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The *Volkskammer* Decision on Accession (August 24, 1990)

During the night of August 23, 1990, after controversial discussions between the proponents of rapid unity and the supporters of continued independence, the GDR *Volkskammer* decided to accede to the Federal Republic on October 3, 1990. The following article from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* describes how two FRG politicians, Chancellor Helmut Kohl (CDU) and Deputy SPD Chairman Oskar Lafontaine, responded to the news.

A Day of Joy for all Germans

Kohl thanks the Volkskammer, the Allies, Gorbachev/ Lafontaine also welcomes the accession decision.

In a government declaration before the Bundestag on Thursday, Chancellor Helmut Kohl spoke of “a historical event in German history” – his appraisal of the *Volkskammer’s* decision to expand the jurisdiction of the Basic Law to include the territory of the GDR as of October 3 and to thereby effect the GDR’s accession to the Federal Republic. “Today is a day of joy for all Germans. Wednesday, October 3, 1990, will be the date of reunification. It will be a great day in the history of our people. After more than forty years, that which the preamble of the constitution demands for ‘the entire German people’ will come to pass: ‘To achieve the unity and freedom of Germany in free self-determination,’” said the chancellor.

Kohl said that it was a day to give thanks, as well as a day to offer respect and appreciation to colleagues in the *Volkskammer* and the government of the GDR for carrying out the task given to them by voters on March 18th.

Deputy SPD Chairman Oskar Lafontaine also welcomed the *Volkskammer* resolution, since he views it as a foundation upon which the people of East Germany would be able to live their lives in freedom. Lafontaine reminded listeners that political unification was a prerequisite for “real unity” – namely, the establishment of uniform living standards throughout Germany. At the same time, he referred to Carlo Schmid’s demand for a European nation, and spoke out for a new national concept, one that could be realized in a United States of Europe. Lafontaine also called for the creation of a constitutional council, which would prepare a new constitution on the fundamentals of the Basic Law. This new constitution would then be put to a referendum in Germany.

The Bundestag approved an election agreement that evening, establishing the basis for the all-German Bundestag elections to be held on December 2nd.

[. . .]

The long list of those thanked by Kohl began with former Hungarian Minister President Laszlo Nemeth, who, a year ago, opened the border for the [East German] refugees who were camped out in the [West German] embassy [in Budapest], thereby removing the “first stone from the Berlin Wall.” Kohl then thanked the Germans in East Germany. He said their courage, composure, and love of freedom were to thank for the unity that would be realized in a state of freedom over the next several weeks.

Kohl went on to include the Western partners in his expression of thanks, mentioning Presidents Bush and Mitterrand. He also mentioned the citizens’ and human rights movements in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, and above all, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Kohl said that it was Gorbachev’s reform policy that made the far-reaching changes in Germany and Europe possible.

Kohl had special praise for his predecessor Konrad Adenauer and the contributions he made to the unification of Germany that is about to be achieved. What Adenauer described in his memoirs is finally being realized, said Kohl. [. . .]

In the second part of his government declaration, Chancellor Kohl discussed the economic problems in East Germany, referring to numerous positive signs that had received little attention thus far. For example, he mentioned the fact that 100,000 new companies were founded in East Germany in the first half of the year – 35,000 of them in July alone. Apparently, the cost of living in the month of July, the first month after the creation of the monetary union, was 5.5% lower than in the preceding months of the year, even though salaries and pensions had increased.

The present situation is marked by the transition from a planned to a market economy. The problems that arose over the course of forty years of mismanagement could not be corrected in eight weeks, Kohl said. According to the chancellor, the reconstruction of East Germany remains a question of months and years, not days. Furthermore, at this turning point in German history, success depends on everyone’s participation in a great common effort. Kohl pointed out that 57 billion German marks had been made available to support the GDR budget for the first eighteen months alone. The federal government would push for quick payment of these funds. In addition, approved liquidity aid would have to be paid out faster and more efficiently. Kohl announced that the government would provide “extensive additional support” for the export of agricultural commodities from East Germany. Once again, Kohl contradicted the assertion made by SPD chancellor candidate Lafontaine on numerous occasions, namely that the difficulties of the GDR could have been avoided without an economic, monetary, and social union. Whoever maintains this, Kohl suggested, represses all memories of the 300,000 resettlers [*Übersiedler*],

who came to the Federal Republic between November 1989 and February 1990. They made this decision necessary, and they were the decisive reason for the monetary union.

Lafontaine acknowledged the individuals and groups that had made the process of German unification possible. He referred to those who suffered political persecution in the GDR, who had kept the wish for democracy alive there. They had made it clear that an oppressive system which promised paradise in the distant future was doomed to fail. Those who tried to escape from the GDR – Lafontaine named Peter Fechter – had also made important contributions. They had shown the world that the GDR was always a system of oppression.

Without the citizens' rights groups in East Germany and without the churches there, the democratization process would not have been possible. Lafontaine recalled the contributions made by the Polish "Solidarity" movement, by the Czechoslovak group "Charter 77," by Gorbachev and Mitterrand. He mentioned Adenauer's policy towards the West, Brandt's policy toward the East, acknowledged the importance of the Schmidt government's support of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, but also named Kohl's contributions and his talks with Gorbachev in the Caucasus.

The SPD chancellor candidate said that the process of uniting Germany had to be done in a democratic and European fashion. The people had to decide on their constitution. To this end, a constitutional council should submit a draft to a referendum.

Lafontaine warned that European unification should not be forgotten in the wake of German unification. One day, according to Lafontaine, a European nation should exist. The "national concept" should orient itself toward that of the United States. The values of the French Revolution, "Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood," should not be limited to a national perspective but rather be understood in universal terms. In view of "poverty migration" from Eastern Europe, Lafontaine advocated the establishment of social conditions necessary to integrate such people.

He demanded once again that the costs of unification be clarified and that military service and community service be deemed equally important. Lafontaine accused Kohl of wanting to direct the unification process "on his own," which he considered a mistake. He also felt it was a mistake for the federal government to tell the people of the Federal Republic that no sacrifices would be necessary in the course of German unification. With such assertions, the "prerequisite of solidarity" was done away with. Lafontaine announced that there would be social hardship in East Germany and that people in the Federal Republic would "have to do without, to some degree."

Source of English translation: "East German Decision in Favor of Accession" (August 23, 1990), in Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates*,

1944-1993. Translated by Allison Brown and Belinda Cooper. Berghahn Books: Providence and Oxford, 1994, pp. 180-83. © Berghahn Books. Please note: additions and slight modifications to this translation were made by GHI staff.

Source of original German text: "Ein Tag der Freude für alle Deutschen" ["A Day of Joy for all Germans"], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 24, 1990, p. 1.