

The Political Framework: Civil Movements and Governments, 1985-1995

Alexander von Plato, John G. Diefenbaker Fellow (2012)

Karen Brglez, University of Winnipeg

The years between 1985 and 1995 were remarkable times of historical importance. At the end of this period, the world had fundamentally changed its post-war order. The borders of the Cold War vanished, and most of the central and eastern European countries adopted western parliamentary systems with market oriented economies. The Eastern European Cold War Alliance, the Warsaw Treaty, disappeared and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) extended to the borders of the Russian Federation and Belarus.

In 1985, Mikhail Sergejewich Gorbachev came into power in the Soviet Union. A “new thinking” emerged from his leadership bringing change to the rigid Soviet system. Under his rule, the “Brezhnev Doctrine,” which had allowed interventions in the countries of the Warsaw Treaty, was rescinded on July 7, 1989. Democratic reforms under the labels of “Perestroika” and “Glasnost” were introduced at home and Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan in autumn 1989. The Polish political trade union “Solidarność” was allowed to reconvene on April 5, 1989 and the Hungarian Government opened their borders to Austria without questioning by the Soviet leadership one month later. In the west, US-President George Bush demanded at the NATO summit in Brussels at the end of May and in a speech in Mainz at the beginning of June 1989 for an end to the division of Europe, especially in Germany and Berlin. Throughout the spring and summer, thousands of people from the German Democratic Republic, GDR (East Germany) fled into the embassies of the Federal Republic of Germany, FRG (West Germany). Tens of thousands in nearly every city in the GDR demonstrated for democratic laws and freedom, especially in Leipzig (“Monday demonstrations”). The first democratic group, “Das Neue Forum” (New Forum) was permitted in September 1989 and this concession was soon extended to several other civil movement groups. In the middle of October the leader of the GDR, Erich Honecker, was forced to retire and was replaced by younger party boss Egon Krenz. The Berlin Wall was opened by one of the most astonishing misunderstandings in history on November 9, 1989, and only weeks later the central buildings of the Secret Police (“Staatssicherheit” or “Stasi”) were stormed by thousands of East German residents. During this tumultuous period, until the end of November 1989, the civil movements were driving the demands for government reforms in Europe and North America.

A new government of the GDR led by Hans Modrow was appointed on November 13. Modrow constructed a “multi-party coalition” and set up a “round

table” as a response for a call to dialogue from dissidents. The GDR government formulated the aim of a “treaty community” with West Germany. In the west, Chancellor of the FRG, Helmut Kohl, gave his “Ten Points Speech” to the Bundestag on November 28, 1989. In his speech he expressed the concept of a “Federation of the Germanies” and at the end he announced that re-unification of the Germanies was the central aim of the Federal Government. Though Kohl emphasized the European dimension of this process, he made no mention of NATO, only the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and nothing was said about the Polish-German border. Only four days later, President George Bush gave his “Four Points Speech” regarding the German situation from Washington. Bush stressed the acceptance of German re-unification, but with the conditions that it exists only under the roof of NATO, that it accepts the existing borders of Europe, and that it be a slow democratic and peaceful process.

German and Polish politicians criticised Kohl for the lack of clear statements on the Polish German border, and nearly every European government followed. Particularly, Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, were infuriated with Kohl for not being notified of his “Ten Point Programme” in advance. West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had not been informed either, but nevertheless was the first one who had to hear the hostile complaints of the Soviets. Shevardnadze angrily declared, “Not even Hitler would have dared that”. The spectre of German unification also sparked many criticisms from its Western European neighbours. British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher was profoundly concerned about a strengthened Germany in the heart of Europe, whereas French President Francois Mitterrand did not have the same fundamental criticisms, but feared that the process of German unification would disturb European integration.

By February 1990 Kohl advocated for the joining (“Beitritt”) of the GDR to the FRG, following Article 23 of the Federal German constitution, instead of building a new Germany after a Constitutional Assembly. He supported the “Alliance for Germany” under the East German candidate and leader of the CDU in the East, Lothar de Maizière. The party supported Kohl’s proposal and won the absolute majority in the election on March 18, 1990. The dissident groups only got 2.85 percent of the vote. The drive for unification was now being pushed by the governments from above.

In January 1990 the Soviet government accepted the possibility of German unification; however, they demanded to be involved in the coordination of the process. Their main concerns were over the matters of military allegiances and questions of disarmament. In international negotiations bi-lateral, as well as multi-lateral the international pre-conditions for German unification were cleared – between the US-State Secretary James Baker and his administration and German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and his staff. By the end of January the

idea of the “Two plus Four” was born, merely within a few days of when Gorbachev and his advisor Anatolij Cernaev spoke of “Four plus Two” negotiations to stress the importance of the four victors. It was decided that the two Germanies and the four victors of World War II, who held “four power rights” in Berlin, would be the negotiators. This idea was first introduced in Ottawa at the “Open Skies Conference” to the Foreign Ministers of various countries from both East and West. Not everyone supported the idea. For instance, the Foreign Ministers of Italy and the Netherlands protested for being excluded from the negotiations, but Genscher harshly retorted, “You are not part of the game.”

During spring and summer the international conditions were negotiated, including the question of the Polish frontier by Kohl and the Polish government. The internal German questions were negotiated between West and East German representatives Wolfgang Schäuble (West) and Günther Krause (East) and their assistants. The joining of the Currency-, the Economy- and the Social Union came into force on July 1, 1990. On July 22, the law regarding the re-introducing of the five provinces was decided, on August 23 the Eastern Parliament, the “Volkskammer”, agreed to join the GDR to the FRG, and on August 31 the “Treaty Regarding the Establishing of the Unity of Germany” was signed between both German states. By the fall, on September 12, 1990 the “Two-plus-Four Treaty regarding the final regulation concerning Germany” – what a bureaucratic name for such an important international contract – was signed by the six Foreign Ministers after some last minute difficulties. The “Volkskammer” had its last meeting on October 2, and German unification came into effect on October 3.

The end of the Cold War witnessed a reconstruction of Europe. Following the reunification of Germany, some of the central-east European countries changed their political structures to a democratic parliamentary political system, and most of them became members of NATO. By the middle of the 1990s the then Russian Federation and Belarus found themselves as direct neighbours to the NATO alliance. The ideological confrontation that had gripped Europe since the end of the Second World War came to an abrupt end. This had global implications as it led to the termination of the competition over the Third World. The political and economic structures of Third World countries, along with those countries that were non-aligned were significantly altered by the ending of the division of Europe.