

Commentary:

## 20 years of German unity – a success story

by Jean-Dominique Giuliani, Chairman of the Board, Robert Schuman Foundation, Paris-Brussels

On 3rd October 1990 - 20 years ago - the treaty reuniting the two Germanies entered into force. German unity will go down in history as an extraordinary moment in the human story, which we can appreciate better with hindsight. No one really could have imagined it was to be achieved peacefully. It was undertaken with a great deal of Europe-oriented shrewdness, making it possible to overcome some difficult obstacles. Diplomatically and politically, it was a remarkable success to the credit of those involved at the time and to the European spirit.

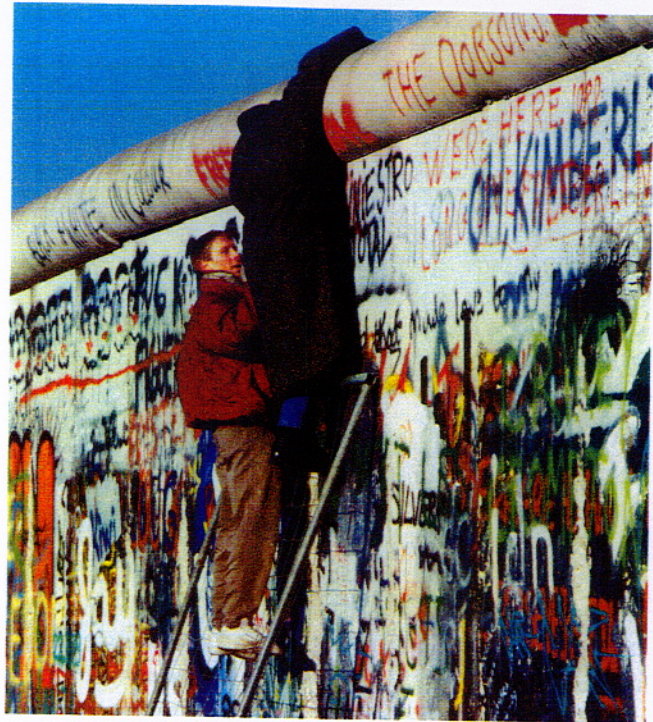
### An incredible effort demanded

However, we do not know as much about the incredible effort demanded of the Germans. More than 1,400 billion Euro, 67% of it in social payments, have been transferred from West Germany towards the Länder in the East since 1991. This represents half of the German annual GDP and nearly 75 billion Euro annually. By means of an extremely costly adjustment between the regions in the West and the new Länder, and an exceptional income and business tax, the rate of which has sometimes risen from 5.5% to 7.5% and which will remain in force until 2019, the German Federal Republic has achieved a real feat of strength.

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Of course there remains a great deal to be done. The unemployment rate is double in the East, 11.5% against 6.5% in the West, re-industrialisation is still proving difficult, the regions in the East have lost one million inhabitants, and some psychological “walls” remain as 40 years of dictatorship cannot be swept away in just a few years.

But increasing average life expectancy by six years between 1991 and 2009, raising household income in the East from 56% to 75% of that of West, enabling 16 million East Germans to align their consumption with that of their fellow countrymen, providing them with pensions and social benefits that are higher than in the West, seeing Pomerania rise to become Germany’s leading tourist destination, raising the production of wealth in the East to an annual 51 billion Euro, i.e. 3,6 times its level in 1991 ... all of this was unimaginable for those who had the sad privilege of living in East Germany.



The Berlin Wall became redundant on 9 November 1989.

Photo: www.nato.int

### Germans need still more ten years to catch up

It is believed that the six new Länder (including Ost Berlin) will have caught up with the eleven in the West (including West Berlin) by 2019.

Thirty years and an enormous amount of work will have been necessary to wipe out totalitarian communism. These figures are a clear answer to any who still cling to an extremely indecent form of “Ostalgia”. They give us an idea of what the imminent collapse of the odious regime in North Korea will cost its 24 million inhabitants.

They offer everyone an image of Germany led by courageous leaders who have assumed great risk even when the cost proved to be higher than originally estimated – here is the example of the German people who have stood by one another, complaining at times, but who have not counted the cost of their support. A European Germany – peaceful, powerful, which has re-integrated into the international scene with an extremely positive role.

On an historical level, which we often lose sight of, – this is an example and a true success, – which we firstly owe to the Germans, but in which European integration has certainly played its part.