

Germany and the European Union

The celebration of reunited Germany coincided with the inauguration of Frankfurt Book Fair which invited the Arab culture as a guest of honor. Such coincidence reflects the friendly relations between Germany and the Arab countries, especially Egypt.

In addition to the German schools and the vast activities of Goethe Institute in Egypt, the German University had started its function in this country in addition to other services and assistance provided by the different German cultural and educational institutions in many fields.

Such German Arab relations also reflect in the existence of an Arabic language broadcast in the German radio, Deutsche Vela, which was headed for some time by the late Egyptian well-known radio presenter, Said Abul Saad. Germany also publishes a magazine called 'Fikr wa Fan' (Thought and Art) in Arabic where many Arab intellectuals make their contributions in addition to a magazine called Deutschland which is now printed in Arabic.

The Egyptian German Trade Chamber is one of the most active institutions in the commercial field, while the German Antiquities Institute continues to receive the German archaeological scientists and it performs many excavations to dig for Egyptian antiquities.

Many Arab writers, thinkers and intellectuals will head to Germany to participate in the Frankfurt Book Fair.

So, the question is how will they find Germany, this friendly country, 15 years after its unification? The first issue that would attract their attention would be the leading role of Germany in the European Union.

It is well known that Germany has been one of the six founding countries of the common European market in 1975.

That European market developed over time gradually till it took at the moment the shape of a union that gathers 25 European countries. Germany provides the largest financial contribution to the budget of the EU mounting to 122 billion dollars annually.

Germany and France share the leadership of the Western European countries that regard the EU as a real tool for giving Europe its leading role that it deserves.

To achieve this, these two countries are willing to sacrifice some of their national privileges in order to strengthen and support this Union. This future position of Germany is different from that of the East European countries that were recently accepted to join the EU.

The East Europeans regard the EU as a tool for getting assistance from Europe and attracting European interests to their countries. This has been contested and resisted by the Western European countries especially Germany which still keeps very high taxation levels.

Despite these contradictory positions, more than 26 billion Euros have been spent on East European countries.

Despite the fact that Germany is facing some economic difficulties, the American Chancellor, Gerhard Shreuder, called for creating a new program for economic reform that is going to be started in January 2005. Introducing such

program led to enormous criticisms against Shreuder and the emergence of demonstrations especially in the Eastern part of Germany. As a result, the Social Democratic Party led by Shreuder faced some defeats in the latest municipal elections.

Despite the demonstrations and the results of the elections, Shreuder is still determined to implement his program.

In his speech before the German Parliament, the Bundestag, he defended this program and emphasized that the purpose of such measures is to lower the unemployment that has reached 9.5% in West Germany and 20% in East Germany.

The Shreuder program is based on reducing the social assistance and reducing the duration during which the unemployed receive the generous unemployment assistance from the government.

Some of them used not to search for a job as long as they are getting a high compensation through such assistance. The German Chancellor emphasized that such reforms will eventually lead to increasing the job opportunities and encouraging the investments.

No-one can deny that among the reasons for the economic hardships of Germany, this enormous assistance the Unified German government provided for the economic and social reforms in the former East Germany.

The total amount of such assistance since the unification till now reached 160 billion dollars that were paid by the tax payers in West Germany who started to show resistance till the level that a recent opinion poll showed that one-fifth (20%) of the inhabitants of Germany wish to have the Berlin wall back, 12% of them from East Germany.

There is no doubt that there are differences and disagreements between the Eastern and the Western parts of Germany regarding the main trends and orientations of the Shreuder program for economic reform.

One of the officials of the Democratic Socialism Party that is composed of former communists said that the job opportunities in the Eastern part of Germany is much less than those in the Western part, which has forced many young men to go in search for a job.

The officials criticized the Nisoihand Company in charge of privatizing the industries in East Germany since unification. This company has rebuilt the economies of this region in the way that closed some factories and sold others to Western German companies leading to an increase in unemployment.

Despite of these problems, the Eastern part of Germany, as one of the English reporters said in the London based Independent Newspaper, became much better off after the unification compared to other East European countries. Many signs and symptoms of economic prosperity and enhanced activities are manifested in the towns and cities of East Germany.

The reporter also said that it is interested to see this great transformation that took place in the former East Germany.