

Delegation Report
Australia to Federal Republic of Germany

8 to 18 November 1999

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Julie Bishop MP

Our visit to Germany between 8 and 14 November 1999, courtesy of the Australian Political Exchange Council and hosted by the German Bundestag, was an extraordinary experience for each member of the delegation. Our expectations, as to what we would learn from this visit and the objectives of the Council in arranging the visit were fulfilled in a number of ways.

First, we were provided with the opportunity to learn more about the German Government and Parliament. As a result of the visit, we were all far more informed, not only about the political system and its history, but about the current issues facing the political forces within Germany. We were made aware of the challenges confronting Germany, given its past and more recent history, and its place within the European Union and NATO.

Secondly, we met with a wide range of people, at every level of government, and from across a broad sphere of political and cultural circles. We met people from the former East Germany and from the former West Germany, who revealed their concerns on the future of Germany, post reunification.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, our visit coincided with the 10th anniversary celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall. This event, and the symbolism surrounding the celebration, presented us with an unprecedented opportunity to observe and to discuss national and local issues with our many hosts, issues that went to the heart of the national psyche including East/West relations, unemployment, immigration and the state of the economy. The event prompted a nationwide self-assessment of the reunification process; pride in what had been achieved on one hand, bitter disappointment at what had not, on the other.

We were in Berlin on 9 November 1999. We sat in the plenary chamber of the German Bundestag and witnessed the speeches by the President of the Bundestag Wolfgang Thierse, Joachim Gauck, Gerhard Schroder, George Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl.

We joined the tens of thousands of people who congregated near the Brandenburg Gate to relive the events of 9 November 1989. We observed, we listened, and in a small way, we tapped into the feelings, not only of those with the political power in the city, but also the citizens.

This event occurred on the second day of our visit. Our understanding of the issues that surfaced at this time, influenced and enhanced our appreciation of what we were to see and hear for the rest of the visit.

As delegation leader, it was part of my role to report to the Council on our visit. I do so by way of the following short summary of the visit, comprising Chapter 1 of this report.

There are five chapters in all. At the outset of our visit, I was impressed by the diversity, intelligence and dynamism of the delegation members. Far be it for me (I thought) to presume to speak on their behalf as to what were, for them, the highlights or what made a lasting impression upon them.

We agreed that those members of the delegation who wished to contribute to this report would do so by way of a separate chapter on one particular aspect of the visit.

The contributions from Chris Barrett, Melissa Horne, Michael Barrett and Stephanie Calder are contained in chapters 2 to 5.

The quality of their understanding of the political issues we confronted, and the benefits that they will have gained as a result of the visit, will be self-evident from a reading of their articulate observations.

It was a delight to be involved as leader with this delegation. I found their energy and their capacity to fill every waking moment both refreshing and exhausting. I delighted in their company, and look forward to a delegation reunion.

Our German hosts were without fault in their organisation of our programme. Their attention to detail, their evident concern for our well-being and their desire to ensure our expectations were met was, at times, overwhelming.

I also record the thanks of the delegation to Debbie Lewis, the delegation secretary. She maintained her calm when the inevitable problems occurred, she was unfailingly polite and accommodating and we appreciated her assistance.

My first experience with the work of the Australian Political Exchange Council has been extremely positive. I found the visit to be of immense benefit, and I thank the Council for providing us with a privileged opportunity to enrich our knowledge and understanding of the German nation.

Chapter 1 (cont): Summary

Julie Bishop MP

8 – 10 November 1999 Berlin/Potsdam

Our three days in Berlin were memorable. On our first day we met with the Ambassador to Germany, Paul Sullivan, and representatives of the Australian Embassy for a detailed briefing. The Ambassador and his wife also hosted a dinner for our delegation.

The German Government had decided, following reunification, to move the seat of government from Bonn to Berlin. The move was in process during our visit, but we were able to meet with Bundestag parliamentarians from the SPD, FDP, PDS and CDU/CSU parties. Our discussions tended to focus on the state of the coalition, and the fate and fortunes of the various parties in recent elections, the reunification process and Germany's economic, European Union and immigration policies.

Later, we discussed German-Australian relations and Germany's Asia Policy with Dr Cornelius Sommer, the Director for Asian Affairs at the Federal Foreign Office. The German commitment to the Interfet force in East Timor was a critical issue. Representatives from different parliamentary committees also met with us, including the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union and the Committee on Food, Agriculture and Forestry.

A dinner with members of the German-Australian-New Zealand Parliamentary Friendship Group was an excellent opportunity to meet parliamentarians in a more relaxed environment.

The events of November 1999 are detailed in Chapter 2 of this report, but we were conscious that we were witnessing a defining moment in world history. It was captivating.

Our day visit to Potsdam enabled us to meet with representatives of the Parliament of Brandenburg, a state of the former East Germany. We visited the Australia Centre of the University of Potsdam, which left us inspired by the concept, but disappointed with its implementation.

We soon realised that there was much to learn and much to absorb about Germany and her central role in European politics.

12-13 November 1999

Dresden

The beautiful city of Dresden fed our cultural needs – Albrecht Castle, the Meissen factory, an enthralling visit to the vineyard *Schloss Proschwitz*, and a particularly dark performance of *Lady Macbeth* at the Semper Opera. We had been welcomed to Dresden by members of the Parliament of Saxony, and discussed with them issues pertinent to the State.

14-15 November 1999

Bochum

From the delights of Dresden in the east, we travelled to Bochum in the west, in the heart of the Ruhr Valley. Our host Herr Klaus Hasenfratz was most attentive. We visited the Bochum Transport Services to meet with board members and to observe the manufacture of heavy steel castings and support equipment for rail systems.

By way of contrast with the traditional heavy industries of the Ruhr, we visited the Bochum Technology Centre, an innovative and entrepreneurial centre designed to enhance the IT industry in the Ruhr.

The highlights of the Bochum visit included the *Starlight Express* performance and our attendance at an SPD party conference of the Bochum county association. Our ALP delegates felt that only the language set it apart from an Australian counterpart!

16-18 November 1999

Frankfurt/Dusseldorf

Dusseldorf was an opportunity to window-shop along one of the most fabulously expensive boulevards in the world, Konigsalle, before we headed to Frankfurt.

In Frankfurt we completed our exposure to the 3 tiers of government with our meeting with members of the Frankfurt City Council. We discussed environmental

concerns including forestry, waste disposal, urban planning and law and order issues.

We met with representatives of the European Central Bank for an informative session on the structure of the Bank, the objectives of its Governing Council and the Eurosystem.

A briefing session with Austrade representatives was also an extremely useful exercise, highlighting trade relations and opportunities. Given the fact that Germany is the world's second largest trading nation and third largest economy, we appreciated the necessity to build on bi-lateral relations.

We departed Germany, having immersed ourselves for the previous 10 days in national and local issues, debates and concerns. Our collective experience was fascinating, challenging, enriching; our collective understanding of Germany and her political system was augmented and refined.

It was a most worthwhile and productive visit for us all.

Chapter 2: Berlin - Old and New

Chris Barrett

The Australian delegation arrived at Berlin Airport on the morning of the 8th of November 1999. We quickly shook off sleep deprivation and repeated doses of airline food upon first contact with the buzz of early morning Berlin.

Berlin for the next few days was the focus of international attention, and for reasons mostly unconnected with our presence.

Tuesday the 9th of November was the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. As is so often the case with a history as busy as Germany's, the 9th of November was also the anniversary of two other important historical events. The first of these was the declaration of the first German Republic by Philipp Scheidemann from the window of the *Reichstag* in 1918. The second was the infamous *Kristallnacht* of 1938 – the night of destruction which signalled the beginning of the Nazis' persecution of the Jews.

These parallels were repeatedly mentioned over the next few days, both in the press, but also in what was a highlight of our trip – the official reception in the *Reichstag* to celebrate the anniversary. We watched from seats in the public gallery as the Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and then George Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl addressed the audience, recalling the remarkable events of ten years previously.

(We were already well known to Mikhail Gorbachev at least, our bus driver having tailed his limousine through the Brandenburg Gate the previous day, with us glued to the windows, waving enthusiastically at him, and earning a wave back for our trouble.)

Perhaps the most memorable line of the day, however, belonged to Joachim Gauck – the man appointed to oversee the files of the former East German Secret Police or *Stasi* – who gently and wittily touched on the differences which remain between East and West Germans when he said "We [in the East] dreamt of Paradise, and we woke up in North-Rhine Westphalia".

It was a special day, and there seemed no more appropriate place to be than that evening beneath the Brandenburg Gate for the public concert and speeches. And there we were. The impression did not escape any of us on that night that ten years (and one day) earlier, we would have been standing in the middle of no-man's land on the wrong side of the Wall.

Berlin is full of these kind of realisations, but the physical cues are ever harder to spot. Where the Wall once stood there is now just a double line of paving stones winding its way through the city – much easier to miss. And the old markers – the shiny shopfronts of the West and the pockmarked buildings of the East – are slowly converging into the uniform face of a huge and prosperous capital of a huge and prosperous nation.

This is the process transforming suburbs like Prenzlauer Berg – which we visited to celebrate our first night in Berlin. Brand new restaurants, bars, cafes and upmarket apartment buildings sit alongside unrenovated relics of East Berlin. The total picture is, however, just a snapshot of a rapidly-moving process.

In years to come, you will need to travel further and further out of Berlin to see the same thing – eventually, you won't see it at all.

The new Berlin will not be this disappearing amalgam of East and West. The real reference point is neither one nor the other. That much is clear from the world's largest construction site, a.k.a. Potsdamer Platz. Here, developers really started with nothing. And here is where the real new Berlin is emerging – not East, not West, just new.

Between them, the new headquarters of Sony and Daimler-Chrysler; the new Chancellor's Department; and the new offices for Members of Parliament are an expression of a more self-confident national capital: they are enormous buildings, at the cutting edge of modern architecture, and above all, they are huge.

The overwhelming impression of Berlin is of a city in a hurry. The massive tension that those of us lucky enough to visit Berlin before 1989 experienced has been replaced by a real optimism of a freshly minted national capital and putative capital of the new Europe. The cosmopolitanism and energy we know from accounts of Weimar Berlin seems to be making a comeback, with a thriving arts community; an influx of different ethnic communities; and now the mass migration of political power.

At the same time, the new Berlin is impressively attentive to its history. From the bricks marking the course of the Wall, to the two soldiers' portraits (one American, one Russian) marking the old Checkpoint Charlie, to the planned Holocaust Memorial, the effort to preserve history in all its facets is substantial and admirable.

Australia is making its own contribution to the preservation of German history. On our first day in Berlin, the delegation visited the future site of the Australian Embassy in Berlin. The building – in the former East Berlin – was for a time the headquarters of Wilhelm Pieck, a leader of the German Communist Party and the first President of the GDR. Australia is taking responsibility for the building's restoration, including the preservation of Pieck's quarters in their original state. It is a remarkable piece of history for this reason alone, but also for the style in which it was built – to this uneducated eye, during the Weimar period. The restored building is sure to be a spacious and elegant home for the Embassy and many of its staff.

Perhaps the most remarkable example is the *Reichstag* itself. The design by celebrated architect Sir Norman Foster has preserved large sections of old brickwork, still covered in the graffiti of occupying Russian soldiers. To house your national Parliament in a building with such a chequered history almost demands this level of sensitivity to history. It is a sign that the new Berlin hasn't forgotten where it has come from in its hurry to get where it is going.

The delegation left Berlin reluctantly, and very much impressed by Europe's newest metropolis. The rest of the trip was fascinating in different ways, but none of us will forget those first few days, so appropriately for Berlin, in the middle of world history.

Chapter 3: Differences Between the Major German Political Parties

Melissa Horne

The impact of reunification ten years ago have resulted in the Left (PDS) and Centre Left (SPD) parties undergoing major exercises in remodelling both their ideology and presentation to the electorate. This repositioning allowed the SPD to seize power two years ago. Prior to the recent Federal election that saw the SPD form an alliance with the Greens to take government, the Centre Right (CDU) had been in power for 16 years with Helmut Kohl as Chancellor.

The Australian delegation met with several representatives of all the major German political parties at all the three levels of Government – with the exception of the Greens.

The German political system is similar to the Australian model in that it has three levels of Government. At the Federal level representatives we met included: Frau Petra Pau – PDS; Frau Ute Vogt – SPD; Herr Ulrich Irmer – FDP; and Prof Karl-Heinz Hornhues – CDU.

Part of the success of the SPD at the recent Federal election must be attributed to a shift in the Party's policy to one more closely aligned with centrist politics. Tackling the issue of national debt, high unemployment and introducing taxation reform are part of the party's platform that they have been attempting to implement with varying degrees of success.

Frau Vogt (SPD) described her party's main goals as fighting unemployment (the current national average is approximately 10% but as high as 17% in the former Eastern States) through a program to create 100,000 jobs for young people by vocational training. The method of support will be through offering employers a wage subsidy, which draws a number of parallels with the former Keating Government's Working Nation Program.

Taxation reform is planned for two stages to reduce levels of individual taxation and the restructure corporate taxation so that companies are paying less tax by the Year 2000.

National debt is being tackled through reducing government spending across the board. Not surprisingly this has come under a great deal of public criticism but what I found interesting was that the SPD was not attempting to shift the blame for national debt onto the former CDU/FDP government.

The SPD also introduced a controversial citizenship law that will allow people born in Germany to non-German residents to have automatic citizenship until they turn 18. These people will then have to make a choice about whether they want to become German citizens or adopt the citizenship of their parents.

However it would appear that the new legislation is somewhat unworkable in its present form due to the compromise that the SPD had to reach with the FDP. Frau Vogt had some difficulty in explaining how the SPD would actually achieve citizenship for people born in Germany. This reform by the SPD was subject to a negative campaign by the CDU and was partly responsible for the SPD losing power in a couple of State elections.

Frau Vogt attributed loss of recent electoral support overwhelmingly to the SPD trying to do too much too quickly. The SPD also had a great deal of difficulty in adjusting to the new role of government in terms of restructuring government strategy, policy development and speeches.

By contrast, the CDU members that the delegation met explained the Federal election defeat as due to not taking into account the underlying socialist sentiment of the East and ignoring the culture of the East. To Prof Karl-Heinz Hornhues it just seems a matter of time before the SPD will make too many mistakes, leaving the way clear for the CDU to be returned to office.

Neither the CDU members or the FDP members that the delegation met gave any indication of having a solid party platform or policy. It was explained that the electorate would eventually see through the inherently 'unsound economic' policies of the SPD/Green Alliance government.

Recent state elections have certainly shown support for the CDU returning although the recent development of allegations regarding failure to disclose party donations from an arms dealer will prove an interesting challenge for the CDU.

Most interesting to me was the transition that the PDS has undergone in the last 10 years from the former Communist party (SED) of the East German Republic (GDR) to gain up to 18% of the vote in recent elections.

In 1998 the SED (ruling East German Communist Party) restructured dramatically to a more democratic model as a result of reunification. Former members of the Stassi (secret police) were expelled or resigned and a special convention held which endorsed a public apology to the people of Eastern Germany. The remodelling also included a name change from the SED to the PDS.

The PDS's party platform also had to become broader to include policies to deal with issues relating to the West, and looking at Germany as a whole.

The PDS also has a strong platform on employment. In the former GDR there was no recognised unemployment. The PDS has been looking at policies that ensure more autonomy for local communities and local economies and replace jobs that were lost through factory closures after reunification. They also want reform of the discrepancy in wages between workers in the East and the West where workers in the East are still paid up to 20% less than equivalent workers in the West.

Another point the PDS are campaigning on is the lack of acknowledgment of some tertiary qualifications from the former Eastern States. For example, a former teacher from the East does not have the same recognition in reunified Germany as teachers from the former West. An interesting point was a discussion held with one member of the FDP who said that the teachers from the East had not been properly educated and were teaching 'untruths'. However information from the Australian Embassy showed that education levels of children from schools in the Eastern were comparatively higher in terms of basic literacy and numeracy skills than children in the West immediately after reunification.

As a broad impression, it would appear that the PDS gone through a major process of public apology and have made a concerted attempt to restructure themselves to ensure they become politically relevant for all Germany.

The SPD have gone through a process of re-evaluating their policies and finding their way through the transition to Government. The discussions that we had with various members of the SPD gave me the impression that they were a party struggling with the issue of reunification and that they were also careful not to lay blame or recriminations for the former civil infringements conducted by the SED. Although one member of the Federal Parliament that I met with explained that although the left wing members of the SPD were potentially closer in political ideology to the PDS than the Greens, an alliance was unlikely in the near future. This was because in the former GDR, the Stassi persecuted members of the SPD. However the indication was that memories of the GDR were still recent and perhaps an agreement or more tolerance of ideology could be achieved in the future.

In contrast the CDU and the more extreme right FDP did not appear to have an approach towards the former East that can embrace their culture and recognise differences in the two societies. Both a member of the CDU and also the FDP described the PDS as the party that inflicted the misery on the people of the GDR.

Given recent rising electoral support for the PDS in the Eastern states and some feelings of nostalgia that were described in the media for some of the more secure social elements of the former GDR – such as public housing, 'full' employment etc. It seems that the CDU and the FDP would do well in considering a more inclusive approach to the role of the PDS in the Eastern states of Germany.

Chapter 4: German Industries – Old and New

Michael Barrett

Germany's post war prosperity is largely attributable to the quality of its manufacturing industries and the worldwide demand for the products of these industries. The German automotive, heavy machinery, steel and chemical industries have been the outstanding performers, employing millions of people and ensuring Germany's position as the world's third largest economy and second largest exporter.

But much as Australia's prosperity is overly dependent on the agricultural and resource sectors, Germany is now confronting the fact that its export base is too narrow. The problem is compounded by the former eastern states' dependence on an inefficient agricultural sector.

Germany is therefore encouraging niche industries and is, belatedly and somewhat uncertainly, embracing the service sector.

The German commitment to innovative small and medium sized businesses is reflected in the growing collaboration between industry and universities. A growing number of German companies are relocating to "incubators", areas at or near university campuses where businesses can both benefit from, and contribute to, university based research. Our delegation visited one such incubator, the Ruhr Technology Centre, on the grounds of the Ruhr University and Technical College.

In Bochum, an industrial city some forty kilometres from Dusseldorf, our delegation visited Bochumer Verein Verkehrstechnik, a company that produces the wheels and axles for trains, light rail services and trams. In addition to supplying parts for the latest generation of Germany's high-speed intercity trains, the company is recognised globally as a leader in its field and has an impressive share of the world market.

The company attributes much of its success to the emphasis placed on quality control and product development. Dating back to the last century, and forced by the economic circumstances of the 1980s to specialise, Bochumer Verein Verkehrstechnik symbolises Germany's, and in particular Bochum's, transition from heavy steel production to the manufacture of steel for specialist purposes.

While the states compete to attract new industry, this rivalry is tempered by the Federal Government's exclusive right to levy taxes. Unable to offer tax breaks, the states can only lure business with the incentive of superior, or improving, infrastructure. This puts the cash-strapped former eastern states at a distinct disadvantage.

With the unemployment rate approaching 20% in some eastern states, governments are also keen to attract those companies which offer extensive on-the-job training programs. Ironically therefore, it seems a large pool of unemployed, willing to work for lower wages than their western counterparts, may not necessarily act as an incentive to those businesses looking for a new home.

There are some eastern success stories. In Saxony, the famous porcelain factory in the medieval town of Meissen continues to prosper.

Its success, however, is attributable to the peerless craftsmanship of its workers rather than any particular policies of the Saxon government – after all, the factory was one of the few genuinely successful enterprises in the former East Germany.

Also near Meissen, the winery of Dr. Georg Prinz zur Lippe provides a promising glimpse of the specialisation and excellence of which the east is capable. It is significant, however, that the Prince was born and trained in the west, only moving to Saxony to buy back his ancestral land after the fall of the Berlin Wall. While East Germany's higher education system was world class in the field of science, it was not noted for its Business Administration courses.

While Germany's commitment to specialist and innovative production is beyond question, its enthusiasm for the service sector is less compelling. Germany may be a by-word for excellence when discussing cars and chemicals, but one can spend ages waiting at shop counters or trying to catch a waiter's eye.

Similarly, in the field of information technology, Germany lags behind other developed economies.

But Germany's politicians and industrialists are aware of this shortcoming. With Germany determined to broaden its export base, it seems only a matter of time before the spirit of German efficiency is evident in the service and IT sectors.

Chapter 5: The 'Berliner Republik' in Europe

Stephanie Calder

Coming from a country located so far from Germany with a relatively meagre history, and with my limited knowledge of German politics, the APEC political exchange program was a great learning experience. In particular, the program provided an overview of the major areas of the German political system, including;

- the three levels of Government in Germany – Federal, State, Local
- a comparison of old and new, east and west
- the overlaying complexity of the European Community (political and monetary union).

Our visit to Germany occurred a little over 12 months after the change of government to a national coalition of Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens, following 15 years of Christian Democrat (CDU/CSU) rule. After taking power with a 19 seat (Bundestag) majority in September 1998, the Government is now seeing a trend of State election results away from the SPD. Our briefings from the party representatives in Berlin were surprisingly frank, particularly in their assessments of their own Government's performance at both a Federal and State level. There were many views regarding the cause of the electoral backlash, from non-performance by the SPD at a national policy level, to non-voter turnout in the States. We were fortunate to be able to meet with politicians and representatives of the different political parties at Federal level, but also to visit the State Parliaments, to understand the issues from a local perspective.

We visited two States, Brandenburg and Saxony, where elections in September 1999 had resulted in significant losses for the SPD. The CDU has been regaining votes, and the PDS has also capitalised on discontent with the national agenda to increase its representation. This has meant that the SPD's influence in the Bundesrat has been further reduced.

Although it is not unusual for federal governments to experience some electoral haemorrhaging post-election, the results underline how fragile political consensus has become in both eastern and western parts of Germany. For example, against the political climate of reform being advocated by the SPD and Greens, the PDS has been able to entrench itself in the east, and extend its support to certain western states. The Greens, on the other hand, are yet to achieve a real presence in the east.

These elections also highlight the complexity of German politics, and in particular, the influence that the European dimension has upon the national policy agenda. With the advent of a single market and emerging European Monetary Union, Germany is a good example of the changing nature of European politics, and the creation of a fourth tier of Government for the member states. The impact of the EU was a continual theme of our discussions with political representatives and obviously an issue constantly on their minds. Thus it seems policy making at the national level is becoming increasingly tied to decision making in Brussels.

For example, Chancellor Schroder's key national policy measures, in particular the eco-tax and Alliance for Jobs initiatives, are closely linked to broader initiatives across the European Union for their success. However, the importance of these for the nation's economy has not been clearly explained to the German electorate, who do not seem to be accepting of the social democratic government's 'third or middle way' policies.

Germany has been a great advocate of European integration, and the election of the 'red/green coalition' in 1998 coincided with Germany's assumption of the EU presidency. In its term, Germany has played a key role in preparing Agenda 2000 – the plan to bring forward eastern enlargement and set a financial framework for EU development into the next century.

As EU Council President, Germany was instructive in the EU response to the Kosovo crisis. The decision to send German troops outside the NATO area for the first time not as part of a UN contingent demonstrates Germany's vision to define itself as an international player. This was further highlighted by their participation in East Timor.

From our briefings and discussions, it became clear that, although the European Union represents a unique opportunity for Germany to exert its strength as an economic power, decisions being made at the EU are having an impact on the day to day lives of the German people. In particular the movement toward common policy across the EU in areas such as justice, domestic affairs, and social (employment) policy. This complexity is something Australia has not experienced. At a time when the costs of reunification in Germany, particularly infrastructure spending in Berlin and the east, are taking their toll on the economy, the Government of the day is experiencing the electoral realities of the development of the common European political and monetary unions.

The final component in our program was a visit to the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, which outlined its role in the European Monetary Union, and financing of future EU initiatives. Germany is one of the five biggest contributors to the overall budget of the Council of Europe, and is a strong supporter of the introduction of the single currency, which will bring advantages for Germany's export oriented economy.

It is clear that Germany has a major role to play, both economic and political, in the European Union, and it has demonstrated a willingness and ability through its leadership of the EU Council. However the German culture and identity at a national level remain strong, often leading to a conflict in its desire to have an influence over the future development of the EU, whilst also pressing German interests.

Our political exchange fell on the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Considering all of the factors currently impacting on Germany, it will be interesting to reflect back in another ten years upon the position of the 'Berliner Republik' in Europe.