

'Ossis' and 'Wessis': Eastern and Western Germans 12 years after unification

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SHORTLY after the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, speaking to a jubilant crowd outside the Schöneberg Town Hall in Berlin, said "now what belongs together will grow together." But still not everything has grown together. There are still people in the 'new' German states and the 'old' western ones who call themselves 'Ossis' (easterners) and 'Wessis' (westerners). With vastly different backgrounds and brought up in two completely different socio-political systems, they are meeting up with each other in an ongoing process of contact and mutual understanding. What this process is about, what hinders or promotes it, is made clear by the examples in this article of people who are actively living and shaping it -- whether they are 'Ossis' living in western Germany or 'Wessis' living in the eastern part, or who simply bump into each other at the tourist resorts of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Social education experts Barbara und Martin Höckmann: From the Rhineland to Saxony-Anhalt
Halle, December 1990. Barbara and Martin Höckmann are on their way to the birthplace of one of the architects of German unity, former West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Their journey by car from Düsseldorf, for which they've allowed five hours, is taking

much longer. Only one year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, not all roads between West and East are connected with each other. Travellers still have to use the few crossing-points on the old inner-German border. That means detours. And on the 'other side' of Germany the major roads have no guard rails, no central reservations. It is dark, and it is snowing. At some point the couple see ahead of them a car with Halle number plates. "We'll

follow them!" decides Martin Höckmann, hoping that the car ahead really is going to Halle. Halle, located near the then huge complex of the East German chemicals industry, was grey. The smell of domestic fuel hung everywhere in the air. But, as Barbara Höckmann recalls, despite the sprawling estates of prefabricated, high-rise housing blocks in Halle Neustadt (New Town) and the decay marking the Old Town -- like other

East German cities, Halle showed the result of a lack of money due to the boom in new housing ordered by the Communist regime in the 1970s -- she felt the city "had something." "I come from the industrial Ruhr," says Martin. "Halle looked like Dortmund in the 1960s. I felt I was back in the days of my youth." Following their flying visit to Saxony-Anhalt the couple decided to move there. She, a social education worker, was employed by a

hostel, he was a social worker at an advisory centre for people in debt. They decided to apply for jobs advertised by one of the many commercial training organisations which at that time were offering qualification and retraining courses in the new eastern states. In following years the couple were to deal with an existential problem faced by many people in the East after unification. For many East German qualifications gained by vocational training or higher education studies did not correspond to western German standards. So they were not recognised.

In the first course which the couple offered as school principal and lecturer, their 'students' included PhDs in economics and teachers. The top qualification these people could achieve in qualifying as social advisers was a certificate. Martin Höckmann approached government

ministries, among other authorities, to try to gain state recognition for the training measures and give the course participants a fair chance for their professional future. But he had no success. In Halle at that time there were more than 100 training organisations with the same problem. In Saxony-Anhalt's key government offices civil servants from its western partner state, Lower Saxony, were still working with local officials on building up a new infrastructure. Everything was still in its infancy. It was impossible to transfer western standards to eastern Germany from one day to the next after its 40 years of socialism.

It was a chaotic time for the students, as well as for the couple from Düsseldorf. While the two Rhinelanders camped, more than lived, in makeshift accommodation, such as at first in a hospice run by a Christian order, later in an old people's home, and then for months in a four-bed room in a hostel for apprentices in the centre of the 'chemicals kitchen' of the industrial area, the old world of the men and women who were taking part in their course collapsed about them. The truth about the real socialism they had grown up in came to light more and more. Whether it was revelations about the detailed spying on the East German people by the 'Stasi', the Communist regime's secret police under the Ministry for State Security, which now made

enemies out of former friends, or of the intrigues and privileges of the party bosses who had ruled the country -- whoever had believed in socialism felt defrauded and betrayed. Quite a few people committed suicide.

Advisers from western Germany who dealt with building up the eastern German public administration sector were followed by western business people -- and scrupulous wheeler-dealers. Some of them hoped that amid the chaos of the radical political and social change in the East they could dig deep not the pot of western government grants and subsidies for former East Germany's reconstruction -- and they were not disappointed. In such a situation the official checks and controls could not be perfect.

In the transition from the Communist command economy to the western social market system, there was widespread unemployment in eastern Germany. And from rents to the prices of gas, electricity and food -- which were low in East Germany -- the cost-of-living gradually matched that of the West. The East German dream of freedom and unlimited consumption was often only brief. Many of them went into debt in fulfilling their pent-up demand for new cars, video recorders or foreign travel. Naively, they signed up long-term with insurance salesmen or for magazine subscriptions. On top of losing their jobs they

also soon feared losing their apartments because they couldn't pay the rent. Their whole living was in danger. Following their disappointment with socialism they were now faced with the completely opposite system. Their attitude towards the West and 'Wessis' hardened.

Although Martin and Barbara Höckmann's training course still offered only a certificate, they pressed on with qualifying people as social workers. "The need was there," said Martin. "The social problems were affecting more and more people and escalating." In the GDR there was no comparable training for social work whose experts could in this situation have taken over the advising on possible offers of assistance. "The medical service carers were actually better nurses. And the juvenile care people did hardly anything else than check the legal aspects of sending young people to a home. Some of our students told us that if there had been training for social workers in the GDR they would have taken it." The Höckmanns saw at least the possibility that those who completed their course and gained a basic qualification could use it later as a ticket to training as a social worker. No less than 80 per cent of their students did this, and some now have key positions in public administration.

The state of German unity in economic and social terms

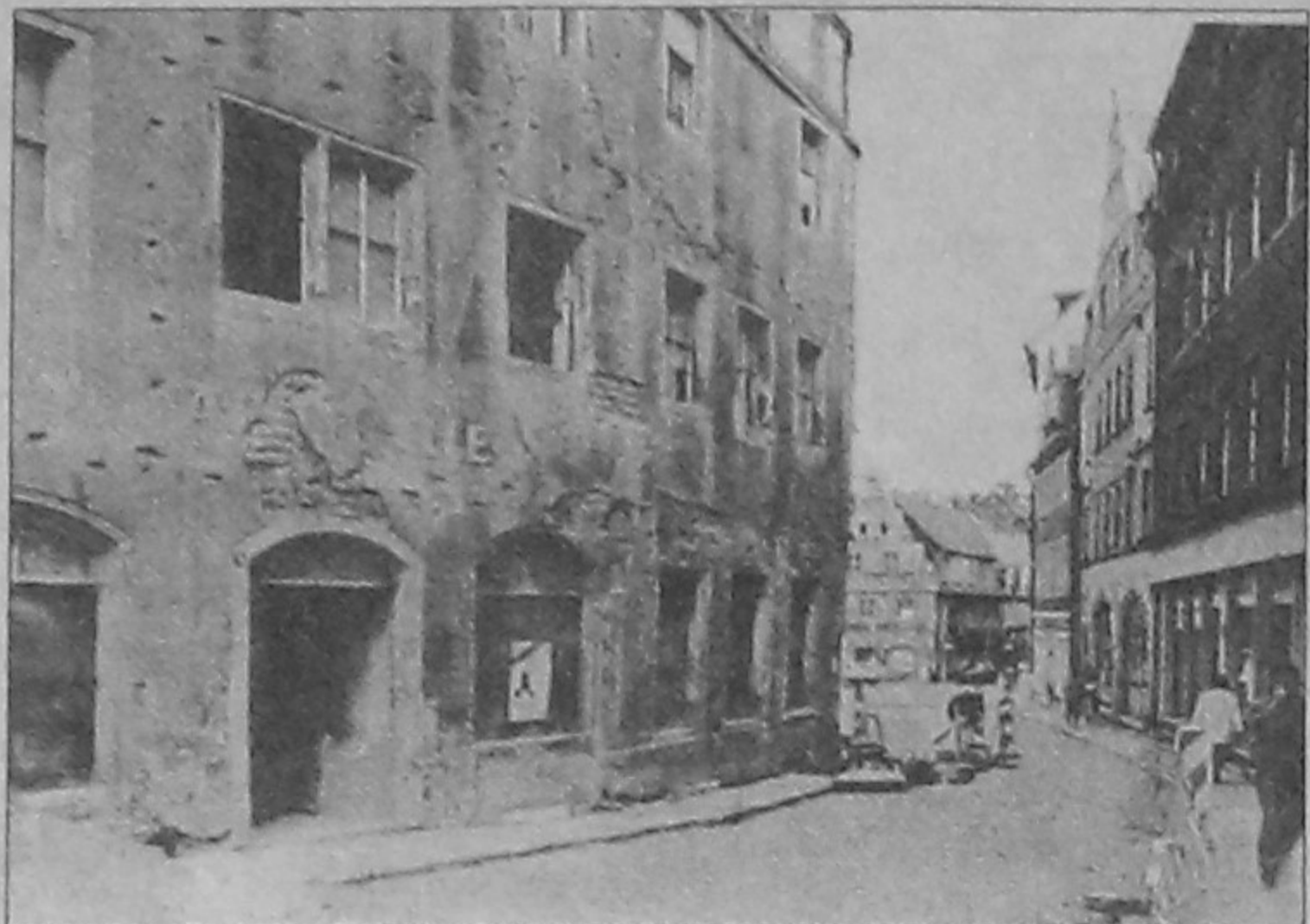
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In the western states at the same time, 2.5 million people were out of work, meaning an unemployment rate of 'only' 7.7 per cent. About 17 million people of Germany's total population of about 82 million live in the new eastern German states and Berlin.

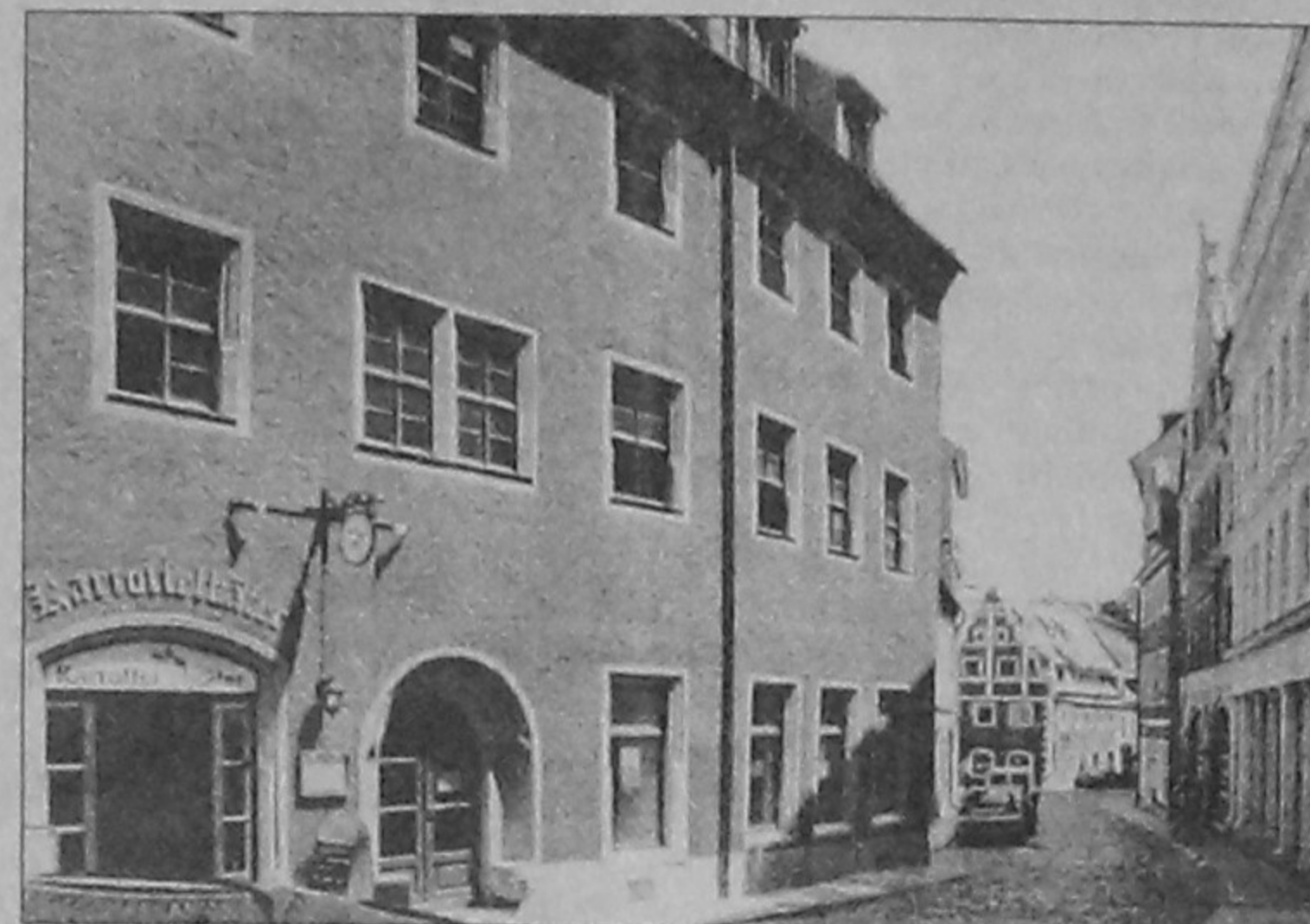
Combating long-term unemployment is a special problem. Here, too, the situation in the new states is much more critical than in western Germany. In 2000, long-term unemployment in the western states dropped by 7.1 per cent, while in the East it rose by 6.7 per cent. That is why the eastern states are taking a disproportionate part in the Federal government's special programme to reintegrate the long-term unemployed in the job market.

The government's active job market policy is continuing at a very high level -- almost 10 billion euros were spent on measures for the new states alone. That is equal to about half the total funds spent by the Federal government and the Federal Labour Office in 2000 on active job market policy measures, with focus on initial and advanced vocational training. For 2001, the funds for combating unemployment were increased by a further one million euros. In addition, the EU social fund is contributing almost 1.7 billion euros to a programme running from 2000 to 2006 to develop the job market in the eastern German states.

The eastern states' contribution



The Marktasse (Market Lane) in Meissen in 1994....



...and after renovation (1998)

of about one million euros per year to a national 'crash' programme to reduce unemployment among young people was increased in 2001 from 40 per cent to 50 per cent. About 45 per cent of the young people promoted in 2000 lived in eastern Germany. Despite all these efforts, experts of the Institute for Labour Market and Occupational Research (IAB), which comes under the Federal Labour Office in Nuremberg, believe there will be no easing on the eastern German job market in the foreseeable future. According to their "provisional model calculation", the experts say "there is no indication of a self-dynamic positive job market development" in the new states.

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The government's promotion

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The government's promotion focal points are investment incentives, research in innovation sectors and the creation of networks. The 'InnoRegio' network is aimed at strengthening regional economic development, whereby educational and research institutions as well as industry and public administration cooperate in a joint innovation concept. 'PRO INNO' promotes small to medium-sized businesses

above all by means of accelerated implementation of research findings. The same main goal is pursued by the national 'InnoNet' programme, in which the eastern states have a stake of more than 50 per cent. The closer meshing of companies and research institutes is aimed not least at countering the so far marked under-representation of the eastern states in research and development (R&D).

Eastern Germany's current share of national R&D staff is only about 9 per cent, and its proportion of all-German spending on internal R&D is in fact only about 6 per cent. This shortcoming is due mainly to the fact that eastern German companies are predominantly small to

medium-sized businesses which can hardly afford cost intensive R&D. The forming of networks is to counteract this deficit which is so detrimental to the power of innovation. That was also taken into account by the Federal government in its decision to allocate the eastern states a disproportionate share of Federal funds for education and research. In 2001, the Federal Ministry for Economics and Technology and the Federal Ministry for Education and Research made available more than 1.5 billion euros for the R&D sector in eastern Germany. In 2002, the Federal Economics Ministry is promoting innovations in small to medium-sized businesses and external research institutes with about 270 million euros. Also for this year, the Federal Ministry for Education and Research is providing about 1.8 billion euros for education and research in the eastern states. All these measures to strengthen the competitiveness of industry in the new states are aimed largely at boosting employment.

Since German unification, another important aspect of social life, provision for old age, has in the new states been continually brought closer to the level of pensions in western Germany. The Federal government in April this year approved a pensions adjustment according to which pensions in eastern Germany were increased from July 1 by 2.89 per cent, and by 2.16 per cent in the western states. The standard state pension in the eastern states thus rose from 86.92 per cent to 87.78 per cent of comparable pensions in western Germany.

Focal points of current promotion policy
This portrayal of the situation in the new federal states 12 years after the beginning of German unity has focused on the economic and social sectors. It has described what has already been done and what is still to be done. The task of the politicians is to decide with what measures the 'Aufbau Ost' recovery programme, which is supported by all Bundestag parties, can be continued in an optimal way. The Federal government has fixed the following focal points for its policy for the new states.

* Realignment of the promotion policy concept on the goal of sustainable development: key areas of promotion are investment, innovations and the further expansion of the eastern German infrastructure. The expansion of networks between companies and research institutes is in particular to facilitate the development by small to medium-sized businesses in eastern Germany of new, marketable products.

* The 'Stadtumbau Ost' (urban restructuring in eastern Germany) programme adopted in the summer of 2001, which is aimed at solving the structural problem of unoccupied flats and revitalising city centres in the new states. By this means the attractiveness of eastern German industrial locations is also to be increased. A total of about 2.2 billion euros will be allocated to the programme from 2002 to 2009.

* The 'Solidarity Pact II' -- in continuance of the promotion by 'Solidarity Pact I' which runs to 2004 -- which is to give further recovery programme measures a stable and reliable financial framework. 'Solidarity Pact II' provides for a promotion volume of more than 150 billion euros from 2005 to 2020. A promotion volume of about 10 billion euros is planned for its first year of application, meaning 'Solidarity Pact II' will pick up on the finance supply provided by 'Solidarity Pact I'. From 2006 the promotion sum will be slowly and continually reduced.

Our heartfelt felicitations to the friendly People and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on the auspicious occasion of

The Day of German Unity



BANGLADESH-GERMAN BUSINESS FORUM
Dhaka, Bangladesh

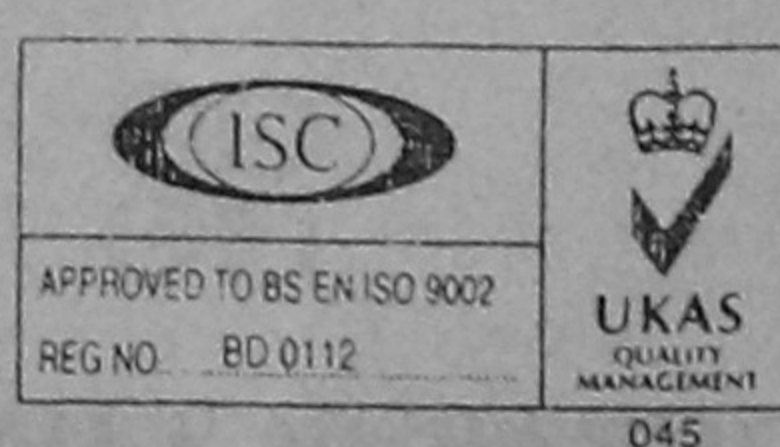
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