

European and German Unification – A Package Deal (1990)

Abstract

The former president of the German Central Bank, Hans Tietmeyer, recalls how Chancellor Helmut Kohl sought to calm international concerns about German reunification by recommending ways to intensify European integration. His recommendations included deepening the political union and the economic and monetary union.

Source

[...] The historic opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, fundamentally and irreversibly changed the relations between the two German states. In no time, the border, which had been sealed up to that point, became passable everywhere. At the same time, the political regime in the GDR started eroding more quickly. This process heralded the start of a peaceful reunification of the two parts of Germany, which had been separated since the end of the Second World War.

This German-German development, which also had an impact on the East-West relations of other countries, naturally also altered the landscape and the prospects for deliberations on further integration in Europe. Not only in the press, but also in political circles of some western European countries, approval for eliminating the former dictatorships [in Eastern Europe] was accompanied by reservations about the possible reunification of Germany. Some obviously feared that in the future an oversized Germany could disrupt the balance that had emerged in the postwar era in Western Europe and further strengthen Germany's position in the EC, which was already often perceived as dominant due to the strength of the Deutschmark. When Chancellor Kohl presented his Ten-Point Plan for German Unification to the German Bundestag on November 28, 1989, without having discussed it beforehand with France or any other partners, several European governments voiced clear reservations. Above all, Paris felt that it was inappropriate not to have been informed of such an important step in advance. In terms of substance, this declaration generated criticism especially because it failed to include explicit recognition of the Oder-Neisse border [between Germany and Poland]. Criticism also came from other capitals, such as Rome and The Hague, and most plainly from London. Mrs. Thatcher in particular made no bones about publicly criticizing Kohl's Ten-Point Program. She clearly rejected Kohl's ultimate vision of a reunification of Germany.

In any case, the political mood for further deliberations on the economic and monetary union was not particularly favorable in the lead up to the Strasbourg summit, which was scheduled for December 8–9. The chancellor took the initiative in this situation and sent a personal letter to the French president, which included a time-line for further steps at the EC level regarding the economic and monetary union. For the European Council in Strasbourg he proposed initial talks on further EC-level institutional reforms. The intergovernmental conference proposed by the French presidency^[1] to set the foundations for a treaty for the economic and monetary union (Intergovernmental Conference Part I) could then be confirmed in December 1990 in Rome “on the basis of reports from expert bodies and in consideration of experience gained in the meantime” and be expanded by another intergovernmental conference “for further institutional reform proposals” (Intergovernmental Conference Part II). This proposal was meant as a clear signal that the German federal government, especially in the context of the now very topical question of German reunification, wanted to maintain its goals for further advancing European integration, which, however, it did not see as limited to economic and monetary union. Later on, when asked about the relationship between German reunification and the further advancement of European

integration, Chancellor Kohl often invoked the metaphor “two sides of the same coin” to illustrate the connection. He said that German reunification had to be tied to further integration of Europe.

This German initiative met with little positive feedback at the Strasbourg summit itself. Initially, some heads of state and government evidently focused more on the political concerns associated with German reunification. Helmut Kohl spoke about it later, saying he had “never experienced such an icy atmosphere at an EC summit,” and he felt he was being subjected to an “almost tribunal-like interrogation.”^[2] His proposals for continued work on the economic and monetary union were in fact taken up at the end by President Mitterrand, but initially only in part. Although Mitterrand declared at the close of the session that “the necessary majority” (Mrs. Thatcher had not approved) had been achieved for convening the intergovernmental conference for talks on the treaty for economic and monetary union before the end of 1990, the decision on another intergovernmental conference on further institutional reform proposals, which the chancellor also proposed, was tabled for the moment. President Mitterrand evidently did not want to weigh down the treaty negotiations on economic and monetary union with the controversy on political union. He therefore spoke only of “prospects of a confederation, which still need to be determined.”^[3]

After several bilateral talks between Kohl and Mitterrand, they presented a joint French-German proposal for a second intergovernmental conference during the summit on June 25–26, 1990; the proposal was then also accepted by the other participants. From a German perspective this at least formally guaranteed the so-called parallelism between talks on economic and monetary union and those on further political and institutional reform of the EC. In substantive terms, however, these parallels remained largely open. Also, the areas of competence within the governments for these parallel talks were distributed differently. Whereas the main responsibility for the economic and monetary portion lay with the finance ministers, it was the foreign ministers who were primarily responsible for the further development of political and institutional reforms. Despite manifold efforts, only limited progress was subsequently made in this area, as the results of the Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2000) summits have shown. Unfortunately, the same is also true regarding the upcoming ratification of the so-called constitutional treaty.

NOTES

[1] The presidency of the European Community (now Union) rotates every six months among the member states – eds.

[2] Helmut Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*. Berlin, 1996, p. 195.

[3] Hans Jürgen Küsters, “Nach dem Fall der Mauer,” in *Die Politische Meinung. Monatsschrift zu Fragen der Zeit*. January, 2003, p. 41.

Source: Hans Tietmeyer, *Herausforderung Euro. Wie es zum Euro kam und was er für Deutschlands Zukunft bedeutet*. Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 2005, pp. 138–41.

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