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Change and Continuity in German Relations With the East

Brian L. Kessel

May 5, 1991

Introduction

On October 2, 1990 the artificial separation of the German state, in place since 1945, officially came to an end. The symbolic finale, of course, took place nearly a year earlier with the spontaneous breaching of the Berlin Wall. The sudden protests that brought down the Berlin Wall and the Communist governments of Eastern Europe took the West by surprise, as did the speed of German reunification. The reunification of Germany, in addition to the Soviet withdrawal from the rest of Eastern Europe has brought an end to the bipolar division of Europe that had been in place since 1945.

Great joy has resulted among the peoples of Germany and the rest of Eastern Europe. Questions and concerns have also been raised. The removal of Soviet control has left a power vacuum in Eastern Europe. Although the Soviet presence and influence in Eastern Europe was uniformly reviled by those states, the USSR did supply them with markets for their goods, inexpensive petroleum, and, for Poland, a guarantee of the sanctity of the Oder-Neisse line. Today, the Warsaw Treaty Organization is disbanded and COMECON will soon leave the stage. The last Soviet troops in Eastern Europe, those in the former GDR, are scheduled to leave in 1994, their departure financed by the Germans. Many in Eastern Europe are now asking how this power vacuum will be filled.

This is an opportunity for the Germans to fulfill their historic mission as a "bridge" to the East. A resurgence of German influence is both welcomed and viewed with concern in the East.

Their shattered economies are in dire need of German assistance, but the specter of previous German domination remains.

This paper will look at the history of German relations with the East in an attempt to gain insight into the future of German-East European relations. Change and continuity in German relations with the East from the original German colonization of Eastern Europe during the Middle Ages until the present will be examined. Special attention will be paid to the historical, geographical, and economic factors that have influenced German behavior. The paper will attempt to show that the East has always held an attraction and fascination for the Germans, an attraction that has often led to German efforts to dominate the region. These efforts culminated in what was to become World War II. Post-1945 German diplomatic relations with the East will also be examined in an effort to show that despite more limited diplomatic options in a bipolarized Europe, the FRG nevertheless maintained an "affinity" for the East. Finally, present-day relations, as well as prospects for future relations between Germany and the East will be examined.

Colonization of the East

The foundation underlying Germany's sense of mission towards the East lies in Germany's colonization of the region which began nearly a millenium ago. Between the Eleventh Century and 1945, German peoples emigrated into today's Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, the Baltics, and Yugoslavia.

Until the Thirteenth Century German migration to the East was minimal. In fact, the linguistic boundary separating Germans and Slavs, originally formed by the Elbe and Saale Rivers, had moved only sixty miles East by the late 1100s.¹ With the beginning of the 13th century, however, German movement to the East intensified.

As the Germans moved East they converted the pagans to Christianity and assimilated them into their culture. Sometimes the Germans appeared as conquerors, as in the case of Brandenburg Mark in 1035. Although conquered, the Slavic inhabitants were not decimated. Rather, they were simply converted and usually were allowed to remain on their land as long as they utilized more efficient German agricultural methods. At this time the land was sparsely **populated**. The German settlers merely took over previously unused **land**, or drained marshes to create new plots. Over time Slavs and Germans intermarried and eventually the native populations were absorbed by German culture. Even when the Germans were invited into an area, much the same process took place. In the

¹Hermann Schreiber. Teuton and Slav. (New York: Knopf, 1965), 62.

early 1200s Duke Barnim of West Pomerania invited German immigrants to settle the land as a way of strengthening his Duchy. As in the case of Brandenburg, the native population was eventually assimilated and absorbed into German culture.

Nationalism and ethnic dislike between Germanic peoples and Slavs was not to develop for several more centuries. At this time the important differences between peoples was not one of ethnicity but of social class. Thus, assimilation was often unforced and usually welcomed.

The Germans brought technical and cultural innovations. They introduced the iron plough, as well as the ability to drain marshes and build dikes. German culture in the forms of law, language, poetry, and religion were also conveyed to the natives. Cities and monasteries sprang up and merchants brought goods from the West.

One of the most effective means of transplanting German colonies and culture to the East was via the Teutonic Knights. The Teutonic Knights were a crusading order. Although they participated actively in crusades to the Holy Land, the order did not achieve notoriety until it began participating in European crusades in the early 1200s. Around 1220 King Andrew of Hungary invited the Knights to take control of Burzenland, part of present-day Transylvania, in return for defending that area of Hungary's frontier against the pagans. The Knights quickly built fortresses and brought in German settlers. Although King Andrew eventually expelled the Order following a dispute, the settlers were allowed to remain.

This episode in the Balkans, however, was but a precursor for

the Knights' most famous crusade: the conquering of Prussia. In 1224 Duke Conrad of Masovia invited the Order to Prussia. The native Prussians were pagans. Previous crusades by the Poles had failed, and now Duke Conrad was concerned by a civil war taking place in Cracow. The Knights were brought in not only to help conquer the pagans once and for all, but also to enable the Duke to participate in the civil war without fear of attack from the Prussians.

The Prussians fought heartily against the Knights and the early battles of conquest, as well as later revolts, largely decimated the native population. German settlers were brought in and those natives who remained were assimilated into German culture. A Papal Bull of 1234 gave the Order the "sole right to make war, make foreign policy, collect taxes, and exercise high justice" in Prussia.² Despite this degree of autonomy, the Order paid homage to Polish kings until 1660 when the Treaty of Oliva formally turned over sovereignty of Eastern Prussia to the Great Elector of Brandenburg.

The Teutonic Knights went on to conquer the Baltics and establish **German** settlements. The Order's eastward expansion was eventually **halted** by the Russians, however, who by 1560 had succeeded in forcing the Knights from the Baltics. Nevertheless, substantial German minorities remained. Further German colonization of Eastern Europe was facilitated by Catherine the Great's

²William Urban. The Prussian Crusade. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980), 128.

invitation to German settlers to move into the Crimea and Volga River regions of Russia, as well as Maria Theresa's encouragement of German settlements in the Balkans.

The Emergence of Prussia

Brandenburg-Prussia was the last European state to develop as a so-called "Great Power" during the Eighteenth century. The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries were characterized by incessant fighting for territory and influence in Europe. As one of the last powers to appear on the European stage, and by virtue of her central geographic position, Prussia and the other small German states were often at the mercy of more powerful neighbors. In Brandenburg-Prussia's case, Russia and a weak Poland stood to the East, Austria to the South, Sweden to the North, and France to the West. Territorial expansion was thus essential for Prussia to gain influence in Europe, as well as to maintain independence and sovereignty; for only through expansion could economic self-sufficiency as well as a population large enough to supply ample personnel and revenue to support a large army be attained.

Although most of the German states had been devastated by the Thirty Years War, Brandenburg was left in the enviable position of making gains following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The treaty allowed Brandenburg to add a small slice of Eastern Pomerania to her territory. Nevertheless, in 1648 Brandenburg's holdings were greatly separated. The most important

division was between Brandenburg and Prussia. For more than a century rulers of Brandenburg-Prussia would fight to unite these two areas.

The struggle to join these two separated provinces put Prussia into conflict with most of her powerful neighbors at one time or another. For 60 years a combination of Swedish strength in Northeast Europe and French unwillingness to allow alterations in the status quo created by Treaty of Westphalia prevented Brandenburg-Prussia from expanding eastward. However, the Wars of the Spanish Succession served to diminish French influence and an alliance with Peter the Great in 1714 against Sweden allowed Prussia to take Western Pomerania.³ Prussia then had control of the vital Oder Estuary, thus allowing access to the Baltic. The Prussian presence in the East was further strengthened by the taking of Silesia from Austria during the Wars of Austrian Succession.

Prussia's alliance with Peter the Great was the first political treaty between Prussia and Russia and as Angela Stent points out marked the beginning of a relationship that was more often friendly than hostile.⁴ During this time German advisors played a major role in Peter's westernization program and Russian and German nobility intermarried frequently.

³Brandenburg-Prussia came to be known simply as Prussia following the coronation of Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg as King Frederick I of Prussia in 1701.

⁴Angela Stent. "The One Germany". Foreign Policy. no. 81 (Winter 90/91): 64.

Although the Russians under Elizabeth were a member of the alliance that fought Prussia during the Seven Years War, it was Russia's withdrawal from the coalition following Elizabeth's death in 1763 that saved Prussia from defeat. The war impressed on Frederick the Great, who began to fear encirclement by the other powers. Thus, from 1763 onward he pursued an alliance with Russia. Cooperation with Russia was to be found at the expense of the Poles and was embodied in the partitions of Poland.

The first partition of Poland, which was devised by Russia and Prussia and then acceded to by Austria in 1772, provided Prussia with Ermland, West Prussia and a district of Great Poland along the Netze. Although both Ermland and West Prussia contained German minorities from previous settlement by the Teutonic Knights, only Ermland was successfully assimilated and absorbed into Prussia. In West Prussia a strong Polish element remained. As national consciousness grew, this element came to see the Prussians as oppressors and resented the importance of Germans in public life.

In 1793, Russian and Prussian collusion led to a second partition of Poland. Poland was further dismembered by the two powers, Prussia taking Danzig and Thorn in addition to territories around Posen and Kalish which became "South Prussia". The final partition of Poland took place following a revolt by the Poles. Prussia was given Warsaw and some surrounding territory which became known as "New East Prussia". These territories were completely Polish in character. Thus, Poland

ceased to exist and Russia became Prussia's immediate neighbor to the East.

The partitions of Poland served to fulfill Prussia's goal of uniting the separated provinces of East Prussia and Brandenburg. Immanuel Geiss stresses the significance of Prussia's Polish acquisitions: "The annexation of Polish territory had finally endorsed her [Prussia's] claim to be a Great Power in Europe. Prussia's 'raison d'etat' and very existence as a Great Power was hence based on the possession of... Posnan and West Prussia."⁵ Hajo Holborn also notes that the partitions of Poland resulted in a Prussian "dependence" on Russia that would remain "a determining factor in modern German history for the next century".⁶

Prussian cooperation with Russia continued into the Nineteenth century. At first Prussia sought to remain neutral in Europe's war with Napoleon. However, by 1806 France had forced Prussia to sign treaties which made Prussia a virtual French ally, and put Prussia into conflict with England by giving her control of English Hannover. The loss of maritime trade as a result of **worsened** relations with England, combined with French duplicity **led** Prussia to mobilize against France.⁷

⁵Ibid.

⁶Hajo Holborn. A History of Modern Germany 1648-1840. (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1964), 256-7.

⁷During peace negotiations with England Napoleon offered the return of Hannover to the British without consulting Prussia. Furthermore, large numbers of French troops were poised on the Prussian border.

Without waiting for Russian assistance the Prussians fought and were crushed by Napoleon. Napoleon went on to defeat the Russians as well. The French prepared to carve up Prussia. However, when Napoleon and Czar Alexander I met at Tilsit in 1807 to conclude a treaty of peace and alliance Alexander insisted, against Napoleon's wishes, that Prussia be preserved as a state. Napoleon relented, nevertheless, Prussia lost half of her territory, including territory taken as a result of the final two partitions of Poland. These lands were used to constitute a new duchy of Warsaw.

Five years later Czarist forces chased Napoleon out of Russia. Prussia joined the Russians in the fight against France in the Wars of Liberation (1813-15). As Geiss asserts, for the third time Prussia owed its continued existence to Russia.⁸

Unsurprisingly then, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 Prussia raised no objections to Russian ambitions in Poland, and gave away her gains from Poland's third partition to Russia. Despite this loss Prussia retained Danzig, West Prussia, and Posen, which was organized as an autonomous grand duchy and promised cultural privileges. Similarly, Russia's share of Poland was organized as Congress Poland with the Czar as the Polish King. Only Cracow remained as a genuinely autonomous Polish city. Finally, Prussia also gained forty percent of Saxony as

⁸ Immanuel Geiss. "German Ostpolitik and the Polish Question". East European Quarterly. vol XIX, no. 2 (June 1985): 203. The previous two times had been Russia's withdrawal from the Seven Year's War and the Treaty of Tilsit.

well as some Western territories.

Thus, through a combination of military prowess, good fortune and Russian favor, Prussia was able to carve out a niche as the last of the European Great Powers. In the process a special relationship with Russia developed and the long history of Prussian-German domination of the Poles began.

The Rise of Nationalism

One significant result of the Congress of Vienna was the Holy Alliance formed between Russia, Austria, and Prussia. This group of conservative monarchies saw in the Holy Alliance a means of containing the liberal ideals of the French revolution. Their powers were quickly put to the test as fresh revolution spread across Europe.

The first outbreaks of popular revolution took place in France and Belgium in 1830. These revolts were quickly followed by a revolt in Russian Poland. The uprising in Congress Poland was ruthlessly crushed by the Russians, who proceeded to strip the Polish kingdom of its remaining autonomy. The Prussians and Austrians meanwhile mobilized their armies in their sections of occupied Poland to guard against the spread of the insurrection. In addition, Prussia revoked the privileges of Posen and initiated a program of mild Germanization.

A second Polish revolt in 1846 was also crushed and resulted in Austria annexing the free city of Cracow. Following these revolts many Poles fled Congress Poland for the West. A period of Polenbegeisterung, or enthusiasm for Poles, broke out among German liberals. In early 1848 many even called for war with Russia to create an independent Poland. Conscious of pressure from the

Frankfurt Assembly, King Frederick Wilhelm IV allowed the creation of a Polish National Committee in Posen.

German enthusiasm for the Poles, however, was short-lived. In Posen, the Polish National Committee showed little interest in cooperating with the German minority and there were incidents of anti-German demonstrations. In Frankfurt, the delegates were willing to grant the Poles the right to their language, but when it came to dispensing territory or placing Germans under Polish autonomy, the German liberals succumbed to a rising German nationalism and quickly forgot the "Polish question".

These feelings of nationalism soon manifested themselves as a chauvinistic, arrogant approach to the East. German thinkers began to romanticize the role of the Germans in spreading culture to the East. The historian Trietschke argued that prior to the colonization of the East the native peoples were "on the level of animals".⁹ Other academicians began to see the Germans as a "tool of God" which was meant to spread civilization to the inferior and underdeveloped Slav.¹⁰

These attitudes soon turned into a call for further Eastern expansion and Germanization. Much of this spirit came from academic and student circles.¹¹ One influential voice from this

⁹qtd. in Schreiber 180.

¹⁰Urban, 384.

¹¹Schreiber notes that the popular acceptance of such ideas, especially in academic circles, led to several generations of German schoolchildren learning the "doctrine that cultural influence involves the right to use force and confers the right to rule" (334).

group was Paul deLagarde, author of Deutsche Schriften, which was regarded as the "Bible" of nationalist student groups.¹² In 1853 he advocated the absorption of Russian Poland into a united Germany. Furthermore, he urged German settlement of Eastern Europe, including Prussian and Austrian Poland, Hungary, and present-day Czechoslovakia. Others, like the East Prussian democrat Wilhelm Jordan noting the superiority of the German people, spoke of the German "right of conquest" in the East.¹³ Few voices were heard in opposition to such ideas within Germany. Thus, German liberals discarded their ideals of freedom and self-determination for the seduction of nationalism.

There are many possible causes for the intense German nationalism that developed during the revolts of the mid Nineteenth Century. First, nationalism served as a vehicle for unity among liberals throughout the German states. Secondly, German unity promised to bring power and influence to the Germans. As Dahlmann, a historian of the time, noted: "...it is not only freedom that the Germans have in mind, but they are primarily craving for power which has been denied of them until now".¹⁴

Augmenting these already powerful forces of nationalism was the memory and idealization of past German colonies in the East.

¹²F.L. Carsten. Essays in German History. (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), 221.

¹³Holborn II, 103.

¹⁴qtd. in Hajo Holborn. A History of Modern Germany 1840-1945. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 102.

This, according to Ashkenasi, gave German nationalism a "particularly virulent character" that eventually would "galvanize it into concrete expansion".¹⁵

¹⁵Abraham Ashkenasi. Modern German Nationalism. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), 39.

Bismarck and the Second Empire 1862-1918

The Polish Question

To Bismarck, resolution of the Polish question to Prussia's advantage was of vital importance, because Bismarck looked upon the predominately Polish provinces of West Prussia and Posen as "Prussia's best sinews".¹⁶ These provinces bound Brandenburg to East Prussia and tied those two provinces to Silesia. Bismarck believed that the continued survival of Prussia as a great power depended on preventing the loss of this region by the creation of an independent Poland encompassing the borders of 1772. Such a Poland, he feared, would not hesitate to absorb Silesia and East Prussia. This fear caused him to pursue a staunch anti-Polish policy. As he wrote in 1861: "I have full sympathy with their condition but if we want to survive, we can only exterminate them".¹⁷

This belief manifested itself in Bismarck's attempts to Germanize the so-called "Eastern Marches" during the 1880s. In 1887, Bismarck forbade the teaching of the Polish language in Prussian Poland. A Colonization Commission was also formed with the intent of encouraging German colonization and buying out Polish landowners. The program had only minimal success and was probably not worth the enmity for Germans that developed in the Poles. Between 1886 and 1915 only about 21,000 German settlers

¹⁶ qtd. in Geiss , 204.

¹⁷ Holborn II, 165.

moved to Prussian Poland¹⁸ and in 1905 the Poles still made up 45% of the population of West Prussia and 55% of Posen's.¹⁹

Foreign Relations

One of the primary tenets of Bismarck's foreign policy was that, given the existence of five Great powers, it was best to be part of a trio. Thus, Bismarck continued to pursue cooperation with the other two conservative monarchies: Russia and Austria.

Prussian relations with Russia got off to a good start under Bismarck. In large measure these good relations were grounded in the common desire to hold the forces of Polish nationalism in check. During the 1863 revolt in Congress Poland General Gustav Alvensleben, with Bismarck's approval, signed a convention with the Russians allowing for collaboration between Prussian and Russian military commands in putting down the Polish revolt. This convention strengthened Russo-Prusso friendship. One consequence was Russian neutrality in Prussia's wars leading to German unification (1864, 1866, and 1871).

A second tenet of Bismarck's foreign policy was to reassure the other European Great Powers that Germany was a sated state, **uninterested** in further expansion. Further expansion risked **upseting the balance** of power and bringing a coalition against Germany. Therefore, Bismarck embraced a kleindeutsch solution to

¹⁸Elizabeth Wiskemann. Germany's Eastern Neighbors: Problems Relating to the Oder-Neisse Line and the Czech Frontier Regions. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 14.

¹⁹Ferdinand Schevill. The Making of Modern Germany. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1916), 231.

the German problem and attempted to avoid colonial entanglements.

Unfortunately for Bismarck, the world economy of the day was largely unsuited for such a policy. Germany was a growing industrial state in need of large amounts of raw materials and markets. To succeed, Germany needed a free and secure international economy. A worldwide depression in the 1870s, however, triggered global protectionism and caused insecurity in the Germans.

As Calleo points out, the Germans felt themselves to be at an economic disadvantage compared to the other Great Powers. They had no empire like the British or a vast resource-rich interior like Russia.²⁰ The Germans began to feel the need for greater economic security and self-sufficiency. This involved securing markets and sources of raw material, as well as protecting domestic agricultural and industrial interests from foreign competition. Thus, against his better wishes Bismarck was forced to begin altering his policy towards protectionism and imperialism.

This change in policy manifested itself in several ways. First, it **resulted** in an active German colonial policy, the so-called **Weltpolitik**. More importantly for German Eastern relations, was the development of the concept of **Mitteleuropa** and the virtual economic war with Russia that ensued.

²⁰David Calleo. "Germany and the Balance of Power". In West German Foreign Policy 1949-1979. Westview Special Studies in West European Politics and Society. ed. Wolfram F. Hanrieder. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 3.

The first seeds of a German Mitteleuropa were planted by the Austro-German treaty of 1879. Much of the impetus behind this treaty came from a desire by Bismarck to form a Central European customs union. Such a union would provide Germany with a large market predisposed to German control. Furthermore, an Austro-German arrangement served as protection against Russian expansion in the Balkans.

Despite the establishment of the Dreikaiserbund (League of the Three Emperors) in 1872 and its subsequent renewal in 1884, relations between Germany and Russia grew strained. With the subjugation of the Poles complete, the primary source of Russo-German cooperation became less important.

Problems began developing in the Russo-German relationship around 1877. In that year Russian import tariffs began a steady rise that resulted in a halving of German exports to Russia by 1887.²¹ Under pressure from East Prussian agricultural interests, tariffs were introduced on Russian grain in 1880. These tariffs increased by a factor of six over the following seven years and the resulting loss of earnings proved detrimental to Russia's industrial growth.

A growing pan-slavist spirit and Russian expansionism in the Balkans also caused problems for Russo-German relations. The Russians were greatly disappointed in their Balkan gains following Bismarck's "honest brokering" at the Congress of Berlin

²¹Hans-Ulrich Wehler. The German Empire: 1871-1918. trans. Kim Traynor (New York: berg Publishers, 1985), 191.

in 1878. Furthermore Bismark's efforts to intimidate Russia and cool her Balkan expansion by halting trade in Russian securities, backfired badly by forcing Russia to seek financial assistance from France.

Thus, a shift in economic and political realities brought a shift to German foreign policy. The perceived need for secure markets and raw materials caused the Germans to once again turn to expansion. The new German interest in Mitteleuropa put Germany on a collision course with Russia.

Wilhelmian Germany 1890-1918

Trade policy changed little under Bismarck's successors. Like Bismarck, Caprivi (1890-5) recognized the negative effects that protectionism had on foreign relations, but was forced by domestic pressure to continue protectionist policies. Upturns in the world economy did nothing to ease trade restrictions. German insecurity persisted and under Bulow (1900-1909) imperialism and protectionism became the policy of favor.²² Germany began dumping industrial goods on Austria and Russia while maintaining high agricultural tariffs. Taylor asserts that the tariffs were a "weapon of war" aiming "to destroy competition by dumping, and ultimately, to enroll consumers by compulsion".²³

In the diplomatic sphere, relations with Russia continued to

²²By this time German leaders also realized the domestic political utility of maintaining an active imperialist policy. Colonialism proved to be an excellent method of distracting the public from issues of internal reform.

²³Taylor 126.

worsen. In 1890, Caprivi turned down an offer to renegotiate the Reinsurance Treaty signed by Bismarck in 1887. Competition between Austria and Russia in the Balkans grew keener. In 1909, following the Austrian annexation of Bosnia, Austria was on the verge of war with Russia and Serbia. Germany, however, interceded by sending a veiled threat to Russia, advising her to accept the status quo. Although the Russians backed down in the Summer of 1909, they would not do so again five years later during the Balkan crisis of 1914.

German War Aims

The German rationale at the beginning of the World War I was that Germany was fighting to defend herself from the other powers, who had forced the war upon her. Soon, however, forces throughout Germany began to call for annexationist policies. The cry was taken up by academicians, the military, industrialists, and the pan-Germans. As these groups began to propagate annexationist ideas they became immensely popular.

The first set of German war aims was produced as early as September 1914. In the West, areas of France were to be absorbed and Belgium made a satellite state. In the East, most of Central Europe would be placed under a German-controlled economic system. Finally, a section of Polish territory was to be taken to form a border strip between the Poles of Prussia and a new Polish state to be formed from Russian Poland. Poles would be expelled from this strip and replaced by German colonists. As Holborn points out, it is important to note that Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg

relied more on enforcing German control through satellite states and economic controls than direct annexation.²⁴

Following stunning German military successes in the East, Germany's expansionist plans began to grow. One reason was that the blockade of Germany instituted at the beginning of the war highlighted Germany's dependence on imports. Wehler emphasizes that economic autarky dominated German thinking after 1916, creating a demand for the annexation of large parts of Russia to gain sources of food and raw materials.²⁵ A racialist aura also began to surround German eastern annexations. In 1915, General Ludendorff stressed that Russia would provide "the breeding stations for the people who will be essential for further struggles in the east".²⁶

The seriousness of German intentions is illustrated by the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In it, Russia was forced to give up her rights to Poland, Estonia, Livonia, and the Ukraine. German forces, however, went even further advancing as far as Transcaucasia and into the Crimea. The Germans also concluded treaties with Romania, which guaranteed Germany of economic control.

Thus, in Germany's war aims a clear pursuit of Mitteleuropa can be recognized. The expansionist and racialist policies exhibited in this pursuit were but the precursors of a second

²⁴Holborn II, 449.

²⁵Wehler, 212.

²⁶Ibid., 213.

German attempt at European hegemony a mere twenty years later.

The Weimar Republic 1919-1933

The Early Years 1919-1923

In November 1918, Germany was a defeated nation. The kaiser had abdicated and a new republic had been proclaimed. A few months later the Paris Peace Conference convened. The resulting Treaty of Versailles placed crushing demands on the new German government. In addition to accepting primary guilt for the war, the Germans were also faced with heavy reparations. Furthermore, the treaty contained provisions for territorial revision. In the East, both Posen and West Prussia were turned over to Poland, providing Poland with access to the Baltic, as well as separating East Prussia from the rest of Germany. Danzig, considered vital to Polish commerce, was made a free city and placed under the control of the League of Nations. Memelland, a strip of land between East Prussia and Lithuania, was also placed under League control. Finally, Upper Silesia was ordered to hold a plebiscite to choose between Germany and Poland.

The result of the plebiscite, held in March 1921, showed sixty percent of the population in favor of remaining with Germany. In spite of this, Poland claimed that the communes had elected for Poland. To complicate matters, the Polish communes did not form a bloc, but instead were dispersed throughout Upper Silesia. Called upon for a ruling, the League of Nations determined that Poland would receive nearly half of Upper Silesia containing 3/4 of the province's industry and mines, as well as a substantial German minority. The total German losses from the

Treaty of Versailles included ten percent of her population and fourteen percent of her territory, most of which was in the East.²⁷

German public opinion was passionately opposed to the Treaty of Versailles. In terms of eastern relations this manifested itself as strong anti-Polish feelings. Wiskemann points out that the Germans found the existence of a Polish state with a German minority "humiliating" and "intolerable".²⁸

As might be expected, German foreign policy concerned itself with revising the Treaty of Versailles and returning Germany to the status of a major power. One way of returning international standing to Germany was through a revival of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Germany and the Soviet Union had much in common during the days immediately following World War I. Both were international pariahs. Both were seriously weakened economically and militarily. Finally, they shared a common dislike for the new Polish state.

The topic of relations with the Soviet Union was a highly-charged one in German industrial, military, and political circles. Heavy industry, recognizing the Soviet Union as a source of large markets and raw materials, was strongly in favor of close economic ties. The Reichswehr supported close relations on the basis of potential military links. The Communists, who

²⁷John R. P. Mckenzie, Weimar Germany, 1918-1933, (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Rittlefield, 1971), 65.

²⁸Wiskemann, 17-8.

naturally supported closer relations, were joined by the nationalists who saw relations with the Soviet Union as a means of gaining strength and diplomatic room of maneuver vis a vis the Western Allies. Only the majority socialists were opposed to closer German-Soviet relations, expressing concern that the West would find them a threat and block Germany's efforts to attain revision of the Versailles treaty. The failure of Foreign Minister Rathenau's Erfuellungspolitik (policy of fulfillment) to gain any concessions from the West, however, caused the socialists to withdraw their opposition.

Economic discussions with the USSR began in 1921. The Germans proposed an international consortium to finance industrial investment in the Soviet Union. Lee and Michalka assert that through this consortium the Germans hoped to first gain equality with their Western partners and eventually achieve economic dominance over the Soviet Union. This would serve several purposes. German economic dominance would give the Germans more influence in revising the Treaty of Versailles. It would also enable Germany to more easily pay her reparations debt. Finally, it would fulfill the desire for a German-dominated Mitteleuropa.²⁹ The Soviets, however, did not take the bait. Believing that the consortium idea would infringe too much on their national sovereignty, the Soviets withheld approval.

The Allies proceeded to propose an economic conference for

²⁹ Marshall Lee & Wolfgang Michalka. German Foreign Policy, 1917-1933: Continuity or Break? (New York: Berg, 1987), 53-4.

April 1922 in Genoa to discuss the reconstruction of Central and Eastern Europe. Despite their prior inability to come to an economic agreement, both Germany and the Soviet Union feared that each would come to terms with the Allies at the other's expense. This concern led the Soviets and Germans to privately reach an accord during the course of the conference, the Treaty of Rapallo. The treaty served several purposes. It settled claims left over from the World War I, gave both states more room for diplomatic maneuver vis a vis the West, and resumed trade relations.³⁰ Military cooperation also ensued. The Germans were allowed to build and utilize munitions factories and training facilities in return for sharing their expertise with the Soviets. This treaty initiated a period of German balancing of East and West known as Schaukelpolitik.

The Stresemann Years 1923-1929

Gustav Stresemann became chancellor and foreign minister in August 1923. While remaining chancellor for only a few months, he nevertheless, held the post of foreign minister for six years. An annexationist during the World War I, Stresemann pursued many of the same goals as his predecessors in the foreign office. In a 1925 letter to the former Crown Prince he wrote that solution of the reparations problem, maintenance of the peace, and territorial revision in the East, including the recovery of

³⁰Germany became the Soviet Union's most important trading partner, see Dean, West German Trade With the East: the Political Dimension, p.100, and the Soviets became the largest buyer of German industrial goods during the interwar period, see Lee and Michalka, p. 147.

Danzig and the Polish Corridor were his primary goals.³¹

Stresemann pursued these goals through a policy of Verständigungspolitik, or international understanding. He felt that closer ties with the West would aid revision of the Treaty of Versailles. In 1924, Stresemann requested admission to the League of Nations. He believed that admission would enhance Germany's international standing and aid revision. This hypothesis was borne out by a new willingness among the French to enter into negotiations following Germany's enthusiastic drive to enter the League. This willingness to negotiate led to the Locarno Conference of October 1925. The meeting's resulting treaty served to maintain the territorial status quo in the West. Germany, France, and Belgium pledged non-aggression in their relations and Britain and Italy promised to protect Germany from unprovoked French aggression.

Importantly, the treaty did not hinder, and in fact served to aid Stresemann's eastern policy. Despite the desire of Germany's eastern neighbors to conclude some type of "eastern Locarno", Stresemann made sure to avoid recognition of Germany's eastern **frontiers**. Furthermore, with secure western borders, Germany **would be** in a better position to apply force to eastern revision. France would only be able to take action against Germany if she was proved to be the aggressor. German forces could be far into Poland before this determination could be made

³¹Eric Sutton, ed. and trans., Gustav Stresemann: His Diaries, Letters and Papers, 3 vols. (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1935-40), II:503-5.

and action taken. This possibility does not seem so far-fetched when one considers that as early as late 1924 the German government was sending feelers to the Soviet Union exploring the possibility of jointly pushing Poland back to her ethnic frontiers by force.³²

Increasing German cooperation with the West, as symbolized by the Treaty of Locarno, caused concern in the Soviet Union. In an effort to allay Soviet worries, as well as to continue the policy of Schaukelpolitik and German diplomatic independence, Germany concluded the Treaty of Berlin with the USSR in 1926. This treaty reaffirmed the Treaty of Rapallo. It also implied that the Soviet Union would sign no peace treaty that would guarantee Poland's eastern frontier.³³ Cooperation with the USSR would continue until 1932 when increasing Communist activity in Germany and the signing of a Soviet-Polish non-aggression treaty caused relations to deteriorate.

Foreign Policy 1930-1933

Following Stresemann's death in 1929, German foreign policy goals remained largely unchanged. Revision of the Treaty of Versailles and improving Germany's international stature remained paramount. Steps were taken to increase Germany's power through economic means. Foreign Minister von Neurath called for the seizure of new markets and efforts to prevent Eastern Europe from

³²Wiskemann 18.

³³Gaines Post Jr. The Civil Military Fabric of Weimar Foreign Policy. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 46.

industrializing, adding that the German minorities in those countries could be especially helpful in that effort.³⁴

Germany pursued close economic ties with the states of southeast Europe, offering to take their agricultural goods in return for a reduced tariff on German agricultural products. The result was economic dependence on Germany. Again the specter of an economically-defined Mitteleuropa loomed. The Germans further pursued this concept with the attempted Austrian Customs Union project of 1931, which was abandoned due to Allied pressure.

In many ways Weimar foreign policy mirrored traditional German diplomacy. First, control of Prussian Poland remained important in the minds of German leaders. An important aspect of the desired revision of the Treaty of Versailles was the return of Germany's lost eastern territories. During the early 30s State Secretary Bulow even spoke of this in terms of another partition of Poland.³⁵ Secondly, the reemergence of the Polish question, in addition to common economic and political interests caused the Soviet Union and Germany to reestablish the traditional friendship that had begun to sour in the late 1800s. Finally, the concept of Mitteleuropa continued to play a part in German thinking during the Weimar period, as Germany pursued a policy of economic domination toward her eastern neighbors.

³⁴ Lee & Michalka 146.

³⁵ Ibid., 145.

The Third Reich 1933-1945

The eastern policy of Adolf Hitler was both a continuation and an expansion of foreign policy begun during the Weimar years. Like the leaders of the Weimar era Hitler sought a return of the lost eastern territories and clung to the idea of a German-dominated Mitteleuropa. Hitler's plans, however, went far beyond the ideas of mere revisionism. Citing the German need for Lebensraum and German racial superiority, he called for the "conquest, colonization, and domination" of the East.³⁶

Hitler was a firm believer in the need for German autarky. He contended, as had the leaders of Imperial Germany, that Germany required more territory, control of her own natural resources, and a larger population to be a world power. Only by pursuing continental hegemony over Europe could Germany avoid being eventually subjugated by the rising power of the United States and the Soviet Union. Thus, the "European balance [of power] would be sacrificed for the world balance".³⁷ Hitler believed that Imperial Germany's greatest error had been the policy of Weltpolitik. Hitler felt that a simultaneous global and continental policy would be impossible to maintain, and that a global policy served to alienate Germany's "natural ally" Great

³⁶William Griffith, The Ostpolitik of the Federal Republic of Germany. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), 15.

³⁷Calleo II, 5.

Britain.³⁸

Hitler's eastern policy was also dominated by racism. In part, this can be seen as an extension of thinking that began in the mid-nineteenth century. Hitler was fascinated by the Teutonic Knights and their "mission" to the East. His thinking, however, was especially virulent. Hitler's interpretation of Social Darwinism left him with the belief that the slavs were subhumans meant to be enslaved or exterminated. These beliefs provided the raison d'etat for a German-ruled colonial empire in the East.

Weinberg points out that the change in foreign policy goals from mere revisionism to actual expansion provided Germany with additional diplomatic options. Rather than continually pushing for revision as did the Weimar Republic, Hitler felt free to relax tensions in the hopes of future gains later. As Weinberg illustrates:

The old policy fitted into a vision of an Eastern Europe in which Germany played a greater part; the new policy was designed to provide the basis for an Eastern Europe under German domination. The implication of revisionist agitation was change, significant but measured; short term quiescence on the other hand, might lay the

³⁸Ibid. Hitler correctly recognized that Britain was a power in decline. He felt that Britain should be eager to ally herself with Germany because the USSR and the United States would pose a greater threat to the British Empire than a German dominated continent.

groundwork for later revolutionary upheaval.³⁹

This philosophy helps to explain the improved relations with Poland that developed during Hitler's first years in power. Better German-Polish relations, leading to the ten-year non-aggression pact signed in 1934, served many purposes for Hitler. First, it weakened the Franco-Polish alliance, a natural German goal to ease later expansion. Second, it provided protection for Germany's eastern flank while Hitler was pursuing Anschluss with Austria and the annexation of Czechoslovakia.⁴⁰

Finally, Hitler viewed the Soviet Union as his eventual enemy, and he was willing to ally himself with Poland against the Soviets. In November 1938, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop urged Poland to join the anti-Comintern Pact as part of a deal that would return Danzig to Germany and create an extraterritorial railway across the Polish corridor. Although the offer seemed to tacitly recognize Polish sovereignty over the corridor, Marshal Rydz-Smigly recognized that Poland was doomed to become a satellite state if she aligned herself too closely to either of her powerful neighbors, especially if she became a base for Germany's **military** operations against the Soviet Union.

Poland's refusal to cooperate merely led Hitler to seek a new route to his goal. If Poland would not be a willing satellite, she would be brought into the fold by force. Although

³⁹Gerhard Weinberg. The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, vol. 1, Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933-36. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 86.

⁴⁰Holborn II, 788.

his plans for expansion still envisioned conflict with the USSR, Hitler felt free to sign a non-aggression pact with the Soviets in August 1939. Secret articles in the treaty provided for the division of Poland between Germany and the USSR. Thus, even though his methods may have seemed different from those of the past, or at times inconsistent, Hitler's goals in Eastern Europe were the same as those outlined in Imperial Germany's World War I aims, German control of the East as far as the Volga.

Hitler's policy in southeast Europe was also consistent with that of his predecessors. He attempted to set up an area of German economic and political dominance. The roots of the Austrian Anschluss of 1938 can be found in the failed Austrian Customs Union of 1931. Foreign trade policy remained similar to that previously practiced. Germany took large amounts of Hungarian and Yugoslavian agricultural products when the international market was poor making the economies of these two states become dependent on Germany. Likewise Germany became a major buyer of Romanian oil and Bulgarian ores, in return for which Germany supplied arms. By making these states economically dependent on Germany Hitler was able to exert considerable political influence. For example, he was able to get those nations to support, or at least not stand in the way, of his moves against Czechoslovakia.

Another important aspect of Hitler's eastern policy was his use of the eastern minority groups. Following World War I large numbers of German-speaking peoples were to be found in the new

states of Eastern Europe: 800,000 in Poland⁴¹, 2,800,000 in Czechoslovakia⁴², 800,000 in Romania⁴³, and 500,000 in Hungary⁴⁴. Although Stresemann and others in the Weimar Republic had attempted to use the cause of the minorities to facilitate revision of the Treaty of Versailles, their efforts had proven largely fruitless. Moreover, Stresemann had ultimately been forced to abandon a minorities policy because it conflicted with the goals of Verstaendigungspolitik.⁴⁵

Hitler, on the other hand, played the minorities issue like a virtuoso. Control of minority groups and movements passed to Berlin and they became instruments of German foreign policy. As Hitler said to a group of minority leaders in 1934:

As the most advanced vanguard of our campaign for Germany you will enable us to deploy our forces and initiate our manoeuvres...You will act as listening posts and prepare the ground for certain enterprises...Consider yourselves on active service.⁴⁶

The German movement in the Czechoslovakia took all its orders from Berlin. Their agitation served as a pretext for German

⁴¹Wiskemann, 39.

⁴²Ibid., 51.

⁴³Gerhard L. Weinberg. The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, vol. 2, Starting World War II: 1937-1939. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 234.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Lee & Michalka, 95-6.

⁴⁶qtd. in Schreiber.

demands for annexation of the Sudetenland. Hitler's control of these groups is demonstrated by the lack of activity on the part of minority groups in Poland until after the final demise of Czechoslovakia and the Polish refusal to reach an accord with Germany in early 1939.

World War II began on September 1, 1939 with Germany's invasion of Poland. As eastern territory was conquered, Hitler began setting up his eastern empire. Much of Poland became part of Greater Germany, the rest being placed under the auspices of the Government-General for the Occupied Polish Regions. Occupied Russia was organized into two Reichskommissariats. A program of intense Germanization took place. For example, Polish language education ended. Children were only taught German and then only just enough to be able to function.

For a few brief years Hitler's dream of a vast empire to the East and a German-dominated Mitteleuropa came true. It was not to last, by April 1945 the Soviets were in ruined Berlin. The end of World War II brought an end to the era of the Great Powers. In the new **bipolar** world Germany would be faced with fresh challenges as well as traditional concerns.

Post-War Germany and the Adenauer Era (1945-1963)

The face of Europe was radically changed by World War II. East Prussia was divided between Poland and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union adopted the Curzon line as its border with Poland and in compensation Poland's border was moved 100 miles westward. Poland took over Silesia, Posen, and West Prussia. What remained of Germany was divided into four zones of occupation. Into these zones poured 12,000,000 German refugees from the East, many of whom had been expelled by the nations of Eastern Europe.⁴⁷ Schreiber sums up the significance of this:

The 25 years between the treaty of Versailles and the collapse of the German eastern front in the Second World War saw the destruction of everything created by German peasants and monks, miners and artisans, burgesses and knights in the course of a millennium. A single generation had to witness the ruin of the work of thirty...⁴⁸

The end of World War II also signaled the end of Soviet-Western cooperation. Disagreements, misunderstandings, and the conflicting goals of the superpowers led to the bipolarization of Europe and its division into two hostile blocs. At the center of this bipolarization was Germany. Tension between the two superpowers left them unable to reach an agreement on Germany's future. In 1948, the six nation London Conference called for the creation of a West German government. Shortly thereafter the

⁴⁷Dean, 24.

⁴⁸Schreiber, 298.

French merged their zone of occupation with those of the United States and Britain to form Trizonia. The stage was set for the formation of a West German government.

A Parliamentary Council was convened made up of 65 representatives of the German states in the Western zone. The result was the Basic Law (Grundgesetz) of May 1949. The Basic Law claimed to represent all Germans until those in the East were given freedom of choice. At that time the Basic law would be replaced by a constitution "adopted by free decision of the German people".⁴⁹ Following the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) from the Western zones, the Soviets allowed the creation of a German state in their zone of occupation, the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Elections in the FRG in August 1949 made the former mayor of Cologne, Konrad Adenauer of the CDU, the FRG's first chancellor. Adenauer's primary goal was to develop a close relationship with the West. This would serve several purposes. First, the West still retained ultimate control over most aspects of German policy, including foreign relations and trade.⁵⁰ Adenauer felt that the **best** way to regain German sovereignty was through cooperation and integration with the West. His policy of Vorausleistungspolitik, which had its roots in the Erfuellungspolitik of Rathenau and the Verstaendigungspolitik of

⁴⁹Henry Ashby Turner jr. The Two Germanies Since 1945. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 38.

⁵⁰Occupation officially ended and the FRG took over control of its foreign relations, defense, and trade in May 1955.

Stresemann, was one of conciliation and advance concessions. He felt that by making the FRG a trustworthy partner, he would get Western support for his other major foreign policy goal, the reunification of Germany within the borders of 1937.

From this belief he developed the so-called Politik der Staerke. This policy centered on the belief that eventually the world balance of power would shift to the West and lead to German reunification on Western terms.⁵¹ German policy, according to Adenauer, "must be to help make the West strong enough to induce the Russians to want to compromise".⁵² Until that time the FRG must take a firm, uncompromising line towards reunification. Manifestations of this policy included the 1954 Hallstein Doctrine which prohibited recognition of states that recognized the DDR⁵³ and a refusal to recognize the Oder-Neisse line.

Little room was left for the Schaukelpolitik that characterized the Stresemann era. First, it interfered with Adenauer's policy of integration with the West. Western trust and concessions could hardly be expected in the face of anything that could be thought of as a second Rapallo. In addition to upsetting

⁵¹Wolfram F. Hanrieder & Anton P. Graeme. The Foreign Policies of West Germany, France, and Britain. (Redwood City, Calif.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 51.

⁵²qtd. in William G. Hyland. "The Soviet Union and Germany", In West German Foreign Policy 1949-1979. Westview Special Studies in West European Politics and Society. ed. Wolfram F. Hanrieder. (Boulder; Westview Press, 1980), 114.

⁵³The Soviet Union was at first the only exception to this doctrine. Later, the other Eastern European states were also exempted because the FRG viewed them as being coerced into recognizing the DDR.

the West, Schaukelpolitik would also subvert the policy of Politik der Staerke.⁵⁴ Finally, the Soviet Union was too strong vis-a-vis the FRG. The maximum the USSR was willing to accept was a unified but neutral Germany.

Adenauer was unwilling to accept this because it would have prevented his desired integration with the West, and the accompanying increase in German sovereignty, as well as made Germany vulnerable to Soviet domination.⁵⁵ Others in Germany were willing to see Germany neutral if that was a necessary step for reunification. Chief among these was Adenauer's rival, Kurt Schumacher, leader of the Social Democrats. Schumacher feared that German membership in a European Defense Community or NATO would only serve to strengthen the separation of the two Germanies.

In many ways, Schumacher was correct. Politik der Staerke did in fact deepen the division between the two Germanies. It was also unsuccessful in producing any concessions from the Soviet Union. The USSR had not weakened as Adenauer had assumed it would, and by 1955, following the FRG's membership in NATO, the Soviets **had developed** a two Germanies policy which called for a maintenance of the status quo in Europe.

Politik der Staerke also failed from the perspective of Western support for German reunification. While giving lip service to German reunification, the Allies also had an interest

⁵⁴Hanrieder, 51.

⁵⁵Griffith, 44.

in preserving the status quo. The division of Germany maintained the balance of power, and moreover, acceptance of the status quo would lead to reduced tensions. The failure of the West to act during the Berlin uprising of 1953 and later during the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, as well as France's recognition of the Oder-Neisse line in 1959 put doubts in Adenauer's mind of the Western commitment to German reunification.

As Schwartz writes, Adenauer suffered from a "Potsdam complex", which was the fear that the Four Allied Powers would reach agreements at Germany's expense.⁵⁶ As might be expected, Adenauer did his best to oppose detente. He pursued a "holding policy" against detente by calling for Western unity and German reunification as a precondition for detente.⁵⁷ Although this worked for awhile, public opinion in the West and the desire of the United States for arms control agreements showed that detente was more important to the West than German reunification.

Thus, Adenauer had several motives in accepting the September 1955 Soviet invitation to come to Moscow to open diplomatic relations. First, he wanted to gain more influence within the other members of the Western Alliance by developing his own "Russia Card". Although Schwartz notes that even this was pursued in close consultation with the West⁵⁸ because Adenauer

⁵⁶Hans-Peter Schwartz. "Adenauer's Ostpolitik", In West German Foreign Policy 1949-1979, 131.

⁵⁷Griffith 62.

⁵⁸Schwartz, 131.

was anxious to avoid what could be construed as another Treaty of Rapallo.⁵⁹ In addition to this motive, Adenauer also hoped that the Soviets would be prepared to make concessions because of domestic problems and the increasing strain in relations with China. Finally, he hoped to secure the release of the remaining German prisoners of war in the USSR and improve the situation concerning the status of West Berlin. Even though no progress on the German question came from these meetings, diplomatic and trade relations were established, German prisoners were released, and conditions in Berlin temporarily improved. The greatest significance to this meeting, however, was that for the first time since the end of World War II the Federal Republic was beginning to sow the seeds of an independent policy towards the East.

Throughout the late 50s the SPD, FDP, and the DP pushed for closer relations with the states of Eastern Europe. The SPD, especially hoped to regain German political influence in the East through increased trade.⁶⁰ Ties with the East were further renewed in 1958 when, under pressure from business and the SPD, Adenauer **inked a trade package** with the USSR that included provisions allowing the emigration of ethnic Germans from the

⁵⁹This treaty with the USSR following German membership in NATO bears more resemblance to the Treaty of Berlin that Stresemann signed with the Soviets to ease tension following the signing of the Locarno treaties. See Waldemar Besson. "The Conflict of Traditions: the Historical basis for West German Foreign Policy," chap. in Britain and West Germany: and the Future of Foreign Policy. (New York:Oxford University Press, 1971), 74.

⁶⁰Dean 21.

USSR.

Political forces in the Federal Republic were beginning to make traditional calls for close German economic and political ties with the East. Closer relations, however, were limited by the Hallstein Doctrine and the refusal of the FRG to recognize the Oder-Neisse line. The CDU had limited room to maneuver here. A large portion of its constituency was made up of refugees from the East. Although the seeds had been sown for a return for more traditional German approaches to the East, Adenauer would not be the one to bear the fruit.

Ostpolitik

The foreign policies of Adenauer's successor, Ludwig Erhard (1963-1966) were an extension of the cautious look eastward begun by Adenauer. Trade missions were exchanged with Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. In 1964, the FRG signed a trade agreement with Yugoslavia and also attempted to open trade relations with Czechoslovakia. Agreements with Czechoslovakia foundered, however, because while the FRG was willing to reject the Munich agreement of 1938, the FRG was unwilling to declare it "null and void". As under Adenauer, German policy towards the East was constrained by the limitations imposed by the Hallstein Doctrine, unwillingness to accept the Oder-Neisse Line, and divisions in the CDU\FDP coalition.

The Grand Coalition formed by the CDU and the SPD in 1969

sought to further create an "opening to the East".⁶¹ Chancellor Kiesinger and especially Foreign Minister Willy Brandt recognized that Politik der Staerke had served to limit German diplomatic options. The Federal Republic had become an economic giant while remaining a political dwarf.⁶² Thus, one of the first acts by the Grand Coalition was to overlook the Halistein Doctrine by opening diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia and Romania in 1967. However, the limits of this policy were illustrated by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The invasion showed that the Soviet Union was the main arbiter of power in the East and that only through the Soviet Union could an answer to the German question be found.⁶³ As it had often been the case over the previous two hundred years, Germany's fate seemed tied to its large eastern neighbor.

Brandt Era (1969-1974)

In October 1969, Willy Brandt became chancellor of the FRG when the SPD formed a coalition with the FDP. As foreign minister in the Grand Coalition, Brandt had spearheaded the drive for closer ties with the East. As Chancellor, Brandt would go even further **towards** reestablishing ties with the East that had, despite **progress** under previous governments, remained largely unimproved since World War II.

⁶¹ Lawrence Whetton. Germany's Ostpolitik: Relations Between the Federal Republic and the Warsaw Pact Countries, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 93.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 23.

The need for an end to Politik der Staerke and a new Ostpolitik had been recognized by Brandt for some time. The construction of the Berlin Wall during his term as mayor of West Berlin profoundly affected him. The building of the Wall demonstrated to Brandt that Politik der Staerke was unfeasible given Western disinterest in solving the German question. To Brandt the only realistic policy was one of detente conducted from a position of weakness.⁶⁴ According to Brandt:

We could not become the last of the Cold Warriors, the opponents of change...Associated with this was the hope that a detente in East-West relations and changes in the European landscape from cooperation might possibly create a new framework for the solution of the German question.⁶⁵

Hanrieder refers to this as a so-called policy of resignation "designed not so much to bring about changes for a foreseeable future as not to foreclose possibilities for an unforeseeable future".⁶⁶ Brandt was especially concerned with improving the conditions of Germans living in the East. Successful detente with the East would also provide business with new opportunities as economic ties developed, lead to a lightened FRG defense burden, give the FRG more diplomatic freedom of

⁶⁴Terrence Prittie. The Velvet Chancellors: A History of Post-War Germany. (London: Muller, 1979), 107.

⁶⁵Willy Brandt. People and Politics: The Years 1960-1975. translated by J. Maxwell Brownjohn. (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1978), 167.

⁶⁶Hanrieder. "West German Foreign Policy 1949-1979: Necessities and Choices", West German Foreign Policy 1949-1979, 28.

movement vis-a-vis the West, and end Western complaints that Germany's unrelenting cries for reunification were holding up detente.⁶⁷

Brandt realized that the only way Ostpolitik would be a success and relations with the East normalized would be by accepting the status quo in Europe. Thus, within his first one hundred days in office Brandt recognized the de facto existence of the GDR, abandoned the Hallstein doctrine, and agreed to negotiate an agreement to recognize the sanctity of the Oder-Neisse line. Public opinion now supported this. In 1951, 80% of Germans polled said that Germany should not be satisfied with the Oder-Neisse as the German-Polish border.⁶⁸ By late 1969, however, public opinion had shifted. Nearly 75% of those polled approved of official talks with the GDR, while over half favored formal recognition of the GDR and renunciation of the lost Eastern territories.⁶⁹

Brandt's early diplomatic priorities were treaties with the Soviet Union and Poland. In August 1970, the FRG signed a non-aggression treaty with the USSR. The treaty rejected the use of force and recognized the inviolability of all existing frontiers. The agreement served several purposes. First, Brandt used ratification of the treaty as a bargaining chip to get the

⁶⁷Roger Morgan. 'The Ostpolitik and West Germany's External Relations', in The Ostpolitik and Political Change in Germany. ed. Roger Tilford, (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1975), 21.

⁶⁸Ashkenasi, 62.

⁶⁹Whetton, 94.

Soviets to agree to a four power treaty on West Berlin. The agreement also served to reassure other Eastern European nations. At the same time the agreement did not shut the door on the eventual reunification of Germany.

By December of 1970, a treaty had also been signed with Poland. This agreement also recognized the inviolability of the Oder-Neisse. Despite the symbolic importance of such a concession, it nevertheless remained only a de facto recognition of the border. It was pointed out that the FRG could not officially recognize borders that were not its own and that decisions regarding final dispositions of territory had to be left for a peace treaty. Nevertheless, the wording was sufficiently strong to convince the Poles to reestablish diplomatic relations and conclude a trade agreement. Trade also increased with the Soviet Union and the FRG became her largest Western trading partner.

Intense diplomatic activity towards the East continued. By 1973 ambassadors had been exchanged with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Turner notes that "By a remarkable series of delicate **and** interconnected negotiations, Bonn had for the first time **assumed a leadership role** in the diplomatic sphere".⁷⁰ Brandt concurs, writing: "We became the advocate of our own interests vis-a-vis the governments of Eastern Europe. By doing so we strengthened our voice inside the bodies devoted to Western

⁷⁰Turner, 157.

Europe, Atlantic, and international cooperation".⁷¹

Brandt's Ostpolitik was in many ways a further return to traditional German eastern policy. With Ostpolitik the Federal Republic, as had the German state in the past, found a way of achieving independence vis-a-vis the West. Ostpolitik also enabled the FRG to reduce tensions in Central Europe and begin reforging traditional political and economic ties. This policy would continue to be actively pursued under Brandt's successor, Helmut Schmidt.

Schmidt Era (1974-1982)

During the 1970s Ostpolitik became closely tied to detente and arms control. Ostpolitik enabled the FRG to be a force for change and a partner alongside the West in pursuit of detente. As Coker asserts, Ostpolitik "liberated Germany from its role as a client" and enabled her to use her economic power to end her subordination to the Western Allies.⁷²

By 1975, trade with the Eastern bloc had become 6.4% of the FRG's trade. Exports to Poland in 1974 were five times what they had been in 1971, at DM 2.6 billion and exports to the Soviet Union were **three** times as great rising to DM 4.8 billion by 1974.⁷³ Like Brandt, Schmidt was also concerned with the welfare of Germans outside the borders of the FRG. In 1975, the FRG gave

⁷¹Brandt, 168.

⁷²Christopher Coker. "At the Birth of a Fourth Reich? The British REaction", The Political Science Quarterly. v. 61, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1990), 283.

⁷³Morgan, 24.

Poland a DM 3.1 billion payment to compensate for the victims of Nazism, as well as a DM 1 billion credit. In return 125,000 ethnic Germans were to be allowed to leave Poland.⁷⁴

This ability through Ostpolitik and detente to exercise German economic influence in pursuit of foreign policy goals was highly valued by Schmidt. "Our treaties with Moscow, Warsaw, East Berlin...have greatly reduced the many reasons...for seeking and begging for continuous reassurance...our margin of manoeuvre has been greatly enlarged".⁷⁵ The value of this policy to the FRG is demonstrated by the German efforts to maintain detente even during periods of East-West tension. Following the chill in U.S.-Soviet relations following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Bonn proposed a policy of "divisible detente". This would have accepted conflict in the Third World while maintaining cooperation in Europe. Similarly, after the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981, Schmidt, noting the hardship that poor East-West relations placed on the two German states, emphasized "adopting a prudent and measured response that would maintain at least a **minimum** of cordiality".⁷⁶

The **pursuit** of Ostpolitik and detente were essentially a return to **traditional** German diplomacy. They enabled the FRG to cultivate historic political and economic ties. Moreover they

⁷⁴Prittie 237.

⁷⁵qtd. in Coker 283.

⁷⁶Anne-Marie Burley. "The Once and Future German Question", Foreign Affairs. v.68 (Winter 89/90), 71.

also provided the FRG with more political clout by making the FRG less dependent on the West. Finally, Ostpolitik and detente were a return to the idea of Germany as a bridge to the East. Schmidt writes:

For centuries...we functioned as a bridge between Russia...and Europe...The Bridge must be restored and made strong. For the Russians it has always been difficult to understand the West; it has always been difficult for the West to understand Russia and Russian politics-but the Germans can bring about understanding. They have done it throughout their history.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Schmidt, 23.

The Kohl Government and the Reunification of Germany

In 1982, Helmut Kohl of the CDU formed a coalition government with the FDP following a vote of no confidence against Chancellor Schmidt. Despite having many ideological differences with the SPD, Kohl left their eastern policy largely intact. The FRG continued to seek good relations with the East and to use its economic influence, especially with the GDR, to obtain concessions that would improve the lives of Germans outside of the Federal Republic.

In contrast to previous SPD governments, however, Kohl began to reemphasize German reunification and that postwar boundaries could only be permanently established by a peace treaty ending World War II. Kohl also attached importance to developing a German "national identity" in order to combat the "cultural pessimism" that had kept the FRG from pursuing a political role equal to its economic strength.⁷⁸

The American decision to deploy intermediate range missiles in Europe also helped to trigger a revival of the idea of Germany as a "bridge or mediator" between East and West. According to Hans-Georg Betz this strengthened the renewed idea of Mittleuropa forming among intellectuals of the left and right.⁷⁹ Both right and left saw Mittleuropa in terms of a solution to the German Question: the left envisioning a unified,

⁷⁸Burley, 72.

⁷⁹Hans Georg-Betz. "Mittleuropa and Post-Modern European Identity", The New German Critique. no. 50 (Spring/Summer 90), 175.

neutral Germany and the right an opportunity for a return to German hegemony over Central Europe.⁸⁰

The year 1989 was one of great change in Europe as Communist governments began to collapse throughout the East. The situation in the GDR was no exception. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November set off a chain of events that in less than a year's time resulted in the reunification of Germany. The reunification created a state with a population of 78 million, a trillion dollar economy that makes up 35% of the European Community's Gross National Product (GNP)⁸¹, and a trade surplus worth \$80 billion in 1989.⁸² The reappearance of a single German state on the European stage raised many questions and uncovered many latent concerns. The question everyone would like answered is what will be Germany's role in the new Europe?

⁸⁰Ibid, 175-9.

⁸¹Steven F. Szabo. "Reunited Germany", Current History. v. 90 no. 549 (November 1990): 388.

⁸²Russell Watson & other. "The New Superpower", Newsweek. v. 115 (26 February 1990): 20.

What is Germany's Role?

Perhaps the first place to look for an answer to this question is from the Germans themselves. "The future is a more closely knit Europe, with Germany as the first among equals," says one Kohl advisor.⁸³ "We want to lead," asserts another, "Perhaps in time the U.S. will take care of places like Central America, and we will handle Eastern Europe".⁸⁴

Naturally, the most frightening scenario for any of the nations of Eastern Europe is the return of a Germany interested in territorial hegemony. Those that fear such an eventuality cite Germany's long history of conquering her neighbors. However, as Carl Schorske, Princeton professor emeritus of history, points out: "There is no European country that hasn't had its moments of trying to swallow up its neighbors, and I don't think Germany is any worse than any other country".⁸⁵

Those that fear an expansionistic Germany also fail to consider the historical reasons behind Germany's conquests. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries additional expansion **was necessary** to guarantee a supply of raw materials and markets. **Such a guarantee** is no longer necessary today. Germany is **fully integrated** into the world economic and political system. The global free trade that Bismarck's kleindeutsch

⁸³Watson, 17.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵qtd. by Otto Friedrich. "Germany Toward Unity", Time. v. 136, no. 2 (9 July 1990): 71.

solution required to be successful is now in place.⁸⁶

There are also several practical reasons why Germany would be uninterested in territorial expansion. First, as Szabo points out Germany has become a trading state, which means that to be successful she must be sensitive to the views and concerns of her partners. "A strong emphasis on military power would set off counter-alliances and confront Germany once again with its old problem of encirclement by hostile powers".⁸⁷ German emphasis on military power is especially unlikely since Germany has agreed to cut the size of the Bundeswehr by 230,000 men by 1994.

Economically, the price of territorial expansion may also be prohibitive. The cost of reviving the East German economy, supposedly the most modern of Eastern Europe may eventually cost upwards of \$700 billion. In addition, as Stephen Evera asserts, today's post-industrial economies which depend on knowledge-based forms of production are not ready made for conquering. The security measures necessary for subjugation would restrict the flow of information to such a degree that productivity would be seriously limited, thus canceling out any benefits of conquest.⁸⁸

Many of those who fear a resurgent German expansionism are Poles who live in those areas that were part of the prewar German

⁸⁶Calleo, 164-5.

⁸⁷Szabo, 388.

⁸⁸Stephen Van Evera. "Primed for Peace in Europe After the Cold War", International Security. v. 15 no. 3 (Winter 90/91): 14-5.

Reich. They cite Kohl's footdragging to sign a treaty recognizing the Oder-Neisse. They also note Finance Minister's Theo Waigel's July 1989 speech, in which he said that a reunified Germany would have a right to the borders of 1937.⁸⁹ This should not be thought of as the mainstream of German political thought, however. Waigel's speech was a source of much embarrassment. Afterwards, Foreign Minister Genscher threatened to withdraw the FDP from the CDU/FDP coalition if the CDU sought to "turn back the wheel of history".⁹⁰

Kohl's early footdragging on formal recognition of the Oder-Neisse can be attributed to political need. The League of Expellees claims to have 2.3 million members and Kohl's CDU still depends on their votes. This is illustrated by a June 1990 speech to the Bundestag in which Kohl, while stating his intention to formally recognize the Oder-Neisse, spent most of his time expressing sympathy to those Germans from the former eastern territories. However, Peter Schneider argues that the minority problem is really a non-issue. Visiting Poland he found that all of the ethnic Germans he met had been very Polonized and were **uninterested in territorial revision**. Their main concerns were that they **be allowed** to speak German and have church services in German, rights that were guaranteed by an agreement signed by Kohl in November 1989. Back in the West, Schneider reports that

⁸⁹ "Lebensraum all Over Again", Newsweek, v. 114 (24 July 1989): 25.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

many former expellees, including the chair of the Silesian Patriots Club, despite their cries for border revision, would not return to the East.⁹¹ This is not to say that the border and minorities issues might not be exploited for political purposes. In March Kohl emphasized that the status of German minorities in Poland would play an important role in negotiations for a good-neighborliness treaty, but it is unlikely that actual territorial revision will ever be a goal.

Rather than territorial expansion or revision, it is more likely that Germany will pursue her traditional efforts to economically dominate Eastern Europe. According to Anderson and Meyer, German businessmen look to the East as a potential "Taiwan West" because of its pool of skilled, cheap labor.⁹² Watson also points out that Germany's location plus the nature of her manufacturing strengths: machinery, industrial systems, chemicals, and consumer goods makes Germany highly-suited to do business in Eastern Europe.⁹³ In addition, the strength of the German economy makes economic domination plausible. The Mark, which foreign exchange expert Al Soria calls "the currency of the 90s", is **already** the anchor for the nine-member European Monetary System.⁹⁴ Daniel Burstein, an analyst of global business and

⁹¹Peter Schneider. "Is Anyone German Here: a Journey into Silesia", New York Times Magazine. ():64.

⁹²Anderson, 55.

⁹³Watson, 20.

⁹⁴Blanca Riemer & Jonathan Kapstein. "The West German Mark May Soon Rule the East", Business Week. (27 November 1989): 65.

financial issues, predicts that the Bundesbank and other German institutions will become Europe's "center of economic gravity".⁹⁵

Examples of growing German economic influence in the East abound. Half of the 700 foreign ventures in Hungary are German and Deutschebank has already opened branch offices in Budapest and Warsaw. In November 1989, Lech Walesa cleared his calendar to meet with German businessmen, calling for an "invasion" of foreign investors.⁹⁶ That same month, Kohl went to Warsaw with a financial aid package worth \$1.7 billion in new credits in addition to the \$2 billion already written off or rescheduled. While presented as a form of "war reparation" and moral obligation, skeptics saw the aid package as hegemony by another name.⁹⁷

German financial aid also seems to have influenced Hungarian foreign policy. James Hoagland contends that the August 1989 opening of the Hungarian border with Austria, allowing a route for East Germans to escape to the West, was a direct result of pressure from the FRG. This is because the announcement of the decision **came** at a meeting between Hungary's premier and Kohl. Aid to **Hungary** and Hungary's desire to become an associate member of the EC were also discussed at this meeting. Two months later

⁹⁵ "The Awesome German Giant", U.S. News & World Report. (1 April 1991): 50.

⁹⁶ Anderson, 56.

⁹⁷ Harry Anderson. "We have an Interest in the East", Newsweek. v.114 (13 November 1989): 55-6.

the FRG made an untied loan to Hungary and agreed to favor Hungary's request for EC membership. Hoagland also reports that Czechoslovakia took a "hands off" policy towards East Germans following an exchange of messages with the Federal Republic.⁹⁸

Thus, as Germany moves united toward the year 2000 the Germans are as Burley puts it "at the center, economically, politically and culturally, and are determined to press their advantage".⁹⁹ The Germans will continue to play out their role as "bridge" to the East as they have for a millennium. Some things have changed. The days of conquest for the sake of security and economic interests are over in Europe. However, Germany's status as Europe's economic powerhouse places her in the position to be an economic hegemon. Realization of a European economic union that includes the states of Eastern Europe could finally, and peacefully, fulfill the dream of a German-dominated Mitteleuropa. It is up to the Germans to decide whether their role is a benevolent one or a return to the arrogance and haughtiness of previous days.

⁹⁸ James Hoagland. "Europe's Destiny", Foreign Affairs. 40.

⁹⁹ Burley, 72.

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