

# Reunification forecast as East meet

Feature by  
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For several days, media outlets have been covered with news on the latest developments unfolding in Eastern Europe. The recent occurrences in East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia are generally interpreted as the most important world events to happen for decades, and will permanently affect the structure of international relationships everywhere. Speculation abounds as to the next link in the chain of events which continues to unfold. Among the more startling of such predictions is the suggestion that the reunification of the two Germanies is possible. Interviews and discussions with various knowledgeable University of Alberta professors offers a wide range of concrete possibilities for the future of the two Germanies.

Excitement over the changes reverberates around the world, but the explosion which prompted the ultimate action—opening the Berlin Wall—came from within East Germany. Professor Fred Engelmann, a political science specialist in Western European politics, asserts that the events are talked about with little consideration of the internal elements which forced this most dramatic change. Maria Koch, of the department of Germanic studies, concurs with Engelmann. She feels that to understand the drive for liberalization in East Germany, one must first see the reality that East Germans are not demanding immediate reunification, but desire a renovation of the present government to establish a new sovereign state. "This is a greater challenge," she says, "and it is more desirable than to go to West Germany, where everything is already set up, and drown."

The steps toward overhaul of the East German government structure are steep, but achievable. New East German president Egon Krenz has made political reform somewhat of a reality, although these moves may be perceived as shortsighted. Krenz' plan for free elections appears to be one where the current governing party, the SED, competes with what professor Engelmann calls its four satellite parties. He adds that unless the Social Democratic Party, who were forced into an integrated party when the Communist Party first came to power in 1946, can organize and develop recognition, the SED will no doubt carry a majority. Without the Social Democrats, the remaining seats will be turned over to the satellite parties which, in Engelmann's opinion, "show little will of their own."

However, virtually the opposite is still possible: the Communist party may dissolve entirely, as it has in Hungary. This past

Sunday, Krenz said he would fight for political reform, but will step down from his general secretary's position if the party disagrees with his position. Engelmann alludes to this option, noting that "there will be a lot more to say after the SED meets at a special party congress in December. Considering the rapid pace of reforms over the last two weeks, December may well be a long time in the future; wider openings to democracy or even dissolution of the SED are possible within this time frame.

In the meantime, Engelmann says, "opening the wall has gotten the urge to 'get out' away from the East Germans," and adds that the flood of outgoing East Germans will subside and the people leaving now will be matched by the return of earlier emigrants, less skilled workers who were unable to find jobs right away and found the 'social safety net' of the West far less developed than in East Germany. For the time being, self-determination seems to be the main highway to liberalization.

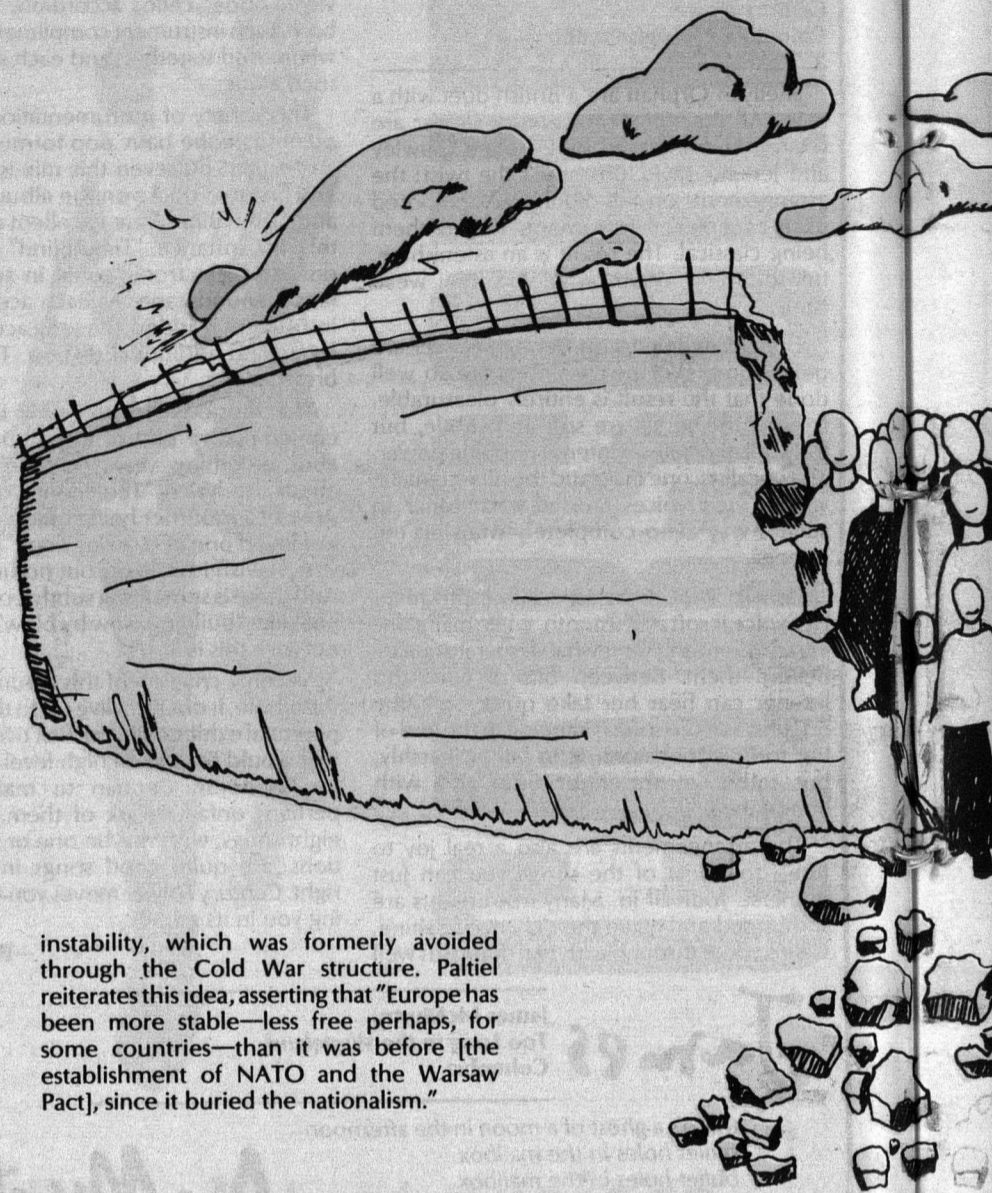
This does not mean that reunification is an impossibility in the long term. Koch believes that the people's drive for self-determination and democratization outweighs structural global concerns. However, she does concede that nationalist sentiment makes sovereignty more difficult for East Germany than it is for countries like Hungary, because the urge to reunite brothers of the same culture and homeland persists.

J.A. Lejnieks, political science professor of international relations and foreign policy, predicted that nationalism would eventually bring the two Germanies together. "It is the natural thing to happen," he said. "Nationalist sentiment can't keep the Germanies apart." He guards this statement, however, by adding that reunification is not achievable in the near future. Lejnieks believes that first major changes in the economic structure of East Germany will occur, which in turn will necessitate political reform.

Professor Jeremy Paltiel of the political science department supports the view that "any reunification first needs self-determination." He also adds that a democratic East Germany may not want to join West Germany, and refers to a poll from East Germany which concluded that 92 per cent of East Germans don't want reunification at this time. Paltiel asserts that "reunification now would mean depriving East Germans of their democratic rights before they have time to decide."

Only professor Engelmann considered reunification as a short-term possibility, possibly in response to the formal integration of the European Economic Community in 1992.

Whether the changes in East Germany lead to reunification or not, the opening of the Berlin Wall has come to be regarded as the end to the Cold War. Some believe that new tensions may arise with the lifting of the Iron Curtain. Lejnieks speculates that the tide of nationalism could inflame European



instability, which was formerly avoided through the Cold War structure. Paltiel reiterates this idea, asserting that "Europe has been more stable—less free perhaps, for some countries—than it was before [the establishment of NATO and the Warsaw Pact], since it buried the nationalism."

