



Volume 10. One Germany in Europe, 1989 – 2009
Unification makes Progress (October 2, 1995)

In an editorial in the Berlin daily *Der Tagesspiegel*, journalist Hermann Rudolph reminds readers that the unification process was making progress despite all of the difficulties involved. According to Rudolph, it was time to name the accomplishments of German unity without losing sight of the problems that persisted.

Most of the Problems are Solvable

Germany unity is in its fifth year. Yet measured by our memories, how long ago was it that West Germans and West Berliners in Dreilinden or Herleshausen waited in line at the border control? And when was it that East Germans calculated the number of years until their retirement age, when the longed-for trip to the West would be possible? Was it ten years ago? Or fifteen? One need not use such fictitious time spans as the framework for this mental exercise to realize how little that which has taken place since the *Wende* can be measured by the years that have passed since then. I am not saying this to downplay differences or blur conflicts. But the fact that, on the one hand, the past sinks back into near nebulousness, while on the other, it still extends forcefully into the present, is above all the result of real, far-reaching changes. Nothing proves better that we can't go back to the time before those years than the difficulties we have trying to *think* back to the time before them. And doesn't this shift in our sense of time perhaps offer a better impression of the extent to which unity has already been fulfilled, how it has become a reality for all of us, than most of the statistics, nitpicking opinion polls, and belabored balance sheets?

Of course, it cannot be disputed that the state of German unity, in its fifth year, leaves much to be desired. In the meantime, however, the time has come to protect it, not only against its critics, but also against its diagnosticians, who see estrangement and conflicting mentalities above all and who try to conjure inner unity. Perhaps it is precisely this noble goal that diverts from the progress of unity. Because it is one of those ideal conceptions before which every concrete step runs the risk of disgracing itself.

For quite some time now, East and West have been tied to each other for better or worse; not only did the "old" states of the FRG "colonize" – to use the provocative term that mobilizes all prejudices – the "new" ones of the GDR, the East also made its own contribution, by virtue of

law and votes, to the political, economic, and social life of the whole Federal Republic, however incomplete it may still be. And as for the complaint that East and West have become more foreign to each other in the last years – this is precisely the flipside of the process of getting to know each other, which is admittedly not a simple one. After all, what did the “Wessis” and the “Ossis” know about each other beforehand? The West Germans barely remembered where Rostock and Cottbus are, and thought that Dynamo Dresden* was the name of a power plant; the “Ossis” were fed bits of the West in the form of little appetizers. Now the latest bits of news from East and West German lands, from the Stasi to Boris Becker, mingle peacefully, or more often contentiously, in the headlines.

All of this, it’s true, does nothing to diminish the problems of united Germany. But these problems have names. They are: de-industrialization, distribution conflicts, restitution before compensation, continuing disparities in income, political offices, as well as ownership and property relationships. Most of these problems are solvable, some more quickly, others only over very long periods of time. But it would be cowardly and unhistorical to fear that the efforts required to get a handle on unity must inevitably damage it. Unity also grows through and in these very efforts, creakingly but unstoppably. It might very well be that unity has already progressed farther than we believe.

Source: Hermann Rudolph, “Die meisten Probleme sind lösbar” [“Most of the Problems are Solvable”], *Tagesspiegel*, October 2, 1995.

Translation: Kelly McCullough

* Dynamo Dresden is the name of a soccer club – eds.