

# Political Culture in Germany

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# 18 Attitudes towards European Integration

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Europe now has a new chance for unification. The political situation of the world is in a state of flux, and Europe is one of its main foci. In all the Eastern European states people are summing up the events of 1989/90 in the phrase 'return to Europe' (Ash 1990). From a Western European viewpoint, it is rather the 'return of Europe' (Schulze 1990); with the old contours of Europe (unity in diversity) once more becoming visible, we can now rediscover a European normality long regarded as extinct (see Weidenfeld 1990). This 'return to Europe' involves the wish for constitutions based on the idea of liberty and human rights, and structured according to the principles of conciliation, compromise and democracy.

A new epoch, not merely a new phase, has now begun. The difficulties in determining attitudes towards European integration are further exacerbated by the coexistence of both new and old elements.

As regards the new elements, for the first time in its history Germany is uniting not against the wishes, but with the explicit agreement, of its neighbours, and is firmly integrated in Western systems of alliances. Germany has now assumed European normality since, as with Germany's neighbours, state and nation are identical (see Weidenfeld and Korte 1991a).

As regards the old, Europe can again put its own house in order. Since the Second World War, the partition of Europe has formed a completely new element in European history (Gasteyger 1990). It is only now that Europe's old structure is re-emerging; Europe can choose unity or diversity. The pictures from Eastern Europe have helped to bring old experiences and old settings back into Europe's awareness. Europeans in both East and West are beginning to think once more in historical and regional categories of life, not merely in terms of political alliance structures. The partition has thus ceased to be the sole possibility for a European existence.

No matter whether it is a return to or a return of Europe, whether it is new or old components in Europe's political content which are

involved, these attitudes are always traceable to pictures inside our heads (see Korte 1987). Such national or European images (how we perceive ourselves and are perceived by others) exert a determining influence on the community both in social and political terms (see Korte 1990a *passim*). People think and act in such images (Dreitzel 1962; Berger and Luckmann 1969; Dux 1982). Their behaviour is largely determined by such perceptions, since our consciousness in turn is determined by a linguistically composed picture of the world and of ourselves (see Frei 1985, p.12).

What picture do the Germans have of Europe, in concrete terms, today? Have the recent upheavals changed these attitudes? What are the differences and similarities between East and West Germans in this regard? What causal connection between European integration and German unity determines the Germans' attitudes in the process of political unification? (See Weidenfeld and Korte 1991a for further details.)

In order to arrive at a meaningful assessment of these questions, it is essential to comprehend that the Germans' attitude towards Europe is just one facet of complex collective alignments. The Germans' political and national consciousness receives its specific expression against the background of regional, European and global attitudes. It is precisely this differentiated multiplicity of their complex collective identity with its regional and transnational ties which is the best safeguard against susceptibilities towards any resurgent and aggressive nationalism. The weights within the collective perception will presumably change in Germany from 1990 onwards; unity will be taken for granted by West and East Germans alike. The questions regarding identity in the common European home will not be silenced by the mere fact of German unity, but these questions will most probably have a European quality about them; they will no longer be governed by the Iron Curtain as their determinant reality. The complicated history of Germany makes it unlikely that once unification has been achieved Germans will cease to be acutely aware of these developments. It is against this background that the Germans' attitudes towards Europe have to be fitted into the complex matrix of loyalties involved in home and society, state and nation.

## EUROPEAN ORIENTATION

West Germans in general are favourably disposed towards Europe. Between 1973 and 1988 an average 77 per cent of respondents in general population surveys answered that they were in favour of a

united Europe. In the autumn of 1988, this had decreased to 68 per cent (Unless otherwise quoted, all data are taken from the regular *Eurobarometer* surveys carried out on behalf of the EC Commission in Brussels). It was not until 1989 that interest in European integration began to increase once more: in spite of the rather lukewarm interest in the elections for the European Parliament in the rest of the EC, the population's positive attitude towards European integration showed an upturn during 1989. In summarizing central indicators from EC surveys in October/November 1989, the *Eurobarometer* concluded that the population's interest in EC politics had shown a significant increase. Four out of five persons asked thought that the Community's affairs were important for their country's future. Total support for the EC continues to increase.

The question ascertaining just how far the Germans regard their country's membership in the EC as beneficial reads as follows: 'Generally speaking, is membership a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?' In the autumn of 1989, 63 per cent of West German respondents thought the Federal Republic's membership was a 'good thing', and only 7 per cent opted for a 'bad thing'.

In May 1990, 76 per cent of East Germans thought EC membership of a united Germany was a 'good thing', with only 1.5 per cent giving it a 'bad' rating. The rating of a 'good thing' rose to as high as 87 per cent during the course of 1990; in no other EC country is there such a high proportion in favour of the EC as in the former GDR. Almost nine out of ten people are 'in favour of efforts to achieve a united Western Europe' (88 per cent). The West Germans (like the population of the EC as a whole) are a little more cautious in their enthusiasm: in the autumn of 1990, 81 per cent were in favour of efforts to unite Western Europe, and 69 per cent thought EC membership was a good thing. About 78 per cent of the population of East Germany are of the opinion that membership in the EC will have advantages for the former GDR, and 72 per cent would personally very much regret it if the EC were to collapse; among West Germans, these percentages are 56 per cent and 53 per cent respectively. It is interesting to note that the proportion of East Germans in favour of the EC actually increased during the process of unification.

## INTERESTS AND KNOWLEDGE

The *Eurobarometer* survey carried out in the autumn of 1990 also shows that the East Germans are very interested in the EC, and would

like to know more about it. No less than 67 per cent of the population in what used to be the GDR stated that they were 'very interested' or 'pretty interested' in matters involving the EC. In contradistinction, only 51 per cent of West Germans are interested in the EC, and among the entire EC population this figure amounts to only 47 per cent. The East Germans' desire for information continues to be very high; only one in ten feels that he or she 'knows enough about the EC and what it does', while almost 80 per cent would like to know more about it. By comparison, 28 per cent of West Germans feel they are sufficiently informed, while 54 per cent would like to know more.

### FUTURE PROFILES

Asked in 1990 about their aims for the future, over 70 per cent of Germans (76 per cent of East Germans, 70 per cent of West Germans) stated that they wish to see a United States of Europe in the 1990s (Deutschland 2000 1990, p.47). Approximately 40 per cent do not care which country the first pan-European head of government may come from. Around 49 per cent of East Germans (but only 40 per cent of West Germans) want to see a German at the head of Europe (Deutschland 2000 1990, p.48). This could be an indicator that national pride in East Germany is more marked than in the West (Korte 1990b). On the other hand, significantly more (60 per cent) East Germans than West Germans (43 per cent) are at the same time against a united Germany assuming a dominant position in Europe (*Spiegel Spezial* 1991, p.48).

### EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND GERMAN UNITY

The Germans' interest in EC politics and European integration, and the attitude towards a united Europe, have (as the data quoted above show) begun to increase again as from 1989, whereas up to 1988 there had been a continuous deterioration (Noelle-Neumann and Herdegen 1989). It is possible that the upheavals in Central and Eastern Europe have contributed to this phenomenon.

In concrete terms, West Germans' awareness of Europe has in no way weakened as a result of the unification process. In this context there are various questions requiring interpretation: 'What political objective is currently most urgent for you, what is more important for you: the unification of the two German states, or the single European

market from 1993?' In early 1990, a total of 53 per cent of West Germans gave preference to unification, and only 20 per cent thought the single European market was more important (Noelle-Neumann and Herdegen 1990, p.282). But, parallel to this, the mood in West Germany concerning the single market improved during the course of 1990; while attitudes towards the single-market project had worsened since late 1988, this trend would appear to have come to a halt with prospects of German unification. This line of interpretation becomes even more meaningful when the question is posed as to whether the drive towards European unification should be slowed down in the present situation or not: early in 1990 55 per cent of West Germans answered that European integration should not be slowed down. The objective of a united Europe has not, for the majority, been rendered obsolete by German unification, but rather the contrary (Noelle-Neumann and Herdegen 1990, p.284).

## EASTERN EUROPE

As far back as 1979 the question was asked: 'Should in your opinion only Western European countries belong to a united Europe, or should a united Europe include Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe?' (Noelle-Neumann and Herdegen 1984, p.315). Even then, as many as one-quarter of West Germans answered that Russia and Eastern European countries should belong to a united Europe. In 1984 (still before Gorbachev took office) this proportion had already risen to one-third. The friendlier attitudes towards the Soviet Union must not, however, be interpreted as a turning away from the West; 70 per cent of West Germans are still in favour of NATO membership. The Soviet Union's image is gradually coming to approximate that of the USA; by 1990 Moscow and Washington are rated almost equally by the Germans, with 68 per cent of West Germans and 65 per cent of East Germans having a good opinion of the Soviet Union (*Spiegel Spezial* 1991, p.25), and 79 per cent of West Germans and 60 per cent of East Germans having a good opinion of the United States.

## SUMMARY

For the West Germans, Europe means more than just the EC; although this continues to be a central factor of their European awareness, their

thinking (especially in the younger generation) additionally encompasses Eastern Europe as well, including the Soviet Union.

The feeling of being a European is very marked, and at the same time perceived with approval. This does not entail any losses in the strength of national identification patterns; these are still more marked and more intensive by comparison.

The Germans' attitudes towards the Soviet Union have undergone a far-reaching and significant change since the introduction of Gorbachev's reform policies; this has not impaired Germans' attitudes towards the FRG's ties with the West. It can, however, be assumed that this trend will have a beneficial effect on relationships with the other countries of Eastern Europe.

The European ideal is firmly anchored in the minds of West and East Germans alike, with the integration process in the EC generally approved; the majority of respondents continue to favour efforts to achieve the unification of Western Europe, and would regret a break-up of the EC. A majority likewise regard the EC as a good thing, with Germany profiting from its membership. Approval of the EC is significantly higher in the five new *Länder* than in the rest of the community.

Only a small proportion of persons asked express clear disapproval; instead of a diffuse enthusiasm for Europe, however, a more differentiated set of attitudes is becoming apparent, especially with regard to the consequences of the 1992 single market.

The subject of German unification has in the short term supplanted the questions of European integration in West Germans' minds. But the data show unequivocally how both objectives are linked to each other. The majority of West Germans, particularly in the current situation of ongoing German unification, also wish to see the process of European integration accelerated.

The return of or return to Europe offers new opportunities for the Germans. 'The state of the nation' (Dahrendorf 1990; see also Korte 1988; Weidenfeld and Korte 1991b) is a current topic once more. The upheavals in Eastern Europe have lent the nation states a new weight. Global interdependence has been too abstract a concept so far to satisfy identificatory needs motivated by socio-psychological factors. The nation state will be retained as a framework for identification, for even if the nation states in Europe today have similar goals in their foreign, security and economic policies, and their concept of civilized values are becoming increasingly convergent, the states will nonetheless long remain as large-scale receptacles for feelings of cultural and social

identity. European integration, however, will on the whole reduce the role of each individual nation state. The level of national identification may nevertheless grow with the increase in the political and economic integration of Europe and its internally competitive politics. The nation states will also continue to represent a protection against hegemonial aspirations. With partition ended and the German nation becoming part of everyday reality, 'normality' will now return. In the long term, the Germans' marked European orientation will most probably settle down to a lower level more consonant with the European average.