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**CDU *DEUTSCHLANDPOLITIK*  
AND REUNIFICATION  
1985–1989**

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ALOIS MERTES MEMORIAL LECTURE

1992



**CDU DEUTSCHLANDPOLITIK  
AND REUNIFICATION 1985–1989**

*Clay Clemens*

**ALOIS MERTES MEMORIAL LECTURE**

The lecture is named in honor of one of the most prominent members of the *Christlich-Demokratische Union* during the reconstruction of post-war Germany. It is made possible by a grant from the *Stifterverband für die deutsche Wissenschaft*.

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## Preface

In his book *Reluctant Realists: The CDU/CSU and West German Ostpolitik* (Durham, NC, and London, 1989), Professor Clay Clemens explored the background, motives, and stages of development of one area of foreign policy in which Alois Mertes played a major role. It was very appropriate, therefore, that he should have delivered the second Alois Mertes Memorial Lecture. His book focused on the analysis of the West German CDU/CSU and *Ostpolitik* from 1969 to 1982, a period when these parties formed the opposition. Thus, I was especially pleased that, in his lecture, Professor Clemens chose to continue his analysis of one major aspect of the story for some of the years after the Christian Democrats had become the senior partner in the government coalition and to address the question of the party's *Deutschlandpolitik* from 1985 to 1989.

Professor Clemens received his undergraduate education at The College of William and Mary; for graduate work, he attended the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. During the 1980s, he held teaching and research appointments at the Department of Political Science at Tufts, at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at the United States Embassy in Bonn. In 1986 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Government at William and Mary. During the *Sommersemester* of 1992, he taught at the newly founded University of Potsdam. Professor Clemens has been the recipient of a number of grants and awards. Since the mid-1980s, he has been invited to speak at important professional meetings and conferences.

In addition to his major book, Professor Clemens has published a series of penetrating and stimulating articles on, for example, "The Antinuclear Movement in West Germany," in *Shattering Europe's Defense Consensus: The Antinuclear Protest Movement in Western Europe*, ed. by Robert Pfaltzgraff and James Dougherty (McLean, VA, 1985); "The CDU/CSU and West German Arms Control Policy," in *The Silent Partner: West German Arms Control Policy*, ed. by Barry Blechman and Cathleen Fisher (New York, 1988); "Changing Perceptions of the United States in German Political

Parties," in *Deutsch Amerikanische Beziehungen: Jahrbuch 1/GermanAmerican Relations: Yearbook 1*, ed. by James Cooney, Gerald Kleinfeld, and Wolfgang-Uwe Friedrich (Frankfurt/M., 1989); "West Germany and the Second Superpower Detente: Old Anxieties and New Options," in *The Superpowers at the Crossroads*, ed. by Michael Cox (Lanham, MD, 1990); "Changing Public Perceptions of NATO," in *The Federal Republic and NATO: Forty Years After*, ed. by Emil Kirchner and James Sperling (New York, 1991); and "Entspannungs- and Ostpolitik, 1969-1975," in *Die USA and die Deutsche Frage*, ed. by Wolfgang-Uwe Friedrich (Frankfurt/M., 1991). Within less than a decade, he has earned the reputation of a first-rate expert on recent German history.

The topic of "CDU *Deutschlandpolitik* and Reunification, 1985–1989," is the dramatic story of frustratingly slow progress and sudden change, which we all remember well yet are still hardly able to comprehend. It is the story of the coexistence of two states, each one, as it seems, firmly and closely linked to one of the Cold War superpowers; the economic, political, and ideological collapse of one of these states, the mass exodus of its people, and the ensuing unification. In short, it is the story of one of *the* major developments in German history, comparable only to the turn of events in 1866/1870 or 1917/1920. Saying this is to indicate that Professor Clemens is venturing into territory that historians and political scientists will attempt to explore in decades to come. And by exploring this territory first, Professor Clemens sets the standards. All those who follow will have to take into account the results of his research.

We are very pleased to present Professor Clemens' lecture as the fifth in our Occasional Paper series.

Hartmut Lehmann  
Washington, D.C.  
May 1992

**DELIVERING THIS LECTURE** is a great honor for several different reasons. First, recognition by the German Historical Institute itself is very flattering, for this organization has rapidly become a major center for the promotion of scholarship, as well as mutual understanding between the Federal Republic and the United States. It is also a high compliment, and a very difficult challenge, to follow in the footsteps of Professor Michael Wolffsohn, whose superb inaugural lecture one year ago set a very high standard.

But perhaps most meaningful for me is the privilege of being asked to help honor the memory of the man in whose name this series was established. When my doctoral advisor, Professor William Griffith, first mentioned the CDU and Eastern policy as a dissertation topic, he then said: "There are many people you should meet, but only one you *must* meet: Mertes." The reason for this emphatic recommendation became ever clearer as I read and researched: The record shows that Dr. Alois Mertes enjoyed influence throughout his own party and beyond, influence resting less on titles or power than on personal credibility. His career demonstrated how it is possible—indeed necessary—in a democracy to act on moral principles without moralizing, and to compete politically without abandoning the quest for consensus on basic values. He knew that conviction without reason leads to dogmatism, while reason without conviction can become sophistry. Dialogue and diplomacy, across borders and across generations, were his life—whether his partners were important statesmen or merely a doctoral student for whom he took time amidst an exhausting schedule on several occasions.

Nothing mattered more to Alois Mertes than his party's *Deutschlandpolitik*. That he did not live to see the German question resolved is a tragedy. While my comments today focus on the time between Dr. Mertes' death in 1985 and the drama that began four

years later, they also touch on his legacy, which was lasting and significant, for his party as well as for his country.

During the 1980s, the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, frequently spoke of reunification, certainly more so than did their political rivals. Yet most scholars, analysts, and commentators have dismissed this as pious, even insincere, rhetoric. They suspect that, since the time of Konrad Adenauer, the CDU had learned to live with national division and regarded unity the way a doubting preacher might view heaven: too remote a prospect to serve as an inspiration in daily life, but (just in case) something worth praising devoutly in each Sunday's sermon.

Helmut Kohl and his party, they often add, thus stumbled like sleepwalkers into history's spotlight in the fall of 1989. Jürgen Schmude, an acute observer, if not an objective one, typified this skepticism when he recently wrote that "... today one can inspect the concrete documentation of Christian Democratic views at construction sites in Bonn, [where] until very recently huge government buildings were going up, as if to ready the capital on the Rhine for all of the coming century."<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, not even CDU leaders claim to have foreseen the coming of unification, which Helmut Kohl has described as "a gift of heaven." But did the goal of unity really play no serious role in party policy before the dramatic events of November 1989? Did the party have what came to be called an active reunification policy? How that question is answered will shape not only our view of the recent past but our expectations of the near future, for it will tell us much about the way in which German leaders plan to complete the task of integrating their country and their continent.

## A DUAL INHERITANCE

My book, to which this lecture serves as an updated epilogue, describes how the CDU/CSU entered government in 1982 with a two-track approach to the national question. One route led through

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<sup>1</sup> *Der Spiegel*, February 3, 1992.



a complex maze of legalisms, at the center of which lay that goal enshrined in the Basic Law's preamble—to achieve "in free self-determination the unity and freedom of Germany." Four-power rights, the Basic Law, and the *Deutschlandvertrag*, it was argued, could ensure that national division remained legally provisional, but the FRG was obliged to fight fiercely in defense of this claim. This meant insisting upon a narrow reading of Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostverträge*, in strict adherence with the joint *Bundestag* resolution of May 1972 and the constitutional court's ruling of one year later. This CDU orthodoxy had many proscriptions: no formal, legal recognition of a united Germany's final borders, including the Oder-Neisse line; no hint that relations between the two German states would rise to the diplomatic level. Equally important was the need to remind Germans and their neighbors that the issue of unity was not politically dead. On his first trip to Moscow as chancellor in June 1983, for example, Kohl told his Kremlin host, "We Germans hold fast to the goal of the unity of the nation," and then pointedly asked: "How would you feel if Moscow were divided?"

Yet the CDU's precise goal, even the order of its priorities, remained ambiguous. Did "unity in self-determination" necessarily mean restoring a single unified German state, and, if so, where would its eastern border actually lie? What, moreover, should Bonn do if confronted with a choice between German unity and the CDU's other cherished ambition, the integration of Europe?

To complicate matters, the party had also come to accept the main legacy of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. For reasons having as much to do with pragmatic calculation and partisan politics as with pure conviction, it grudgingly agreed to accept Europe's status quo and thus the reality of a second German state. This even meant an increasing readiness to ease the financial burdens and diplomatic isolation of the East German regime in order to make life for Germans in the GDR more tolerable, thus ameliorating the pain of a divided nation.

This pragmatism could not always easily be reconciled with the party's legalistic emphasis on reunification. How far could Bonn go in improving relations with East Berlin before such efforts essentially

stabilized the GDR and thus the nation's division? A "policy of small steps" also raised a tempting alternative scenario for resolving the German question: could "national unity" in fact take the form of some closer association between the Federal Republic and a more humane, liberalizing, yet separate East German entity?

Even as they regained a place in government in the 1980s, CDU leaders themselves differed, at least in emphasis, in their answers to most of these questions. Those who defended CDU *Deutschlandpolitik* orthodoxy—and who might be called fundamentalists—were generally older, established party officials, more often from the South than from the North, whose views were closer to those of the *Mittelstand* than to those of the party's Social Committees. Their ranks included expellees; their ally was the CSU. Fundamentalists demanded that the goal of state unity remain at the forefront of all pronouncements on the national issue. Many believed that Bonn should not permit the pursuit of harmonious relations with any neighbors—East or West—to compromise this aim. Most denied that the days of the nation-state in Europe were necessarily over and insisted that German state unity outside of a united Europe was still a viable option.<sup>2</sup> Such active—or at least vocal—support of a united German state reflected their own deep-rooted anti-Communism and national consciousness, yet it also catered to an often even more robustly national-conservative bloc of voters on the party's periphery.

On the CDU's left flank were the *Deutschlandpolitik* reformists: generally younger leaders and activists who were usually progressive on social issues and anxious to win the party a broader, less conservative electoral base. Their chief representatives included Heiner Geissler, Rita Süßmuth, and Eberhard Diepgen; their tacit ally was usually Hans-Dietrich Genscher's FDP. For reformists, ending German division was desirable but not a goal that should dominate the party's foreign policy program at the expense of more

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<sup>2</sup> "The claim that the Germans can achieve their unity only in a united Europe describes only one among several variants that are politically as well as historically equally plausible. Alongside the European option stands, unchanged, the nation-state option." Rupert Scholz, "Der Weg zur Einheit über den Nationalstaat ist nicht verboten," *Die Zeit*, October 16, 1985.

immediate priorities: European integration and East-West accommodation. Without explicitly renouncing the goal of state unity, they rejected the concept of the nation-state, giving greater precedence instead to preserving a sense of German identity, which they believed would only come through German-German interaction. Any form of unity, they added, could only come within the framework of an integrated Western Europe and a pan-European peace order. In any case, they warned, the Union risked diplomatic isolation and political irrelevance unless it showed greater willingness to settle for a gradualist, accommodationist approach.

In short, for fundamentalists, national reunification itself mattered more than the context within which it might occur; reformists reversed that order of priority. Yet broad divisions such as these served neither the CDU's political fortunes nor government policy, especially in a tripartite coalition that included both the CSU and the FDP. Thus party leaders like Chairman Kohl and Alois Mertes continually tried to bridge these differences; colleagues like Alfred Dregger, chairman of the parliamentary group, or Volker Rühle, his deputy, leaned toward the fundamentalist or reformist view, respectively, but also attempted to play this same role—as intra-party mediators.

Formulas left over from the 1950s and 1960s helped to some extent: "freedom and unity are mutually reinforcing," for example, or "German unity in a European framework," or "reunification is not a question of territory but of values." It was above all Mertes who tried to synthesize the fundamentalist and reformist positions: Negotiating to promote human contacts across the existing border and preserving the legal case for self-determination were, he stressed, *both* part of a *gesamtdeutsch* human rights policy. In addition, refusal to recognize East German citizenship, combined with greater human contact, could *both* preserve a sense of common national identity. He praised "necessary efforts to hold together the German people [so

long as] such steps did not work against the long-term goal of unification."<sup>3</sup>

Yet it remained difficult to weave all the separate strands of CDU *Deutschlandpolitik* into a strategy for healing the nation's division. Indeed, defining concepts, models, and detailed tradeoffs only threatened to narrow the party's room for maneuver and jeopardize its unity. At times, even specifying what price the party would not pay to resolve the German question became a delicate issue. CDU leaders in the early 1980s thus remained content with rather ambiguous formulas, never giving up on some form of reunification but almost never spelling out how to achieve it.

#### FROM STATIC TO DYNAMIC

Such ambiguity, however, was best suited for a time of relative geopolitical stasis. So long as East and West remained adversaries and European unity but a distant dream, the CDU could easily avoid either choosing between its priorities or clarifying its vision of what an undivided Germany might actually look like. At least in retrospect, it is clear that the early 1980s were such a static period, and thus—as even a fundamentalist wearily conceded midway through the decade—"In the status quo, according to the given political circumstances, Germany's division has indisputably achieved a certain degree of actual stability..."<sup>4</sup>

Beyond German borders, however, two men took office in the mid-1980s and began transforming Europe. Their efforts would, to say the least, alter the context of the national question. Seizing on the Single European Act, Jacques Delors, president of the EC Commission, began the unexpectedly rapid movement toward Western Europe's internal market—and beyond. More important still, Mikhail Gorbachev's accession in the Kremlin brought

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<sup>3</sup> Alois Mertes, "Hinter Honeckers Forderungen steht Moskau," *Deutschland-Archiv* 14 (4/1981):377.

<sup>4</sup> Rupert Scholz in *FAZ*, October 16, 1985.

*perestroika*, new thinking in foreign policy, and talk of a common European house. To be sure, neither man himself immediately grasped the full implications of his ambitions for the German question. Certainly few in the CDU did. At first, party leaders suspected that the Kremlin chief planned only to undermine Western solidarity—a wariness that was reflected in the party leadership's initial suspicion of Soviet diplomatic blandishments. But as the thaw in East-West relations and the dynamic of Europe's single market grew irreversible in the late 1980s, the prospect of a new, dramatically reshaped Europe increasingly tested the CDU's tenuous internal compromise on *Deutschlandpolitik*. Fundamentalists and reformists alike increasingly believed that the time had come for the party to commit itself to a much more specific course of action.

The former acted first. As their suspicions of the Kremlin leader faded, defenders of CDU orthodoxy began to urge that Bonn press its Western partners to put German reunification on the table as part of any further East-West negotiations. Alliance obligations, they hinted, or EC integration should be no pretext for passing up a possible deal leading to unification. This option appealed not only to mavericks like Bernhard Friedmann, deputy of the CDU in the *Bundestag*, and Heinrich Lummer, former interior senator of Berlin, but to expellee spokesmen and many other fundamentalists as well.

Party reformists and mediators expressed understanding for this desire to see progress toward unity, yet quickly quashed the idea of a bargain with the Kremlin. Risking a break with Bonn's Western allies, let alone accepting anything like a quasi-neutral status—an Austrian solution—would be an intolerable price, they said, even for some form of national unity. Germans must instead count on gradualism, on European union and detente, to pave the way to a more acceptable resolution. As Kohl wrote to Friedmann: "Reunification of Germany is thinkable only on the basis of ... a longterm positive process of broad-based cooperation and the dismantling of distrust."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Die Welt*, February 18, 1988.

During 1987 and 1988, reformists also urged the CDU to make its strategy for dealing with Germany's division more concrete, but they had a different end result in mind. Now more than ever, they argued, the party must soften its old reunification rhetoric, which only jeopardized promising progress toward European integration. Instead, it should fully embrace efforts to expand German-German diplomacy. While acknowledging the resistance of the SED regime to *perestroika*, they argued that the thaw in East-West relations was gradually tempting Erich Honecker to bargain for greater diplomatic status and hard currency from the West. Bonn could exploit this to promote expanded human and cultural contact, and thereby a greater sense of national togetherness, if not outright state unity.<sup>6</sup>

Events did indeed seem to be moving in this direction. The year 1987 brought a dramatic upsurge in cross-border travel and German-German diplomacy, which culminated in Honecker's visit to Bonn. Many CDU fundamentalists at first urged limiting the status of this occasion—by greeting him at Frankfurt airport rather than in Bonn; by conducting no political discussions in the Federal capital; by holding a formal reception not at the presidential residence but at a palace outside the city. Yet Kohl's government gave Honecker the ceremony befitting a head of state. (In Munich the fanfare was, if anything, greater still.) Shortly thereafter, Union leaders voiced support for conditional contact between the *Bundestag* and the GDR *Volkskammer*, long dismissed as a tool of tyranny.

Encouraged by what he and fellow reformists regarded as a watershed event, General Secretary Geissler convened a working group of CDU leaders in early 1988 to draft a statement on the national question for the party's approval at its Wiesbaden conference in June. Those invited did not include any parliamentarians from the *Deutschlandpolitik* committee of the *Bundestag*, let alone from the expellee groups—both noted bastions of party orthodoxy. Among other things, the draft declared that:

- freedom is the condition for unity and not its price;

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<sup>6</sup> CDU leaders in Berlin, for example, tried to entice Honecker to visit their city, downplaying a host of traditional status issues to do so.

- the goal of unity is to be achieved by Germans only with the agreement (*Verständnis*) and support of their neighbors in East and West;
- overcoming the division of Europe and thus of Germany presupposes overcoming the East-West conflict;
- not changing borders but making them transparent and overcoming them through humanity and understanding with all of Germany's eastern neighbors is the core of the party's policy;
- the CDU wants dialogue with the churches, but also with other social and political groups and institutions [in theGDR].<sup>7</sup>

These statements would have done little more than bring declaratory CDU policy into harmony with the day-to-day policy of Bonn's governing coalition. But they were still controversial by CDU standards. Almost immediately the paper thus came under attack for omitting the term reunification and creating the impression that Bonn's partners in the EC could veto German unity. Some labeled it a sellout of longstanding party commitments; others merely called it imbalanced. Rupert Scholz, for example, conceded that current realities made a policy to ameliorate the nation's division necessary, but added: "*Deutschlandpolitik* must not be transformed into its opposite by [a policy that] gives up its own normative positions—reunification, preserving the national option, and the task of state unity for the Germans."<sup>8</sup>

Chancellor Kohl and other party mediators put a good face on the discord, saying it illustrated how seriously the CDU took the national issue. Nonetheless, the presidium thoroughly revised the paper. As in the earlier draft, European unity was designated as "the decisive task for the future," but it was no longer singled out as the party's main aim. Instead, whereas the first version never used the term reunification, the revised statement opened with a quote from Konrad Adenauer: "The reunification of Germany in freedom was and is the most urgent goal of our policy." The word reunification

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<sup>7</sup> Draft cited in *FAZ*, February 19, 1988.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, March 24, 1988.

reappeared several more times as well. The final draft also dropped any reference to the need for Germany to win the "agreement" of its neighbors before reunifying, stating instead "we need [their] understanding and support." Such sympathy, it added, would be possible when "the solution to the German question is embedded in a European framework and takes place not against but in accordance with well-understood interests of neighbors." A catalogue of documents containing expressions of the legal basis for German unity was also inserted into the final version.

In short, a controversial manifesto was watered down to another opaque compromise. Nothing better exemplified this than the dilution of the first draft's appeal to help remove the divisive character of Europe's borders: in the final version it read "[the CDU wants a Europe] in which the arbitrary borders are *aufgehoben* and not merely made transparent." The ambiguous key word, which philosophers suggest also served Hegel so well, enabled the party to imply that it aimed either to deprive existing borders of their meaning or to abolish them altogether—two sharply contrasting policy objectives.

Even after it was diluted and endorsed by Kohl, the party statement sparked debate at the Wiesbaden convention.<sup>9</sup> Several district party groups proposed adding still stronger orthodox language to the final draft, such as specific reference to the continued existence of Germany in its borders of 1937. They scoffed that the term "unity of the *nation*" was far more vague than state unity. Specific reference to the GDR came under fire as well. Fundamentalists also rejected any hint that Germany's neighbors might have a say

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<sup>9</sup> Kohl stressed that the CDU must keep the issue of unity alive so that other less democratic forces could never exploit national sentiments. However, he also pointed out that so long as unity was not possible, policy must focus on "doable" tasks, above all, on improving the lives of ordinary Germans through dialogue. As for the future, Germans could not solve their national problem in a way that ignored larger issues in the community of states and thus "should never lose sight of the interests of neighbors in East and West." All democrats agreed that the division could not be ended by nineteenth-century-style power politics; instead Germany must seek detente with the East and respect the rights of its Western allies. *FAZ*, April 15, 1988.



in unification. Calls again came for a diplomatic campaign aimed at pressing the Western allies to put unification on the agenda of European diplomacy. A united Germany going its own way as a neutral state even found a bit of backing.

Reformists fired back that Bonn's goal must be "to make the division more liveable" for GDR residents through structures that spanned the border; without such a network of human contacts, national unity in whatever form could never be achieved. They did agree that Bonn should remind its allies of their obligation to press for unification, but said Germany must focus primarily on winning sympathy and understanding from its friends.

After a few hectic hours of fending off amendments from all directions, the meeting's chairman, Ottfried Hennig, parliamentary state secretary in the Inner-German Ministry, concluded that "all parts of our party can now live with the balanced result that has come about through very strenuous consultations."<sup>10</sup>

#### THE DECISIVE YEAR: 1989

In short, both flanks of the party tried in vain during 1988 to clarify CDU *Deutschlandpolitik*. Nonetheless, despite the rapid pace of events in Europe—or perhaps because of it—no specific strategy for overcoming the nation's division emerged. Either alternative, whether it emphasized or downplayed reunification, demanded too high a price in terms of existing German foreign policy commitments and party unity. Comfortable ambiguity prevailed instead.

However, as 1988 became 1989, all segments of the party increasingly recognized that reform sweeping the East bloc would affect the German situation. Often without saying so explicitly, they

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<sup>10</sup> All references drawn from *Protokoll: 3. Bundesparteitag der CDU*, June 13–15, 1988, Wiesbaden. Reformists did not give up. Later that year, Geissler spoke of the "fruitful tension" between national and European unity. With the decline of the nation-state and the expansion of freedom in Europe, he said, borders were losing their meaning: "It would be a historic mistake [to believe] we can restore the German national state in the borders of nineteen-hundred and XY." Adenauer and Strauss had said much the same, he insisted. But at a session of the CDU/CSU *Fraktion*, he received little backing.

agreed that the SED faced increasing internal and external pressure to emulate its liberalizing neighbors. Thus progress toward freer elections, human rights, and greater travel anywhere in Eastern Europe, Kohl observed, was progress toward self-determination for the German nation.

Partly for this reason, the party also agreed that Bonn's diplomacy should foster reform throughout the East, something to which Foreign Minister Genscher was already committed.<sup>11</sup> It joined in the warm welcome given to Gorbachev during his triumphant progress through Germany in June and endorsed calls to grant the father of *perestroika* large-scale Western aid. That spring the CDU also approved a large bank credit for Hungary and, more grudgingly, conditional aid for the reformist coalition in Warsaw, as well as the general idea of a conciliatory gesture to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Nazi Germany's march into Poland.

Honecker and other SED leaders continued to ignore all such hints that a looser rein would reap rewards, and their obstinacy sparked more discontent and requests for exit visas. Yet, while condemning this stubbornness and the tension it produced, CDU leaders still assumed that change east of the Wall would come about only when the established authorities agreed to it. They therefore saw no alternative to continued cooperation with the SED regime, hoping it could be induced to emulate the incremental reformism of Hungary; in mid-July, for example, Kohl dispatched Rudolf Seiters to East Berlin for discussions on ways of improving relations between the two neighboring states.

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<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Schäuble told an interviewer in late 1988: "I assume that at some point or another, which I cannot now discern, the situation in Germany will fundamentally change. This can also be already in the near future." He went on to say that the double pressure on Honecker—from Gorbachev and his own subjects—put the SED in a vulnerable position. Without destabilizing or depopulating the East, he argued, Bonn should expand German-German contacts while convincing the SED leadership that "setbacks" would thereby carry an ever-higher price: "There must be much at stake for the GDR and for the Kremlin if they reverse the progress achieved." All this meant more hope for greater freedom for Germans, "and more freedom will in the end lead to more unity." *Braunschweiger Zeitung*, December 2, 1988.

Despite harmony among CDU leaders on the need to continue negotiations, however, there was still the familiar discord on other points. Now more than ever, reformists argued, it would be foolish to set any obsolete limits on Bonn's Eastern diplomacy, even if this meant sacrificing some cherished elements of orthodoxy. Aside from urging unconditional financial aid to Poland, they called for an explicit guarantee that even a *united* Germany would be bound by Bonn's acceptance in 1972 of the Oder-Neisse border. Such gestures would—among other things—foster reconciliation and bolster the position of the Polish prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, sending a signal to Honecker in the process. Moreover, they argued, an expanded dialogue with all groups in the GDR, even those close to the SED, would serve to promote change. During debates over an early draft treaty on European union and throughout the 1989 campaign for EC parliamentary elections, they proclaimed that Germany's national goals would not interfere with this integration process.

Fundamentalists fiercely retorted that even now—indeed especially now—reunification remained the party's primary stated goal and should not be subordinated to the quest for dialogue with the East or integration with the West. What they called the government's deplorable vagueness on this front was, in their view, already driving traditional CDU/CSU supporters to the upstart nationalistic *Republikaner*. Bonn must thus make it much clearer that, for example, only a united Germany could define its eastern borders; binding statements now would merely call into question the claim that Germany's division remained legally provisional.<sup>12</sup> Several CDU parliamentarians also lambasted the Strasbourg parliament's draft treaty on European union, demanding reservations that would allow Germany to decide alone, without permission of its EC partners, whether to pursue German unity and even to pull out of the European union if it so decided. Otherwise, they held,

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<sup>12</sup> Many in the CDU applauded when CSU chairman, Finance Minister Theo Waigel, declared that the German Reich continued to exist in its borders of 1937, saying that this only reiterated what the constitutional court had ruled.

giving up sovereignty to a federated Europe would make national unification legally impossible.<sup>13</sup>

Reformists fired back that such "fully superfluous discussion" damaged the larger goal of a European peace order in which all Germans could find their way back together.<sup>14</sup> They deplored the revival of "German-nationalistic voices ... [and] aggressive German

jingoism [*Deuschtümelei*]."<sup>15</sup>

As usual, Kohl and other intra-party mediators struggled to bridge or straddle two positions on all such issues. They quickly disavowed rhetoric certain to sabotage planned summits with Gorbachev and Mazowiecki, dialogue with the GDR, and momentum toward European integration. The chancellor repeated his warning, by now familiar, that merely asserting legal positions did not make for good policy. Talk of state unity almost never surfaced in his speeches for most of 1989; less blunt formulations like national unity and self-determination took its place. Alongside them were reminders that Bonn would continue to honor the letter and spirit of the Warsaw treaty of 1972, under which the FRG accepted the Oder-Neisse border. Nor, Kohl said, would Bonn ever consider slowing progress toward a European internal market and political union simply to protect the option of national unity.<sup>16</sup>

All the same, Kohl and fellow mediators by no means entirely abandoned the legalisms and rhetoric of CDU orthodoxy. Kohl explicitly reminded Gorbachev of Bonn's "constitutional obligation and political determination to achieve in free self-determination the unity and freedom of Germany." In the same vein, the chancellor also would not commit Germany to a final, formal pledge on the Polish border. "There is no necessity to begin a border discussion," he said somewhat ambiguously.<sup>17</sup> When Richard von Weizsäcker's conciliatory letter to Polish leaders implied just such a guarantee,

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in *Die Zeit*, January 27, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Ulf Fink, in *FAZ*, July 14, 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Ulf Fink in *ibid.*, July 11, 1989.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, May 19, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, July 7, 1989.

Kohl distanced himself from the federal president and blocked efforts of the SPD to win endorsement of the letter in the *Bundestag*.<sup>18</sup> Open CDU contact with groups in the GDR, such as its political namesake—the *Ost-CDU*—remained forbidden. And party mediators continually pointed to special clauses in the Treaty of Rome, which they said legally bound Bonn's partners in the EC to help promote and ultimately accept German unity.

In late summer, the SED regime began to collapse, as its citizens flooded across Europe's increasingly porous borders. Though preoccupied with an internal party crisis, delegates to the CDU's convention in Bremen in September cautiously welcomed the unfolding drama to their east. Even a few reformists used the word reunification, while Kohl declared that the German question belonged on the international agenda. Party leaders promised to raise the issue with Bonn's Western partners.

Yet, despite the air of drama—or perhaps exactly because of it—the party as a whole still did not commit itself to a specific plan for ending national division. As Kohl declared: "We have never been so close to realizing this vision [of reunification] as we are today, provided we set the right priorities and do not raise certain questions at the wrong time ..."<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, the CDU welcomed the refugees, assured them of their right to West German passports, and reminded them which party in Bonn had most strongly opposed recognizing a separate GDR citizenship. To be sure, no one in the Union wanted the blame for sparking an explosion east of the Wall, and all denied any desire to depopulate, isolate, or destabilize the GDR. Indeed, when Seiters declared that East Germans seeking refuge in the FRG's permanent mission in East Berlin created more problems than it solved, and when Bonn temporarily dosed the office, there was no

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<sup>18</sup> Von Weizsäcker had planned to visit Warsaw on this anniversary and sent a letter to its new non-Communist government that read: "My country has given a binding pledge not to make *any* territorial demands on Poland now and in the future."

<sup>19</sup> CDU, *Bundesparteitag der CDU Deutschlands, Bremen, September 1989*, CDU-Bundesgeschäftsstelle.

criticism from within the CDU. Dialogue rather than pressure remained paramount during these hectic weeks. Throughout the autumn, Kohl even offered to meet GDR leaders, including Honecker himself, and to make "a concrete, future-oriented offer" of assistance in exchange for the SED's readiness to launch economic and political reforms.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, for the first time, more than small steps clearly seemed possible, and CDU leaders thus gradually grew more ambitious. Beginning in September they urged the SED to end its power monopoly, to invite opposition groups to a round table discussion about the country's future, to guarantee civil liberties, and to hold free elections. A process of genuine self-determination for Germans in the East, so long a vain hope, now seemed within reach.

In the CDU's view, did this necessarily mean an end to the nation's division? Reformists saw no reason to push change too openly, let alone in the direction of national unity. Kurt Biedenkopf, for example, warned against what he called crude efforts to demand sweeping reforms in exchange for aid from the West, pressure that would "overpower" its eastern neighbor. He proposed instead unconditional aid to improve a rotting infrastructure in the East and even a pledge to accept the GDR's continued existence. Only then, he said, would authorities dare to accept real reform that would give people enough security to remain at home. Geissler even charged "arsonists" in his own party with wanting to spark a conflagration in the GDR. He and Lothar Späth also cautioned that the pace of events in Germany should not be allowed to overtake European unification.

Not surprisingly, the party's right flank was far less shy about what it labeled this "renaissance of German identity." It urged the American president to discuss unification at his next superpower summit and sharply reminded Bonn's suddenly uneasy partners in Paris and London about their obligation under the *Deutschlandvertrag* to work for German unity. If the EC could not digest a united Germany, many added, complete European integration ought

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<sup>20</sup> FAZ, October 5, 1989.

to be discarded in favor of a broader, less cohesive Europe of nation-states, a federal yet decentralized entity stretching from Portugal to Poland. And if need be, defenders of the orthodoxy warned, Germany should even reunify without the support of its Western friends.

Even amidst such commotion, Kohl continued his balancing act—right up until a state-of-the-nation address on November 8, just hours before the curtain unexpectedly went up on the drama in Berlin. Germans in the East wanted to shape their own futures, he declared. Yet "practical cooperation" with the GDR remained the best way to help them, and they needed the patience to await reform and "evolutionary change." At the end of this process lay self-determination, and then—only if the East Germans so decided—reunification, a term that surfaced very rarely in his address.

As for borders, Kohl declared, "we cannot change and do not want to change legal positions," and he repeated the pledge, by now ritual, to honor "the letter and spirit" of the 1972 Warsaw treaty "in all its parts." Under heavy pressure from the FDP on the eve of his trip to meet with Mazowiecki, Kohl did accept a resolution stating that "Germans"—and not merely the Federal Republic—would make no future claims on Polish territory. At the same time, that concession came packaged with references to past agreements, which the CDU said upheld the provisional aspect of any pre-unity border accord. Nor did Kohl concede that his party saw a need to choose between its national and Western priorities. "Reunification and Western integration, *Deutschlandpolitik* and European policy," he declared, "are different sides of the same coin."

Toward the end of his speech, Kohl warned: "We should avoid the assumption that resolution of the German question can be predetermined with a script and schedule in hand. History does not hold to a calendar. Historic developments do not run according to a firm timetable."<sup>21</sup> A day later the Berlin Wall was opened.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., November 9, 1989.

## CONCLUSION

What happened after that point is best left to another talk. But in a summary of CDU *Deutschlandpolitik* before November 9, 1989, one conclusion is inescapable: the party lacked a consensus strategy specifically designed to end Germany's division—an integrated, coherent, active reunification policy. Policies it supported during the late 1980s did not add up to an integrated concept for erasing or transforming the GDR. Partly due to genuine ambivalence, partly because of its own unbridgeable internal differences, the CDU instead struck an uneasy balance between its maximal goal of state unity and other aims—dialogue with the East and EC integration.

Yet to some extent, that flexibility, that ambiguity, served the party and even the country well. Never foreswearing national goals such as unification reassured many conservative voters who might have otherwise fiercely opposed a *Deutschlandpolitik* consisting solely of dialogue with the East. They might have even opted for a more radically nationalist cause that would have set back any hope of unification. As one official declared, it was the Union's special mission to integrate various strands of opinion and thereby preserve a broad consensus for a balanced government policy.<sup>22</sup>

To be sure, compared to their SPD rivals, CDU leaders often seemed out of touch with mainstream German public opinion during the 1980s, since they were more frequently embroiled in debate over arcane legal issues rather than in the formulation of practical policy. But hindsight also suggests that the Union's stubborn refusal to rule out unification—indeed its deliberate vagueness on this score—actually came closer to reflecting the underlying sentiment felt, if not always expressed, by most Germans.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., March 28, 1988.

<sup>23</sup> The SPD was more willing to abandon this goal. According to Hans-Jochen Vogel, a European peace order should permit the Germans "without regard to their *staatliche* organization to continue understanding themselves as members of one and the same historical, cultural, linguistic, and emotional community, thus of one nation ... [and] stand in peaceful competition with



Beyond that, some of the legalisms that the CDU defended until 1989 ultimately proved far less abstract than many critics had anticipated. One example was the right to FRG citizenship that, in part, emboldened a great number of East Germans to cross the border, which helped spark the GDR's final collapse. Even while bargaining extensively with East Berlin authorities, moreover, CDU leaders still kept some distance from the SED regime, which was often not true of their Social Democratic rivals. To be sure, ex post facto Union accusations of appeasement in this regard may be unduly self-righteous. Yet it nonetheless helped preserve the morale of East Germans to know that not all in the West were willing to treat their SED overlords as fully equal and legitimate partners. And ultimately, the survival of CDU orthodoxy, however modified in form, ensured against prejudicing or discarding the option that many never expected Germans to have—state unity.

Perhaps most important, by keeping the feeble flame of reunification alive while also eschewing a detailed plan for achieving it, the party left Bonn's diplomacy the kind of latitude needed during the remarkably fluid situation of the late 1980s. Social Democrats, who seemed so much more realistic in developing models that treated the partition of Europe as permanent, often became prisoners of their own premises; by contrast, the CDU consciously foreswore any attempt to shape the future or even foresee it, perhaps fearing what might actually lie ahead. German diplomacy profited from what to many may simply seem like an inclination to improvise. For in the changing political landscape of Gorbachev's Europe, an outdated plan for either abandoning *or* achieving national unification might only have led to the wrong destination.

Was this foresight, or lack of it; leadership, or the absence of it? Plainly, *party* leaders considered their own flexibility entirely intentional and prudent. As Wolfgang Schäuble noted in late 1988, this time of rapid change was not the time for a grand design.<sup>24</sup>

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one another inside their distinct social orders." *Die Zeit*, December 16, 1988.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Schäuble, "Relations between the Two States in Germany: Problems and Prospects," *International Affairs* 64 (Spring 1988):215.

Ottfried Hennig also cautioned impatient colleagues that "magic formulas" or "patent remedies" would, in a time of unforeseeable developments, merely commit Bonn to ways of thinking that might quickly prove obsolete.<sup>25</sup> Yet, in part, the party also simply made a virtue out of necessity: its internal unity could not have withstood a policy that clearly moved in one direction or the other too fast.

In the final analysis, moreover, one cannot deny that fortune smiled upon Helmut Kohl and his party. In the age of Gorbachev and the fundamental changes he produced, however inadvertently, the German question was bound to be transformed.

And, of course, the CDU's non-committal approach to the national question also had high costs: some it quickly paid off after November 9, 1989; others it left outstanding.

To take one example: Continual appeals for state unity, above all from CDU fundamentalists, gave foes of reform throughout the Soviet bloc a pretext for slowing the process that ultimately resulted in the GDR's collapse. In this sense, it was perhaps not the active exponents of unity, but rather CDU reformists (and, of course, the FDP and SPD) who, by urging dialogue and accommodation, may have helped hasten unification more than anyone—a goal they rarely mentioned and, ironically, a goal many of them may not even have truly wanted.

Its vague approach to national unity also left the CDU at a loss in the dramatic weeks after the Berlin Wall opened. Initially the party seemed uncertain as to what form a united Germany might take, that of a confederation or that of a federation; where its eastern border would lie; or how it would best fit into the EC. While most of these issues were quickly resolved through a combination of skill and good fortune, this ambiguity created mistrust in East and West—residues of which are still apparent, above all in Poland.

Perhaps the most complicated legacy of CDU *Deutschlandpolitik* results from the fact that, partially to preserve its own internal unity, the party sustained—indeed fostered—a strong sense of German national identity. CDU policy rested on the premise that this

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<sup>25</sup> *Texte zur Deutschlandpolitik*, Series III, Vol. 6, 449.

national consciousness would remain a positive, integrative force, and that it would be easily—indeed inevitably—reconciled with rapid movement toward ever-more supranational European structures.

Can the party now contain and guide the kind of national sentiment it expressly sustained for so long? In this sense, the legacy of the CDU's own success in helping to achieve unity is now the opportunity of validating Alois Mertes' belief that German national interests would never again be separated either from the interests of Europe as a whole or from the ideals of freedom and peace. Meeting this opportunity, and indeed this challenge, is the special mission of Mertes' political heirs in the 1990s, and all of Germany's friends can only wish them success.