



## ANNIVERSARIES OF UNIFICATION AND FREEDOM: SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE FUTURE

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2009 is a year of celebrations for Germany. Sixty years ago, on May 23, 1949, Germany's Basic Law was ratified, an important step towards a parliamentary democracy based on the rule of law. And 20 years ago, on November 9, 1989, citizens of East Germany, in the Peaceful Revolution, began to tear down the wall that had separated the two Germanys. That was the decisive step towards unification in liberty. In 2010, Germany will celebrate the 20th anniversary of its reunification.

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The anniversaries of the coming years have one thing in common: without the courageous decisions of Christian Democrats such as Konrad Adenauer, Ludwig Erhard and Helmut Kohl – to name only three – Germany's history would have certainly turned out differently. It may be pointless to think about the "what ifs," but such anniversaries are an opportunity to reflect on our heritage, basic common values and the achievements of personalities who shaped Germany. Two web portals commemorate two of the most accomplished Christian Democratic politicians and provide users with a great deal of important historical information: [www.Konrad-Adenauer.de](http://www.Konrad-Adenauer.de) and [www.Helmut-Kohl.de](http://www.Helmut-Kohl.de).



*On May 23, 1949,  
68 delegates including  
those from Berlin  
ratified the Basic Law of  
the Federal Republic  
of Germany.*

But looking back is insufficient. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung aims at highlighting how the stage is being set for the future. The foundation is using the anniversaries as an opportunity for a number of events. Trust in politics can only be regained by reviving the values that enabled the rebuilding and modernisation efforts of Christian Democrats. What matters today are the values of a democratic and caring federal state; the basic principles imparted by Catholic social teaching and Protestant social ethics; and the regulatory foundations of the Social Market Economy. People in Germany should use these traditions as a guideline for modernisation measures. If a political system based upon Christian values is to be relevant in this day and age, then it needs to be legitimated and revitalized again and again. Herein lies the key to Germany's self-assurance and trust in its power to reform itself.

Between 2008 and 2010, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is drawing attention to the extent to which Christian Democratic politicians have contributed to Germany's success story. The foundation's activities are organised around the crucial events shaping Germany's path after World War II.

- The Federal Republic of Germany gave itself a liberal constitution with the signing of the Basic Law, a precondition for the establishment of a stable parliamentary democracy.
- The Social Market Economy, which is inextricably tied to Ludwig Erhard, decisively contributed to West Germany's "economic miracle" during the 1950's.

## ANNIVERSARIES OF FREEDOM AND UNIFICATION Shaping the path of the future

*This web portal is dedicated to the contributions Christian Democrats have made to Germany's success story. It addresses how Germany's defining elements will be shaped in the future. It also underscores that the only way to gain back some of the lost trust in politics is through a revival of Christian Democratic values. The portal features texts, documents, photographs, film extracts, and gives information on events. The site is structured along the following topics: Parliamentary Council; Western Alignment; Social Market Economy; Bilateral Relations; European Policy; and Reunification.*

**[www.kas.de/  
weichenstellungen](http://www.kas.de/weichenstellungen)**

- Konrad Adenauer's domestic political decisions led to the country's renewal and modernisation. His policy of alignment with the West and of European reconciliation set the course of the new country's foreign policy.
- Fostering relationships with France, Great Britain, Israel, Poland, the Soviet Union and the United States was required for West Germany to win back the trust of its wartime opponents and enemies, and to become a partner within the international community. This was the precondition for a reunified Germany that respected the interests of its neighbours.

After 40 years of Socialist Unity Party (SED) dictatorship, the people of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) strived for freedom, peace, the rule of law and prosperity. Their courage led to the fall of the Socialist regime in 1989 and the free and peaceful establishment of a unified Germany – thanks to the diplomatic groundwork and the support of Helmut Kohl's policies. The moral courage of the East German people during the Peaceful Revolution formed the basis for German unity. And having achieved this unity is, despite the many problems, a central element in the success story of every German in the 20th century. The existence of so-called *Ostalgie* – nostalgia for the former East Germany – and many people's ignorance of history, particularly among the young, makes education about the failed socialist model of the GDR and the reality of life in a dictatorship all the more necessary. This is all the more important as concepts of a putative socialist alternative could undermine the rule of law, economic governance and the values of a liberal parliamentary democracy.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has set up a web site ([www.kas.de/weichenstellungen](http://www.kas.de/weichenstellungen)) that provides information and material on the aforementioned key events in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. It features texts, documents, photographs and film extracts, and also gives information on events. The aim is to ensure that essential and up-to date information is available quickly. A further web site confronts both myths and reality of the GDR ([www.DDRmythen.de](http://www.DDRmythen.de)). This web portal, featuring didactic material, was developed with teachers and young people in mind. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has also developed a specific program for pupils and schools, featuring conversations with witnesses to history, civic education days and once a year a young people's congress.

Beyond that, a number of special events have been organised. The Hohenschönhausen forum is an event the foundation jointly organises with the memorial at the former Stasi prison in Berlin. It focuses on the analysis of the GDR dictatorship and the promotion of a culture of memory. Topics of discussion at other events are also the Central and Eastern European liberation movements, as well as the extent to which these countries have been transformed. In the series "Auslandsinformationen", the KAS published a booklet on 1968, including a detailed historical analysis of the Prague Spring. For the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and its 70 offices stretching from Amman to Shanghai, the anniversary of the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany and of the fall of the Wall is a major event that will spur international cooperation and exchange. The valuable experience of Germany's peaceful path to unity and liberty will be the background for discussion with our partners to promote the development of democracy, the rule of law, security and a Social Market Economy worldwide.

The future is made of memories – so looking back is a precondition for shaping the future. Which is why, in 2008, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung began to focus its work around the anniversaries of unification and liberation.

# THE GDR MYTH: A NEED FOR EDUCATION

The GDR enjoyed the rule of law; everyone could go to university; women had equal rights. Nearly 20 years after the Peaceful Revolution in the GDR, young people across Germany still have surprisingly positive views of the German Democratic Republic. Especially young people in the so-called new states – those in the former East Germany – tend to play down what happened in a country full of injustices. This was the result of a recent study by the *Forschungsverbund SED Staat* at the Free University of Berlin. Students in east and west Berlin in particular said they knew very little about the GDR, and that in class the topic was hardly addressed, if at all.

The generation growing up today is not the only one to view the GDR more positively as time goes by – the same applies to many of those living in what used to be East Germany. Because of their difficult economic and social situation, they are caught up in *Ostalgie*, or nostalgia for East Germany. But a glorified look back at a system that undermined or destroyed so many peoples' lives does not help matters. Needed instead is a realistic debate about the SED system.

To that end, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has established a new knowledge platform on the Web. Entitled "GDR: Myths and Realities" (DDR: Mythos und Wirklichkeit), the web site provides information about the undemocratic political system of the GDR and aims at closing knowledge gaps. Six categories – Everyday Life, Economy, Government and Society, Church, Relations between the Two Germanys as well as Resistance, Opposition and Flight – inform the visitor in a scientific and didactic manner.

Furthermore, a glossary lists the most popular misconceptions on the GDR and provides a critical counterpoint. Also included are interviews with witnesses to history and videos – among them a conversation with Bishop Joachim Wanke about church and religion in the GDR – and a calendar of important anniversaries. All in all, the site is full of information for everybody; teachers in particular can download teaching material.

The events section provides up-to-date information on the various events organised by the program and conference centres of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, among them debates, film screenings and discussions, concerts and readings.

[www.ddrmythen.de](http://www.ddrmythen.de)

