



About the 30th anniversary of the German reunification

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As we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berliner Wall, hundreds of documentaries about the strength of the German Democratic Republic flooded us. Many decry the gap still there as well. But what about Europe?

Today, Berlin is a European capital, with a developed creative and artistic scene which makes it very popular among the youth. Its Döner and nightclubs, its beer and bicycle paths, all immersed in a vintage, historical but cosy atmosphere, contribute to the charm and attractiveness of the city. Berlin is a bilingual city where English is as much spoken as German for tourists and people from all over the world to understand themselves. Significant is also the geographical location of the city: Berlin is right in the middle of Europe at the intersection of the route between Madrid and Vilnius and between Stockholm and Athens. When hanging out in Berlin, no one would imagine why the East of Germany would still have resentment against the West, and now also against Europe. When shopping on Alexanderplatz or visiting the GDR museum, you could think “the heart of Europe is now here”, in this place symbolizing the end of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, which enabled Europe to unify with the Maastricht Treaty and, later, the enlargement to the East.

Yet, just as Berlin stood as a “capitalistic Isle” in the Soviet block during the Cold War, it appears nowadays as a flourishing dream city, a “European Isle”, in the middle of Länder suffering from ageing process, desertification and lack of economic activity. 30 years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, difficulties and sadness still stick to small cities which belong to East German, and even after the national reunification meant to enable the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to catch up with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). To many former East German, the feeling of having been guzzled by West German people and their culture lingers. Former heroes of the GDR are not always recognized by former West German people, even they are part and parcels of the GDR’s history, myths and glory : e. g. Sigmund Jähn, the first German man to go to space, who took part to the 31st Soyuz Mission but was completely ignored in the FRG. He had to disappear and to be forgotten after 1989 because he embodied a facet of the soviet success. Economically speaking, the feeling of having been gobbled prevails as well. Privatizations and takeover bids had rushed off between 1989 and 1994 thanks to the Treuhandanstalt, a West German body in charge of the liberalisation of the East German economy, and the consequences are nowadays further sensitive. The time of popular jubilation during which East German people were enthusiastic to join the FDR and to enjoy the variety of products offered by a capitalistic economy is far

away. A hidden wall stands on an intangible level, in the imaginaries but also in the economic wellbeing, dividing again and again German people. There is no leader coming from the former GDR among the wealthy Dax firms and the GDP per inhabitant reaches only 75% of the GDP per inhabitant in the former FRG.

If the old generation accepted silently what was going on and didn't dare to claim its communist affiliation, today's youth comes to terms with this legacy. This trend has clearly be understood by the anti-European movement "Alternative für Deutschland" (AfD), which tries to capitalise upon it by taking over former slogans claimed in 1989 such as "Wir sind das Volk" ("We are the people") or "friedliche Revolution" ("peaceful revolution"). They target the hurt national pride to gain sympathy -and therefore vote- in the eastern Länder. All those tricks have succeeded: the AfD obtained 22% in Brandenburg in September 2019, lagging just behind the SPD (liberal), and 27,5% in Saxony behind the CDU (right-centrist). This testifies for the failure of the reunification, leading today to an anti-European resentment much stronger in the East than in the West of Germany. Since traditional parties promote Europe and since they exemplify how under-represented in society former East German are, they are dismissed by the eastern Länder which thus use Europe as a scapegoat as well.

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