

Helmut Kohl's Legacy for Germany

Children and adults in Euroland, a space constituted by the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), have discovered an exciting new hobby: collecting the new currency—euros and eurocent coins from the 12 EMU nations. Whereas the front side is the same on all the coins, the back depicts a motif of the nation that minted it. The circulation of these variants is underway, and this year's summer holiday season has accelerated it. The face of Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg has already shown up in Athens and Helsinki. The well-fed German eagle, irreverently known as the fat hen, reportedly flew to the Balearic Islands. One can admire the Irish harp in Paris, Lisbon, and The Hague.

Statisticians predict that, in a few years, the purse of a Euroland citizen might roughly consist of 33 percent German euros and eurocents; some 15 percent each from France, Italy, and Spain; and so on, down to 0.2 percent from Luxembourg.¹ Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, and King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden have not yet joined the minted portraits, but that is a different story.

Because spending foreign cash at home and domestic cash abroad are no different, concepts such as “foreign” and “domestic” or “at home” and “abroad” no longer have much meaning. Furthermore, what is true for everyday experience also holds true for politics: the traditional distinction between domestic and foreign affairs is dissolving in Europe. This European trait is the central legacy of Helmut Kohl, twentieth-century Germany's longest-serving chancellor, who held office from 1982 until 1998.

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One of Kohl's major arguments for the euro was that it would imbue people, particularly young people, with a new sense of belonging to the greater community called "Europe." For Kohl, the single currency symbolized much more than buying power. He liked to quote a passage from Winston Churchill's famous speech to students in Zurich on September 19, 1946, that in a free and united Europe, "small nations will count as much as large ones and gain their honor by their contribution to the common cause."² The equal value of all the euro coins—whether they were minted for 80 million Germans or 450,000 Luxembourgers—illustrates the harmonization of diversity and equality among European nations.

The EMU would not exist today without Kohl's strong personal commitment.

Also symbolically, no Euroland country has a majority holding in the common currency. Even Germany, the demographic and economic heavy-weight, is in a minority position; and the more members the EMU gains, the smaller each national share of the monetary pie will become. Nothing could better illustrate the essence of European integration: stable supranational institutions are replacing the unstable balance-of-power system that was always threatened by hegemonic aspirations of individual nations and by the dynamics

of ever-changing coalitions. Granted, Frankfurt am Main became the seat of the European Central Bank, but nobody in truth complains any longer about what used to be called the monetary hegemony of the Bundesbank (that is, the German Federal Reserve Bank).

About two-thirds of Germans disliked the idea of relinquishing their beloved deutsche mark for the sake of Europe.³ The mark had been a symbol of West Germany's economic and political success, and it embodied the German abhorrence of instability and their quest for continuity. The German hyperinflation of 1923, with its devastating consequences for the country's social and political stability, was a traumatic experience that has remained deeply fixed in the collective German memory and has shaped much of the German structural conservatism—a way of thinking that even to this day has prevented the country from sufficiently adjusting its economic legislation, labor market regulations, political decisionmaking procedures, university system, and other domestic institutions to the changes of the post-Cold War era. The mark even became an all-German symbol in 1990 when monetary union between East and West Germany preceded national reunification.

Now that the turbulence of the German Christian Democrats' financial scandal, disclosed in 2000–2001, has passed and Kohl has not been found

guilty of corruption, an undisturbed look at his achievements has become possible again. Many will remember Kohl's greatest merit as his refusal to surrender to unfavorable opinion polls in his persistent conviction that the EMU project, stipulated by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1991–1992, was key to preventing a reunited Germany from upsetting the European balance. Kohl combined credible patriotic rhetoric with nonnationalistic action, thus preventing far-right populist parties and leaders from exploiting widespread anti-euro sentiments. "German unity and European unification are the two sides of the same coin," he used to tell his reluctant compatriots.⁴ In fact, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Kohl was the first European leader to seriously consider expanding the European Community (as the European Union [EU] was then called) eastward—at a time when only Poland among the Warsaw Pact countries had a non-Communist head of government.⁵

The EMU would undoubtedly not exist today—and the eastward enlargement of the EU would probably not have been forthcoming—without Kohl's strong personal commitment. In tribute to his leadership, EU heads of state and government granted Kohl the title Honorary Citizen of Europe after he was voted out of office in 1998—a distinction conferred previously only on the legendary Jean Monnet (1888–1979).

From the Guinness Book of World Records: The Party Leader

Kohl, as the last chancellor of West Germany (known as the Bonn Republic) and the first chancellor of reunited Germany (the Berlin Republic), became an incarnation of continuity himself. The Weimar Republic existed no longer than 14 years (1918/19–1933); Kohl's tenure lasted 16. The Federal Republic of Germany is now 53 years old; for almost half of that time—from 1973 to 1998—Kohl was the chairman of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party. He will have been a member of Parliament since 1976 until his retirement after the upcoming election on September 22, 2002.

These figures should suffice to explain how Kohl epitomized the stability that has marked the second German democracy. He personified predictability and reliability, which was good for Germany, a country that more than any other in Europe depends on its neighbors' trust. Under Kohl's leadership, the Teutonic colossus at the heart of Europe presented itself as a peaceful, cooperative partner that no one need fear—"civil, civilian, civilized," as Timothy Garton Ash put it.⁶

As centrist-conservative parties, the CDU and its Bavarian sister, the Christian Social Union (CSU), were strong enough to integrate and thus neutralize the nationalistic fringes. Kohl's strategy had been to rule out uncompromisingly any coalition or political cooperation with parties of the ex-

treme right, even at the cost of losing opportunities to form CDU-led governments in city halls or on a regional level. German far-right populist parties—unlike those in Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and other EU countries—have not succeeded in entering the national legislature, and this pattern is not likely to change in the near future.

For a few months in 2000, however, it seemed that Kohl had led his party to the brink of moral, political, and financial ruin. The same party to which Kohl had bequeathed proud memories of landmark triumphs experienced the deepest crisis in its history when he and his government were accused of corruption while in office. Kohl stoutly denied this allegation, and no one

Kohl ruled out any coalition or political cooperation with parties of the extreme right.

has invoked evidence to support the accusations so far, but Kohl was estranged from his CDU successors and from the public for more than one-and-a-half years. Kohl admitted from the outset that some DM 2.1 million of unknown origin had flowed into secret party accounts between 1993 and 1998. Kohl said—and continues to say—that he received the donations from honorable citizens, to whom he unlawfully promised anonymity. Kohl apparently used the bulk of these funds for

election campaign purposes in the former East Germany; even his political adversaries do not accuse him of having taken the money for personal enrichment.

Since mid-2001, the CDU has been able to recover from the “donation affair,” and Kohl and the party’s new leadership formally reconciled at the party convention in Frankfurt in June 2002. The price Kohl had to pay, however, was the limitation of his role to that of a historic personality with no say in current political affairs.

Contrary to much commentary about his leadership style, Kohl was not an authoritarian political boss or a ruthless bully. His system of governing was highly sophisticated. He was at the center of a network of personal loyalties—a web he himself had woven over many years. All information, which other members of the system held only in fragments, converged within him. His most important means of communication was private conversation, either face-to-face or on the telephone, not through memos or letters. His chosen instrument of power was the carrot, not the stick; he preferred reward to punishment and deals to orders.

Kohl did not govern through institutions but rather through confidants. The role of the committees he chaired often was merely to confirm decisions that had already been made within informal circles. The so-called coalition

rounds, in which the leading representatives of the coalition parties—CDU, CSU, and Free Democrats—met, had more political weight at decisive moments than Kohl's cabinet had. This personal style of politics facilitated the reunification process of 1989–1990. In those happy days, Kohl settled essential issues in private conversations with President George H. W. Bush and Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev—all on a first-name basis—while French president François Mitterrand and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher glowered and their diplomatic machines found keeping pace with the U.S.-Soviet-German triumvirate difficult.

Kohl's outstanding skill in forging alliances was optimally adapted to German political culture, with its tendency to avoid conflict. Coalition governments need a chancellor who is a good psychologist and an expert in patiently talking rival partners into compromise. For the heads of coalition governments themselves, full support from their own party (the biggest coalition partner) is the decisive source of power, which is why Kohl did not relinquish the CDU party chairmanship even after becoming chancellor.

As head of the CDU—a federation of 15 regional associations, some of them quite powerful and self-confident—Kohl also had to be a master networker. In the regions, the CDU chairman, like a medieval king, faces princes and dukes who do not always accept instructions from above. (Kohl himself had once been a duke at the top of the Rhineland-Palatinate CDU.) If necessary, King Kohl would ally with local barons against the regional higher nobility.

Until reunification, the CDU and the CSU under Franz Josef Strauss challenged Kohl's position of power almost every year. After 1990, however, no internal rival or critic could seriously dispute Kohl's right to be number one. Kohl remained cautious nevertheless, minimizing risks to his power. Behind the scenes, he would mediate political conflicts and would often proclaim his own decision only after he became sure of a clear majority. When issues meant a great deal to him, however, he did not shun a battle, as in the cases of the deployment of the U.S. Pershing II as well as cruise missiles in 1983 and the decision to introduce the EMU in the face of reluctant public opinion in 1998.

Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat? Domestic Politics

According to conventional wisdom, Kohl was good at politics and bad at economics—a great European statesperson of the twentieth century with a less impressive domestic record. In terms of economic reforms, he was surely not a German Thatcher, but neither was the Social Democratic Party (SPD) a German version of the pre-Blair Labour Party. By the 1980s, both

the CDU-CSU and the SPD were more pragmatic and less ideological—in a nutshell, more centrist—than their right-wing or left-wing counterparts in other European countries. The Bonn Republic that Helmut Schmidt yielded to Kohl in 1982 was in bad economic shape, but still a much better one than that of the United Kingdom that Thatcher inherited in 1979. If Kohl was not as observant a conservative as Thatcher, his more moderate ideological temperament as a continental Christian Democrat was one factor, but the need for radical reforms was also less marked in West Germany than in Great Britain 20 years ago.

When Kohl left the chancellor's office in 1998, becoming an ordinary member of Parliament, Germany was united and surrounded by allies and friends, but the country was suffering from poor growth, high unemployment, and a gigantic public debt. That description would be fairly accurate in 2002 as well. The German labor market is still notorious for its inflexibility, and exceedingly lengthy approval procedures remain a trademark of the country's perfectionist bureaucracy. According to this year's *World Competitiveness Year Book*, Germany ranks fifteenth (albeit ahead of the United Kingdom and France) among the most competitive economies—just as it did in 1998.⁷ Germany's higher education system still generates the world's oldest university students and its retirement system supports the youngest old-age pensioners. To use a caricature, many Germans spend the first 30 years of their lives preparing themselves for jobs, and the last 20 years recovering from them.

This situation comes at a time when German society is aging rapidly. Such a development, a result of declining birthrates, is occurring in other industrial societies as well, but the German case is among the most dramatic. At the end of the nineteenth century, the ratio of men and women older than 75 years of age to those younger than 20 was 1 to 79. A hundred years later, the ratio was 1 to 14; almost 25 percent of the population was more than 60 years old. Whereas three employees financed one pension in the early 1990s, the ratio is likely to be 1 to 1 in the year 2020. In theory, mass immigration from Central and Eastern Europe and from fast-growing Islamic populations around the Mediterranean could fill the demographic gap, but that outcome is practically excluded for many reasons—one of them being the tide of xenophobic sentiments sweeping the EU and bringing far-right populist movements to the surface.

An accurate analysis of Kohl's balance sheet should divide his 16-year tenure into two terms: eight preunification years (1982–1990) and eight postunification years (1990–1998) with very different agendas. Budget consolidation, domestic reforms, and the last battles of the Cold War marked the first term; the integration of East Germany, moderate adjustments to

globalization, and the construction of an ever-closer EU marked the second. Opinion polls conducted in the summer of 1989 suggested that Kohl might lose the next federal election scheduled for early 1991—the third in which he ran. After the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, however, Kohl boldly seized the opportunity to show national leadership, while his Social Democratic challenger, Oskar Lafontaine, warned against rapid reunification.

During Kohl's first term, West Germany experienced a period of uninterrupted and reasonable economic growth. A far-reaching income tax reform, instituted in three steps from 1986 to 1990, relieved the middle class of disproportionate burdens. The number of gainfully employed persons rose by 2.2 million, and inflation decreased. Budget consolidation caused public expenditures to decline from 50.1 percent to 45.8 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). (After reunification, and as its consequence, the ratio climbed to a peak of 50.3 percent, declined again to 48.6 percent in 1998, and equaled 48.4 percent in 2001.)⁸

Kohl and the new leadership formally reconciled the financial scandal in June 2002.

In retrospect, the 1980s look like the golden autumn of the old Federal Republic. The (West) Germans were “rich, bothered, and divided,” as David Marsh, the *Financial Times*' Bonn correspondent, observed.⁹ West Germany was an orderly place where competitiveness and social balance were reconciled—indeed, West Germans viewed them as two sides of the same coin. Growing prosperity for everyone seemed to be something that the country could take for granted; the collective pie was big enough. Postmaterial values became fashionable, although they required a fairly full wallet. The proverbial estate in Tuscany where West Germans, tired of civilization, learned to spend their weekends enjoying bucolic tranquility over good red wine was, of course, never free.

Nevertheless, at the end of Kohl's first term, the Bonn Republic was strong enough financially to bear the enormous costs of German unity. Critics of rapid reunification still contend that a slower accession of East Germany to the Federal Republic would have been much cheaper. These critics fail to consider, however, that the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was doomed. After the iron curtain lifted in 1989, mass migration from East to West Germany was unavoidable, and depopulation sooner rather than later would have bled the GDR dry and rendered it unable to survive as a functioning state.

During Kohl's second term, the Germans were no longer divided and not as rich—but still bothered. Kohl, like many others, had been far too

optimistic about the speed of recovery of the East German economy after more than 40 years of Communist rule. The so-called reunification boom of 1990–1991—when East Germans replaced their technically backward cars with nice West German ones—hid the new challenge facing Germany as a whole, a challenge whose name had not yet entered the broad public debate: globalization.

During the recession year of 1993, the opposition, the media, and Kohl's own adherents urged the chancellor to address the nation with a patriotic "blood, toil, tears, and sweat" speech, appealing to citizens' (alleged) willingness to make sacrifices. He refused to do so, arguing that this kind of rhetoric would grossly exaggerate the problems Germany was facing. Toil and sweat, yes; but blood and tears?

Even if one shares that view, and even if one accepts the excuse that an unprecedented post-reunification agenda dominated German domestic politics to a great extent, the reform process of the 1990s undoubtedly started too hesitantly and remained, all in all, too slow. On the credit side, the government privatized and demonopolized the state-run mail and telecommunications services, reformed the business tax, cautiously deregulated the labor market, and moderately adapted the public health insurance and pension systems to the changing demographic balance. On the debit side, the SPD-led majority in the Bundesrat (the assembly of the 16 federal states of Germany, or upper house) rejected the income tax reform in 1997, and the Christian Democrats failed to create a legal framework for immigration policies to replace the counterfactual mantra that "Germany is not a land of immigration."

Kohl left a domestic construction site to his successor. Given the all-party German credo that the broadest possible agreement in society should be the basis for changes—a belief that slowed German reform processes—plenty of work will remain for his successor's successors.

The Evil and the Cuckoo Clock: Reconciling Germany's Past

In the movie *The Third Man*, Harry Lime uses a historical comparison to illustrate his distorted value system. "In Italy for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed—but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock." The fascist worship of great men whose destiny elevates them far above the rules that apply to ordinary individuals is the exact opposite of what may be called the spirit of the Bonn Republic. Liberal democracy has stood in Germany for more than half a century, which, although

certainly not as impressive as more than 500 years, stands as a greater achievement of civilization than any masterpiece of public architecture could represent.

Kohl, born in 1930 and 15 years old at the end of World War II, belonged to the small interim generation of Germans who had been too young to be involved in the Nazi system and too old not to notice what was happening around them. Kohl felt that the “blessing of being born later” put a special obligation on him and his contemporaries.¹⁰ Many interpreted the blessing phrase, which became one of his most-quoted sayings, as a rejection of collective responsibility by someone who had been personally innocent. What Kohl meant, though, was quite the contrary—and this principle should be seen as a key element of his legacy for both Germany and Europe. His clear belief was that united Germany should try to be—or rather, to become—a “normal” member of the European family. That the concept of normalcy would not make sense to everybody is understandable, however, after a national history that was abnormal in so many respects until reunification.

A good definition of what Kohl felt to be normal would focus, first, on balanced self-confidence, free of inferiority and superiority complexes, based on pragmatic humanism. Normal Germans should neither be at one's feet nor at one's throat; they should look the person in the eye. Kohl undoubtedly subscribed to what Hans Magnus Enzensberger said in 1993:

Since we are no longer the world champions of Evil, we feel ourselves obligated to be the world champions of Good. We have to lead the way by setting a good example; we have to be morally better than the others. I find all this a bit warped. I would be happy enough if we could just be normal people in this regard, no worse and no better than the others. Normal civil conditions would suffice completely for me. Even the rest of the world would be content with that.¹¹

In Germany, many national goals are defined not in positive terms but in terms of “Never again!”—referring to errors and sins that paved the way for the tyranny of nazism and, later, the Communist dictatorship of the GDR. If something like a German civil religion existed, its main liturgical expression would take the form of an exorcism rather than a credo. Without denying that the Holocaust had to remain an absolute point of reference for what the Federal Republic, whether governed from Bonn or Berlin, is not and refuses to be, Kohl tried to promote a historical consciousness that would also include positive, edifying elements. One of them was the pre-1848 liberal

Kohl's tenure should be divided into two terms: preunification and postunification.

democratic movement that had played an important role in Kohl's home region, the Palatinate. After all, had not the Bonn Republic itself become an encouraging chapter in Germany's history? Until Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* (1969–1974), the republic had defined itself as a merely provisional entity. Thereafter, it began to see itself more and more as something definitive, even though it never formally reneged the German claim to reunification.

Kohl bequeathed two important museums to the nation that had been his personal idea: the House of History in Bonn, which is dedicated to German postwar history, and the German Historical Museum in Berlin, which fo-

Accepting more military responsibilities in Europe's Balkan backyard became essential.

focuses on German history as a whole. After some commentators initially and unjustly accused the two projects of promulgating too rosy a view of the German past, the public now widely accepts them. The third project, the Central Memorial in Berlin (*Neue Wache Unter den Linden*), is meant to be a place of mourning for the victims of war and tyranny in the twentieth century. In other words, the memorial's dedication embraces those murdered in German

concentration camps as well as German soldiers who fell in World Wars I and II. The protest against Kohl's and President Ronald Reagan's visit to the war cemetery in Bitburg in 1985 showed Kohl how easily such symbols could be misconstrued as an attempt to play down Nazi atrocities; he therefore readily supported the plan to build a Central Holocaust Memorial for which he offered federal land near the Brandenburg Gate.

For Kohl, normalcy also meant putting Germany at the heart of Western civilization and its Euro-Atlantic institutions. When, at the beginning of his federal career, he defined himself as "Konrad Adenauer's grandson," he was referring not least to the conviction of the Bonn Republic's main founding father that Germany belonged in Western civilization. In the early 1980s, Kohl advocated the deployment of U.S. Pershing II and cruise missiles as a response to Soviet SS-20s on the grounds that, otherwise, NATO and therefore Western Europe would face an existential crisis. His predecessor, Schmidt—also a committed Atlanticist—had lost the majority support of his own SPD over that question, forcing him to yield the chancellery to Kohl's new coalition majority in 1982. In the mid-1980s, Kohl strongly rejected the idea—advocated by intellectuals from the left and the right—to revitalize the concept of *Mittleuropa* (Central Europe), defining an independent cultural space, with Germany as the center of the center, between the Russian-led Eurasian and the U.S.-led Euro-Atlantic spheres. In 1989–

1990, Kohl left no doubt that German reunification would be acceptable to him only if the Soviet Union conceded to the enlarged Federal Republic of Germany the sovereign right to choose which alliance the country wanted to join—namely, to remain a member of NATO.

The third element of normalcy is the congruity of the state and the nation. To German ears, both concepts remain distinct, but they are gradually converging. Before reunification, the German situation could be expressed in the formula “one nation, two states”; the present-day situation may be described as “one state, two societies.” More importantly, the accusation of irredentism no longer burdens Germany. A fundamental consensus exists, both inside the country and among its neighbors, that the borders of the German state now coincide with the borders of the German nation. Kohl contributed to the death of irredentism in 1990, when he confronted those who still dreamed of a return of Silesia, Pomerania, and other eastern regions to Germany. He spoke bluntly: Either we stick to that legal claim and forgo reunification, or we seize the opportunity to be reunited by definitively abandoning the claim. Even the agenda of the German extreme right is no longer revisionist and expansionist; instead, in a shrinking population, this group is obsessed with ways to make the borders watertight against what they perceive as a threatening influx of foreigners attracted by an increasing demographic vacuum.

Out of the Area: Defense Politics

Before reunification, the role of the federal armed forces (Bundeswehr) was confined to defending the West German as well as the North Atlantic territory in central Europe. The idea that German troops could one day be deployed out of the area was a taboo topic, certainly on the left but also on the right. The nightmare that German soldiers (that is, West Germans) might have to shoot at German soldiers (East Germans) on their expeditions to distant continents haunted politicians in Bonn. Bonn's NATO allies, for what was then called “historical reasons,” also would not have appreciated Germany's capability to intervene militarily all over the globe.

With regard to its security interests outside the area, the Federal Republic thus became used to being a freeloader, and many West Germans came to believe that this state of affairs was somehow a sign of moral superiority over allies that had rapid deployment forces, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. “The word ‘realpolitik,’” the aphorist Johannes Gross commented after reunification, “has been lost in the German language and will no longer be needed; it lives on in other languages as a foreign expression. In place of it we urgently need the word ‘Moralpolitik’ in order to label that which we, out of responsibility, refrain from doing.”¹²

During Kohl's second term, the Federal Republic grasped that its allies had changed their expectations. Learning to accept more military responsibilities in Europe's Balkan backyard and other parts of the world became an essential item on the normalization agenda. The process started in 1991, when just-united Germany was exempt from direct military participation in the Persian Gulf War but had to contribute the equivalent of some DM 17 billion in payments, equipment, and weaponry.

For Kohl, the introduction of the euro was the point of no return for European integration.

These payments actually led to a bitter irony that haunted Kohl during the "donation affair." In 2000 his government was suspected of having taken bribes from Thyssen, a German tank-producing corporation, in exchange for official permission in February 1991 to export Fuchs (Fox) tanks, specialized in the detection of nuclear, biological, and chemical fallout, to Saudi Arabia. In fact, Kohl had told Secretary of State James Baker in November

1990 that he planned to give that permission and thus make an exception from the restrictive German regulations for weapon exports to non-NATO countries. The understanding was that this gesture would be one element of German support for the anti-Saddam coalition.¹³

During the 1990s, Kohl very actively tried to convince his hesitant compatriots that the Berlin Republic had to give up the Bonn culture of reticence from direct military engagements. Many Germans of his generation and older who had memories of the war, however, were not so enthusiastic about abandoning the idea. For Kohl himself, this effort was probably a matter of duty and responsibility, rather than pride and prestige. The left strongly opposed the alleged militarization of German foreign politics, but the pacifist "Never again!" rhetoric yielded inconclusive results. Was it really a lesson of history that Germany should do nothing about ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia?

Ironically, the "red-green" government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, which has been in office since October 1998, completed what Kohl and his center-right coalition had started in 1991 when it decided that the Bundeswehr should participate in the war in Kosovo in 1999. That campaign marked the first time since World War II that German armed forces were involved in fighting on a broader scale; and, of all governments, this event took place under the aegis of an administration whose leadership consisted of many members of the former peace movement. In a television address on March 24, 1999, Schröder told the public, "We are not making war"; the facts, however, contradicted him.

The Bundeswehr's survival as a conscription army up to the present is another of Kohl's legacies. In July 1990, Kohl personally convinced Gorbachev that the Soviet Union should agree to an upper limit of 370,000 German soldiers; otherwise, the Bundeswehr would have to be transformed into an army of career soldiers. In the 1990s, the Bundeswehr played an important part in the intra-German integration process by bringing together tens of thousands of young men from West and East Germany. The successful and calm merger of two formerly hostile armies, the Bundeswehr and the East German National People's Army, is one of the unsung heroic deeds of the post-reunification decade. Yet, the question remains: Will conscripts be able to cope with the rising professional standards of rapid deployment forces?

What's Left? What's Right?

Kohl started as "Adenauer's grandson." He left office as the statesperson who completed Adenauer's grand design for a free and united Germany in a free and united Europe.

Since the nineteenth century, the German question had haunted the Europeans, not least the Germans themselves. Its three components were the incongruity of state and nation, the weakness of liberal democracy in a united Germany, and the tension between German unity and European balance of power. In an almost obsessive fashion, Kohl used to emphasize that he wanted the answer to the German question to be "irreversible."¹⁴ He gave this reason when he was asked in 1996, after he had tied Adenauer's 14-year record as a chancellor, why he did not want to retire. The problem of state-nation incongruity was solved. West Germany's tried-and-tested liberal democracy had become the political system of the country as a whole. The third component of the German problem, however, was still there. According to Kohl, the process of European integration had not yet crossed the point of no return; for him, this point was defined by the decision, scheduled for 1998, to introduce the euro.

Some have argued that Kohl used the EMU as a pretense because he could simply not imagine not being the German chancellor. Those who know him, however, will confirm that he truly believed in the euro's relevance to an irreversible integration of united Germany into a supranational European framework. After all, the Treaty of Maastricht and its EMU project had been the result of a joint Franco-German initiative in the spring of 1990, aimed at making the imminent German reunification acceptable to Germany's neighbors. (Incidentally, its domestic impact should not be underestimated either. To name but one example, the rules of budgetary discipline for EMU members prevent careless deficit spending. In Euroland countries, the ratio

of the annual government deficit to GDP must not exceed 3 percent at the end of the preceding fiscal year, and the ratio of gross government debt to GDP must not exceed 60 percent.)

“Irreversibility,” as Kohl understood it, meant that Germany had to be put on rails she would be unable to jump. This concept was put to a first major test when the “red-green” coalition came to power in 1998. The new

War between European nations has become unthinkable.

government—certainly Schröder himself, as well as Joschka Fischer, the green foreign minister—had ideological roots in a left-wing tradition that had once “refused to let Germany join any club that would have it as a member.”¹⁵ Among these clubs, NATO had been the most controversial one. Nevertheless, Schröder and Fischer acted as good Atlanticists whenever they had to declare

themselves—from Kosovo 1999 up to the American-led campaign against international terrorism. Fischer’s speeches on the future of Europe sounded as if they had been written by a mainstream Christian Democrat. If Kohl was Adenauer’s grandson, then Fischer became Kohl’s nephew with regard to *Europolitik*¹⁶ or, to use a term coined by Heinrich August Winkler, a loyal member of the “posthumous Adenauerian Left.”¹⁷

The epoch-making changes to which Kohl contributed have in truth molded a political landscape very different from the world to which he himself belonged. War between European nations has become unthinkable. Preventing it, once and forever, had been a top priority for the postwar leaders of Europe, among whom Kohl was the youngest and last. When the Cold War was over, a golden era seemed to begin, and Germany cashed in an ample peace dividend—the ratio of its defense budget to GNP has gone down from 3 percent to 1.5 percent. On the Balkans, though, it became obvious that the dreams of eternal peace were an illusion. After September 11, the post-Kohl generation of political leaders is tasked with convincing their reluctant compatriots that Europe’s vital interests have to be defended in far-off theaters. A single currency is simply not enough to buy the amount of global influence for which the EU is striving.

Global change has also confronted German domestic politics with new challenges. Looking back to four “red-green” years since 1998, one is tempted to say that Schröder has merely intensified Kohl’s neocorporatist style of “round-table” agreements between Big Business, Big Labor, and Big Government. That method no longer works. The structurally conservative network of intertwined institutions lacks the flexibility and creativity needed to give an innovative answer to globalization.

In the Berlin Republic, political power itself might become more volatile. To young Germans, the traditional length of power cycles (CDU-led governments were in power from 1949 to 1969, the SPD from 1969 to 1982, and the CDU again from 1982 to 1998) will probably look strange. Reunification accelerated the dissolution of traditional constituencies. Religious allegiances, of great significance for the Christian Democrats, have been weakening considerably. Before reunification, 43 percent in the West and 4 percent in the East called themselves Catholic; 41 percent in the West and 21 percent in the East called themselves Protestant. Accordingly, more than 10 percent in the West and 70 percent in the East do not belong to any religious community. While the number of Christians is decreasing, the number of Muslims (some 4 percent this year) is increasing.¹⁸

Kohl may not have been a “white revolutionary,” as Henry Kissinger called Bismarck,¹⁹ but the results of his politics could prove to be far more durable than those of the “iron chancellor” whose answer to the German question remained incomplete—and therefore reversible.

Notes

1. See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, April 14, 2002, p. 61 (predictions of Professor Dietrich Stoyan from the Technical University of Freiberg).
2. <http://www.eurplace.org/federal/churdisco.html> (accessed July 15, 2002).
3. In June 1998, for example, 62 percent of West Germans (71 percent of East Germans) said they had little or no confidence in the euro; 27 percent of West Germans (18 percent of East Germans) said they had confidence. Cf. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Renate Köcher, eds., *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1998–2002* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2002), p. 952.
4. See *Bulletin of the Federal Government*, no. 130 (1992), p. 1,189 (Kohl's parliamentary speech at the final reading of the Treaty of Maastricht, December 2, 1992). To the best of the author's knowledge, Kohl made this statement for the first time at a CDU convention on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Federal Republic on January 18, 1989. Helmut Kohl, *Der Kurs der CDU* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1993), p. 334.
5. Cf. Michael Mertes, *The Role of the Federal Chancellery During the Process of German Unification 1989–90* (Washington, D.C.: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2001), p. 16.
6. See Timothy Garton Ash, “Germany Unbound,” *New York Review of Books*, November 22, 1990.
7. See *World Competitiveness Year Book*, <http://www01.imd.ch/wcy> (accessed July 15, 2002).
8. For 1982–1998, see <http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Anlage1333/Bundeshaushalt-2001.pdf> (accessed July 15, 2002), p. 22. For 2001, see http://www.das-parlament.de/2002/10_11/Bundestag/014.html (accessed July 15, 2002).
9. See David Marsh, *The Germans: Rich, Bothered, and Divided* (London: Century, 1989). The German translation received a more optimistic title. David Marsh, *Deutschland im Aufbruch (Germany's Awakening)*, trans. Paul Zsolnay (Vienna: Darmstadt, 1990).

10. See *Bulletin of the Federal Government*, no. 13 (1984), p. 113 (Kohl's speech to members of the Knesset in Jerusalem, January 25, 1984).
11. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Die Schwierigkeiten der Deutschen mit Sich Selbst," *Der Tagesspiegel*, January 19, 1993.
12. Johannes Gross, "Notizbuch Johannes Gross. Neueste Folge," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Magazin*, February 26, 1993, p. 10.
13. See Helmut Kohl, *Mein Tagebuch 1998–2000* (Munich: Droemer, 2000), pp. 255–263.
14. See *Bulletin of the Federal Government*, no. 125 (1992), p. 1,142 (Kohl's speech at St. Antony's College, Oxford, November 11, 1992).
15. See Mark Lilla, "The Other Velvet Revolution: Continental Liberalism and Its Discontents," *Daedalus* (spring 1994): 146.
16. See, for example, Joschka Fischer's often-quoted speech at Humboldt University in Berlin, May 12, 2000, located at http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/en/index_html (accessed July 15, 2002).
17. See Heinrich August Winkler, *Streitfragen der deutschen Geschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1997), p. 131.
18. Cf. Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds., *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Einheit* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1991), p. 424, <http://www.kirchensteuer.de/konfession.html> (accessed July 15, 2002).
19. See Henry A. Kissinger, "The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck," *Daedalus* (summer 1968): 888–924.