

# *A Comparison of German and Korean Division: Analogies and Differences*

*Hanns Günther Hilpert*

## **Abstract**

The comparative analysis shows striking similarities in the post-war security situations of Germany and Korea, simultaneously leading to artificial separation and the deep-freezing of the division into cold war confrontation. Once division was established, two different systems and mentalities developed. In the end, both the GDR and the DPRK thoroughly failed economically. But although Korean division has endured until now, the situation in the Korean peninsula still looks very much like the German situation of the 1980s. Once the artificial inner Korean border falls, North-South migration is bound to occur, and the ROK will face similar political and economic challenges as the FRG did in 1990. More revealing than the similarities are the regional and national differences, however, which may explain why unification took place in Germany, but not in Korea. Both the mutual trust built up over nearly 20 years of détente and the FRG's deep Western multilateral integration were preconditions and facilitators in the process of reunification. The differences also imply that unification will be much more difficult for Korea, since the DPRK is in absolute and relative terms much poorer and larger.

**Key Words:** German-Korean comparison, North Korea, German reunification, German division, Korean division

## Introduction

On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall came down and the process of German reunification started. The Cold War ended only in Europe, however. In Asia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was visibly not affected by the historic developments in Europe. Alas, Korean division continues up to the current day. Since Korea and Germany suffered the comparable fate of artificial separation and division over a period of nearly 40 years, it may be helpful to use Germany as a yardstick for analyzing the problems and implications of the still divided Korea – across a distance of 20 years. It may be asked: Are there any lessons Korea can draw from Germany's past experiences of division and reunification? Using the German experience as an instrument to analyze the Korean situation is only permissible, however, if something comparable exists. Therefore, a kind of stocktaking is needed.

Roughly divided, the transition from national division to unification has a political dimension, a security dimension, an economic dimension and a human dimension. First, national politics determine whether sufficient political consensus and sufficient political power exists in order to make unification happen. Second, international politics and security demand that unification does not threaten regional or international peace. Third, economic analysis shows the eventual unification costs depending on both state entities' size as well as their income, factor endowment and productivity ratios. Fourth, the human/cultural dimension exposes whether the people and the societies of both sides will fit easily into one reunified nation. Of course, these four dimensions are not equivalent. Obviously the political dimension constitutes the necessary pre-conditions,

and these determine if reunification can be translated into action at all. The estimated economic and human costs, however, are rather influential in decision-making. Looking at these four dimensions in Germany and Korea, both analogies and differences can be discerned. With the intention of searching for conclusions and lessons for contemporary Korea, the following analysis follows this juxtaposition.

As will be shown further on, analogies mainly can be found in the genesis of the divisions and in the evolving formation of two different states and systems, both in Korea and in Germany. Consequently, five striking analogies will be examined, namely (1) crucial geostrategic locations, (2) the parallel genesis of the divisions, (3) the international security context, (4) the development of capitalistic versus socialistic systems, (5) the emergence of different identities and mentalities. The obvious differences result primarily from the different historical developments and political structures of North and South Korea and of East and West Germany. Such different patterns can be noticed (1) in the regional security environments, (2) in the size and income ratios, (3) in the depth and intensity of the division, (4) in the differences between West Germany and South Korea, and (5) in the differences between East Germany and North Korea.

## **Striking Similarities between the German and Korean Divisions**

### ***Crucial Geostrategic Locations***

Both Germany and Korea occupy sensitive geopolitical positions in their respective regions. Germany is located right in the centre of Europe, with hardly any natural borders impeding either access to Germany or

expansion from there. As a consequence of its crucial geostrategic location, Germany's foreign policy orientation was always considered crucial to the European balance of power. Korea is located between the three major powers of Northeast Asia, namely China, Japan and Russia, and is equally open to entry and exit. Korea, which has traditionally been perceived both as an "entry door to China" and as a "dagger pointed at Japan," is regarded by those two neighbours with deep strategic concern. Historically China and Japan have strived for a friendly, and possibly politically dependent, Korea. As a consequence of their strategic locations, both Germany and Korea have been military battlegrounds in geopolitical competitions between external regional powers at several points in history.

### ***Parallel Genesis of the Divisions***

Both Germany and Korea were divided as a consequence of the Cold War between East and West. Both divisions were unintended, however. When the allied powers deliberated the post-war fate of wartime enemy Germany and of occupied Korea at the Yalta Conference from February 4 to 11, 1945, they neither planned nor desired the territorial and political division of these two countries. Both in Germany and in Korea, division occurred, however, when the initially temporary occupation zones were transformed into two separate states. In Germany the western sectors, then controlled by France, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), were merged on May 23, 1949, to form the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). On October 7, 1949, the eastern sector governed by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) became the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In Korea, a trusteeship was formed by the

US and the USSR with a “zone of control” demarcated along the 38th parallel. The purpose of this trusteeship was to establish a provisional Korean government which would become “free and independent in due course.” With mistrust growing rapidly between the US and the USSR, no agreement was reached on how to reconcile the competing provisional governments and how to hold joint elections. Following separate elections both in the South and the North, two separate Korean states were established; first the Republic of Korea (ROK) on August 15, 1948 and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) on September 9, 1948.

***The International Security Context:  
No Unification without International Consent***

Since both Germany and Korea are located in crucial geostrategic locations, the circumstances and the conditions of the reunification had or will have important implications for the regional and global order. Thus the way in which Germany and Korea are anchored into their regional security environment to a high degree defines that same environment. A Germany or Korea firmly integrated into a workable system of regional security enhances regional stability and peace, whereas a Germany or Korea loosely inserted into the region would endanger regional stability and peace, as it would invite foreign competition for influence. There is also an imminent risk that security uncertainties may entice Germany or Korea to enhance their own security by unilateral measures. Unification, both of Germany and Korea, has uncertain consequences for the regional and international security architecture. Therefore international acceptance of reunification is a necessary

precondition for unification.<sup>1</sup> Because of the international security implications involving unification, both Germany and Korea are not fully sovereign states. In this respect a great many quite similar critical reunification issues had to be resolved or will have to be resolved in the course of reunification by some kind of international agreement. The significance of the various issues discussed below, however, may differ between Germany and Korea.

- *A peace treaty*: Germany was until 1990, and Korea still is, in a state of war according to international law. In the case of Germany, a necessary premise of reunification was a peace treaty ending World War II. A necessary precondition for Korean reunification will be a peace treaty ending the Korean War. In the case of Germany a formal peace treaty was not intended by the four allied powers, so the 1990 Treaty of Final Settlement of Germany (or Two Plus Four Agreement) set an end to the war instead. This formula became the precondition for the full restoration of German sovereignty. In future the Potsdam Treaty of 1945 cannot be utilized by a third country as the basis for a claim for a peace treaty or for German reparations.<sup>2</sup>
- *Territorial dimensions*: Both (pre-unification) Germany and Korea had/have unresolved territorial issues, which had/have to be closed prior to unification. Germany in the Two Plus Four Agreement re-

---

<sup>1</sup>-Hanns W. Maull and Sebastian Harnisch, "Exploring the German Analogy: The "2+4 Process" and Its Relevance for the Korean Peninsula," unpublished document, Trier University, 2001.

<sup>2</sup>-Eckart Klein, "Deutschlands Rechtslage" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte (eds.), *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), pp. 284-285.

cognized the Oder-Neiße-border to Poland and renounced formally all territorial claims based on pre-war German territories.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, territorial issues are far less important for the settlement of the Korean division and are not likely to become an obstacle for Korean unification. But unified Korea will also face discussions on its border issues with China (Mount Paektu) and Japan (Tokdo).

- *Possession of nuclear weapons*: Both (pre-unification) Germany and Korea had/have to clarify their positions on weapons of mass destruction. To calm the fears of its neighbours, Germany declared formally in the Two Plus Four Agreement its permanent abdication of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The German abdication did not constitute a major issue in the Two Plus Four negotiations, because neither the FRG nor the GDR possessed nuclear weapons nor had Germany any armament intentions. In the case of Korea, the topic obviously is a core issue. Already at present, the DPRK's possession of nuclear weapons does threaten directly its neighbours (ROK, Japan), it has the potential to set off a horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons (regionally and internationally), and it damages the international non-proliferation treaty. In the case of unification, a major international demand will be the complete disarmament of the DPRK's nuclear arsenal and possibly even of its civil capacities. Similar agreements will be needed in the areas of chemical weapons, biological weapons and possibly land mines.

---

<sup>3</sup>-Ibid., pp. 286-288.

- *Conventional force reduction*: Both Germany and Korea located or locate a high concentration of conventional army forces on their soil, including a considerable number of foreign forces (NATO forces in the FRG, Soviet forces in the GDR, US army forces in the ROK). In principle, a reunification process establishing peace and stability should require the demobilization of army forces. It also raises the question of the future of the foreign forces stationed there. For Germany the Two Plus Four Treaty stipulated that Germany's force level shall not exceed 370,000 men and that the Soviet troops shall leave Germany no later than 1994.<sup>4</sup> In the case of unification, the dismantling of the Korean forces as well as the future of the US army forces in Korea will be major issues.
- *Alignment*: In both Germany and Korea, the two separate states were aligned to opposing powers and systems. When reunification has to be dealt with, the question of alignment comes up. In the Two Plus Four negotiations, Germany upheld its right to freely choose to align with NATO. Eventually the USSR conceded, but with the provision that neither foreign troops nor atomic weapons may be stationed on East German soil. In Korea a similar debate will arise: Will the ROK remain aligned to the US? Will a unified Korea allied to the US be acceptable for China? If so, will the US be allowed to station troops or even nuclear weapons north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel?

---

<sup>4</sup>-Ibid., pp. 285-286.



### ***The Development of Capitalist Versus Socialist Systems***

Both in post-war Germany and in post-war Korea two adversarial states emerged with antagonistic systems of political governance and social organization.

*The FRG and the ROK* became states with capitalist economic systems and pluralistic societies. They both excelled in economic development. Despite tremendous war destruction both the FRG and the ROK created their own versions of economic miracles and became world-class industrial powerhouses. Both states developed into working democracies, although the democratization process started in the ROK at a considerably later stage. On the other hand, both *the GDR and the DPRK* built up socialist systems which demonstrated astonishing similarities, especially in the early years<sup>5</sup>: (1) Pressured by the Soviet occupation forces, all leftist domestic forces were merged into one unitary socialistic party (SED = Socialist Unity Party of Germany, KWP = Korean Workers' Party). The SED and the KWP were asserted to be the true representatives of the working class and the people, and became the leading political forces, (2) Camouflaged as police or coast guard forces, a powerful military was built up, (3) Following the Marxist-Leninist blueprint, socialist states were established: opposition was eliminated; jurisdiction was subordinated; the legislative bodies (the People's Chamber in the GDR; the Supreme People's Assembly in the DPRK) were reduced to rubber stamp parliaments; mass organizations, mass media and constant propaganda were set up to organize society and to create socialist men and women; by means

---

<sup>5</sup>-Rüdiger Thomas, "DDR: Politisches System" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte (eds.), *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), p. 177.

of land reforms and expropriations, virtually all agrarian and industrial property was transformed into social and state property; and central state planning decided on all economic production, distribution and consumption.

Some initial successes in reconstruction after the war notwithstanding, the socialist systems completely failed in creating sustainable economic growth. Both the GDR and the DPRK lost in the competition between the systems. After 40 years of separation, their peoples were economically worse off than their fellow countrymen in the West (of Germany) and in the South (of Korea). Furthermore, the socialism practiced in the GDR and the DPRK resulted in the destruction of housing, infrastructure and environment in both states. North Koreans even suffered an awful famine in the mid 1990s. As a consequence of the socialist failures, massive economic assistance has been required. Both massive public investment in the physical infrastructure and extensive business investment in manufacturing industry and in agriculture are needed.<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Emergence of Different Identities and Mentalities***

The artificially separated peoples of both Germany and Korea developed different mindsets, attitudes and mentalities as a consequence of living different lives in different systems over a period of 40 or 60 years.

---

<sup>6</sup>-Jürgen Gros, "Wirtschaft" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte (eds.), *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), p. 847; Karl-Heinz Paqué, *Die Bilanz: Eine wirtschaftliche Analyse der Einheit*. München: Hanser, 2009, pp. 1-23, 208-214; Gerlinde Sinn and Hans-Werner Sinn, *Kalstart, Volkswirtschaftliche Aspekte der deutschen Vereinigung* (München: Beck, 1993).

In post-unification Germany, different attitudes remain intact even after 20 years of living together in the same state. Thus internal unity has not been reached in Germany yet. Value surveys show that Easterners, when compared with Westerners, have a higher esteem for equality (in contrast to liberty) and for social security (in contrast to individual opportunity). Easterners also hold less systemic faith in democratic and capitalistic institutions, although this may originate in unfavourable transformation experiences. Remembering their lives in the former GDR, Easterners keep a distinct identity. Internal unity of Germany is not helped by the fact that many Westerners ignore, disregard or even have contempt for these memories.<sup>7</sup>

No reliable information exists on the mindsets and attitudes of the North Korean people. For two reasons, it may be assumed that - compared with Germany - the mental gap between North and South Korea is much higher. First, the division between the ROK and the DPRK not only has lasted longer, but has also been much more strict and severe. Second, North Korean defectors arriving in South Korean society do face tremendous problems in adapting and integrating into modern society.

## **Obvious Differences between German and Korean Division**

### *Different Security Environments in Europe and Asia*

Already prior to 1945, the roles of Germany and Korea in international policy and security were completely different. Germany was an

---

<sup>7</sup>- For value surveys, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Renate Koecher (eds), *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie Band 11 (1998-2002)*, *Balkon des Jahrhunderts*, München: Saur 2002.

expansionist military power all throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, challenging the European status quo. Germany under Nazi leadership not only unleashed a devastating war of aggression against its neighbours, but was also responsible for the crimes against humanity committed during the Holocaust. Abroad Germany was widely considered a threat to world peace and a country prone to political intemperateness with no consideration for the fears and needs of its neighbours. Therefore many foreign politicians and analysts regarded German division as a necessity to uphold peace and stability in Europe. Like an antipode of Germany, Korea throughout its history has practically never tried to expand beyond its own territory. Korea, historically being a rather inward-oriented country, was always more preoccupied with withstanding the offensive advances of its neighbours. There has never been a Korean Question in Asia as there has been a German Question in Europe. In contrast to Germany, Koreans do not bear any responsibility for the painful division of their fatherland. Korea is rather seen as the passive victim of unfavourable circumstances.

Once division was established, the Cold War reigned both in Germany and in Korea, with the FRG and the ROK becoming integrated into the US-led pluralistic Western world, and the GDR and the DPRK becoming members of the USSR-led socialist community of states. But it was only in Korea where cold war turned into hot war: the DPRK, intending to unite Korea by force, was stopped through military intervention by the US, which was authorized by UN Security Council resolutions 82 and 83. In turn, America's advance into the North was countered by Chinese intervention. During the Korean War (1950-53), probably more than two million soldiers and around three million

civilians lost their lives, approximately 1.5 million fled from the North to the South, and many families were separated for good. The lasting legacy of the Korean War is a deep anti-communist sentiment in the ROK, deep anti-Americanism in the DPRK, and throughout Korea a bitter feeling against the great powers. The armistice, signed only by the US, China and the DPRK, is still the only safeguard for peace on the Korean peninsula. Fortunately Germany never experienced an inter-German war, only security crises such as the Berlin Blockade (1948/49) and the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961). Since the two superpowers were facing each other eye to eye in Berlin and in Germany, a military clash on German soil probably would have meant full-scale war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and also quite likely a nuclear confrontation. Neither side wanted to risk such an escalation.

The global character of the superpowers' antagonism notwithstanding, Europe and Asia featured quite different security environments during the Cold War. Compared with Europe, Asia's security environment was somehow more diffuse and turned out to be less stable. Proxy wars such as those in Korea and Vietnam became possible. In Europe two multilateral defence alliances were opposing each other - the US-led NATO and the USSR-led Warsaw Pact - with the FRG and the GDR as the respective frontline states. In addition, Europe was divided by two economic blocs, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), each including the FRG and the GDR, respectively, as essential parts. In contrast to Europe, Asia was and still is characterized by a system of bilateral security alliances. America's five bilateral alliances with Australia (1952), Japan (1952), the Philippines (1952), the ROK (1954) and Thailand (1954/64)

constitute the predominant regional security architecture, which is instrumental to the maintenance of peace, strategic stability and economic development in Asia. On the other hand the USSR held military alliances with Mongolia (1921-1992), China (1950-1960) and the DPRK (1961-1996). What is more, China, pursuing an independent foreign and security policy after the split with the USSR in 1960, forged its one and only military alliance with the DPRK (1961). Thus the DPRK, in contrast to the Eastern European Soviet satellite states, possessed two guardians.

In the 1970s, political *détente* softened the Cold War confrontation in Europe. The superpowers started nuclear disarmament negotiations, and the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) set binding norms guiding the relations between the participating states, such as inviolability of frontiers, refraining from the use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes and non-intervention in internal affairs. To be sure, the military and ideological antagonism continued, but Cold War confrontation was complemented by peaceful coexistence.

In Asia, such a “Helsinki Process” never started. What is even more important, the Cold War ended in 1990 only in Europe. The Gorbachev reforms of the 1980s (“Glasnost,” “Perestroika”) had launched a powerful political process which finally led to the breakdown of the already ailing Soviet system. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the whole European post-war policy architecture collapsed. In East Asia, however, the DPRK was able to maintain its governance system intact, proving that it was not a dependent puppet regime. The DPRK’s resilience was reinforced by political and economic support from a rising China, which remains strategically concerned about the potential of a reunified Korea militarily allied to the US.

***Bilateral Size and Income Comparisons***

When comparing divided Germany of 1989 with divided Korea of today, the stark differences in bilateral size and income relations are conspicuous [see Table 1].<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1. Size and Income Comparisons FRG–GDR versus ROK–DPRK**

	FRG (1989)	GDR (1989)	Percentage Share
Population (millions)	62.4	16.4	26.3
Area size (km <sup>2</sup> )	248,689	108,333	43.6
GDP (billions DM)	2,237	353	15.8
GDP per capita (DM)	36,300	21,500	59.2
Foreign Trade Volume (billions DM)	1,148	286	24.9
	ROK (2007)	DPRK (2007)	Percentage Share
Population (millions)	48.5	23.2	48.0
Area size (km <sup>2</sup> )	99,173	122,762	123.8
GNI (billions US\$)	971.3	26.7	2.7
GNI per capita (US\$)	20,045	1,152	8.1
Foreign Trade Volume (billions US\$)	728,3	2.9	0.4

Sources: Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden 1990; Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR, Berlin 1990; Ministry of Unification, Seoul, <http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng/default.jsp?pgname=NORtables>.

- In 1989, the last year before German reunification, the 16.4 million GDR population was roughly one-fourth of the FRG population of 62.4 million people. On the other hand, 23.2 million North Koreans

<sup>8</sup>–See a similar analysis in Marcus Noland. *Avoiding the Apocalypse, The Future of the Two Koreas* (Washington, DC: The Institute for International Economics, 2000), pp. 286-295.

today make up nearly half of the South Korean population of 48.5 million.

- In 1989, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the GDR corresponded to a 15.8% share of the West German GDP. The corresponding share of DPRK Gross National Income (GNI) in relation to the GNI of the ROK in 2007 amounted to a mere 2.7%.<sup>9</sup>
- The comparison of income relations shows a similar picture. Whereas the per capita income of the GDR was roughly 60% of FRG per capita income, DPRK per capita income is just 8.1 % of ROK per capita income.
- GDR foreign trade volume was about a fourth of the FRG foreign trade in 1989. The DPRK's foreign trade is less than one percent of the ROK foreign trade at present.<sup>10</sup>

The percentage shares clearly show that the DPRK of today is much poorer relative to the ROK than the GDR ever was in comparison to the FRG prior to reunification. On the other hand, the DPRK population is

---

<sup>9</sup>- It has to be conceded that the comparison of performance measurements, such as GDP and GNI, between market economies and centrally planned economies is not really permissible. The European transformation history has shown that once external liberalisation takes place, the industrial production in (former) centrally planned economies nose-dives. Therefore, both the GDR 1989 figures and the DPRK 2007 figures under "normal" market economy conditions would have been considerably lower.

<sup>10</sup>- It has to be admitted, though, that the foreign trade comparison is unfavourably skewed at the expense of the DPRK: (1) Both East-West German trade and North-South Korean trade did not/do not count as international trade. This omission especially downsizes the DPRK trade, of which a dominant share is carried out with the ROK; (2) The GDR exports were somehow inflated because the GDR's trade with Comecon trading partners was not carried out at market terms and was bound to collapse once Comecon was dismantled.



nearly half the ROK population, whereas the GDR population was just about a quarter of the FRG population. In addition, the DPRK's area size is even larger than the ROK's area size. Just looking at the numbers, one can easily conclude that merging the North and South Korean economies will be much harder than the unification of East and West Germany had been. To lift the income and production of the North up to Southern levels will demand many more resources than in the comparable German case (both in absolute and in relative terms). More capital will have to be employed to close the economic gap between the North and the South. At the same time, the incentive to migrate from the North to the South will be relatively higher. To make matters worse, both the absolute and the relative gaps are widening year by year. An already rich ROK is still growing, while a very poor DPRK stagnates.

### ***The Depth and Intensity of the Division***

After the Korean War, the division between the North and the South became complete. North-South trade effectively ceased to exist. Postal and telephone lines were cut off permanently. In the following years the DPRK even succeeded in controlling virtually all communication and information flow into and out of its territory. Resurgence of war was a constant and not unrealistic possibility at least until the early 1990s. Mutual hate and mistrust, hostile propaganda, and extreme accusations characterized official inter-Korean relations. No personnel encounters were permitted, apart from some officially sponsored family meetings of the more recent past.

In comparison, German division was less strict and less complete<sup>11</sup>: until the Berlin wall was built in 1961, the domestic border between East and West remained somewhat permeable. East Germans could still leave the GDR via Berlin. Domestic trade between the FRG and the GDR (East-West trade) never stopped. Already in 1951, a trade agreement between the different currency areas of the West and East had been concluded. This German domestic trade proved to be highly profitable for both sides. To keep business going, the FRG government granted an ever increasing credit line to the GDR (so-called swing credit). Postal and telephone communications, though at times interrupted, were in principle always allowed. Parcels containing scarce consumer goods were privately sent to relatives and friends in the GDR, thus improving the overall provisioning of the people. For people from the FRG, business and holiday traffic into the GDR remained possible, although it was heavily restricted and tightly controlled. People in the GDR could receive West German television. Only in the GDR's southeastern districts around the city of Dresden, reception was not possible. Some TV programmes (e.g. "Kennzeichen D") especially dealt with GDR issues and even had some influence on official policy. By an application process, pensioners were allowed to emigrate from the GDR to the FRG. Moving to the West for the purpose of family reunions or for other reasons was also possible. However, approval of the applications was highly arbitrary. In many cases the FRG government paid a bounty to facilitate the move. After the construction of the Berlin Wall, it became common practise for GDR

---

<sup>11</sup>-Peter-Jochen Winters, "Innerdeutsche Beziehungen" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte (eds.), *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), p. 444.

political prisoners to have their freedom purchased by the FRG government. The purchasing price per prisoner rose from an initial 40,000 DM to 100,000 DM. Cultural and sports exchanges took place, although under tight restrictions. In the 1980s a small youth exchange program and a twin city program started. Journalists from both sides were mutually admitted, but they had to be formally accredited. Journalistic activity in the GDR was heavily restricted, however.

In the 1972 Basic Treaty (“*Grundlagenvertrag*”) the FRG and the GDR recognized each other as legal constitutional entities, but not as sovereign states. Each side promised to respect the other’s territorial borders, autonomy and independence. Each pledged not to interfere in the interior or foreign affairs of the other, and to develop relations on an equal footing. Permanent representatives, not ambassadors, could speak for their side’s interests within the other German state. Special treaties on business, science, technology, communication, culture, sports, etc. could be concluded. The Basic Treaty, which was approved by the FRG constitutional court, became a stable and sustainable basis for the further development of mutual German relations. The FRG government continued to feel responsible for the fellow German citizens in the GDR and constantly tried to achieve a humanitarian relaxation of the division. Subsequent to the 1972 Basic Treaty, the two German states concluded a total of 30 agreements on practical division issues.<sup>12</sup>

Catholic and Protestant parishes from the FRG assumed god-parenthoods over GDR parishes with the dual objective of financially

---

<sup>12</sup>-Jens Hacker, “Grundlagenvertrag” in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte (eds.), *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), pp. 417-429.

sponsoring them and keeping contact on pastoral issues and questions of faith.<sup>13</sup>

### *Differences between West Germany and South Korea*

Reunification came to Germany as a surprise, but in retrospect, it can be assessed that the FRG was politically and institutionally quite well prepared.

The FRG was closely integrated into a dense network of both *regional political integration (EU) and transatlantic security cooperation (NATO)*. The existing European security architecture had provided both reassurances for Germany's neighbours and solid anchors for Germany's foreign policy already prior to unification. The long-established multilateral framework perfectly fulfilled the same task during and after reunification. German reunification itself was carried out multilaterally within the so-called Two Plus Four Process. By virtue of the multilateral enclosure, German reunification received the necessary American leadership and support and the (initially hesitant) approval of Germany's European partners as well. Thus multilateralism was a critical prerequisite for the successful unification of Germany.<sup>14</sup>

A major advantage was the FRG's location at the centre of *European economic and monetary integration*. The fact that the FRG was a part, if not the heart, of a wider economic space alleviated the unification process in many ways. With the Deutsche Mark being the key currency of the

---

<sup>13</sup>-Peter Maser, "Kirchen" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte (eds.), *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), pp. 491-492.

<sup>14</sup>-See Maull and Harnisch, "Exploring the German Analogy," p. 3.

European Monetary System (EMS), anticipation of German unification did not lead to a currency shock, although the financial markets anticipated early on the detrimental economic and financial impact of the GDR collapse on the FRG economy and government budget. Through a kind of involuntary burden sharing, Germany's neighbours bore the costs of sharply rising interest rates in 1990, too. Thus the whole European capital market provided capital for the financing of Germany's reunification. A further advantage was the deep integration of the FRG into the single European market. Europe supplied companies eager to invest in the GDR and transferred technical and organizational know-how. Europe offered markets for East German products and job opportunities for GDR citizens.

After 40 years of *democratic normalcy*, the FRG possessed sufficient internal strength and resilience to weather the political, economic and social challenges of reunification. The FRG constitution (basic law), with its foundation in the rule of law, social balancing, federalism, and anti-totalitarianism, had created political stability and a wide-spread satisfaction with the political system and its institutions. It also contributed to the high degree of social stability within the FRG. In spite of a pronounced polarity between left and right parties, West German society was characterized by a broad political consensus. Social tensions were low, compared to the situation in neighbouring West European countries.

In contrast to the FRG of 1989, the ROK would face a less favourable starting position, if unification started today. To begin with, the ROK is much less integrated into multilateral structures. The ROK's security ties with the US are only of a bilateral nature. Second, the process of regional

political and economic integration in East Asia is far less developed than in Europe, and given the reluctance of Asian nation-states to renounce sovereignty to supranational bodies, no meaningful regional integration should be expected anytime soon. Korean unification would start from a much more difficult initial outset. To be sure, American leadership and support may be granted as in the case of Germany, but for the time being there exists no multilateral framework to enclose or to bolster Korean reunification. Third, there is no resilient regional setting for economic burden sharing. Product and factor markets in the ROK as well as in the whole of Asia are of a purely national nature. At best, Korea's northern part may be provided with preferential loans and grants from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) or from Japan. Fourth, the ROK lacks the political and social consensus culture of the FRG of the 1980s. To be sure, after more than 20 years of democratic normalcy, democracy is well entrenched in the ROK as well. However, one must worry that the inevitable heightened tensions in the course of unification might challenge the internal stability of Korea.

### ***Differences between East Germany and North Korea***

The GDR and the DPRK, both socialist and authoritarian states of a divided country, have developed fundamental differences. Five major points are suggested here.

First, the DPRK succeeded in gaining foreign policy independence from its former Soviet and Chinese masters. No foreign troops are based in the DPRK, since the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) left in 1961. Notwithstanding treaties of amity and alliance with the USSR (until

1996) and with China, no foreign power has the capacity to coerce the DPRK politically. The DPRK has developed a truly independent security policy, which is firmly based on its military power. The DPRK has established an autonomous capacity for a conventional first strike beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, which would potentially carry tremendous damages to the South. This capacity should deter the US from a military attack on the North. Furthermore, the DPRK commands an arsenal of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. Through the latter, the DPRK has gained political clout. In distinct contrast, the GDR never attained foreign policy independence from the USSR. As a socialist satellite state, the GDR followed Soviet leadership on all essential international affairs, even on the issue of Germany proper. The GDR constitution stated explicitly that the GDR was forever and irrevocably allied with the USSR and an inseparable part of the socialist community of states (Art. 6, 2). The GDR army was also firmly integrated into the Warsaw Pact system and thus subordinated under Soviet command. However, the GDR was able to withstand Soviet pressure on some important occasions. For example, the GDR opposed the stationing of new intermediate-range missiles on GDR territory in the mid 1980s.

Second, judging from DPRK foreign policy behaviour and official declarations, the reunification of the Korean peninsula on DPRK terms and the upholding of national Korean resistance against American imperialism seems to be the true mission of DPRK statehood. From this standpoint, the DPRK has always considered itself the true and sole representative of the Korean nation, while the ROK is demeaned as a contemptible colonialist puppet regime. The GDR, however, maintained an all-German claim only in the first two decades of its history, thereby

challenging the rival claim of the FRG. Subsequent to the conclusion of the German Basic Treaty of 1972, the GDR began to abandon its all-German claims in its quest for international recognition as a legitimate and sovereign state. The new GDR constitution of 1974 deleted all references to an all-German nation covering the two states. Previous mentions of German unification on the basis of democracy and socialism were suppressed. Henceforth, the GDR considered itself as the socialist fatherland of workers and peasants on German soil. The GDR's major foreign policy goal was its explicit recognition as a separate German state by the FRG. The GDR called on the FRG to abandon the claim to exclusive representation of Germany and to recognize a special GDR citizenship.<sup>15</sup>

Third, the GDR (as well as the DPRK) established a Stalinist political and economic system in its founding years, but later on the GDR pursued a gradual de-Stalinisation. Although remaining an authoritarian regime of injustice until the demise of Erich Honecker in 1989, the political climate in the GDR became comparatively mild and tolerant. Dissent and disagreement were tolerated as long as the political authority of the SED was not challenged directly. In visible contrast to the DPRK, the GDR did not develop totalitarian characteristics. There was no cult of personality for any of its leaders. Although many arbitrary sentences were handed down, in general the judiciary was subject to the rule of law. The treatment of political prisoners was sometimes harsh, but there were no gulag-style camps.

---

<sup>15</sup>-Johannes Kuppe, "Deutschlandpolitik der DDR" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte (eds.), *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), pp. 252-266.



Fourth, whether by mistake or out of weakness, the GDR permitted an increasing economic dependency on the FRG. A steady flow of FRG money helped the GDR to outperform their Comecon neighbours. Most important, the GDR received a yearly lump-sum of 575 million DM for maintaining the motorway transit routes to West Berlin and was granted an interest-free trade credit for East-West trade. In 1989 this so-called swing credit amounted to 2.5 billion DM. Both the advantageous East-West trade with the FRG and the acceptance of a major FRG credit loan in 1983-1984 amounting to 1.9 billion DM stabilized the overall difficult economic situation of the 1980s. But these financial support lines made the GDR increasingly dependent on FRG goodwill. With the USSR declining into economic decay, the FRG became effectively the most reliable provider of financial reassurance preventing the economic collapse of the GDR.<sup>16</sup> Such economic dependence was always avoided by the DPRK at any cost, even if it meant the physical annihilation of a large part of the North Korean population during the Great Famine of the 1990s.

Fifth, the GDR was a reliable partner in international relations. Negotiations tended to be difficult, but once an agreement was struck, the GDR stuck to it. The GDR, being eager to attain international recognition and reputation, did not want to be regarded as untrustworthy or unreliable.<sup>17</sup> The DPRK on the other hand never hesitated to deceive their foreign counterparts, if such opportunistic manoeuvring could reap some short-term gains.

---

<sup>16</sup>-Gros, "Wirtschaft," pp. 848-849; Paulson, "Außenpolitik," p. 33.

<sup>17</sup>-Paulson, "Außenpolitik," pp. 32-33.

## Conclusion

The comparative analysis shows striking similarities in the post-war security situations of both Germany and Korea, simultaneously leading to an artificial separation and the deep-freezing of the division into Cold War confrontation. Once division was established, two different systems and two different mentalities developed. In the end, both the GDR and the DPRK utterly failed economically. But although Korean division has endured until today, the situation on the Korean peninsula still looks very much like the German situation of the 1980s: once the artificial inner Korean border falls, North-South migration is bound to occur and the ROK will face political and economic challenges similar to what the FRG faced in 1990.

More revealing than the similarities are the differences, however. The latter can be a fruitful basis for conclusions and lessons.

- The differences may explain why unification took place in Germany, but not in Korea. Both the mutual trust built up over nearly 20 years of détente and the FRG's deep Western multilateral integration served as preconditions and facilitators in the process of reunification. But the DPRK, in contrast to the GDR and other Eastern European COMECON countries, has never been a puppet regime living on Moscow's mercy. Thus the demise of Soviet power ended socialist one-party rule only in Eastern Europe. What is more, the DPRK could and can rely on the continuous backing of China. Furthermore division was and is more intense in Korea. To this day, the DPRK manages to seal off its territory against foreign influences that might

have a destabilizing effect, although initial signs of disintegration can be detected.

- The differences imply that unification will be much more difficult for Korea. The DPRK is in absolute and relative terms much poorer and larger. The DPRK's economy and environment is more run-down than the GDR's ever was in the 1980s. Korean division is also much deeper, it is more complete and it has endured 20 years longer. For the coming Korean unification it can be expected that more resources will need to be spent, that the North Korean people's mental adaptation to capitalism will be more difficult and more protracted, and that most probably frictions will be more pronounced.<sup>18</sup> In only one aspect Korea may have an advantage. Korea can learn from the practical examples of system transformation of the 1990s and from Germany's experience of unification. Even now, a thorough contingency plan can be set up.
- The history of German division, especially in the period after the conclusion of the Basic Treaty of 1972, has shown that economic cooperation, provided reliably on a long-term basis, may slowly build up trust and change attitudes. To be sure, economic cooperation helps to stabilize the regime, but it also helps to alleviate the poor living conditions of the people and improves official relations. Economic cooperation will only have a sustaining political impact if it

---

<sup>18</sup>- See also Aidan Foster-Carter, "One Country, Two Planets: Is Korean Reunification Possible?" in The Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University (IFES) and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty (FNS) (eds.), *Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and Lessons for the Korean Peninsula*, November 9, 2010, Seoul, <http://www.fnfkorea.org/uploads/document/%281109%29proceeding.pdf>, pp. 73-85.

is not utilized for short-term gains such as business profits or political concessions, but is pursued persistently. Only after both Germanys had mutually recognized sovereign equality and legal legitimacy did bilateral relations improve and East-West cooperation on practical matters begin in earnest. Only then could mutual trust and dependency be built up.

- The German experience of détente in the 1970s and 1980s also shows that rapprochement is not a substitute for unification or for system transformation. System convergence is not possible. Thus injection of foreign capital into the DPRK socialist system will not lead to adaptation, but rather to economic waste. ROK financial spending in the DPRK may be necessary for the gradual building up of political trust, and it may also be considered as a kind of advance investment in the reconstruction of North Korea, but it should not be regarded as a stepping stone for system merging.
- The FRG's strong political and economic fundamentals contributed positively to the unification process. Furthermore, the central role the FRG played in the regional economic integration of Europe and in the security architecture of NATO not only made unification acceptable to Germany's neighbours, but also alleviated the pain of the process. Although the international political framework is markedly different for Korea nowadays, the ROK can profit from investing in international trust-building, too. A responsible Korea, actively participating in international burden sharing, refraining from unilateral actions or measures vis-à-vis the DPRK, and actively promoting regional cooperation and integration, will gain even more international prestige

and appreciation. By acquiring political goodwill abroad, the ROK may further reassure wary regional partners and gather support in the still uncertain future for reunification.

▪ Article Received: 4/14 ▪ Reviewed: 6/1 ▪ Revised: 6/14 ▪ Accepted: 6/18

## References

- Foster-Carter, Aidan. "One Country, Two Planets: Is Korean reunification possible?" in The Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University (IFES) and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty (FNS), eds. *Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and Lessons for the Korean Peninsula*. November 9, 2010. Seoul, <http://www.fnfkorea.org/uploads/document/%281109%29proceeding.pdf>.
- Gros, Jürgen. "Wirtschaft" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.
- Hacker, Jens. "Grundlagenvertrag" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.
- Klein, Eckart. "Deutschlands Rechtslage" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.
- Korte, Karl-Rudolf and Werner Weidenfeld. "Deutsche Einheit" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.
- Kuppe, Johannes. "Deutschlandpolitik der DDR" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.
- Mählert, Ulrich. *Kleine Geschichte der DDR*. München: Beck. 2006.

- Maser, Peter. "Kirchen" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.
- Maull, Hanns W. and Sebastian Harnisch. "Exploring the German Analogy: The "2+4 Process" and Its Relevance for the Korean Peninsula." Unpublished document. University Trier. 2001.
- Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth and Renate Koecher, eds. *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie Band 11 (1998-2002). Balkon des Jahrhunderts*. München: Saur 2002.
- Noland, Marcus. *Avoiding the Apocalypse, The Future of the Two Koreas*. Washington, DC: The Institute for International Economics. 2000.
- Paqué, Karl-Heinz. *Die Bilanz: Eine wirtschaftliche Analyse der Einheit*. München: Hanser. 2009.
- Paulson, Thomas. "Außenpolitik" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.
- Rödder, Andreas. *Deutschland einig Vaterland. Die Geschichte der Wiedervereinigung*. München: Beck. 2009.
- Seliger, Bernhard. "Ten Years After German Economic Unification: Are There Any Lessons for Korean Unification?" *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2001.
- Sinn, Gerlinde and Hans-Werner Sinn. *Kaltstart. Volkswirtschaftliche Aspekte der deutschen Vereinigung*. München: Beck. 1993.
- Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik, ed. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*. Berlin: Haufe. 1990.
- Statistisches Bundesamt, ed. *Statistisches Jahrbuch 1990 für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1989*. Stuttgart: Metzler-Poeschel. 1990.
- Thomas, Rüdiger. "DDR: Politisches System" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.

Winters, Peter-Jochen. "Innerdeutsche Beziehungen" in Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, eds. *Handbuch der Deutschen Einheit, 1949-1989-1999*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 1999.