

# NEW GERMANY: EUROPE'S BENEVOLENT GIANT?

*The old East Germany may have been swallowed whole, but its unique culture could be just what the Federal Republic needs.*

BY MADELEINE POULIN

ONE CAN SAY A LOT ABOUT THE UNIFICATION of Germany; there is economics, sociology, history, even futurology – and of course, there is anxiety. Claude Cheysson, a former French minister of foreign affairs in the Socialist government, hasn't quite gone this far yet. But as he sees it, to speculate about the eventual absorption of Austria into Germany – “So is Austria next?” – is more than just a bad joke: it's a way of saying, “What are they capable of next?” This senior civil servant, who served as European commissioner in Brussels, is clearly annoyed with the manner in which the West Germans have steamrolled their way to political and monetary union, without regard to either the fragile state of the East German economy – “It's a kind of colonization,” he says – or to the delicate structure of European integration.

Despite all the reassurance emanating from Bonn, France wonders whether Germany will lose some of its enthusiasm for forging ahead with the Europe of tomorrow; there is so much to do at home now. After they have finished their work, will a counterbalance to the powerful German voice within the great European concert still be possible? Chancellor Kohl has said he wants “a united Germany in a united Europe.” The first part of this wish has already come true; the second is still a long way off.

In this Parisian apartment overlooking the Luxembourg gardens, there is a prevailing sense of unease. Will Germany be the guarantor of European security or a destabilizing force? It's a question that preoccupies Claude Cheysson, but one for which he can only answer, “I don't really know.”

BUT HOW CAN WE KNOW, after all the new Germany has not taken shape. Maybe it will simply become a larger version of the Federal Republic, adding another sixteen million inhabitants in much the same way that a person adds kilos and now tips the scales at seventy-eight with no change in personality. The former German Democratic Republic did agree after all, to be swallowed whole, leaving no trace of its previous political, economic and legal structure.

In West Germany, however, no one is betting on this. These events are absolutely un-

precedented and even the economic outcome, to take the area most easily measured and analyzed, is still very much in doubt. At the prestigious *Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung*, quartered in a quiet suburb of (West) Berlin, the economist Heiner Flassbeck reminds us that in the space of just a few short months East Germany has gone through a political revolution, followed by two severe economic jolts: the abrupt introduction of a market economy and, most important, the drastic revaluation of its currency from the unofficial, but realistic, rate of 4.4 to the Deutschmark, to parity.

No other country has ever undergone such a transition, Flassbeck points out. No doubt, East German citizens were happy to exchange the anaemic communist marks they had accumulated (up to a certain amount, depending on the age group) for powerful capitalist marks, but the impact on East German businesses and industries was disastrous. In the space of a day, they were rendered totally uncompetitive in the new larger German market. The result in the East was unemployment, disenchantment and numerous demonstrations. Easterners knew immediately that they would remain poor cousins for a long time to come.

“DO YOU THINK IT'S A PLEASURE BEING SWALLOWED up?” asked Ludwig the Second of Bavaria at the time of the first German unification carried out by Bismark in 1871. Even Wilhelm the First, who had done the swallowing, reportedly had nothing more positive to say than, “It's the saddest day of my life.” Why so? Because he feared that the Prussian virtues would be diluted and lost in the larger Germany. This same apprehension exists today in what was once the Federal Republic.

Today's West German intellectuals have different virtues in mind to be sure, and if they worry it is because they believe these only recently acquired virtues to be still fragile. The “virtues” can be summarized in a single word: democracy. After Bismark and the Kaisers, after the brief unhappy interlude of the Weimar Republic, and after Hitler, the West Germans

were presented, as it were, with democracy by the victorious Western Allies. But is democracy all that more firmly entrenched among West Germans than totalitarian socialism was among the East Germans who, having been given it by Soviet victors, now say “no thank you.” It is a question that some dare to ask.

GEORGIA TORNOW IS AN ELEGANT YOUNG woman who manages *Die Tageszeitung*, more familiarly known as “Taz”, the most anti-establishment of West Berlin's newspapers and a vehicle for the avant garde. “Here in the FRG we have experienced democracy, how it works, the checks and balances, its interest groups, etc. But in the GDR, even the most politically astute people have no idea of all this when they try to imagine an effective political order. They have been living in a cocoon all this time.”

Georgia Tornow is impatient. She fears that the sixteen million new citizens will retard Germany's progress toward the kind of society of which she dreams. They will want, she says, a failure-proof social security system and guaranteed employment rather than flexible arrangements which take into account the quality, and not just the standard of life. In the eyes of some, however, most notably the always restless left, the situation appears even more grave.

Dieter Esche was born during the Second World War and has worked with the entire spectrum of left-wing parties, including the Greens. He is one of many Germans who distrusts Germans, who expresses doubts about the depth of democratic sentiment in the Federal Republic and is astonished that West Germany is viewed in Eastern Europe as an exemplary democratic society. The doubts are even greater when it comes to the sixteen million new citizens who have joined the ranks of the expanded Germany. For evidence, Esche points to the traditions of old authoritarian Prussia, the core of East Germany, on to which, over the last forty years, have been grafted habits of obedience to the totalitarian state. He does not discount the possibility that these influences could change the Federal Republic, and above all, he fears the emergence of a new nationalism.