

# GERMAN REUNIFICATION 10 YEARS ON - SPECIAL ISSUE

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*Germany celebrated 10 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. But there is still a severe imbalance between life in the east and west of the country which the German CDU/ CSU says it is determined to correct.*

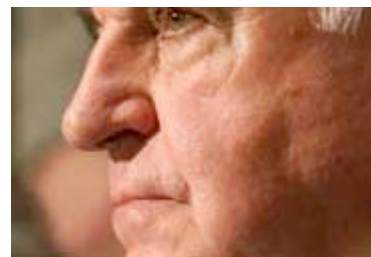
## CELEBRATING UNITY



Half a million people gathered in front of the Reichstag in Berlin on 03/10 to celebrate one of the most momentous events of the late 20th century - the peaceful reunification of Germany. French President Jacques CHIRAC said that it was thanks to the - absent - former Chancellor Helmut KOHL that Germany had "reconciled itself with itself, and is still - even more then before - committed to the project of European union." Kohl would go down in history as "a great German and a great European."

At an earlier CDU celebration on 01/10, EPP President Wilfried MARTENS said that whatever disputes and problems had arisen since reunification "nothing can diminish what is owed Helmut Kohl, not just by Germany, but by Europe as a whole, in achieving German unity."

Because of continuing wrangles over his role in the party finance scandal , Kohl had declined to take part in the national celebrations in Dresden. But at the CDU event in Berlin, he was accorded a long standing ovation after declaring that the "flourishing landscapes" he had predicted for the former German Democratic Republic had been realised. Every political party had played its part over the last decade, he said, but no other had so decisively shaped the federal republic as the CDU. It had been in power for 36 years: "the best years in Germany's and Europe's history."



He paid tribute to the role of his SPD predecessors Willy BRANDT's and Helmut SCHMIDT's Ostpolitik; Brandt in particular had been key, he said, in persuading Mikhail GORBACHEV that despite the fall of the Wall everything was quiet, and that there would be no uprising against the Soviets.

But, in remarks which sparked controversy in Germany, Kohl (right) recalled that just before the collapse of the GDR, the present Chancellor Gerhard SCHRÖDER had declared that the people of East Germany must not be lied to, that reunification was "utopian".

Germany's Social Democrats had, on the fateful issues, failed the nation, Kohl declared. As late as 1987 the SPD had in effect abandoned the constitutional commitment to one Germany, proclaiming that both Germanies must be prepared to exist side for side indefinitely, and try to get on. History must not be rewritten, said Kohl. The Socialists had also resisted European integration in the 1950s, and even now "have problems" with the idea of a social market economy.

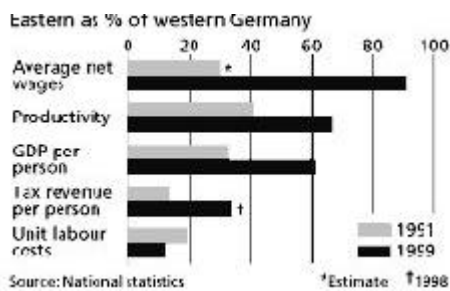
## "An unmistakable longing"

CDU leader Angela MERKEL, who grew up in the GDR, told the meeting that no party had a monopoly on German unity, which belonged to the people: They are the winners of history." At the same time, the CDU could not accept there were debates which were taboo. "I will never forget the words which Helmut Kohl said to (then GDR leader) Erich HONECKER, to his face and in public. I heard them on the tv in my flat in East Berlin: 'People in Germany are suffering from the division. They suffer from a wall which literally stands in their way and repels them. If we dismantle what divides people, we are answering the Germans' unmistakable longing: they want to be with each other, because we belong together.'" (Kohl had insisted, as a condition of Honecker's state visit to West Germany, that both their speeches be broadcast in both Germanies).



## Balance sheet, 10 years on

The abolition of the GDR has not been only a matter of flourishing landscape. There had certainly been mistakes, Kohl conceded in an interview - "I say that for myself too, since I know that better than anyone". But he above all defended exchanging the DM one-for-one for the 'Ostmark'. It had been, he acknowledged, "a political decision which couldn't actually be defended on strict economic terms. But we were thinking above all of the people and their hopes."



Despite a small minority among the c.15m people of eastern Germany who insist that life was better before, life has demonstrably improved enormously in what was the GDR. More than 750,000 new homes have been built since 1993, and some 40% of easterners now own their own homes, the same as in the west of the country. But there is still a long way to go: East Germans remain twice as likely to be unemployed as west Germans, and about 25% worse-

paid.

The cost of transforming the region has so far been 1.2 trillion DM (\$540 billion) - more than double this year's federal budget. Another 300 bn - 400 bn DM is still needed to bring the east's infrastructure into line with the west's. Angela Merkel reflected the continuing CDU commitment to a united Germany.

She recalled the 1990 party congress in Hamburg when CDU members from the east, like herself, became simply people from different Germany Länder. "That," she said. "Was the day this CDU became one CDU for one Germany," she said.