

Poland, Germany, France at core of changes in Central Europe

by Rainer Apel

The change of government in Poland in August, the wave of refugees from East Germany and the mass protest rallies in Leipzig, Dresden, and the other major cities there, the reshuffling of the communist leadership in East Berlin, and the discussion of millions of East Germans on economic and political reforms, free elections, and German reunification—all these events have stirred the world and dominated the headlines.

But the developments which began with the opening of a few new crossing-points at the Berlin Wall in the night of Nov. 9-10 foreshadowed the shape of a new architecture, a political structure of a Europe to replace the regime which was set at the February 1945 Roosevelt-Churchill-Stalin conference at Yalta, and which has ruled European affairs throughout the postwar era.

Berlin, which has been the centerpiece of the postwar Iron Curtain, was changing overnight: A few hours after the re-opening of the sectoral border was made public, 100,000 East Germans had streamed into West Berlin, mixing with at least the same number of excited West Germans in the streets of the city. German flags were waved, and every single car coming from the East was welcomed with cheers. Thousands of people from East and West climbed on the Wall, celebrating the beginning of a new era. People of all ages were full of joy and tears at the same time. Relatives who had not seen each other in the 28 years since the Wall was built embraced each other, as did people who had never met before. No clearer expression of the Germans' feeling as one nation could be imagined.

Fidelio, Act I

On Nov. 11, people along West Berlin's Kurfürstendamm avenue were singing the moving refrain "Be embraced, ye millions!" from Friedrich Schiller's *Ode to Joy* in Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Other popular songs were chanted as well, and thousands joined in.

This was only the beginning: The next day, 400,000 East Germans streamed into West Berlin, and 1 million the day after. Meanwhile, far away from Berlin, at the new crossing-points along the German-German border, tens of thousands streamed into the West—half a million altogether. Brass bands from the West welcomed the visitors from the East, and bands from the East marched into the West to play as well.

The high point of this German-German reunion occurred in West Berlin on Sunday, Nov. 12. All visitors from East Germany had free entry to all classical music concerts performed in the city that day. The Berlin Philharmonic had decided to give a special, unannounced concert, and hundreds of East Germans, many of them young families with small children, took the opportunity to listen to Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 and Piano Concerto No. 1 at the Deutsche Oper. The concert was conducted by Daniel Barenboim, who told the audience he was proud to contribute to this special moment, and received roaring applause, with the audience spontaneously rising from their seats.

Another, well-attended concert took place at the Deutsches Konzerthaus, where a performance of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* was given. Other, smaller concerts of classical and religious music at churches all over West

Berlin were well attended.

West Berlin, as well as many West German cities, reported massive interest of East German visitors at art museums and other sites of historical interest, where long queues of people were lining up for most of the day.

East Berlin itself looked rather depopulated that Sunday. The square at the Marx-Engels monument, usually a much-frequented meeting place for East Germans, looked completely deserted—a scene that was highly symbolic of the present situation in East Germany: People have had enough of Marx and Engels, of socialism.

The figures published by the East German authorities on Monday spoke for themselves, to the same effect: More than 5 million East Germans, roughly one-third of the population, had enlisted for traveling visas to West Berlin and West Germany.

It was as the writer Reiner Kunze—himself a refugee from East Germany in 1977—wrote in a lead editorial in the Bonn daily *Die Welt*, after this historic weekend on Nov. 13: *Fidelio*, Act I—the prison gates are opening, the prisoners enjoy the open air after a long period of incarceration. As in Beethoven's opera, the prisoners returned to their cells (when their visas expired), but they are determined to come back. It is, Kunze wrote, still a long a way to go until the final act of real liberation is finally reached, but the process leading toward it has definitely begun. What is required now, in view of these broad and intense social processes, is leadership, and reasonable action by governments and politicians.

Joint heritage of Germany, Poland, France

As these breathtaking developments were unfolding in Berlin, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was in Warsaw. He had arrived for a five-day, official visit in the morning hours of Nov. 9, prepared for difficult and delicate talks with the new Polish government. The developments in Berlin, this mass expression of the longing for freedom, made it easier for Kohl to get his specific message across in Warsaw. In his official dinner address that evening, the Chancellor cited the joint heritage of French, German, and Polish freedom fighters against the regime of the Congress of Vienna in the early 19th century as a crucial point of reference for cooperation of the three nations for a better Europe at the end of this century.

"Today," Kohl said, "all of Europe looks upon the great Polish people which, not for the first time in its history, revives the most valuable traditions of our continent to new life.

"The common desire for freedom and self-determination: This was also the characteristic of one of the greatest periods in the history of our two peoples. During the Polish struggle for freedom in 1830-31 and in the years after, Germany was seized by a wave of sympathy and enthusiasm for the neighboring people.

"The high point was, in my Palatine home-region, the Hambach Festival on May 27, 1832, at which the [Polish]

red-white and [German] black-red-gold flags were fluttering together, while German, French, and Polish students were calling for constitutions and citizen rights for all Europeans, and were singing songs of freedom. Speeches given at that event proclaimed: 'Without the freedom of Poland, no German freedom; without Poland's freedom, no lasting peace, no salvation for the peoples of Europe. Therefore, rise up to fight for Poland's restoration!'

"The *fraternity* proclaimed by the French revolutionaries: Isn't that an old name for what we call *solidarity* today? This bond has remained, and even war and dictatorial regimes haven't been able to tear it apart."

Kohl could not have chosen a better point of reference. The cooperation between the three nations of France, Germany, and Poland was never again so close during the 157 years that followed that event at Hambach Castle. And the chance for a new era of close cooperation between the three has never been so close in the past 157 years, as right now.

German-Polish reconciliation

Kohl's trip to Warsaw had been prepared in close consultation with the government of France, in several personal encounters between the Chancellor and French President François Mitterrand, and on the phone between Bonn and Paris. Since he was assured of full support on the part of Mitterrand, Kohl was assigned a special mission to Warsaw that only he could carry out.

West Germany plays a crucial role regarding Poland for several reasons: 1) it is Poland's single largest creditor and trading partner in the West; 2) it has to be engaged with Poland in a pincer-like move to support the process of political reform and transformation in East Germany; and 3) as the political-economic pivot for the ongoing process of German reunification, West Germany's guarantee of secure borders with Poland is essential, because the border question must be kept free of any tensions.

The reconciliation and cooperation between West Germany and France in the postwar period, especially the historic alliance between France's President Charles de Gaulle and West Germany's Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in the late 1950s and early 1960s, can serve as the model for the new quality of cooperation between a united Germany and Poland. For the Poles, on the other hand, it is important to know that both leading industrial nations on the European continent, France and West Germany, are supporting the first non-Communist government in Warsaw now, at the peak of the Polish economic crisis. The combined weight of France and West Germany is crucial for Poland also in political-strategic terms, because it helps to increase the maneuvering room against the threatening Russian neighbor in the East.

It is furthermore important for Poland to know that France and West Germany are cooperating on the question of East Germany with the aim of helping to remove the Stalinist regime in East Berlin and to replace it with a government

that is oriented toward Western values. A reunification of Germany along the Western model is not threatening to the Poles; indeed, it is the only guarantee for the liberation of the Polish nation from the paws of the Russian bear.

Kohl had to interrupt his trip to Poland for 24 hours on Nov. 10 and Nov. 11, to fly to West Berlin because of the political developments around the Wall. Addressing some 20,000 Berliners from East and West, Kohl said in a highly emotional speech at Schöneberg City Hall: "We are one nation, we will remain one nation, and we belong together. . . . People in the German Democratic Republic have a right to free and secret elections and a free press, and political parties. Our fellow countrymen are fighting for these rights and we are fully behind them. . . . We are ready to help you rebuild your country, you are not alone."

The Chancellor flew back to Bonn, got on the phone with Mitterrand the same Friday night and did so again the next morning, as well as speaking with U.S. President George Bush, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachov, and East Germany's new leader Egon Krenz. After an emergency cabinet meeting in Bonn Saturday morning, Nov. 11, Kohl went back to Warsaw to resume his talks there. The 24-hour interlude was not to the disadvantage of the German-Polish talks, as could be seen on Sunday, when Kohl and Poland's Minister President Tadeusz Mazowiecki joined for a visit to Kryszyow in Lower Silesia.

Kryszyow, the German city of Kreisau before 1945 and since then under Polish rule, is symbolic in two ways. On the one hand, it is a litmus test of whether Germany today can live with the fact that one of its former cities is now part of Poland. And on the other hand, it is a historic center of the anti-Nazi resistance movement in Germany; the estate of the landowning family of Count Moltke at Kryszyow played an essential role in the preparation of the planned overthrow of Hitler on July 20, 1944. A museum of the history of the anti-Nazi resistance is to be built on the restored, former Moltke estate now, in a joint German-Polish venture.

Catholic Church connections

The reunion of Kohl and Mazowiecki at Kryszyow on Nov. 12 became a very moving event. Father Nossol, the priest of the Catholic ethnic German minority in Lower Silesia, welcomed "these two excellent Christian-Democratic statesmen" and recommended, in his prayer, that "Poles and Germans shall work together for the re-evangelization of Europe." Mazowiecki then embraced Kohl in an explicit gesture of reconciliation—also an expression of the traditional Peace Prayer recited by the Polish Catholics—and said: "There is a new Polish-German feeling of fraternity upon which the future of a better Europe can be built." The two heads of state then traveled on to the Shrine of the Black Madonna's at Czestochowa, the cultural heart of Catholic Poland (and the equivalent of the Cathedral of Chartres in France, as many say), where a *Te Deum* was sung in the

German language. The scenes at Kryszyow and Czestochowa on Nov. 12 were highly reminiscent of the reunion de Gaulle and Adenauer had at the Chartres Cathedral in September 1958, at the beginning of their alliance.

The next day, at the Catholic University of Lublin, where Kohl received an honorary doctor's degree, the new alliance between the Germans and the Poles was deepened. "The reforms in Poland and Hungary created the precondition for the changes we are witnessing now in the G.D.R.," said Kohl. "We know that without a free and stable Poland, there will be no free Europe, because Poland is important for all of Europe."

The Chancellor added: "There is nothing to fear for the Poles from the developments in neighboring G.D.R., because support for both reform processes, there as well as in Poland, is in my government's genuine interest. . . . The development of both has to be seen in one and the same context." Concerning the German-Polish border question, the Chancellor said he could not imagine any future expulsion of "millions of Poles who have lived for three generations now" in the former German territories. There is no problem with today's borders, Kohl said. There is only a question of their interpretation; the West German government is respecting the German-Polish Treaty of Warsaw signed in 1970, which declared there are "no territorial claims to Poland."

A reunified Germany, Mazowiecki declared a few hours after the ceremony in Lublin, is no threat to the Poles, so long as there is a German guarantee for Poland's current western borders with East Germany along the two rivers Oder and Neisse.

On Nov. 14, after Kohl and Mazowiecki signed a joint declaration on the new quality of German-Polish relations and cooperation in Warsaw, the Chancellor characterized at a press conference his four days of talks with the new Polish government as "a fateful moment of world history and of German policy," because they offered, for the first time in at least 50 years, an option for developing sound German-Polish relations. Mazowiecki visibly appreciated these remarks, especially when Kohl referred to the two leaders' joint visit to Kryszyow and to Czestochowa, their public gesture of reconciliation there.

Mazowiecki said that the visit to Kryszyow and Czestochowa should not be misread as a merely tactical move of diplomacy, but as a real reflection of a "new quality of friendship between the two nations." He called Kohl "a real friend of the Polish nation" and said that the two had "been able to reach a deep level of understanding because both of us are religious politicians."

If this level of understanding, combined with a sound economic policy of industrial development in Poland and East Germany, is the basis of the new German-Polish cooperation together with France, there is reason to believe that these five days between Nov. 9 and Nov. 14 were the beginning of a change in Europe for the better.