

European Parliament and the path to German reunification

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, set in motion by the events of 9 November 1989, which led to Germany's full reunification within less than a year. The accession of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the Federal Republic of Germany (Federal Republic) completed the reunification process on 3 October 1990. Moreover, with the accession of the former GDR to the Federal Republic, the GDR integrated into the European Economic Community (EEC) of the time via a special procedure. As the GDR's status as a subject of international law ended with its accession to the Federal Republic, a normal EEC Treaty accession procedure was not possible. The European Parliament followed the chain of profound political developments triggered by the fall of the Berlin Wall closely.

1989 – A historical turning point

In the contemporary history of Europe and its integration process, 1989 was a crucial turning point. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November of that year was one of several events that launched democratic change in central and eastern Europe. Events in 1989 included: the end of the Hungarian communist power monopoly (January); Tadeusz Mazowiecki's victory in partially free elections in Poland (June); overthrow of the Bulgarian Head of State and Party Leader Todor Zhivkov (November); the execution of Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the election of human rights activist Václav Havel as President of Czechoslovakia (December). Nevertheless, the fall of the Berlin Wall particularly characterised 1989 as a historical turning point, signalling the end of the 50-year east-west conflict and the beginning of today's free movement throughout Europe. At the time, the EEC was about to implement the goals of the 1986 Single European Act, the first major revision of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, and intended to establish the single market by December 1992. Against this background, the European Parliament paid particular attention in its debates and analyses regarding the far-reaching political changes in central and eastern Europe and the impact of the process of German unification on the EEC.

European Parliament response to the fall of the Berlin Wall

The European Parliament reacted quickly to the November 1989 events in Berlin. As the Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs was meeting in the Reichstag from 8 to 10 November, some Members of the European Parliament actually experienced the opening of borders between East and West Berlin at first-hand. In a public statement of 10 November, the Committee welcomed the GDR authorities' decision to ease border crossings at the inner-German border. Due to uncertainty regarding whether borders might remain open, the Committee's public statement also expressed the hope that the GDR authorities would abolish remaining restrictions on passenger transport at the inner-German border within a very short time.

Some days later, on 22 November 1989, the European Parliament held a plenary debate on the events in central and eastern Europe. The attendance of two members of the European Council, French President François Mitterrand and Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl, underpinned the high political relevance of this debate, with the fall of the Berlin Wall a prominent topic. In his speech, Kohl stated that 'Germany will be completely united only if progress is made towards the unification of our old continent. Policy on Germany and policy on Europe are completely inseparable'. Kohl's speech therefore clearly indicated that his enlargement policy was based on an awareness that a united Germany would need support from Europe and the EEC. The speech also aimed at allaying European partners' fears that a united Germany would aspire to European hegemony.

A European Parliament [resolution](#) following the debate also included the message that German reunification and European integration were two sides of the same coin. It stressed that 'having regard to recent developments in the GDR, and notably the opening of the Berlin Wall ... the closer integration of the EEC will create the basis for closer cooperation with the states of Central and Eastern Europe ... and closer ties between the German states'. To study the broader possible consequences of German reunification, especially with a view to the European integration process, the European Parliament set up a Temporary Committee to consider the impact of the German unification process on the EEC.

Temporary Committee to consider the impact of the process of German reunification on the EEC

Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission at the time, inspired the creation of the Temporary Committee, pointing out to the European Parliament in January 1990 that, given the special situation in the GDR after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was conceivable that East Germany might rapidly integrate into the EEC. In response to this political assessment, Parliament decided to create a Temporary Committee tasked with analysing the impact of GDR integration into the EEC on the latter's fields of activity, to make a constructive Community contribution to the German unification process, and to adapt the EEC itself to the new geopolitical landscape.

Set up in February 1990, the Temporary Committee consisted of 20 Members. Among them were three former foreign ministers: Claude Cheysson (France), Fernando Morán López (Spain), and Leo Tindemans (Belgium). Furthermore, former President of the European Parliament, Simone Veil (France), and former West German Ambassador to the United Nations, Rüdiger von Wechmar, sat on the committee. The inclusion of such major European political figures demonstrated the importance of the Temporary Committee within the European Parliament.

At its constituent meeting, the Temporary Committee drew up a plan of action enabling it to consider the institutional aspects of German reunification, the overall political context, and the impact on EEC sectoral policies. To cover these different areas, the Committee held discussions at its regular meetings with representatives of the governments of the GDR, the Federal Republic and even the United States and Soviet Union. Moreover, the Temporary Committee, with the help of the Parliament's Directorate-General for Research, collected information and opinions on the situation in the GDR from across the political spectrum. These activities contributed to the work of the Committee's rapporteur, Alan John Donnelly (United Kingdom), a Member of the Group of the European Socialists of the time. Parliament adopted Donnelly's [interim report](#) in plenary in July 1990.

The report emphasised the need to bring about European integration in parallel with German reunification. It proposed to prevent derogations and transitional measures granted to the former GDR from weakening central EEC objectives, including the full achievement of the single market. Moreover, the report underlined the need to place the German reunification process within the wider context of relations with central and eastern Europe. The report argued that the GDR's entry into the EEC could play an important bridge function with those countries. The report also looked at a number of other specific policy issues raised by German reunification, such as industrial and competition policy considerations, transport and telecommunications, energy and research, and economic and social cohesion. In addition, the report proposed to assign observer status in the European Parliament to representatives from the former GDR.

Representation of the former GDR in the European Parliament

The suggestion to give observer status to representatives of the GDR aimed at responding to the need to represent the 17 million inhabitants of East Germany in the EEC after the accession of the former GDR to the EEC. The Federal Republic refrained from both requesting additional Commissioners and greater voting power within the Council. However, it demanded representation for the East German *Länder* in the European Parliament. Complying with this demand raised two particularly problematic issues for the Parliament: First, any changes in the number of Members would have disturbed the balanced system of representation, according to the size of each country's population but with an equal number of Members (81) for each of the EEC's most populous countries (France, Italy, the United Kingdom and West Germany). Second, it would have been incompatible with democratic principles if, following German reunification, East German citizens were to be represented for a considerable period by Members they had not themselves elected. The solution found was to invite 18 non-voting Members from East Germany to the European Parliament as observers. Finally, in the 1994 election, the number of MEPs elected in Germany was increased by that amount. Current German Member, Constanze Krehl (S&D), was one of these East German observers from 1991 to 1994.

German reunification and European Union

The Temporary Committee adopted its final political report in November 1990. It again emphasised the need to pursue the process of German reunification in parallel with European integration. Moreover, the report stated that German reunification should be considered as a step towards European union. In fact, German reunification contributed to creating the momentum for the EEC leaders of the period to launch the December 1990 intergovernmental conference on European monetary union and political union, which concluded at the Maastricht Summit in December 1991, and the agreement to promulgate a new treaty on European Union.

