

Recommendations for Merging the Two Education Systems (September 26, 1990)

Abstract

A joint GDR-FRG commission of ministers of education and cultural affairs recommended priorities in the democratic reform of East German education and research. Their recommendations envisioned the transfer of established Western structures onto the new federal states.

Source

Joint Education Commission

Results of the Third and Final Session of September 26, 1990

1. The Joint Education Commission convened on September 26, 1990, in the office of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States [*Kultusministerkonferenz* or KMK], for its third and final session. Prof. Hans Joachim Meyer, Minister for Education and Science, led the delegation from the German Democratic Republic; Minister Marianne Tidick, president of the KMK, led the delegation from the Federal Republic of Germany, and Undersecretary Fritz Schaumann represented the Federal Ministry for Education and Science.

[...]

2. The Education Commission agreed that the education system must make a substantial contribution to the political, economic, and social modernization process in the five new federal states and to the unification process in general. The Commission determined that several essential steps have already been taken on the path to shaping a new education system and that it will be a task of the newly founded federal states to advance this process in the future. From the outset, the federal and state governments of the Federal Republic have supported the reform efforts of the GDR, both financially and with expertise. In addition, numerous private relief measures have come out of the Federal Republic of Germany. State and private initiatives have quickly led to intensive cooperation at all levels and in all areas of education and research, enabling contact between all the parties involved.

After unification, one primary aim is to continue merging the two education systems, which developed under different social conditions. The prerequisites for this have been satisfied by the GDR law on the establishment of federal states and the Unification Treaty. When the GDR accedes to the Federal Republic, the new federal states will be subject to the Basic Law. With that, they will largely assume responsibility for the task of organizing their respective educational, scientific, and cultural affairs.

In view of the starting position of the new federal states, very different structures will more or less continue to exist in these states for a transitional period. In the interest of the citizens, it is important to achieve the necessary degree of uniformity as soon as possible.

Over the coming months and years, the ongoing merger of the two education systems will be an important joint task for the KMK and for the Federal-State Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion [*Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung* or BLK]. The urgently needed modernization of the education system of the five new federal states will require the involvement of the federal government and the federal states, both financially and in terms of

planning.

Moreover, it will be important for schools, training centers, universities, and research facilities in the five new federal states to be incorporated as quickly as possible into the network of European international exchange and cooperation programs and into other networks as well.

3. In the area of *general education*, the Education Commission approved recommendations on restructuring the education system for general education in the new federal states. The commission noted that the principle of granting cultural autonomy to the federal states will be of fundamental importance as the educational spheres are merged. In light of their federal rights and duties in the area of schooling, the states see it as their ongoing task to ensure that their education policy decisions guarantee both the necessary standardization and equal opportunity. The development of a joint and comparable basic structure for the school system must also satisfy the essential prerequisite of freedom of movement in the education system. According to Article 37 of the Unification Treaty, the basis for this is the Hamburg Agreement of the federal states on the standardization of the school systems, as well as other relevant agreements made by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

Certain regulations in school organization, such as the annual schedule and school vacations, as well as the foreign language requirement for the receipt of a secondary school leaving certificate and for qualification for university study should be standardized by the 1991-92 school year.

[...]

The Education Commission agreed that the basic conditions and the transitional periods that will apply for the German school system in the future should be coordinated by the federal states in the Conference of Ministers.

In the area of *vocational training*, the Education Commission supported the fastest possible introduction of the Regulation Framework for Vocational Training in the Federal Republic (Vocational Training Act, Crafts and Trade Code, Vocational School Act, training regulations and core curricula) and explained which measures were necessary to achieve this. It was introduced on September 1, 1990, and created the basis for the reform of vocational training. With the assistance of the federal government and the federal states, comprehensive qualification measures were instituted for vocational training personnel (trainers, vocational school teachers, continuing education instructors). The federal government guaranteed the supply of informational materials, training codes, and core curricula. Furthermore, support was offered for measures to offer positions to young people who had either not received training positions in the fall of 1990 or whose apprenticeship contracts had been canceled. The results were reflected in the decision of the Council of Ministers of August 22, 1990. The federal government passed a provisional program on September 25, 1990, according to which some measures of the Council of Ministers were to be continued.

[...]

The federal government sees an urgent need for additional consultation and for support leading to the consolidation of the governments of the new federal states and to complete adaptation to the dual education system, which had never existed previously [in the GDR] in as pronounced a form as in the Federal Republic.

In the area of *universities and research*, the Education Commission reached agreement on creating a unified science and research landscape in united Germany by entrusting the Science and Humanities Council [*Wissenschaftsrat*] with a thorough assessment of the science and research landscape in the GDR, including all university and non-university educational and research facilities. This assessment will be the basis of the Science and Humanities Council's assessment of facilities and for the Council's

recommendations on the structure of the science and research landscape in the GDR, the integration of facilities and institutions within this structure, as well as the expansion of the facilities.

Higher education institutions in the new federal states will continue to offer admission within the limits of their existing capacity, also to applicants from the Federal Republic. The assessment of capacity should no longer depend on parameters such as dormitory and cafeteria space.

Furthermore, there was agreement on expanding the scope of the University Construction Act [HBFG] to the territory of the new federal states and on expanding the competencies of institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany (such as the Science and Humanities Council, the German Research Foundation, the German Academic Exchange Service, Higher Education Information Systems, foundations for the gifted, etc). In order to get a reliable overview of the social situation of students at higher education institutions in the new federal states, this should be incorporated into the thirteenth social survey, if possible.

Given the condition of the buildings and the equipment of universities in the new federal states (which sometimes need extensive improvement) the Education Commission views the speedy continuation of work in the existing bodies as urgent. Curricula in a number of important subject areas need to be restructured and major areas need further development.

According to the Education Commission, *continuing education* makes an essential contribution to promoting vocational qualifications and furthering the understanding of democracy. In view of the great need among citizens of the new federal states, the Commission felt that it was necessary to guarantee sufficient options for continuing education. Therefore, it has been particularly concerned with integrating successful preexisting facilities into the new structures, and in converting and founding other institutions for continuing education.

[...]

Within the framework of the Education Commission, recommendations for a legal reorganization of *vocational training assistance* in the GDR have been drafted. On the basis of these recommendations, Appendices I and II of the Unification Treaty stipulate how the Federal Education and Training Assistance Act [BAföG] will be amended before it takes effect in the newly formed federal states on the territory of the present-day GDR on January 1, 1991, and they [also] stipulate which of the former GDR regulations on financial assistance for students will remain in effect up until then.

[...]

4. The Commission believes that the Unification Treaty will open up important *opportunities* for individual areas of the education system in the new federal states.

Regulations that are necessary within the scope of the reorganization of the *school system*, including transition regulations, are to be drawn up by the five new federal states. The necessary regulations for recognizing degrees based on school law will be agreed upon by the Conference of Ministers. Both cases are based on the Hamburg Agreement and other relevant agreements by the Conference of Ministers.

In the area of *vocational training*, it is essential that training leading to qualifications be guaranteed for all young people, thus promoting and ensuring their competitiveness on the labor market. Companies, the appropriate government offices, and sponsors of other educational facilities should develop and offer corresponding programs for further vocational education for young adults who completed their training under the system of skilled craftsmen's trades in the German Democratic Republic, and who also want to acquire qualifications in a related skilled vocation recognized by the Vocational Training Act or the Crafts and Trade Code.

In the area of *higher education*, it is most important that the freedom and plurality of teaching and research be reinstituted. The most important prerequisites to this end are university autonomy, the ongoing expansion of access to study and academic work, and greater independence and self-reliance for university instructors, researchers, and students. University research needs to be strengthened.

Democracy and the social market economy necessitate *continuing education* on a totally new scale in the acceding federal states. This is the instrument needed to give many people, as quickly as possible, the information they need to actively shape the new social and economic order. Continuing education initiatives must facilitate mutual familiarity [between Germans in East and West], and they must make it possible to shape the future together in a unified Germany.

The Unification Treaty provides for the incorporation of the five new federal states into the *joint educational planning and research promotion* of the federal government and the federal states. The federal and regional governments are to quickly pass the corresponding agreements pursuant to Article 91b of the Basic Law.

5. The federal government and the federal states of the Federal Republic will support the new federal states in their efforts to reform education and research, establish the administrations in the new federal states, and execute administrative decisions.

In conclusion, the Joint Education Commission noted that in its short period of activity, important prerequisites and orientation guidelines for merging the two education systems have already been drawn up. It has thus succeeded in making a contribution to the unification process. As future joint bodies, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs [KMK] and the Federal-State Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion [FLK] are called upon to continue working toward a joint education system.

Source: Gemeinsame Bildungskommission, “Ergebnisse der dritten und abschließenden Sitzung vom 26. September 1990”, *BMBW Presseinformation*, no. 143/90, September 26, 1990, pp. 220–25.

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