Administrative Assistance (June 17, 1994)

Abstract

The author, an employee of the Ministry of the Interior, examines the administrative assistance given to the new *Länder* by West German civil servants. He arrives at a positive assessment but does not fail to mention the problems associated with this help. While civil servants from the West accelerated the process of administrative restructuring, the use of Western leadership personnel and the loss of Eastern jobs also generated resentment.

Source

The Administrative Buildup in East Germany Succeeded / Sponsorships as an Aid to Quick Self-Help

When decisions made during the year of German unification are critically assessed from the vantage point of 1994, the results of this assessment do not justify the conclusion that the decisions made back then were wrong. This also applies to the decision to give the new federal states massive help in rebuilding their administrations by sending Western personnel. Granted, there were cases like that of one department head on loan from a West German municipality whose most urgent aspiration seems to have been the purchase of a low-priced property; or that of one female expert flown in from Bonn who turned right around and went back after inspecting her modest East German office.

Fortunately, these were the exceptions, and they can't cast doubt on the usefulness of Western help, even though today, at the end of the first rebuilding phase, one occasionally hears the call: "*Wessis*[1] go home." Mind you, a – West German – department head did in fact note critically that one occasionally saw too few *Ossis* in leadership positions. In his mind, that also had negative consequences: "The Western civil servants' quest for perfectionism occasionally slowed down the rebuilding; there were too many regulations, and they were too overly detailed. The East German civil servants who were retained didn't make decisions that were as perfect in legal terms, but they got things done."

Construction of a New Self-Government

Still, he doesn't question the necessity and usefulness of the Western help, nor does his – East German – office chief, who notes: "Without help from West Germany, we wouldn't have managed to do it so quickly." Given the virtually unanimous decision made after the fall of the Wall in favor of the legal and administrative systems of the West, there was no other choice back then: in a state system based on the rule of law, there was no place for the top-ranking political and administrative functionaries of the collapsed GDR, those responsible for the failed Communist system.

The *Volkskammer*'s decision of May 17, 1990, to reintroduce municipal self-government, and its decision of July 22, 1990, to reestablish the *Länder* that had disappeared back in 1952, meant that the administrations of 7,753 East German cities and municipalities, and of 179 counties [*Landkreise*] had to be rebuilt, and that the administration on the state level – state governments, intermediate agencies [*Mittelbehörden*], and federal offices – had to be constructed from the ground up. If one wanted to connect East Germany to the German administrative tradition, then it was inconceivable to accomplish this without guidance from West German administrative officials, especially lawyers. Does this mean that East Germans were the losers in this business? No, that's a prejudiced view and the numbers argue against it: in 1992, nearly 1.7 million people were working at all levels of administration in the new

Länder. Of those, 35,000 had been dispatched or transferred from the West: 15,000 in the federal administration, and 10,000 each in state and local administrations.

Career Setbacks

Of course, for many former [GDR] administrators, the *Wende* meant the loss of their jobs; the vast majority, however, stayed on. There were career setbacks: once Western standards were applied, former section heads suddenly found themselves as *Referenten* [officials responsible for a division]; department heads could barely be used as caseworkers. In the end, many were undone by their closeness to the regime, whether to the party or the security agencies. Manfred F., who came from West Germany and heads a post office, praises his East German personnel: “They all got the hang of it, and weak employees are something we also had in the West.”

He notices, however, that the pressure to cut personnel places a growing strain on his co-workers. The civil service in East Germany had far too many employees; in spite of numerous dismissals and the lower pay, personnel costs per citizen in East Germany are still one-third higher than in the West.

The basis for the building and rebuilding of the administration was the Joint Protocol on Principles that was part of the Treaty on the Establishing a Monetary, Economic, and Social Union of May 18, 1990. In it, the government of the GDR had agreed to reform its law on the basis of the principles of a liberal, democratic, federal, and constitutional [*rechtsstaaliche*] order – that is, on the basis of the Basic Law – as well as in accordance with the legal system of the European Community. Since that could be accomplished only with Western assistance, the federal government had committed itself to offering official help.

Sponsorships

The administrative help occurred on many levels: the federal government had to set up around 4,200 agencies; among them, almost 200 in the federal bureaucracy proper, more than 1,200 in the area of defense, about 100 border control offices, and about 1,300 offices each for the postal service and the railroad. When those were set up, it was possible to retain most of the approximately 420,000 employees in the personnel reservoir of the predecessor offices of the GDR.

Within the framework of sponsorships, West German state governments placed nearly 8,500 employees; about 1,500 came from federal agencies and were used above all in the ministries. Incidentally, the federal government focused its personnel help on establishing property, land registry, and surveying offices, in order to create the precondition for a successful rebuilding by reorganizing the legal framework of property.

Active Exchange between East and West

The East German municipalities are also benefiting from the idea of partnerships. The 40 communal partnerships that existed at the end of the GDR have turned into more than 2,000 cooperative relationships between West and East German municipalities and counties. As part of this cooperation, there was also an active exchange of professional knowledge – through the dispatching of about 10,000 officials to East German municipalities, and through internships and training courses for East German municipal officials in West German municipalities. The umbrella organizations successfully supported the rebuilding with numerous acts of assistance.

The federal government provided sustained support for this publicly minded help by subsidizing personnel costs, which means that West German advisors and helpers are compensated for income discrepancies – incomes in the public sector in the East are currently only at 80% of Western levels – and for higher expenses stemming from the maintenance of two households and trips back home. The

federal budget has set aside 170 million Deutschmarks for this (1993: 181 million Deutschmarks). For the federal government, a focal point of its personnel help was the training of new expert personnel and the continued training of personnel that stayed on. In 1992, the federal government trained about 10,000 young people from East Germany in its training institutions. By the end of this year, every East German employee is supposed to have had the opportunity to participate in a retraining program. Only by proceeding as such is there a chance that the East German administration will be able to continue working largely independently after the financial subsidy for personnel runs out at the end of this year.

NOTES

[1] The term *Wessi* refers to West Germans and *Ossi* to East Germans – eds.

Source: Klaus-Henning Rosen, “Verwaltungsaufbau in Ostdeutschland hat geklappt / Patenschaften als Hilfe zur raschen Selbsthilfe”, *Das Parlament*, June 17, 1994, p. 10.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: Administrative Assistance (June 17, 1994), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/a-new-germany-1990-2023/ghdi:document-3373> [October 13, 2026].