed from the Protestant Church of St. Nicholas after the prayer for peace and was repeated every Monday in the autumn of 1989. The demonstrations under the slogan "Wir sind das Volk" ("We are the People") became more and more numerous and spread to other cities in communist Germany.

As Chancellor Angela Merkel recalled on 3 October 2019: "Thirty years ago, in the autumn, thousands of people gathered in churches to pray for peace and to demand separation of powers, freedom of the press and democratic elections. Others risked fleeing through Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Hundreds of thousands dared to take to

the streets to demonstrate peacefully for freedom and democracy and knocked down the Wall².

The citizens of the GDR took to the streets, less and less afraid, to demand change. On 4 November, five days before the fall of the Wall, more than half a million people gathered on the emblematic Alexanderplatz in East Berlin. The multitudinous manifestation was the clear reflection that the end was near. Even former members of the Communist Party (SED) and the regime participated, such as the former head of the foreign secret services, Markus Wolf, who in the 1970s had caused the fall of Chancellor Willy Brandt.

Despite the mobilizations, no one could think that events would happen the way they did and as the result of a misunderstanding.

Consequence of a misunderstanding

On the afternoon of November 9, 1989, a press conference was held to report on the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. There was a certain expectation, in case there would be any news about the conditions to travel to the West. The boring press conference turned into a historic moment when party spokesman Günter Schabowski read the communiqué announcing freedom to travel: "Private trips abroad can be requested without specifying requirements such as reasons for the trip or family relations. Permits will be granted in a short period of time".

It was not literally said that the borders were open, but that one could travel anywhere. A journalist asked a simple question: "When?" Schabowski really didn't know, but he took out a piece of paper and said: "I read here that immediately" The Berlin Wall had fallen.

In fact, the decree was to be read on the radio at 4 a.m. on November 10. But no one had warned Schabowski that a time had been set for the entry into force of the new rule. In 1999, during an interview, he blamed Egon Krenz who, in turn, blamed him. Schabowski said he and Krenz had talked about making that decree public at the press conference. But Krenz didn't tell him that attached to it was a deadline to get it going.

² Available at: <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/suche/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-anlaesslich-des-festakts-zum-tag-der-deutschen-einheit-am-3-oktober-2019-in-kiel-1678326>. Fecha consulta: 5/11/2019.

For Egon Krenz it was the most dramatic night of his life. "By a mistake of the spokesman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party it was said that the border was going to be opened immediately and many people from Berlin went immediately to the Wall. We decided to let things go and not use force," he told me ten years later.

The Bornholmerstrasse post was where most people congregated. The border guards didn't know what to do, no one had informed them of anything. The plan was to allow the passage to the West from 4 in the morning with a passport, which not everyone had, and in an organized way. However, the pressure of the citizens was increasing and the head of the post, Harald Jäger, a lieutenant of the feared STASI (the intelligence services of the GDR), decided, at 21.20, to apply the so-called *Ventillösung*, which consisted of letting out a few, the most troublemakers or those who showed the most nervousness, in order to calm the mood.

With that decision he sought to gain time and prevent any of his subordinates from losing his nerves and shooting, which would have led to a very different night. But the "ventilate" solution didn't work. More and more people were demanding to go to the other side, to West Berlin, with shouts of "open the door" and "we will come back".

Harald Jäger, desperate, called his superiors again and again, but no one knew what to tell him as, in reality, the orders had not yet been transmitted. And, something logical in a regime such as that of the GDR, nobody wanted to take the initiative because of the consequences that might follow. Around 23.29, under his responsibility, he decided to open the barrier. The repressive state of the Democratic Republic fell without a single shot.

The path to unification

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was visiting Poland. He immediately suspended the visit and returned to West Berlin to make it clear what the objective was: "My goal remains, if the historical moment permits, the reunification of our nation".

The Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, was already thinking about the same thing: "What happened was not something unexpected for me, but to see on television how the Germans behaved, how they showed their feelings in that situation, convinced me once again that the question of the reunification of the two German states had already passed

to a more important level, to the level of the people. Politics should now be oriented towards the wishes of the people“.

For a time, the expected reunion and joy prevailed over everything else. The way in which the Wall had fallen was like a miracle, a madness from which the Germans on both sides were infected. But a new wall was built, this time in the hearts and heads of many of them.

The East began to call the Western *Besserwisser* ("those who know everything best"), tired of being given lessons and occupying the best places in the former GDR. For those in the West, those in the East had little initiative and were accustomed to the state giving them everything done. The East Germans, moreover, began to despise their own products they had consumed for decades. Everything Western seemed better to them. That, too, would catch up with them at the end.

The GDR regime realised that the choice was between renewal and death. There was a change of leadership. Egon Krenz was replaced, on December 6, by Hans Modrow, who had become the strong man. In the months that followed, Modrow took such important decisions as holding a round table on 7 December with members of the opposition and including some of them in his government or transmitting Gorbachev his support for a possible unification.

In early December, the leadership role of the Communist Party was withdrawn from the East German Constitution. The East Germans demanded quick changes. The cry of Monday demonstrations, which were still going on, changed from "We are the people" to "We are a people" and "Germany, united homeland". The desire for freedom was unstoppable and something had to be done to stop the flight of its citizens, especially the young and the best prepared, to the West.

What happened in the 1950s was repeated. East Germans began to vote with their feet, to emigrate to the other side. It should be remembered that the Berlin Wall was built precisely because of this, as Markus Wolf told me in 1999: "It was not the anti-fascist wall to protect against a direct threat from the West. Its main reason was to stop the flight of the citizens of the German Democratic Republic to the West". For the victorious powers of the West also was well to settle the division and the question of Berlin.

The first free elections were held in the GDR on Sunday 18 March 1990. 48% voted in favor of the Alliance for Germany, led by Lothar de Maizière and made up of the conservatives of the CDU of the East, which won 41%, the DSU (German Social Union),

the subsidiary of the Bavarian CSU, which won over 6% and the small civil rights party Democratic Awakening (Demokratischer Aufbruch, DA) which won just 1%, with a more social and ecological discourse. The Eastern CDU had made reunification the focus of its election campaign.

It was followed, by far, by the SPD social democrats who, although considered the likely winners, only got 22%. Then came in third place, with over 16%, the former communists of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism). The liberals got 5%.

After arduous negotiations, De Maizière ended up forming a coalition between his Alliance for Germany, the SPD and the liberals. On 12 April 1990, he was elected by parliament the GDR's prime minister, the first and last democratically elected one. His aim was to strengthen relations with the other Germany and one day reach unification.

The last summer

On 1 July 1990 the Treaty on Economic, Monetary and Social Union entered into force. The political decision on the change to be applied had serious economic consequences. Many consider that it was the key to the problems that followed. Wages and pensions were changed 1:1, as were certain amounts of private savings. This led to a fall in competitiveness in the East. There was a decrease in investment and consumption. So came recession and unemployment. This union was the beginning of the economic transition. Decisions were made for political rather than economic reasons.

Messages about the need for swift action were coming from the USSR: "In May 1990 I spoke in Moscow with Eduard Shevardnadze [Soviet Foreign Minister of the USSR]. He advised me to do it as quickly as possible. He told me: We don't know how long we will have a majority and supporters for this issue, for reunification," recalled Lothar de Maiziere.

On July 14, 1990, Chancellor Kohl traveled with Gorbachev to the Caucasus. Two days later, at a joint press conference in Zheleznovodsk, Gorbachev gave his approval for all Germany to join NATO and assured that Soviet troops would finish withdrawing in 1994. Germany promised the inviolability of existing borders, a reduction in its military personnel, a permanent renunciation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and vast economic aid. Chancellor Kohl thus returned home with reunification in his wallet.

And he was aware that they had to act quickly. No one knew how long Gorbachev could remain in power. The events took place at a dizzying pace.

The democratically elected government and parliament of the GDR experienced their first and last summer. The executive entered its final phase. In reality, all it had to do at the end was to prepare the Unification Treaty and sign its death certificate. In its team of spokespersons was a woman, a doctor in physics, who had accidentally entered politics. Her name was Angela Dorothea Merkel who ended up being the first female chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Unification Treaty was negotiated in record time and signed on 31 August 1990. The main negotiators were Wolfgang Schäuble, then Minister of the Interior of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Secretary of State for the GDR Parliament, Günther Krause. "If you look back now, years later, you don't understand it yourself. That was the extraordinary thing and, seen like that, it was also a revolution, a very peaceful, very formal, loyal, bureaucratic and orderly revolution," Wolfgang Schäuble said to me years later.

On September 12, 1990, another step was taken to clear the way to reunification with the signing in Moscow of the Treaty Two plus Four between the two German states and the victorious powers of the Second World War. It was the decisive diplomatic contribution to German unity. No one openly refused reunification. But there were some who, ironically and diplomatically, said they liked Germany so much that they preferred two of it. On October 1, in New York, the four „occupying“ powers renounced their rights and responsibilities in relation to Germany. In this way, the country could regain its full sovereignty after living in a kind of supervised sovereignty since the end of World War II.

Unification

The days before and on the day of German unification, 3 October 1990, one could perceive in Berlin sensations and feelings that would have a decisive influence on the new Germany. They were surreal days, because, without a doubt, something surreal has the disappearance of one country to reappear as part of another.

What did this change mean for the citizens of the East? For some, the younger ones, it was a unique opportunity to start a new life. But there were one or two generations of

East Germans, many of whom were going to lose their jobs. Women, accustomed to working like men, became the first victims of unemployment. The officials, including teachers and directors, knew that they could be replaced by officials from the West and those who were party members or Stasi informants were aware that the justice of the victors would be applied to them. Much of it happened that way. A lot of them had to start from zero.

On 2 October, a state was dismantled. The members of the People's Chamber met for the last time to dissolve the GDR Parliament in a solemn act. Rainer Eppelmann, East German Minister for Disarmament and Defence, exonerated all members of the People's Armed Forces (NVA) from their obligations. Early in the afternoon, the Berlin Senate at the Philharmonic dismissed the three Western (and "occupying") commanders of the city.

Karl Lehmann, president of the German Bishops' Conference, warned at the time: "Many are disoriented and cannot find their way around. What worked well or badly, but in any case, was something known, no longer exists, and what is new and promising is often not presented convincingly". Helmut Kohl made his well-known promise: "Through our joint efforts, through the politics of the social market economy, there will be flourishing landscapes in Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia within a few years". And the words of Lothar de Maizière were premonitory: "German unity will not be completed with the adhesion. It is and remains a common task for all Germans. Unity must not only be financed, but also desired by hearts".

In order to understand what happened after it is necessary to remember that for the East Germans in the "microsecond" between 23'59'59...of October 2 and 00'00'00 of October 3, 1990, all the references of their last 40 years, their flag, their anthem, their symbols, etc... disappeared. This undoubtedly led in many to a loss of identity.

A new era began on German soil, that of reunified Germany. Many have asked themselves, and are still asking today, whether it could have been done otherwise. Probably, yes, but maybe there wasn't time. And both society and the political leaders of the East were interested in a rapid reunification.

Was it a unification on equal conditions or an annexation? Obviously, it was not the first and it looked very much like an annexation. But this concept should not be used because of its historical connotations. The word *Anschluss* (annexation) referred to the *Anschluss* of Austria by Nazi Germany. It was about the absorption of one state by another. And

there wasn't enough exploration of another option. The terrible economic and financial situation and the uncertainty about what could happen in the USSR and with Gorbachev advised against experiments.

Article 23 of the German Basic Law was thus applied, the ultimate aim of which was that all former German territories should form part of the Federal Republic of Germany, and therefore, using this simple formula, the five Länder that had been left on the other side joined in. It was easy and legally logical.

What really happened was a voluntary takeover of the East by the West. The legal-political, social and economic structures of the Federal Republic of Germany prevailed. For Ignacio Sotelo, professor emeritus of Sociology at the Free University of Berlin, it was not a good option: "The unification was the worst of the possible forms that could have been used, that is to say, it was a pure and simple annexation of East Germany, by the will of the East Germans, because they believed that with this annexation the next day they would have the standards of living of West Germany". But it was impossible to quickly match the levels on either side.

For those in the East, in the end, the feeling was in many cases of not belonging to a state that was alien to them. They actually saw it as an annexation, even if they had asked for it themselves. In any case, unification solved the German question, that is to say, the composition of that state and its final borders.

On 2 December 1990, for the first time since November 1932, free parliamentary elections were held throughout the country. If those of 1932 ended up lifting Hitler to power and led the country into the abyss of war, the Holocaust and division, those of 1990 opened a new era full of hope. The campaign focused on German unity and its financing.

The clear winner of the first elections in the united Germany was the governing coalition between CDU/CSU and FDP. The Christian Democrats together with their Social Christian partners won 43.8% of the votes. The FDP liberals achieved almost 11%. The SPD Social Democrats fell from 37 to 33.5% and fitted their worst result since 1957. They paid dearly at the polls for their critical vision of unification. The Greens didn't do well either, unlike the party that inherited the communist SED, the PDS, which had a good result in the East. Helmut Kohl was elected first chancellor of unified Germany.

In that and successive elections, the differences that existed and still exist between the two parties at the time of voting began to become apparent. The PDS, now allied at federal level in The Left (Die Linke) along with the party that created Oskar Lafontaine after leaving the SPD, is more voted for and even wins in some states in the East. And the far right, which barely had strength in the West, managed to achieve in some regional elections in the East more than 20% and, thanks to its boom there, was the third most voted force in the last general elections throughout the country.

The new Germany

With 82.8 million inhabitants, more than 7 million of them foreigners -20.3% of the population is of immigrant origin- the new Germany is diverse and multifaceted and the first European power. The number of unemployed is 5%. More than half of young people opt for vocational training and more than 90% of students study in public and free institutions.

With the beginning of the century, the negative effects of the reunification became apparent. It fell into recession and a severe economic and social crisis broke out, the first to be faced by the new Germany. By the costs of unification, the consequences of globalization and the high social benefits of the welfare state, the country was on the verge of precipice. Austerity measures and reforms were adopted in a crash plan called Agenda 2010. Despite the cuts, the social welfare system remains above that of most European countries. But the gap between rich and poor has increased and is bigger than ever, as have the so-called *minijobs* (more precarious jobs). Poverty has increased and is most severe in the East.

Thus, the road to complete unification is not proving easy, something that former chancellor Willy Brandt, who was the mayor of West Berlin when the Wall was built, expressed clearly when it fell when he recognized that it was not the destroyed houses but the broken souls that most saddened him in the new Länder. Destroyed and damaged objects can be rebuilt relatively quickly. But it takes much longer to recover the spirit and soul of people.

Angela Merkel also acknowledged: "In the 29 years since then, an incredible amount has been achieved. In the West and the East, people are more satisfied with their life as a whole than at any other time since unification. But we also know that this is not the whole

truth. The balance after 29 years of German unification also includes the fact that most East Germans in the Federal Republic feel like second-class citizens, as surveys show. According to these surveys, less than 40% of East Germans believe that unification has been a success and only about 20% of those under 40 believe it has. Less than half are satisfied with democracy in Germany... All of us -in politics and in society- must learn to understand that an improvement in the economic situation alone does not mean identification with our democracy"³.

East German psychologist Hans-Joachim Maaz already warned: "For many people a hope has been destroyed, there is a lot of disappointment in the process, hope for a better life has not been fulfilled, they have become unemployed, they have no possibility of adapting well to society and that depresses many people".

Many in the West thought and think that life in the GDR was not a real life and that it really began in 1990. In the end, many East Germans experienced a bitter awakening. They ended up unemployed, their businesses dissolved, and their institutions disappeared. Many felt deceived. They said their biographies had been stolen.

There was everything from political and personal to professional discrimination. It had to be proved that the GDR was an unfair state. The citizens of the East feel that they were mistreated for no reason. Most Eastern elites were replaced by Westerners.

Reunification was financed on the basis of debt and with large transfers guaranteed by the Solidarity Pact which ends in 2019. In the West there was a growing lack of understanding about the amount of financial aid. It has transferred between 80.000 and 90.000 million euros to the East each year. Little by little, the West Germans became more distrustful when they saw that their contributions did not reach the expected and promised goals. And few of them visited the East unless they had family. They even went so far as to call it "the wild east." It is not surprising that a wall was built in the hearts and minds of one another.

In a context of hopelessness, unemployment or broken families, the young people of the East became easy prey for the extreme right who saw in them the right breeding ground

³ Available at: <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/suche/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-anlaesslich-des-festakts-zum-tag-der-deutschen-einheit-am-3-oktober-2019-in-kiel-1678326>. Retrieved on: 5/11/2019

to expand their ranks. The leaders of the West moved to the East. Neonazi youth culture began to spread throughout the former GDR.

The historical review that took place in Germany during the post-war period did not take place in communist Germany. They were antifascist by executive order and therefore free of all blame for Nazism. Meanwhile, in the West, after the war, there had been a collective catharsis and a historical review of Nazism and the Third Reich, and there was a struggle against this legacy. In the early years of unified Germany, the far-right phenomenon took on an unknown dimension in the country's post-war period.

The diversity that is taken for granted in the West was unknown in the East because their society was very homogeneous. They were not accustomed to living with foreigners. Those who were in the country during communism were "invited" by the regime and lived separately from the indigenous population. Therefore, it was relatively easy to turn foreigners into scapegoats of all ills.

At the beginning of the century, though small, the number of potentially violent right-wing extremists increased and so did the number of aggressions. In the East, xenophobic tendencies are well-known, its inhabitants consider that too many foreigners live there when their percentage is considerably lower than in the West. But, as a foreigner, you are twenty times more likely to be attacked by right-wing radicals in the East than in the West.

In the East there were even "liberated national zones" or zones of fear, controlled by violent neo-Nazis. The NPD (National Democratic Party), together with parties such as the DVU (German People's Union) and the *Republikaner* (Republicans) were the protectors of these violent ones. Recently, the so-called *Reichsbürger* (citizens of the empire), xenophobes, racists and anti-Semites who deny the existence of the Federal Republic and even the Holocaust, have become more active. There are estimated to be several thousand. Politically they are irrelevant but can become a possible violent, even terrorist, focus of the extreme right.

This trend in the former GDR has not diminished and has led to xenophobic movements and the strengthening of parties such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which wants to end the cession of sovereignty to the European Union, protect borders, exit the euro and is against Islam. It did not manage to enter the German Parliament in the September 2013 elections, although it was very near to the necessary 5%. But in 2014 it already won MEPs in the elections for the European Parliament and it has entered in the legislative of

all the federated states. In the 2017 general elections he got representation in the Bundestag in a number that it became the leader of the opposition after the formation of the Grand Coalition.

From September 2015, it was able to make use of the refugee crisis, thanks to its stance against its massive arrival. The party experienced a considerable increase in popular support. The AfD is more successful and logically more influential than the NPD or previous extreme right-wing parties that never made it to the federal parliament. And it has eclipsed the Islamophobic movement Pegida (European Patriots Against the Islamization of the West).

In 2018, 19.409 crimes were recorded (19.467 in 2017) with a right-wing extremist background. With 1.088 acts of violence, the number of acts of violence increased slightly compared to the previous year (2017: 1.054). The number of attempted homicides rose from 4 in 2017 to 6, all for xenophobic reasons. The number of acts of xenophobic violence also increased by 6.1% to 821 offences (2017: 774), while right-wing extremist offences against asylum centers fell again in 2018, slightly below the 2014 figures (170), following the dramatic increase in 2015 and 2016⁴.

In the five new federated states, the AfD is stronger and more radical than in the West. Right-wing resentments are turning into violence much more often in the east. Police statistics are a sad indicator. Since unification, the number of right-wing acts of violence has been proportionally higher in the East than in the West. And yet the AfD agitators Alexander Gauland and Björn Höcke, so successful in East Germany, are West Germans.

With 31% for the Left and 23% for AfD, the first and second most voted forces, the recent elections in Thuringia show for the third time this year in the East that Germany is divided. In Brandenburg, the AfD reached 23.5%, in Saxony 27.5%. Also, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt it was above 20% in the last elections. And the results of The Left in all of them are also good and better than in the western federated states.

⁴ Data extracted from Verfassungsschutzbericht 2018. Every year the German secret services publish their report on extremism and violence in the country. Available at: <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/publikationen/verfassungsschutzberichte/vsbericht-2018> Retrieved on: 5/11/2019.

The German city of Dresden, capital of Saxony and cradle of the Islamophobic and anti-immigration movement Pegida, has declared a state of "Nazi emergency". In a motion passed on 1 November 2019, the consistory recognizes that it has a serious problem with the far right and is committed to strengthening democratic culture. This is an unprecedented resolution⁵.

Foreign and security policy

With unification, a new era in foreign policy was opened up for Germany, which had regained its full sovereignty. It remains anchored to the European Union and NATO. In not a few neighbors and allies the fear of a great Germany began to grow. The country had to learn to walk on its own, to manage the power it had due to its economic, geographical and population dimensions. If internally it had to look for its new identity, externally it had to look for its place in the world, including its place in the European Union. Former Bundestag President Wolfgang Thierse mentioned history as another key element: "We cannot and do not want to forget it and it is an arduous process to become more sovereign, or if you like, more normal, like other countries".

Its first important and independent decision turned out to be an important blunder, to put it mildly. They took it without consensus with their allies. It was the recognition of the independence of its Balkan protector, Croatia, when it unilaterally declared its independence from the former Yugoslavia on 25 June 1991. The German decision only contributed to lighting the fuse of fire into which the Balkans ended up becoming.

The Germans became aware of their mistake and it was perhaps this that helped them to become much more cautious when making decisions at the international level and to advocate a Germany that defends "peacebuilding" and "peacekeeping", that is, a Germany that looks for dialogue and negotiation rather than military interventions.

There was no more possible the so-called checkbook diplomacy. Germany still did so in the 1991 Gulf War, that is, it excused its military participation by paying. It was a way to buy military non-intervention with money. Having regained its sovereignty, its role had to be necessarily different. With the decision to intervene in Kosovo and then Afghanistan,

⁵ VALERO, Carmen *La ciudad alemana de Dresde declara el estado de emergencia nazi*. Retrieved on: 5/11/2019. Available at: <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2019/11/02/5dbdba6221efa0385b8b463d.html>

Germany tore its garments while becoming an adult in foreign policy, but said no to the invasion of Iraq.

Little by little, it has assumed a growing responsibility for achieving sustainable global development in cooperation with its allies, even though some accuse it of wanting a lonely path or of looking only for its own interests. It's the responsibility of "never alone again". As the country's president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said when he was head of the foreign ministry: "We are called to promote understanding among peoples, political solutions to conflicts and the preservation of structures that ensure peace. Ideally, our foreign policy foresees and prevents conflicts before they arise".

The project is called "Review 2014-Rethink Foreign Policy". In addition to defence and disarmament, it is a question of considering the important role of human, economic, ecological and social rights. Berlin thus promotes the protection of human rights, a sustainable economic system, cross-border protection of the climate and the environment and intensive cultural exchange, becoming more involved in multilateral organizations. It is committed to the protection and strengthening of human rights as a basic condition for peace, security, stability and sustainable and just development. It is, in essence, a requirement that derives from its Fundamental Law.

Germany doesn't want a leading role in defense, but they don't care if they have it in economy. It is true that it faces the fact of what role it wants to play on the international arena in different fields. After the fall of the Wall, it has been presented with the second opportunity to be the predominant power in Europe, after destroying the first in the 20th century. And whether you like it or not, it's its hour of truth. Germany's former president, Richard von Weizsäcker, asserted that "we were not at all tempted to assume the leadership of Europe" because the Germans were marked not only by war, but by the division of Europe and their country. At the end of the day, Berlin was comfortable in its role as an economic giant and political dwarf.

Sociologist Ulrich Beck said of current Germany that it is the best we have seen, considered its history. The country expresses modern greatness and tragedy like no other. The new Germany does not want to see its army in military interventions, but it does not rule them out if there are humanitarian reasons involved. In any case, the taboo of the intervention of German troops abroad was already broken at the end of the last

century under the red-green coalition government and with the support of intellectuals such as Günter Grass or Jürgen Habermas.

The state of the unit

The balance in the thirtieth year of the fall of the Wall is positive, but much remains to be done even though much has already been achieved. The economic power of the eastern part is growing and so is also employment and a feeling of satisfaction with life. However, the process of harmonizing living conditions has not yet been completed. Further strengthening of economic power through the promotion of investment, innovation and internationalization remains indispensable⁶.

The transition from a planned economy to a market economy was described as the "take-off from the East", a transformation in which entire industrial branches were reduced to the bare minimum. Sectors such as mining, or shipyards suffered the consequences of the conversion. In 1995, the Solidarity Pact entered into force. It should have concluded in 2004 but had been extended in view of the fact that the problems and differences had continued. The West had to pump money to the East nonstop. The reunification has been financed on the basis of indebtedness and huge transfers that are guaranteed until 2019, under that pact. By then, the West will have invested more than 1.4 billion euros in the East to finance its modernization.

No one saw the scale of the economic problem at the beginning and no one knew what the real state of the economy was in East Germany, because the figures and data that had been known during the GDR were distorted. When this industry wanted to open up to the world market, its poor viability could be verified. While it is true that there are flourishing landscapes in the East, such as Dresden or Leipzig, Jena or Berlin-Brandenburg, it is also true that there are completely depressed areas that will hardly develop in the future.

The enormous internal gap in income, employment and productivity and how much it was going to cost to close it were not wanted to be seen or not recognized. The economic

⁶ Data from the *Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung zum Stand der Deutschen Einheit 2019*. Every year, since 1997, the German government issues a report on the state of the German unity. Retrieved: 5/11/2019. Available at: https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikationen/Neue-Laender/jahresbericht-zum-stand-der-deutschen-einheit-2019.pdf?__blob=publicationFile=24

situation in the East was much worse than had been thought. Only a quarter of GDR companies survived unification. Wolfgang Scheremet, from the Institute for Economic Research, described the situation to me years ago in a rather pessimistic way: "There was a difference in competitiveness, productivity, the economy of the East had a productivity difference of between 30 and 40 percent with respect to the West. That is why wages had to be lower, otherwise companies would not have been able to place their products on the world market and unemployment would have been higher".

The process of economic development in the East has been and is one of the greatest challenges of unification. Many of the companies in the former GDR were not competitive, but rather inefficient, had outdated and obsolete machinery and were also polluters. In just over a year, industrial production in the GDR fell by 60-70% and a third of the nine million jobs disappeared. Faced with the disastrous situation of the East German economy and, above all, the inoperability and lack of competitiveness, it was decided to set up the *Treuhandanstalt* (or *Treuhand*), the office for the privatisation of property in the former GDR. It was a gigantic institution that had to clean up, sell or close thousands of East German state-owned enterprises with some four million employees (40% of the workforce). They were state-owned enterprises of all kinds and in all sectors. About 85% of privatized companies got finally owned by West Germans, 10% by foreigners and only 5% by East Germans.

East Germany's economic power has risen from 43% in 1990 to 75% of that of the West by 2018. Gross wages and salaries and disposable income of households currently reach about 85% of the level of Westerners, although the gap narrows considerably when the different average cost of living is taken into account. There has also been growth in business and revenue in the East. In 2018, GDP there (including Berlin) grew slightly more in real terms (1.6%) than in West Germany (1.4%)⁷.

With regard to infrastructure, urban and rural landscapes, housing conditions, the environment and health care, a positive development can be observed. The life

⁷ Most of the data in this section are taken, updated, from the *Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung zum Stand der Deutschen Einheit 2019*. Every year, since 1997, the German government publishes a report on the state of German unity. Retrieved: 5/11/2019. Available at: https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikationen/Neue-Laender/jahresbericht-zum-stand-der-deutschen-einheit-2019.pdf?__blob=publicationFile=24

expectancy of citizens is now at the same level. Legal and social policy adjustments have been largely completed.

However, there are still differences in economic performance. They are mainly due to structural factors, such as the lack of corporate headquarters for large companies. No East German company is listed on the DAX-30 index. And almost no large company is based in that part of the country and many East German companies belong to West German or foreign groups.

In recent years, the labor market in East Germany has experienced increasingly positive developments. The unemployment rate in East Germany fell by more than 12 percentage points from its peak of 18.7% in 2005. In August of this year, it was 6.4%. By way of comparison, the average unemployment rate in West Germany is 4.8%. Nothing to do with the difference of more than 10 points that existed at the beginning of the century. Average wages increased last year throughout Germany, in the East even more than in the West. In 2018, the average gross monthly salary of a full-time employee in East Germany corresponded to 84% of the average gross salary of a full-time employee in West Germany. In other words, they earn 16% less per month.

Since 1990, more than 1.2 million people have left the new Länder. West Germany and in particular the southern Länder have benefited considerably from the immigration of young and well-trained East Germans. In the East, net emigration together with a decline in the birth rate has led to an ageing population and a shortage of skilled workers. Immigration could alleviate the problem⁸. In 2015, for the first time since unification, the new Länder experienced slight population growth, mainly due to immigration from abroad. However, racism, discrimination, stereotypes, prejudice and extreme right-wing violence pose a major challenge in the face of a possible increase in such immigration.

Dissatisfaction is evident in the East. According to a recent survey conducted for the federal government, 57% of East Germans feel like second-class citizens. Only about 38% consider the unification to have been a success. For people under 40, the figure is only about 20%. The figures for democracy approval in East Germany are worrying almost half of its population is quite dissatisfied with its functioning. This dissatisfaction is

⁸ Available at: <https://www.nzz.ch/wirtschaft/30-jahre-mauerfall-in-ostdeutschland-blueht-die-unzufriedenheit-ld.1516418> Retrieved on: 5/11/2019

also expressed in the significantly different election results, as we have seen, in East and West in recent years.

It's one of the unsealed scars yet. To the question of whether Germany is already a united homeland, the answer of several sociologists is an ambiguous *Jein* ("yes and no"). This lack of completed unity continues to mark the new Germany and influences domestic and even foreign policy. The political class, led by the government, has to take into account different perceptions and even sensitivities when making far-reaching decisions.

Conclusion: an inconclusive unification

In fact, until 1990, there had never been a Germany with the current borders, there is no historical precedent. This undoubtedly influences how the country has evolved in its domestic and foreign policy. It has undergone many changes since unification and there are still many challenges and problems. It has reformed its Nationality Law and has been placed in the orbit of the most modern countries by replacing *ius sanguinis* ("right of blood") with *ius soli* ("right of soil"). Another taboo was also broken by recognizing Germany as an immigration country in the new Immigration Law.

Germany and the Germans have gone through different phases in these 30 years, from the initial and majority feeling of hope to disappointment. They are now in a phase of stability, in which a hitherto good economic climate makes adjustments and shocks fit and cushion better. But it is also true that we must reflect on the past and on the former GDR, on its identity and legacy and on the imprint it left on its citizens.

There is already only one Germany, although differences and even conflicting feelings and different perceptions persist, but the fracture has been overcome. There will soon have to be more talk of regional differences than of differences between the two parts of the former divided Germany, although there will always be a sediment that will mark the east of the country. A few years will pass before these interior walls are completely demolished and the resentment and incomprehension still perceived in part of the population on both sides of the former border has been overcome.

Since the end of the Second World War the Germans have lived with a certain sense of temporariness, of feeling that the Federal Republic would be unfinished as long as the Eastern states were not part of it. The fall of the Wall opened the door to the exit of the tunnel in which they had been for decades and at the same time confronted them with the cruel reality that 40 years of separation had not passed in vain.

The Dresden priest Stephan Fritz sums it up perfectly: "Now we are talking about the healed wound, the healthy wound, but you can still see the scars. Scars serve as a reminder of what happened. But the reconstruction shows us that together with the Europeans we have overcome the consequences of the war. Today we live with our neighbours in Europe in friendship, the enemies of the war of yesterday are today our friends".

*Pilar Requena**

Journalist, professor of International Relations