

Foreign Policy Association together with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung offer you a newsletter on foreign policy and European integration issues of the Republic of Moldova. The newsletter is part of the "Foreign Policy Dialogue" joint Project.

# NEWSLETTER

MONTHLY BULLETIN • SEPTEMBER 2019 • NR.9 (163)

## Synthesis and Foreign Policy Debates

The newsletter is developed by Sorina Ștefârță, editor-coordinator

### TOPICS OF THE EDITION:

1. HE Angela Ganninger, German Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova: „We are counting on the new Government to fully implement the Association Agreement with the European Union in word, deed and spirit”
2. Editorial by Oleg Serebrian, political scientist, writer, Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to Berlin: “What is Germany..”
3. Dr. Fritz Felgentreu, member of the German Bundestag and chairman of the German-Moldovan Forum: “The secret is not to become overly dependent of one single power only”
4. Expert Opinion. Markus Meckel: „The Difficulty of Remembering -Differences in Assessment”

### News in Brief



The European Commission approved on October 10<sup>th</sup>, on behalf of the EU, the payment of a 30 million euro instalment to the Republic of Moldova: 10 mln in the form of grants and 20 mln as loan. It is the first of the three payments planned under the Macro-financial Assistance Programme for the Republic of Moldova adopted in September 2017, but suspended in the summer of 2018, because of the non-transparent invalidation of the election results in Chisinau municipality. After the new Government embarked in June 2019 on a comprehensive process of strengthening the independence of justice and combating corruption, the Commission and the European External Action Service decided that the political pre-requisite for the payment of the first instalment had been fulfilled. According to Pierre Moscovici, European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, “The European Commission is ready to continue its close collaboration with the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to contribute to the achievement of a broad and ambitious set of necessary economic and structural reforms with a view to ensuring jobs, economic growth and investments to the benefit of citizens”.



Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, was in Chisinau on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Here, during the meetings with the top leadership of the country, Federica Mogherini referred to the main actions that the Government is currently focusing on such as the justice reform and the fight against corruption, the appointment of a new professional and upstanding General Prosecutor, the investigation of bank fraud and money recovery, organizing free and fair local elections, but also promoting Moldova's interests abroad. The head of the European diplomacy said that her visit to Chisinau is a signal of the relaunching of relations between the EU and the Republic of Moldova and appreciated the determination of the Cabinet led by Maia Sandu in carrying out the comprehensive reform agenda. In her turn, Prime Minister Maia Sandu underlined that the Association Agreement and the European integration policy give us the most realistic chance to create a functional state. The head of the government appreciated the continuous assistance offered by the EU to our country due to which 70% of the exports go to the EU, over 6000 companies benefited from support, over 3000 jobs were created and over 700 kilometres of road were rehabilitated.



The actions and priorities to be included in the current Republic of Moldova - Council of Europe (CoE) Action Plan for the years 2019-2020 were discussed at an extended meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. The CoE representatives and those of the national authorities exchanged views on the impact of the completed and ongoing projects, and identified the actions and priorities to be included in the current Plan. Nicu Popescu, the head of the Moldovan diplomacy thanked the CoE for contributing to various areas of strategic importance for the Republic of Moldova and mentioned the impact and results of implementing assistance projects in areas such as strengthening democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights. At the same time, he stressed the need to mobilize internal and external resources in order to advance the reform processes in the country, which will be visible to the citizens.

## The German lesson, which we are still learning how to learn



Foto: <https://kadiasfood.files.wordpress.com>

### Sorina Ștefârță

The current issue of the newsletter “Syntheses and Debates on Foreign Policy” is dedicated to Germany. Well nothing special is happening in Germany these autumn days. It's just a crossroad of two anniversaries - 29 years since the reunification of the state, produced on 3 October 1990 and 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, which happened on 9 November 1989. And a model of how

to resist and be reborn – literally and figuratively - from its own ashes; how to build your future with dignity, assuming fully your past; how to prosper and assert yourself worldwide; and how to become what we call today “the political and economic engine of the European Union”. And ... just an example of how to be a friend. Because Germany remains, for nearly 30 years, one of the faithful friends of the Republic of Moldova.

Each of those who interacted with Germany has his/her own history with ‘the country of the 16 Länder’. For some, this means philosophy and literature. For others it is just BMW, Mercedes and Volkswagen ... For some this means the chance to do a PhD through DAAD or to benefit from high-quality medicine, which they have not been able to find at home. For others Germany identifies with

- ▶ the fact that they have tap water due to the dozens of projects carried out by GIZ in Moldova...

For me, Germany is the first European media project, thanks to which, in the early 2000es, I was able to talk to my fellow citizens about Europe and our need for Europeans. And it also means ... the lesson about the value of the present in which we live. A peaceful and more or less free present.

It happened to me some years ago, in autumn, in Berlin, on my first visit to this city and country. I had taken a few extra days to the "official" ones, as much as to fit within the time limits of the visa, which was very carefully restricted by the German Embassy, even though it was the Embassy that invited me there (yes, yes, "some years ago" the Moldovan citizens needed visas to travel to the EU!). But that was enough for me to fall in love with this city.

In one of the evenings, wandering along the streets, I came across a piece of wall. It was a remnant of the Berlin Wall, the sad symbol of the Cold War, erected in 1961 and demolished only after 28 years, in 1989. Full of multi-coloured graffiti, that piece of wall no longer resembled the concrete wall that divided a city, a nation, and a country for almost three decades. And yet there was something grim and I found myself crying. I was thinking that moment how I would I feel if one morning I found out I could no longer visit my brother who lived in Buiucani, while me living in Botanica. Obviously, like all the brothers and sisters, the two of us used to fight in the childhood and even today we are arguing. But for someone else to decide whether or not I can see him?!

Not once I remembered that Berlin night. I remembered that whenever I saw my fellow citizens, but also the politicians stubbornly refusing to take on the past - deportations of tens of thousands of people to Siberia, for instance - but at the same time trying to revive another past – kolkhozes. All of them, pretending to be thinking about the future. But future can be built by reconciliation. And reconciliation - human and historical - is possible by recognizing and accepting memory, not by denying it. Only in this way can freedom be born.

It is probably the most important lesson that Germany gives us every day. It is probably the most important lesson we have yet to learn.

## **We are counting on the new Government to fully implement the Association Agreement with the European Union in word, deed and spirit**



### **HE Angela Ganninger, German Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova**

**G**ermany is one of the states that consistently and often without too much noise has supported the Republic of Moldova in its development efforts both from an economic point of view and from a political perspective. About the Moldovan-German relations today, but also about the lessons we could learn from the experience of the most powerful country in the European Union, I spoke with HE Angela Ganninger, German Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova.

■ Your Excellence, first of all, congratulations on the occasion of the National Day that you have recently celebrated and which marks 29 years since the unification of Germany. How much, in your opinion, did Germany manage to achieve from the expectations it had almost three decades ago?

■ Thank you for the congratulations. Expectations with regard to the benefits

of German reunification were tremendous and a great deal has been achieved. The fundamental freedoms – freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of travel and others – that were sorely missed in the GDR were available immediately. The justice system and the education sector in the "new Länder" (the former GDR) were reformed, while the infrastructure was modernised, etc. It is also true that German reunification meant a big reversal in the lives of many people, especially those from the former GDR. Not everyone managed to cope in the same way and not all individual dreams and expectations came true.

■ Did the Berlin Wall fall completely 30 years ago or is it still separating the Germans?

■ The Wall fell completely 30 years ago. There has been no wall separating Germans since then – physically or otherwise. But as I said, especially those who were born and raised and had a life, a family and a job in East Germany before the fall of the Wall experienced tremendous changes which, quite naturally, continue to have an effect to this day.

■ **What is the main lesson learned in those years? And what lessons could we learn from you so that we don't repeat your mistakes?**

■ It is always difficult to compare different historical situations and to draw lessons that can be applicable in a different context. What was useful for us 30 years ago was that we based our foreign policy on respect for international law, that we fulfilled our obligations to our friends and neighbours and that we worked in order to gain the confidence of the international community.

**Nothing will ever change for the better if nobody has the courage to tackle the major issues**

■ **How do you see today the Moldovan-German relations that during the last four to five years have gone through a period of "frost"? Who or what can defrost them? Can the recent visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration to Berlin be considered as a signal of the dialogue recovery?**

■ I would not call the last four to five years a period of frost. Germany has invested money and energy with the aim of improving the living conditions of many Moldavans – be it with regard to water supplies, energy efficiency, the health sector or fostering foreign investment in the Republic of Moldova. It is true, however, that we have gone through some difficult political times in recent years. We are counting on the new Government to fully implement the Association Agreement with the European Union in word, deed and spirit. And we are counting on the new Government to reform the justice sector, which was prone to political influence. Without any doubt, the recent visits by Prime Minister Sandu and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Popescu to Berlin have provided our bilateral relations with positive momentum.

■ **What is the situation in the field of economic cooperation between the two countries? Although Germany has always been among the largest investors**

**in the Republic of Moldova, in the public perception, the names remain the same – Südzucker, Dräxlmaier, now Kaufland. Is there anything else that we should know?**

■ There are other investors as well, of course. And some of those you mentioned have made additional investments recently. The German Government also provides assistance with regard to "sustainable economic development". One of the elements that Germany supports in this context is "vocational educational training" that combines theoretical training with practical on-site experience in companies. This concept is being promoted because there is a mismatch at times between the qualifications of the workforce and the needs of potential employers; and because there is a shortage of qualified workers in some fields due to ongoing migration.

■ **How do you see the reforms relaunched in Chisinau in this regard? To what extent is the emphasis placed where needed, when needed and how it is needed?**

■ Fundamental reforms take time in Moldova, just as in any other part of the world. Like any government in a similar situation, the Government of the Republic of Moldova has to make choices and to prioritise. And sometimes unexpected things happen and have to be dealt with as well. It is for the Government and Parliament to decide the where, when and how of the reforms. What we would expect is that political actors keep in mind the expectations and interests of the people of the Republic of Moldova.

■ **What are the chances of these reforms under the conditions of a governing coalition that many people today still don't regard as possible, functional and sustainable?**

■ Reforms are a challenge for many governments. What we know from experience is that implementing some of the major reforms will take time. We also know that nothing will ever change for the better if nobody has the courage to tackle some of the major issues – even if there is no guarantee of success. Reforms are necessary and we wish the Government every success in its endeavours.

**Diversification could be an asset if brought together in a sensible way**

■ **To what extent are you satisfied with the developments on the Transnistrian dossier in which Berlin has invested both logistically and diplomatically, but which still seems to remain an internal, regional and even international problem?**

■ The Transnistrian file is a complicated one. Germany will continue to support steps that improve the lives of people on both sides of the Nistru. And we will also continue to support the OSCE mission and its mandate.

■ **You have been in Chisinau for more than a year. What are in your opinion the strengths and the weaknesses of the Republic of Moldova?**

■ That is difficult to say in a few words. I often feel that the diversity – the different backgrounds, language skills, historical perspectives, etc. – of people in the Republic of Moldova could be an asset if brought together in a sensible way – as is the case in Switzerland, for example. However, I have come to understand that this remains a complicated and controversial issue.

■ **What projects does the German Embassy plan to develop in the future in order to deepen the cooperation at the official level as well as the popular diplomacy level?**

■ On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, we will present an exhibition on "The Power of Emotions. Germany 19/19" in the National Art Museum. It will be open to the public from 29 October through 17 November 2019. As to the next year, we are still working on some of our ideas. But we certainly hope to celebrate the festival of the German language with those involved in teaching as well as learning it. And we would like to organise another summer concert in Teatru de Vara in Valea Morilor.

■ **Thank you for the interview.**

**Sorina Ștefăruță**

## Editorial

# What is Germany...

**Oleg Serebrian,**  
*political scientist, writer,*  
**Ambassador of the Republic**  
**of Moldova to Berlin**

***It is curious the extent to which the end of the ages is associated with the fall of certain "built" landmarks, as if they needed a materialization to enter history and be understood by its consumers. The end of the era of absolutism is associated with the fall of the Bastille, while the end of the modern era - with the fall of the Winter Palace. The end of the last world conflagration is identified in history with the fall of the Reichstag, and the end of the Cold War - with the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is also interesting that the end of the Second World War as well as that of the Cold War occurred at a very small distance from each other - only a few meters, if it's to be more accurate, in the very centre of Berlin, a city that played a crucial role in the history of the 20th century.***

Thirty years have passed since the fall of the wall that separated the communist East from the democratic West. A generation that did not know the tensions of the Cold War grew up. Europe is no longer divided by concrete walls, although the traces of the demarcation lines are still visible today - in stone, but also in mentalities. And not just in Germany.

### ***German reunification, a (still) partial success***

In these three decades, Germany has made a huge leap. A country with 83 million population, by far Europe's largest demographic and economic power, the second financial and technological power of the world, the third world industrial and commercial force, the seventh military power of the planet is defying the pessimistic forecasts that have been made regarding its future despite the complex international conjuncture. Of course, there are still many voices claiming that the reunification of the two German states is only a partial success, that the trillions of Euros invested in the new federal lands did not bring the expected prosperity, did not produce a real economic miracle and did not erase the differences between the former democratic West and the former communist East. There are still many nostalgic people who remember that the old GDR was, in the seventies of the last century, the tenth industrial power of the world, with an incomparably higher standard of living than in the



other communist states and even in many West European states. The privatization policies that led to the collapse of the old industries in the East, the closure of hundreds of large companies and the laying-off of millions of people are also strongly criticized. This criticism is only partially justified because, despite the multiple problems and difficulties, the pace of development of the new federal lands is much faster than that of the countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovenia or Hungary, seen by many as champions of success in the former communist bloc.

### ***A natural interest in the region***

Moreover, Germany has also played an important role in the changes that have taken place in the post-communist states of the Central and South-Eastern Europe, being the largest investor in their economies and the most important trading partner for most countries of the region. The Republic of Moldova is no exception in this regard. Germany's interest in our region is natural too as there are too many communicating vessels- visible or less distinct- that link it to Eastern Europe - economically, socially and security-wise. This also explains the attention with which our partners in Berlin are following everything that is happening in the Republic of Moldova, but also in other nearby countries.

Thus, Germany has watched with interest and understanding the evolution of the political situation in Chisinau in recent months, with Berlin having a significant role in the changes that have occurred recently. The fact that just a few days after the investiture, Mrs. Maia Sandu was invited by the Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to make an official visit to Berlin is also very conclusive.

Germany is also one of the main foreign donors of the Republic of Moldova, but also the most important foreign investor in the industry of our country. Evidence of that is the presence on the Moldovan market of the largest German companies, including Kärcher, Knauf, Südzucker, Sumitomo Electric Bordnetze, Dräxlmaier, where thousands of our people work. Also in the sphere of services we have several big German companies, such as Metro, Kaufland, Mabanaft. Thus, despite the rather unfavourable regional situation caused by the instability in Ukraine, the interest of German entrepreneurs for the Republic of Moldova remains high. Many are attracted by the advantages offered by the free economic areas we have, by the geographical location of the country or even by the cost of production.

The role of Germany in the negotiations over the Transnistrian issue is not to be neglected either. In 2016, during the OSCE German Chairmanship, Berlin came up with some concrete initiatives that were the basis of the actions taken later in the regulatory process. We can say that the 2016 OSCE German Chairmanship was one of the most dynamic and active on the Transnistrian dimension. The current RFG ambassador to Romania, Mr. Cord Meier-Klodt, at that time special representative of the OSCE German Chairmanship for the Transnistrian issue, had a special role in developing and promoting the “small steps” concept.

### **Past, present, future**

Our present is linked to Germany, but also our history - perhaps even more than one might think at first sight - as well as many inter-human relations. The ones who laid the foundation of the first capital of the Moldovan Voivodeship, Baia, were the German colonists invited in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the Hungarian kings. Also in other Moldovan medieval cities, the German presence was very important, the names of towns such as Piatra Neamț (*Neamț* translates as *German*) or Târgu Neamț being evidence to that.

Many representatives of the Moldovan intellectual and political elites of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were educated at German universities. The modernization of the Principality of Moldova in the years of Mihail Sturdza's rule happened under the guidance of the German lawyer Christian Flechtenmacher, the father of the composer Alexander Flechtenmacher who wrote the melody for “The Hora of Unification”. Also in Bessarabia of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Germans left a deep imprint through such personalities as Karl Schmidt, the mayor of Chisinau, or Rudolf von Raaben, the governor of Bessarabia in the years 1899-1903. Today, in Germany descendants of 100 thousand Bessarabian Germans live keeping alive the memory of their parents' historical homeland, including by keeping the Museum of the Bessarabian Germans in Ludwigsburg.

After 1989, tens of thousands of former residents of the Republic of Moldova settled down in Germany. Some of them, such as the ballerinas Dinu Tamazlăcaru and Alexei Orleoco from the State Ballet in Berlin, or the professor Alexandru Mustea from the University of Bonn, carry the fame of our country not only in Germany, but also in the whole world, maintaining a close relationship with the country of origin.

In short, for the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, Germany has been a model for many centuries to follow. We, the Republic of Moldova, are no exception. There is a great sympathy for Germany and the German people in our country, but also a great opening of Germany for us. Throughout these three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall, I have always felt the support of Germany, which has been in many complicated times of our recent history the most determined Western ally we have had.

## **The secret is not to become overly dependent of one single power only**



### **Fritz Felgentreu, member of the German Bundestag and chairman of the German-Moldovan Forum**

**Dr Fritz Felgentreu has been a member of the German Bundestag since September 2013 and spokesman on security and defence policy of the SPD Parliamentary Group since January 2018. Dr Fritz Felgentreu is member of the executive committee of the German Atlantic Association and chairman of the German-Moldovan Forum since November 2015. Four years during which he got to know the Republic of Moldova not only by hearsay. Namely from this perspective**

**I asked Dr. Felgentreu about how our country is seen today in Berlin and how high the Chisinau chances are to make a qualitative breakthrough...**

■ **Mr Felgentreu, after a nearly glacial period, which has marked the Moldovan-German relations in the last four-five years, we are witnessing a revival and even a breakthrough. How do you see the Moldovan-German dialogue today?**

■ As you say: There is the prospect of a fresh start. In the last couple of years, Moldovan politics (and society) seemed cemented in a way that dispirited the country's friends abroad and drove the young, the critical, and the creative away. Now we see new possibilities.

## **The peaceful transition of power has helped to put Moldova back on the map**

■ **How do you assess the political developments in Chisinau over the last three to four months? How strong are – only if they are – in Europe the echoes of what has been called the “peaceful change” of Power in the Republic of Moldova?**

■ It has always been one of Moldova's handicaps that in a way it is Europe's forgotten country. The peaceful transition of power has fostered respect for Moldovan democracy and has helped to put Moldova back on the map for many, certainly for those who are interested in Eastern Central European affairs. Everybody is watching excitedly how things are developing. Will the new majority hold? Will the government be strong enough to act according to its plans and announcements? This reverberates across the borders of Moldova.

■ **What would you say to those who are still convinced that all the change has been reduced to a deal between three major world powers?**

■ I think the geopolitical competition between the great powers not only creates new dependencies but also opens up possibilities. At the moment, there is wiggle room for the mice between the elephants' feet. If a government has a sound strategy, it can find partners for development. This may be a volatile situation, but why not make the best use of it? The secret is not to become overly dependent of one single power only.

■ **One of the hot topics for the Moldovan society is the foreign policy of the country, and more precisely, the different and even contradictory messages promoted abroad, on the one hand, by the pro-European representatives of the Government, and, on the other, by the pro-Russian President. How dangerous is such a ping-pong for the Republic of Moldova and what “balancing” solutions are there in a regional context that is only apparently calm?**

■ It is not a question of either - or. Moldova has always been at a west-eastern crossroads,

which is, actually, not such a bad place to be. What's wrong with being pro-European and pro-Russian at the same time, as long as you are pro-Moldovan at heart? From an EU point of view, the implementation of the DCFTA should be the basis for the development of our relationship. But this leaves plenty of room for trading and preserving invaluable cultural links with the great northern neighbour. In the long run, I think Moldova can cherish its Russian heritage and its capability to be a builder of bridges even as an EU member state, the way Bulgaria never forgets what it owes to Russia. But the best first step for now is probably to commit to implementing the DCFTA in all its facets and stipulations. And that will take a huge effort for sure.

## **A positive development in Ukraine could serve as an inspiration to Chişinău**

■ **And also related to the regional context. Ukraine, our eastern neighbour, seems to be facing a new political crisis, arising from President Zelensky's acceptance of the so-called Steinmeier formula. Although it was proposed as a solution to the Donbas crisis, many representatives of the political class regard it as unacceptable, on the grounds that it would be a Russian “poisoned apple”. Also in Chisinau the idea is viewed with scepticism, several analysts being of the opinion that Ukraine has stated to be de facto being ‘transnistrianised’. What do you think about it?**

■ The question is: What can a Ukrainian government do to overcome the current deadlock? The historical answer Germany gave in a comparable situation was: Accept realities, get on with life, find workable solutions in the interest of the people living on both sides of the conflict, but never compromise on the goal of having a free and united Germany when the moment comes. The strategic patience paid off in 1989, after 40 years of division. But this is a very German perspective. Ukraine has to find its own path.

■ **To what extent could the implementation of this formula in Ukraine**

**be a signal of encouragement for Tiraspol, in the demand for a special status and the recognition of the elections they organize periodically?**

■ If it works in Ukraine, under much more complicated circumstances - which remains to be seen -, something like it can definitely work in Moldova. A positive development in Ukraine could serve as an inspiration to Chişinău. But if not, in my experience, pursuing a policy of step-by-step improvements that make people's lives easier is the best way to eventually reach a breakthrough.

■ **How do you see, in general, the developments and solutions on the Transnistrian issue, with Berlin making considerable efforts in the regulatory process ...?**

■ My inveterate optimism has been blunted a little bit by how slowly things have been moving along. Hopefully, the new majority, with its (partially) excellent connections to Moscow will be able to find viable solutions built on trust and goodwill where the old one could not. We'll see. But in any case, the Transnistrian question should not stand in the way of implementing the DCFTA.

■ **In November 2019, Germany is marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in 2020 Germany will mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of reunification. What are the main lessons learned in those years? And what lessons could we learn from the Germans, so that - possibly - we don't repeat your mistakes?**

■ Germany should not aspire to being the schoolmaster of Europe. We have been successful with the approach outlined before in this interview. I still believe in it, mostly because the people, the families have benefited from it even during the decades with no discernible progress towards reunification. But would it work to the same end in Moldova, or Ukraine? That is not for a foreigner to decide.

■ **Thank you for the interview.**

**Sorina Ștefăruță**

## Expert opinion

# The Difficulty of Remembering - Differences in Assessment

**W**hile the very fact of the (need for) German reunification in general does not cause any controversy in the German society, the way in which things have evolved subsequently - especially for the eastern part of the country - remains a subject of debate and even of academic or social research. The topic is getting relevant especially now, when Berlin, volens-nolens, will have to make an assessment of the three decades since there is only one Germany. But is it “just one” in the minds of German citizens? One of the politicians who is trying to answer this question is Markus Meckel.

*Markus Meckel is protestant reverend, politician, and co-founder of the East-German Social-democratic Party in 1989, which played an important role in the peaceful revolution. From 2013 to 2016 Mr. Meckel was President of the German War Graves Commission. From 1990 to 2009 he was member of the German Bundestag and in 1990 he served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of German Democratic Republic, negotiating German Unification in 2+4 Talks. About that period and about the years that followed is the chapter entitled “1989–1990: The End of the Cold War and Challenges for Europe”, signed by Markus Meckel for the book “Exiting the Cold War, Entering a New World”, edited by Daniel S. Hamilton and Kristina Spohr that will soon come out at the Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC. An abstract from this chapter we are presenting below.*

### Markus Meckel

Thirty years after the end of the Cold War and the upheavals and revolutions in Central Europe, it is significant that internationally, German unification counts as a great success story. I can only share this perspective: 1989-90 was the happiest hour for the Germans! Forty-five years after we Germans had brought so much terror and horror to all of Europe, we had the opportunity to live in freedom and democracy, united again, and with the acceptance of all our neighbours. I wouldn't ever have dared to dream that I would experience this!

At the same time, there is currently a discussion in Germany that focuses on dissatisfaction with the way unification has evolved. Particularly in eastern Germany there is a feeling among some that

they were “colonized” by the West and that their contribution to German unity remains underappreciated.

Of course, when it comes to describing and assessing events 30 years ago differences are apparent not only in Germany. Poland and Hungary, who blazed the trail for freedom and democracy with the militant slogan “back to Europe” and were the paragons of transformation in the 1990s, have become symbols of a considerable Euroskepticism under their current governments. Anti-liberal politics and upending European politics—and not just in these countries. How we remember the revolutionary years 1988 - 1991 has become a battleground for values and different points of view.

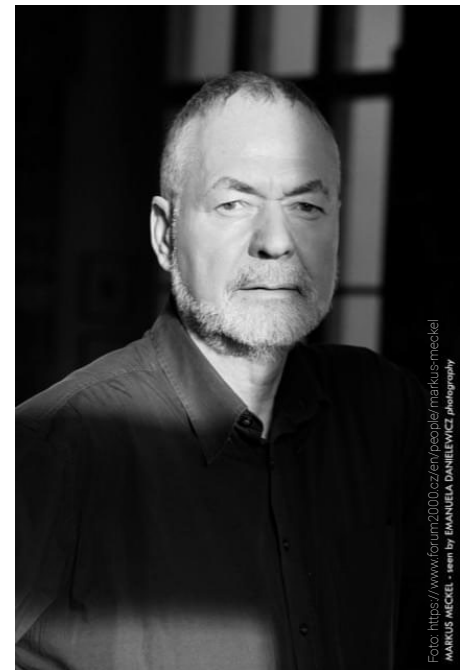


Foto: <https://www.forum2000.cz/en/people/markus-meckel>  
MARKUS MECKEL - seen by EMANUELA DANIELWICZ photography

If 30 years ago Gorbachev's policies were an essential prerequisite for change, in today's Russia he is largely regarded as the gravedigger of former (imperial) grandeur. For current Russian President Vladimir Putin, “the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century” was the disintegration of the Soviet Union and not, for example, Stalin's crimes or Hitler's destructive war. While the Soviet Union was ready to grant full sovereignty to united Germany in 1990, today's Russia does not accept the sovereignty of its neighboring nations. The annexation of Crimea and the hidden war in eastern Ukraine are only the most obvious examples of this. International law and common values, as they were celebrated in the 1990 Charter of Paris, are under great pressure today. Worries about a new Cold War are circulating.

Therefore, it makes a lot of sense to connect memories of the upheavals at that time with an analysis of current challenges, because our challenge is how the values that were asserted and proclaimed then can be realized today. The situation is made even more challenging by the fact that under President Trump there is now an administration in power in the United States that similarly disparages these values.

## **The Path to German Unity as the Process of East German Self-Determination**

Even 30 years later we Germans are still far from having a common view of the process of German unity, or even an understanding of the various perspectives that shaped it. Official anniversary events make this clear time and again.

For most (West) Germans, Helmut Kohl's image shapes German unity, as if it were his work alone. With all due respect to his important role, this is simply not the case. For most Germans, the 15 months from summer 1989 to October 3, 1990 have become one event. But I believe that for an appropriate understanding of this time, it is important to distinguish between three important periods.

The first was the culmination of the crisis in summer 1989, amplified by the East German exodus and the opening of the Hungarian-Austrian border; the fall of the dictatorship in the fall 1989 revolution; and the fall of the Berlin Wall. In this phase, the political action and leadership of the new opposition groups and organizations and the powerful pressure on the streets and in the squares produced a symbiotic dynamic that swept the regime from power.

The second phase took place between November 1989 and March 1990. It was the time when the prospect of free elections became real, when opposition groups met with the government of Hans Modrow to address popular concerns and pave the way for elections, and the building pressure that pointed the way to German unity.

The third phase took place between March and October 1990, beginning with the free elections in the GDR on March 18, the decision of the elected *Volkskammer* that the GDR would accede to the Federal Republic of Germany according to Article 23 of the Federal Republic's Basic Law, and the internal and external negotiations on German unification, leading to the currency union

on July 1 and the subsequent unification treaty and the 2+4 treaty.

### **The dictatorship in the GDR was brought down from the inside, not the outside**

These three phases had one common thread: the path to German unity was driven first and foremost by the actions of East Germans. The dictatorship in the GDR was brought down from the inside, not the outside. The East German people fought for free elections, which became a vote for unity. Accession to the Federal Republic was decided by the freely elected *Volkskammer*. In short, East Germany's path to freedom led directly to German unity. Seen from this perspective, German unification was the self-determined path of the East Germans, who pursued this with their heads held high.

Therefore, I believe that it is not accurate to speak of a victory of the West over the East. It is even dangerous to do this. Anyone who speaks like this is probably referring to the victory of freedom and democracy over the communist dictatorship that ruled Eastern Europe. Referring to this as the victory over the East is mistaken, for people who live there do not feel they were defeated. Throughout East Central Europe, including the GDR, the dictatorships were swept away by the peoples of the East, not the powers of the West. The end of the barriers separating the German people and Europeans East and West was a victory of the people who advocated for freedom and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

Of course, the West created basic conditions that were an important prerequisite for this transformation: among others, the successful and magnetic model of the European Community; freedom and democracy; prosperity and peaceful accommodation of various national interests; and the clear position of NATO, which relied simultaneously on deterrence and dialogue. The West was not inactive. On its own, however, it could not bring down the Soviet system without

endangering peace. That was the problem. When suppression occurred in 1953 in East Germany, people looked on helplessly—as they did in Hungary in 1956, in East Germany again in 1961, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and in Poland in 1981. The ultimate breakthrough, the freeing from dictatorship, had to come from within these countries themselves. And just that happened in 1989.

Through these years the Federal Republic could only react and try to influence these dynamics by facilitating people-to-people contacts and influencing East German actors. For the key lay in the GDR. When the revolution finally occurred in the East, it was then incumbent upon the West to bring the ship of German unity into harbour without great shocks, for this is precisely what the East Germans were not in a position to do. This included securing Four Power agreement to unity through the 2+4 talks, ensuring that all parts of a united Germany were included in the EC and in NATO, and reaching broader agreements with the Soviet Union and other European neighbours. This is where I acknowledge the special contribution of Helmut Kohl.

The many-layered nature of the decision-making process has not yet been appropriately researched nor is it present in the public consciousness. However, a differentiated view of this history is important because it is associated with our self-image today.

### **Legacies**

We originally entered the negotiations on German unity intent on forging a unified Germany that would not simply be an expanded Federal Republic in the sense of a "West Germany writ large," but a new joint state in which East Germans would not have to adopt everything that had grown up in West Germany. Some reformers in the West shared this hope. They showered us with reform proposals that we were supposed to incorporate into the negotiations even though they had failed time and again in the West. We were not even in a position to read everything



that came across the table! In the end, however, we were unsuccessful. German unity was an acquisition, not a merger. This has led to great disappointments.

The German-German treaty on the internal aspects of unification became a tour de force of the administration of the Federal Republic. It was the generously designed attempt to adapt the completely different social relationships in the GDR to the German Federal legal system so that it would cause as little pain as possible in the East, but also not make changes unless absolutely necessary. As Wolfgang Schäuble, the lead Western negotiator of the internal aspects of unification admitted, “the concern now is unity and not with this opportunity to change anything for the Federal Republic.”<sup>1</sup>

One important consequence of this approach is the lingering sense among large parts of the population in eastern Germany that their concerns and contributions were—and are—not really taken seriously. Implementation of unification has also been problematic. Despite massive economic transfers, in many respects the eastern *Länder* represent Germany’s *Mezzogiorno*—a region where dim economic prospects are exacerbated by outward migration. 30 years later, east Germans largely feel

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Schäuble, *Der Vertrag: Wie ich über die deutsche Einheit verhandelte* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1991), p. 156.

that their contributions are inadequately recognized. They have yet to arrive in unified Germany.

For some years, the reconstituted communist party, the PDS, reaped the political benefits from this disillusionment. Today, the protest vote is going to the right-wing *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). Germany’s various grand coalitions have failed to devote the necessary attention to the problems of eastern Germany. Even though Chancellor Angela Merkel and former President Joachim Gauck are each east German, they did not act on their special identity.

Nobody today denies that mistakes were made. To what extent alternatives at the time could have offered a better approach to the problems, however, is something that is still assessed very differently today.

One important example, which I still believe today was a big mistake, were decisions made regarding the constitution. Even in the constitution commission of the round table and in the *Volkskammer* there was considerable controversy around the nature of unified Germany’s constitution. However, the common goal was that unified Germany should provide itself with a new constitution based on the Basic Law. The West-SPD supported this explicitly. In March 1990, in a *Der Spiegel* conversation with Wolfgang Schäuble, I

mentioned that for us the concern was not to change so very much about the Basic Law, but rather that all Germans should create a constitution. I still believe today that even if this were a largely symbolic move, it would have strengthened the identification of East Germans with unified Germany as their state and common weal. But that too was rejected. What remained was the constitution commission of 1991-1994, a joint project between the *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat*, the two houses of the German Parliament, which produced meagre results.

Thirty years after the Peaceful Revolution and German unity, Germans east and west each face the task of recontextualizing their individual histories and experiences. Most people socialized in the West regarded the East as a “special zone,” and in their eyes, German history took place in the West. This overlooks the fact that much of German history in the 20th century was that of a divided postwar country of two different states. It cannot be understood if one fails to examine both halves and their intense relationship.

Thirty years on, the Germans are the people in Europe who know themselves the least. A national conversation is urgently required.

The opinions expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) or of the Foreign Policy Association (APE).



**Foreign Policy Association (APE)** is a non-governmental organization committed to supporting the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and facilitating the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in the context of the country Europeanization. APE was established in fall 2003 by a group of well-known experts, public personalities and former senior officials and diplomats, all of them reunited by their commitment to contribute with their expertise and experience to formulating and promoting by the Republic of Moldova of a coherent, credible and efficient foreign policy.



**Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)** is a German social democratic political foundation, whose purpose is to promote the principles and foundations of democracy, peace, international understanding and cooperation. FES fulfils its mandate in the spirit of social democracy, dedicating itself to the public debate and finding in a transparent manner, social democratic solutions to current and future problems of the society. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has been active in the Republic of Moldova since October 2002.