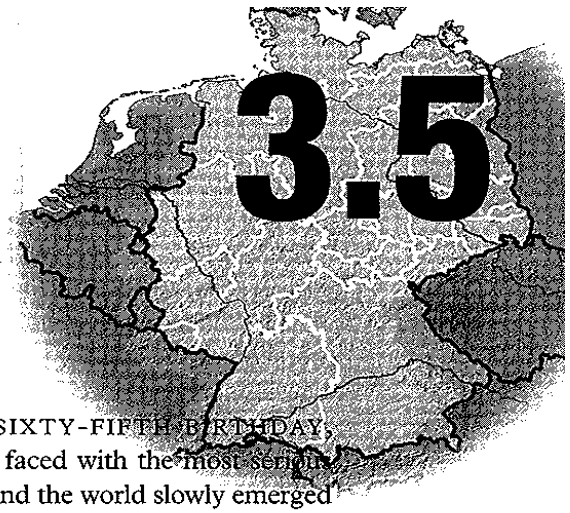
What Is the Future of German Politics?



3.5

As the Federal Republic approaches its sixty-fifth birthday, it and its fellow members of the European Union are faced with the most serious crisis since the end of World War II. No sooner had Europe and the world slowly emerged from the 2008–2009 recession, the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s, when at the end of 2009 the new Greek government announced that its government deficits would be 12.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and not 3.7 percent that the previous government had reported. The next business day the interest rates for Greek, Portuguese, and Spanish sovereign skyrocketed. Although like German bonds, they are, of course, denominated in euros, financial markets saw far higher risk in these southern European countries than they did in Germany.

As we discussed in Chapter 3.4, the strong medicine of the Schröder and grand coalition governments started a recovery process that began in late 2005 and continued in spite of the 2008–2009 financial crisis. Yet had these reforms not been implemented, the country would have been in worse economic condition. Indeed, Germany came out of the recession far more successfully than most of its neighbors.

The Federal Republic must also deal with the ongoing problem of immigration and its treatment of foreign residents. Almost 20 percent of the population has what demographers term *a migratory background*—that is they are first or second generation immigrants. To these problems—many of which are common to other developed democracies—must be added the continued challenge of unification. Twenty years after unification, the eastern regions still lag behind the "old" western states. While great progress has been made, there is still about a 20 percent gap in living standards between the two regions. This "last mile" toward full integration will be difficult. Unified Germany also must define its role in the international arena, especially its relationship to the postcommunist societies of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This chapter examines these issues.

None of the republic's current tasks, however, should obscure its fundamental accomplishments since 1949: a consensus on liberal democracy has finally been achieved in a German political order. The Federal Republic has become a stable and legitimate democratic political system. The current challenges will be met within this democratic consensus. Although there is no lack of problems, few modern democracies have more resources to deal with these problems than the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Economy and the Euro Crisis

As discussed in Chapter 3.4, since the low point in 2005 the grand coalition (2005–2009) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)–Free Democratic Party (FDP) government

of Chancellor Merkel have made substantial progress in dealing with the country's economic problems. The reforms introduced by the Schröder government and continued under Merkel enabled Germany to emerge quickly from the 2008–2009 worldwide financial crisis. The combination of spending cuts for social programs and a growing economy transformed deficits in the pension, health care, and unemployment systems into healthy surpluses by 2011 and 2012. Agenda 2010 also encouraged a new entry-level, lower wage job sector that has enabled less-qualified job seekers access to the labor market.

This is also the downside to Agenda 2010: a low-wage sector of part-time and temporary workers with few of the protections available to traditional workers. Many of the 2 million new jobs created since 2005 have come from this sector. Germany's current (2013) unemployment rate of 5.3 percent, less than half of the average eurozone level of 11.0 percent, reflects in part the growth in the low-wage sector. One at least partial solution to the low-wage problem is the introduction of a minimum wage. After initial opposition, the new Merkel grand coalition government now supports this. The improving economy also adds to Germany's weight in the eurozone. Wage restraint, declining deficits, and social programs in surplus all enable the country to lead by example. Germany's critics, of course, charge that much of this strong economic performance comes at the expense of the poorer southern European countries. After the introduction of the Euro, German sales to Greece increased by 66 percent; exports to Spain and Portugal grew by 59 percent and 30 percent respectively.

Trade surpluses with the weaker members of the eurozone have enabled Germany to post record trade levels and profits. Germany, they argue, now has an obligation to create conditions that enable these countries such as Greece, Spain, and Portugal to repay their debts. Some critics even argue that the whole crisis could have been averted had Germany simply not been so generous in extending credit to the southern European "sinners" during their spending spree.[1]

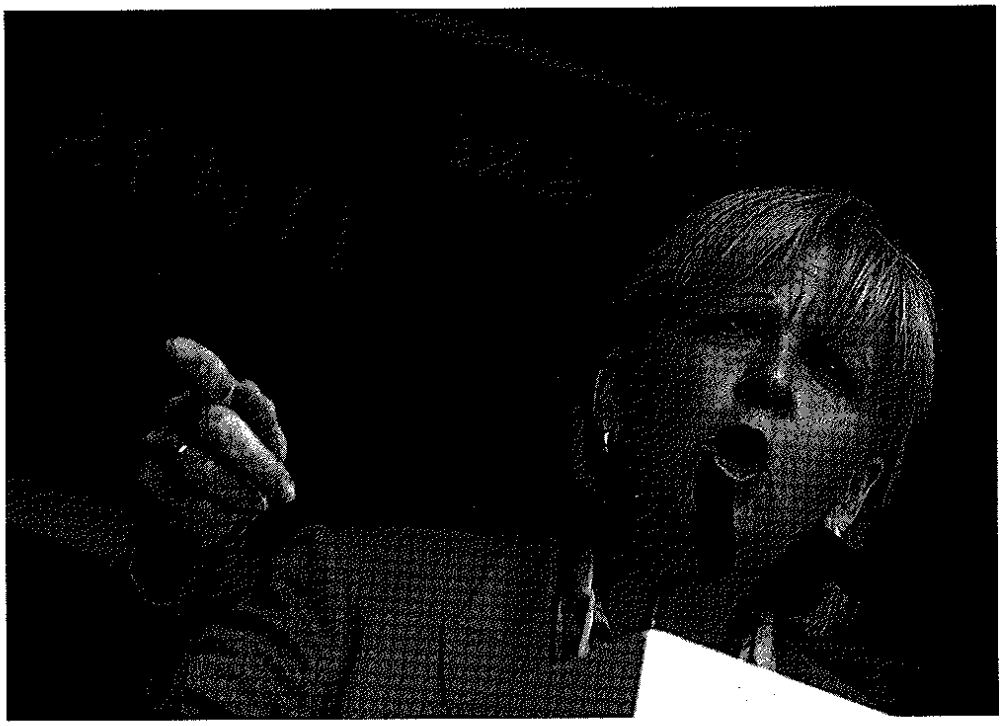
For many economists, the long-term solution to the eurozone crisis is a fiscal union to complement the monetary union. In a fiscal union the taxing and spending policies of the member countries would come under the control of a European authority just as the monetary system is the province of the European Central Bank (ECB). If the member country budgets were considered too large or expansionary with too high a deficit, the fiscal authority would have the power to veto it—or according to some proposals actually be involved in the formulation of the budget. The same procedures would apply to taxation. What would this fiscal union authority look like? For some it could be the European Commission, or a European finance czar. Others envision a multimember authority composed of the commission, some representative of the ECB, and perhaps a representative from the European Council (the heads of state and government of the whole union). Regardless of composition, all agree that the authority would have the final say on any member country's taxing and spending policies.

If such a powerful fiscal authority were created, it would pave the way for the introduction of eurobonds. These bonds were first proposed in 2010 as the "Big Bazooka" needed to solve the crisis. They have been a constant issue throughout the four-year crisis. From the outset the Germans have rejected their introduction without a fiscal union. Austria, the Netherlands, and Finland are also opposed. Merkel seeks to save the euro by shifting the eurozone toward the model of a fiscally responsible, stable growth economy that has been characteristic of Germany's postwar economy. She wants, for example, all eurozone countries to have debt limits in their constitutions.

Politics and German public opinion also complicate any long-term solution to the euro crisis. Throughout the crisis, Merkel and her government have also been constrained by the domestic political institutions discussed below in this chapter. During her 2009 to 2013 government, she had to maintain coalition unity especially with more extreme voices in the FDP and the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), obtain Bundesrat approval, and receive Constitutional Court validation. Political and economic elites are divided over the proper responses, and public opinion thus far has adamantly refused to support further bailouts for the troubled southern European economies. At the 2013 election a new anti-euro party, the Alternative for Germany, which advocated a return to the deutsche mark, narrowly missed entering the parliament.

Institutional Gridlock and the Federal System

The political institutions and processes once considered major factors in the success of the Federal Republic are now viewed by some critics as the causes of its problems. The strong, stable party system that replaced the ineffective Weimar alignment and gave postwar governments reliable majorities was by the 1980s considered a liability. The parties treated the state as their prey, said one former president. They spent more time cooperating and



SPD leader Hannelore Kraft, North-Rhine Westphalia's Minister-President, speaks at a 2013 trade union rally . She will probably be the party's Chancellor candidate at the next national election scheduled for 2017.

Source: Roland Weihrauch/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images.

insulating themselves from public scrutiny than they did competing for the support of the electorate. The heralded constitution with its strong commitment to basic civil liberties and many limitations on government (but also on direct populist influence) now seemed to be a negative veto machine. By contrast, the strong federal structure under which the constituent state governments were directly involved in national policymaking seemed inefficient and an unneeded check on centralized authority. Overall, the constitution, according to this view, now hinders the parliament, government, the states, and even the courts in their efforts to make innovative decisions within the context of a united Europe; a global economy; and the transnational challenges of inner security, terrorism, and immigration.

Would reform of the federal system help? Increasingly, state elections are not only influenced but also dominated by national issues. In May 2005, for example, widespread dissatisfaction with the Schröder government was the decisive factor in the Social Democrats' defeat in the state election in North Rhine–Westphalia, Germany's largest state. Voters used this and other state elections to vent their opposition to the national Red–Green government. Chancellor Merkel's U-turn on nuclear power in 2011 was prompted not only by the disaster in Japan but also by a critical state election.

One electoral reform proposal calls for scheduling all state elections midway through the term of the national government—that is, about two years after a national election. State elections would then become essentially midterm elections, thereby giving the national government time to pass and implement its program before the voters react. In short, the current system allows too many "veto players" into the policy process. Indeed, often the smallest state can veto an entire national program. This situation inhibits major reform and produces programs that are so compromised that their original purpose is difficult to identify in the final product.

During the 2005–2009 grand coalition, a joint federal–state reform commission completed two major attempts at addressing these problems. The first reform, completed in 2006, gave the states almost complete autonomy in education policy and reduced the ability of the Federal Council (Bundesrat) to veto national legislation. The second reform in 2009 introduced debt limits on both the federal and state governments. Both reforms required numerous constitutional amendments. But in the judgment of most experts, both fell short in addressing the more fundamental problems of revenue sharing and the distribution of taxes.[2]

Putting Germany Back Together Again: The Continued Challenge of Rebuilding and Integrating the East

The 1990 unification added further burdens to an economy and society already in need of reform. It was not a merger of two independent sovereign states but a friendly takeover. East Germany was bankrupt; the communist regime had been discredited; and the great majority of easterners wanted unification—the security, prosperity, and freedom they associated with the west—as soon as possible. After the disappearance of their own state, however, East Germans discovered that many West Germans considered them an economic and political burden. Perhaps that is why surveys conducted from 1990 to 1999 found that more than 75 percent of easterners felt they were second-class citizens.[3] Today, they continue to resent the arrogance of some westerners and their colonialist attitudes, calling them Besserwessis ("know-it-all" westerners). Easterners also find westerners too

materialistic and manipulative. Meanwhile, many easterners feel that their condition is just an accident of history. They have neither a sense of guilt nor a sense of responsibility for the forty years of communist dictatorship.[4] On the other side, since unification, westerners have realized that stiff tax increases and large deficits are the price for real unity, and many question why they should continue to sacrifice. Some westerners see the Ossies (easterners) as lazy, always expecting a handout: "They think they can live like we do without working for it." Political leaders continue to struggle with this "Berlin Wall in people's heads" or "inner unification."

Yet after almost twenty-five years of living together, Germans have made substantial progress toward breaching the psychological "wall." When asked in 2012 whether they considered unification to be a source of happiness or concern, about 70 percent of easterners saw unification in a positive light.[5] Between 2002 and 2012 the proportion of easterners who felt they were more German than east German rose from 38 percent to 53 percent. Among easterners under the age of 30, about 75 percent identified more with Germany than eastern Germany; about half of the over 60 age group had such an identification. Between 2002 and 2012 the sense among easterners that they were "second-class citizens" dropped from 57 percent to 33 percent. Age differences were especially noticeable on this question with almost 70 percent of the under 30 group rejecting the idea that they were second class as compared to about 40 percent for the over-60 age group. There is thus increasing evidence of generational change with younger, post-unification age groups more likely to share the views of their western counterparts than those of older easterners.

The Economic and Environmental Reconstruction of the East

Unification revealed the full extent of the former East Germany's economic problems. Its economy was characterized by an outmoded, overstaffed industrial sector; an underdeveloped services sector; and a dilapidated infrastructure. Many of the region's industrial enterprises were largely incapable of competing in a market economy. Many East German products were obsolete, of poor quality, and, when priced in "hard" currency, more expensive than those of western competitors. And many East Germans were underemployed; feather-bedding was widespread. By 1989 the average West German worker was producing almost four times as many goods and services as his or her East German counterpart—that is, the gross national product (GNP) produced by East Germany's 9.2 million workers equaled the GNP of only 2.4 million West Germans.

After unification, the economy of the former East Germany went into a free fall; hundreds of plants were closed, some for environmental reasons, and unemployment soared. Production in some areas dropped by as much as 70 percent. By the end of 1992, the region's workforce had declined by about 33 percent, from 9.2 million in October 1990 to 6.2 million in December 1992. One million were unemployed, an additional million and a half were on subsidized part-time work, and more than half a million had moved to western Germany.

These dislocations reflected in part West Germany's policy of privatizing the East German state-run economy as quickly as possible. After unification all state-owned property was put under the control of a Trusteeship Authority (Treuhandanstalt), which was tasked with cleaning up these companies and making them viable in a competitive market economy. The leadership of the authority quickly decided that the best way to clean up these enterprises

was to privatize them, to sell them to private companies and individuals. Critics charged that the authority sold these properties, mainly to westerners, at bargain prices with huge job losses for East Germans. The Treuhand was denounced as a "job killer" and became a symbol for West German indifference to the feelings and accomplishments of easterners.

After twenty-two years, the economy in the region still remains partially dependent on transfer payments from the west. Between 1990 and 2012, total transfer payments to the east amounted to about $2.2 trillion (this figure does not include tax and other payments that then flowed back from the east to the west), or between 4 percent and 5 percent of the west's GDP. About 60 percent of the transfer payments has been used to supplement the east's social welfare programs—pensions, unemployment payments, health care—in order to bring them up to western standards. The remaining 40 percent has financed a variety of infrastructure investments such as transportation, telephone systems, and hospitals. Private sector investment during the 1990–2010 period totaled an additional $850 billion. These funds have been used mostly for new housing, commercial and industrial offices and plants, and equipment. Yet in the judgment of many analysts, the problems still outweigh the successes.[6] Unemployment remains higher in the eastern states, although it has come off its high of 19 percent in 2005 to about 11 percent in 2012. The east has shared somewhat in the generally strong economic upturn since 2009. Research and development activity remains largely confined to the western region. And easterners are very underrepresented in the boardrooms of Germany's major companies.

The transfers from western to eastern Germany have, however, had a major impact on the living standards of easterners since 1990. Their net monthly income increased from 55 percent of the western level in 1990 to over 80 percent by 2011. Pensioners in the east have fared even better. Under the communist regime, pensions were very low; in 1990 the core East German pension amounted to only 40 percent of the western level. By 1998 it had risen to about 87 percent. But this increase has come at the expense of the overall pension system. Easterners have used some of their additional income to acquire the services and durable goods long regarded as necessities in western Germany, but as scarce luxuries under communism. In 1990 only 18 percent of East Germans, largely the trusted party and state elite, had private telephones. By 1998 telephone service had reached the near-universal level of the west. A similar pattern was found for items such as computers, microwave ovens, and other household items. Private bathrooms and central heating were enjoyed by less than half of all East German households in 1990; by 1998 this figure had increased to 86 percent.

Overall, then, the economy of the eastern states has made progress in achieving parity with the western states (see Table 3-8). East German per capita GDP as a percentage of the western level rose from 43 percent to 71 percent. Wages and salaries grew from about half the western level to over 80 percent by 2011. The east–west productivity gap has also narrowed. By 2008 easterners were almost 80 percent as productive as their western cousins. Unit labor costs in the east in 2011 were about 3 percent higher than in the west, but this figure is a substantial improvement over the situation in 1991 when labor costs were 144 percent of the western level. The key to increasing productivity was new investment in plants and equipment. Overall then in terms of many economic indicators the eastern glass is not half full but about 80 percent full. But that 20 percent will be difficult according to many economists.[7]

Table 3-8 Catching Up, Eastern Germany Versus Western Germany: Economic Indicators, Selected Years, 1991–2011 (Eastern Level as Percentage of Western Level)

Indicator	1991	1994	1999	2004	2011
GDP per ccapita	43	57	61	64	71
Investment in plant and equipment	70	164	147	98	85
Wages and salaries	49	73	78	78	83
Productivity	41	65	69	72	80
Unit labor costs	144	113	114	108	103

Note: GDP = gross domestic product.

Sources: 1991, 1994, 1999: Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher wirtschaftlicher Forschungsinstitute e.V, Die Lage der Weltwirtschaft und der deutschen Wirtschaft im Herbst 2000, Halle, 2000, 81; 2004: Stand der deutschen Einheit 2005, Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung (Berlin: Bundesverkehrsministerium, 2005), 7, 142–159; 2011: Stand der deutschen Einheit 2012, Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung (Berlin: Bundesverkehrsministerium, 2012), Appendix, 2, 3, 9.

As discussed in Chapter 3.4, western taxpayers, present and future, are largely footing the bill for this economic and social reconstruction. The transfer payments have also come at the expense of the western economic base. The current special programs of eastern support, including the "solidarity" surtax on incomes, are scheduled to expire in 2019. Whether parity will be achieved by that time is still an open question.

Cleaning Up the East

In addition to economic development, the eastern states had serious environmental problems. Water, ground, and air pollution levels were among the highest in Europe. Only 3 percent of the region's rivers and streams were ecologically intact, and only 1 percent of its lakes were free from pollution. Almost 80 percent of the area's water sources were either biologically dead or heavily polluted. The most important waterway in the east, the Elbe, was among the most polluted rivers in Europe.

Pollution was most severe in the industrialized south and southwestern parts of the region. Outmoded industrial plants, many built before World War II, dumped millions of pounds of untreated industrial and chemical wastes into waterways or huge pits each year. The area's major source of energy, lignite or brown coal, was the chief cause of air pollution, including virtually nonstop smog during the fall and winter months. The sulfur dioxide emitted when lignite is burned affects the nose, throat, and lungs. Skin cancers and respiratory ailments were two to three times higher in this area than in the rest of the former East Germany.

Soil pollution was the most extensive in the uranium mine areas in the states of Saxony and Thuringia. From 1946 until 1990, more than 200,000 tons of uranium were shipped to weapons factories and power stations in the Soviet Union. Whole villages were evacuated and destroyed during the mining operations.

By 2009 most of the cleanup work had been completed. The strip-mining of brown coal was reduced from 300 million tons in 1989 to 70 million in 2008, and the current operations are now consistent with international environmental protection standards. Indeed, eastern Germany now has the most modern brown coal–fired power plants in the world.

The damaging sulfur dioxide emissions have been reduced by almost 50 percent, which has helped Germany to achieve the target figures in the Kyoto Accords. The cleanup of old strip-mining, chemical plant, and uranium mining operations is also largely finished. Most of these areas have been turned into nature preserves and parks with man-made lakes. The more than 500 new sewage treatment plants have improved water quality in most rivers and streams. In the process, Germany has become a worldwide leader in the technology of complex environmental restoration.[8]

Minorities: Foreign Residents, Immigrants, and Right-Wing Violence

Historically the major nation states of Europe have been ethnically, culturally, and linguistically homogenous. National identity was based upon a common language, history, and culture. One is born into this culture and absorbs its norms and values without any conscious effort or achievement such as tests or language competency, knowledge of history or government. National identity was thus ascriptive rather than an acquired or achieved characteristic.

Because immigration has never been central to the German national identity, Germans have been slow to accept the reality that in an age of globalization they are becoming a multicultural society. Yet with Europe's largest economy, Germany is the chief target country for immigrants seeking a new life in Europe. Indeed, the condition of its almost 7 million foreign residents is the most complex social problem confronting the Federal Republic.[9] The economic miracle of the 1950s transformed Germany from an economy with a surplus of labor to one with an acute labor shortage. There were simply too many jobs available for the native workforce, especially in menial, low-paying positions. To remedy this problem and to maintain economic growth, the government, working closely with employers, recruited workers from Italy, Greece, Spain, Turkey, and other less-developed countries. Guest workers (Gastarbeiter), as they were euphemistically termed at the time, usually occupied the lowest rung on the jobs ladder—unskilled manual positions, sanitary and sewage workers, custodial and janitorial staff. They tend to be concentrated in large cities: Berlin, for example, has the third-largest Turkish population in the world.[10] Apart from their jobs, many foreign workers have little or no social contact with the native German population, and they have been subjected to discrimination in housing, which further isolates them.

The dependents of foreign workers, especially their children, have made immigration a potentially explosive issue. Many of these children have spent most or all of their lives in Germany, but their parents cling to the hope of someday returning to their home countries and want their children to retain their countries' languages and values. The result is that children grow up in a sort of twilight zone—they master neither their parents' language nor German. They invariably drop out of school and, urged on by the parents, attempt to secure employment to augment the family's finances and hasten its "return" to the homeland. The tighter job market, however, has made it difficult for young and untrained foreign people to find work. The result is a growing body of unemployed adolescents, especially in the large cities, involved in petty crime and the drug trade. More broadly, many foreign residents are living as a subculture, isolated from the mainstream. Because of native indifference, the cultural practices of some foreign groups—such as the subjugation of women, arranged marriages, child abuse, and honor codes, which clearly violate German law—have been tolerated.

Discrimination, a lack of social mobility, and poor educational and job opportunities for their children are the result, in part, of the guest workers' lack of political influence. As non-Germans, they cannot vote, and the acquisition of citizenship until 2000 was a difficult process even for those foreign residents who want to be naturalized. Since the 2000 citizenship law about a million foreign residents have become naturalized citizens. But an additional 3 million, although eligible, have not applied. Many fear that they will lose the citizenship of their native country. Nonetheless about a 100,000 foreign residents a year do complete the process. As the ranks of naturalized citizens slowly grow, the political parties have begun to respond to their policy needs.

Several proposals have been made to improve the overall status of foreign residents and their families. One involves giving the franchise to foreign residents for local elections. Two states, Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg, passed such legislation in 1989. This law would, it was argued, make local officials more responsive to guest workers' needs, especially in housing and education. In 1990, however, the Federal Constitutional Court declared the law unconstitutional. Since 1992, citizens from other member countries of the European Union have been able to vote in local elections.

As discussed previously, in 1999, after years of debate, the Social Democratic–Green government passed legislation reforming the country's 1913 citizenship and naturalization laws. Based largely on the principle of lineage or blood, the old laws made it very difficult for foreign residents to become naturalized citizens. The new legislation grants automatic citizenship to anyone born in Germany if at least one parent has lived in the country for at least eight years. Dual citizenship is allowed until the age of twenty-three, when a choice must be made. The legislation also liberalized the naturalization process for foreign residents by reducing the required length of residency and the costs of the process. From 2000 to 2012, the first twelve years after the law's passage, about a million, or roughly 12 percent of the foreign population, acquired German citizenship. This figure represents substantial growth when compared with that under the old law.[11]

Immigration and Asylum

By the late 1980s the problem of foreign workers was compounded by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of "political" refugees from various developing countries and ethnic German resettlers from the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. An antiforeigner backlash also developed among native Germans in some cities related to the successes of the radical right-wing Republican Party.

In 1991 and 1992, groups of skinheads and young neo-Nazis attacked some of the hostels and dormitories where many asylum seekers were housed. Resentment toward foreigners was especially strong in the former East Germany. Although political leaders and the great majority of the public condemned the violence, growing support for reducing the influx of foreigners prompted the government, with the support of the opposition, to amend the constitutional right to asylum in 1993.[12] The amendment sought to exclude persons who attempt to enter the country for largely economic reasons. By 1994 the number of asylum applications had declined by 60 percent. In 2004 a new immigration law was finally passed that attempts to limit further immigration by granting preferences to those with exceptional educational or technical skills. Germany, like many of its western European

neighbors, now wants new immigrants only if they bring technical and scientific expertise in short supply among the native population.

Xenophobia and Right-Wing Violence

The new citizenship, asylum, and immigration laws have improved, but by no means solved, the problem of foreign residents and their integration into German society. Right-wing violence against foreigners, which began in the early 1990s, has not disappeared. A disproportionate amount of radical right-wing activity is found in the eastern regions. In 2008 there were about three violent acts per 100,000 of the population, as compared to only one in the western states. The range between individual states went from a high of 4.15 in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt to a low of 0.41 in Hesse, about a 10:1 ratio.[13] The relatively few foreigners in the eastern regions make them ideal targets for skinheads and other radical right-wing groups. Emigrants from Asia and Africa, whose skin color easily distinguishes them from Germans, are routinely insulted, harassed, and physically attacked by roving gangs of skinheads.

Concern with right-wing violence and terrorism increased in November 2011 with the discovery of a small neo-Nazi group, the National Socialist Underground (NSU), in the eastern state of Saxony. Between 2000 and 2007 this three-member cell, with the support of allied organizations, murdered seven small businessmen with Turkish backgrounds, one Greek, and one female German police officer in various states throughout the country. In addition, in order to finance their operations, they robbed several banks during this period. The entire case was badly handled by police and security units at both the national and state levels. Initially the death of the Turkish residents was explained as some sort of internal Turkish mafia conflict. The members of the terrorist group were well known to security officials in Saxony who, however, did not share the information with their colleagues in other states or at the federal level. Many of the officials involved in the case were forced to resign. The conduct of security organizations was also generally criticized for their concentration on left-wing terrorism and their neglect of similar activities by the extreme right.[14]

The issue of immigration and the role of foreign residents remains controversial. In 2010 a mainstream political figure from Berlin, Thilo Sarrazin, published a controversial book, *Germany Is Eliminating Itself,* in which he argued that immigrants were a drain on the economy and a threat to German culture and identity. His views were strongly criticized by all major parties as racist and xenophobic. In a television interview he also made reference to the unique genetic composition of Jews. He was expelled from his party, the Social Democrats, and removed from his post at the German national bank (Bundesbank). Yet his remarks about foreign residents and especially Muslims struck a responsive chord among some sectors of the broader German public.

Germany's International Role

Like Japan, Germany has maintained a low profile in the international political arena since the end of World War II. Although it is an economic powerhouse, it has encouraged other Western nations, especially France, Great Britain, and the United States, to take the lead in dealing with international issues. During the 1991 Gulf War, it sent no combat troops to the Middle East, but it did make financial contributions amounting to billions of dollars to the effort. Yet because of its size and strength, Germany's allies and neighbors expect it to become a more important

player in international politics in the future. Such a shift also means, however, that the Federal Republic will be a less compliant partner, particularly in its relations with the United States, than it has been in the postwar period.

In 1995 Germany's new, more active role was on view when the Federal Republic contributed four thousand troops to the UN Bosnian peace force. It was the largest single deployment of German soldiers since World War II. The German contingent was composed of medical, transport, and logistics units rather than combat troops. Mindful of Nazi atrocities against Serbs during the war, the Kohl government requested that German forces be stationed only in Croatia.

A new chapter in post–World War II foreign policy began in March 1999, when Luftwaffe jets took off from bases in Italy to participate in attacks on Serbia as part of the Kosovo operation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It marked the first time since the 1940s that German military forces, once the most feared on the continent, had engaged in combat. The action was not without controversy. Several members of Schröder's SPD–Green government opposed the military deployment. It was one factor in the resignation of Oskar Lafontaine, the leader of the SPD's left wing. At a stormy Green Party convention, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who once advocated Germany's withdrawal from NATO and the country's unilateral disarmament, was pelted with bags of paint after he argued strongly that Germany had to take responsibility for stopping Serbian aggression in Kosovo. But while participating in the air war, the Schröder government steadfastly opposed the deployment of ground troops to drive out Serbian forces. The eventual cease-fire spared the government from an open conflict with the United States and Great Britain over this issue. In the meantime, Germany has contributed more than six thousand troops to the NATO peacekeeping force in the region.

Germany and the September 11 Attacks

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Chancellor Schröder declared Germany's "unconditional solidarity" with the United States. Shortly thereafter, Schröder agreed to deploy up to 3,900 troops, including elite special forces units, to Afghanistan. Only the United States has more troops stationed in that country. Parliament approved this action in a narrow vote on November 16, 2001, which the chancellor also made a confidence vote on his government—that is, if the government had lost, it would have resigned. The Afghan deployment was continued and expanded during the 2005–2009 grand coalition.

While most of the German troops in Afghanistan have been stationed in the more pacified regions of the country, in 2009 German forces participated in the surge operations against the Taliban and were in some cases on the offensive. In September 2009, just weeks before the election, German forces were involved in a major combat operation, which became another source of friction between Berlin and Washington. German forces had generally been restricted to peacekeeping and reconstruction operations. But after Taliban forces hijacked two tanker trucks, the German commander, fearing they were part of a planned attack on German troops, called in a NATO airstrike, which killed about 100 people, some of them civilians. The Afghan mission has become increasingly unpopular among the German public; between 2002 and 2009 the proportion opposing the deployment more than doubled from 30 percent to almost 70 percent.[15]

Although it strongly supported the Afghanistan antiterror action and cooperated closely with the United States and its European allies in pursuing terrorists at home, the Schröder government adamantly refused in 2002 to support the planned American invasion of Iraq. Unlike the administration of President George W. Bush in the United States and the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair in Great Britain, the German government drew a sharp distinction between the antiterrorism campaign and Iraq. This antiwar position on Iraq tapped the latent pacifism of many Germans and the anti-Americanism of some elements of the SPD and the Green left. It also was supported among citizens in the eastern states who had no personal experiences with American support for Germany during the cold war and weaker attachments to NATO and other institutions of German and American cooperation. But it also expressed Berlin's increased sense of independence from Washington, which had been growing since unification.

The Iraq War decision was the first time in its history that the Federal Republic had openly opposed the United States on a major issue. Opposition to the war began during the 2002 election campaign when Schröder made Iraq a major campaign issue. In early 2003 Berlin took its opposition to the Bush administration Iraq policy a step further when it entered into an informal alliance with France and Russia in opposition to the war. At times, the relationship between Berlin and Washington became openly hostile and communication between President Bush and Chancellor Schröder broke down.[16] While German-American relations since then have improved, the current Merkel government also remains generally skeptical about military intervention in countries such as Syria and Iran.

Relations between Berlin and Washington were further strained by revelations in October 2013 that the US National Security Agency, apparently working out of the American embassy in Berlin, had been listening in on Chancellor Merkel's cell phone conversations for years. Major political figures in other European countries such as France and Italy also had their cell phones tapped. Chancellor Merkel protested officially and personally to President Obama. Together with President Hollande of France she called for an agreement between the three countries to ban such activities.

Despite showing increased independence in the international arena, for a variety of reasons Germany is still reluctant to assume a leadership role. First, its elites and most of its citizens know that many of the country's neighbors still remember the Third Reich and what the Nazis did to Europe and the world. And they recognize that some neighbors still harbor a residual distrust of Germany stemming from this experience. Second, Germany's low political profile approach has been successful. Never before in history have so many Germans had so much peace and freedom as they have today. Third, Germans fear that expanded international leadership will eventually bring the country into a major military conflict somewhere in the world. The memories of the death and destruction caused by the world wars of the twentieth century are passed down from generation to generation and kept very much alive. There is a latent, yet pervasive, pacifism in the country that inhibits the actions of its political leadership. Fourth, the country will continue to struggle with unification, the common European currency, and the enlargement of the European Union for at least the next decade. Any international initiatives would be premature and not supported by public opinion. Finally, Germany hopes that its international responsibilities can be accommodated through its EU membership. It wants the European Union to assume a stronger role, and it wants to act only with and through a united Europe.

Yet it is doubtful that these factors will be as important in Germany's future foreign policy as they have been in the past. With the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and of the Soviet Union itself, a vacuum developed. Germany has been in the process of assuming a leading economic and political role in this region. Hopes that this role can be carried out through the European Union have thus far been unfulfilled. For example, the European Union failed its first foreign policy test when it was unable to stop the civil war in Yugoslavia.

As for its relationship with Russia, the Federal Republic has become Russia's major sponsor within the council of NATO and the European Union. Stressing the West's obligation to Russia, Germany has urged that NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe be accompanied by special partnership agreements between the alliance and Russia. Since the collapse of the communist bloc, German economic activity in eastern Europe and the former Soviet satellites has skyrocketed. Russia has become the country's largest single supplier of oil and natural gas. With Europe's fastest-growing economy, Russia has become an important export market.

From 1945 to 1990, as a divided country protected against Soviet power by the nuclear shield of the Western alliance, Germany led a sheltered existence. Since unification this has fundamentally changed. A Europe that once feared Germany now looks to it for leadership. This is new ground for the Federal Republic. The institutions, leadership, and processes of German democracy we have examined in this section now have new responsibilities and challenges. How the political system meets these challenges will fundamentally influence European politics in the coming decades.

NOTES

1. One leading German economist remarked the following in rather colloquial language: "The Germans were catering a big party that was going on in the Euro area, selling the food and offering credit to the party guests. But the guests got drunk and ate too much, and now Germany is stuck with the bill." Thomas Mayer, Chief Economist, Deutsche Bank cited in Anthony Faiola, "Germany's Frugality Bemoaned for Inhibiting Eurozone Growth," *Washington Post,* February 28, 2010, A08.
2. Simone Burkhart, "Reforming Federalism in Germany: Incremental Changes Instead of the Big Deal," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 39 (June 2008): 341–365.
3. David P. Conradt, "Political Culture and Identity: The Post-Unification Search for 'Inner Unity,'" in *Developments in German Politics,* ed. Stephen Padgett, William E. Paterson, and Gordon Smith (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 269–287.
4. EMNID surveys cited in *Der Spiegel,* July 22, 1991, 28; ALLBUS, 2008 Survey, Variables 503–504.
5. Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, "Die gegenseitige Wahrnehmung Ost- und Westdeutscher," Allensbach: 2012 (*Kurzbericht*), 12, 13, 15, 20, 21, 23–24. Downloaded from Institut website, April 2013.
6. When compared, however, not with western Germany, but rather to its eastern neighbors in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, the economic reconstruction of the eastern states is phenomenal. According to Federal Statistical Office figures, labor productivity in the Czech Republic in 2008 was only 41 percent of the eastern German level.
7. Michael C. Burda, "Wirtschaft in Deutschland im 21 Jahrhundert," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte,* nos. 30–33 (2010), 32.

8. Bundestag, "Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung zum Stand der deutschen Einheit 2005," Berlin, 2005, 119–129.
9. There are probably an additional 1 million illegal foreign residents.
10. This also means that the religious and ethnic conflict in Turkey spilled over into Germany. As in their homeland, German Turks are divided into groups of Islamic fundamentalists, secularists, and Kurdish separatists. The radical left-wing Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) is believed responsible for much of the periodic violence against Turkish institutions in Germany.
11. Federal Statistical Office, "Einbürgerungen im Jahr 2012," press release, July 18, 2013.
12. Germany had the most liberal political asylum law in Western Europe, in part because many of the founders of the Federal Republic were themselves political refugees during the Third Reich. Germany contends, however, that many asylum seekers are not victims of political persecution but want access to the Federal Republic's prosperous economy and generous welfare state.
13. Federal Interior Ministry, *Verfassungsschutz Bericht 2008,* Berlin, 2008, 36, www.bmi.bund.de.
14. Michael Birnbaum, "Germany Refocuses on Neo-Nazi Threat," *Washington Post* (August 12, 2012).
15. Infratest DiMap surveys cited in *Der Spiegel,* July 6, 2009, 26.
16. Although the government opposed the Iraq War, German military and intelligence authorities, according to reports leaked to the German and American press in early 2006, continued their normal cooperation with the United States. See "Liebesgrüsse nach Washington," *Der Spiegel,* January 16, 2006, 22–35, for the initial account of the alleged German-American military cooperation.

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