

GERMANY ... NINE YEARS OF A SPLENDID UNITY ...

A week after the general elections that defined the form of governance in the unified Germany for the coming four years, our friendly country is celebrating its 8th anniversary of unifying East and West Germany, on October 3, 1998.

This unity is the fruit of long and strenuous efforts that finally crystallized in a peaceful revolution, launched by 120,000 youth in Leipzig in the Eastern part of Germany, where demonstrators hoisted the slogan “**Germany .. The Unified State ..**”. Now, with the lapse of years, the question is once more posed on “results of this unity”!!

Undoubtedly, the declaration of the unity was received by great joy and unprecedented enthusiasm, on behalf of “East” Germans. To them, unity meant an immediate and automatic rise in per capita income, together with freedom and democracy.

However, this great joy started to be shaken, due to the many and intricate problems emerging upon uniting “East & West Germany”, without prior preparations after long years of different systems of governance.

This has created a bottomless abyss between the two peoples, particularly between the young and old generations of both sides. Here, we recollect forty years of isolation that have led to a growing feeling of alienation among the lines of East Germans, in spite of one common language, culture and history for this people before the separation.

Also, we should remember that the government of the unified Germany, under the leadership of Counsellor Helmut Kohl, known to the German people as the “Engineer of the Unity”, was able to make miracles.

Intensive efforts were exerted by the government, in order to surmount the existing problems and bring the two Germanys to the aspired equilibrium.

Today, after eight years of unity, we find this great joy transformed into an impelling desire to carry out a subjective and practical assessment of what has been achieved and what is still to be attained, depending on priorities.

Here, it is necessary to acknowledge that the feeling of alienation, which existed during the first years of the unity, has started to dwindle and will soon disappear, altogether.

With the approach of October 3, 1998 – the 8th Anniversary of the Unity – we witness another date, September 27, 1998, where 60.5 million German voters joined in the general elections that were to shape the government of the unified Germany for the coming four years.

At this point, we stop to contemplate these elections, which are to decide the way of handling unity problems in the coming few years.

It is known that Counsellor Helmut Kohl has been governing Germany since 1982 through a coalition government of three parties.

This coalition joins the general elections vis-à-vis the German Socialist Party, headed by Gerhard Schroeder. It is noteworthy that in Germany there are no direct elections for the position of Counsellor. Parliament (Bundestag) members are elected, who – in turn – elect the “Counsellor”.

On September 27, the German voters went to the ballot boxes to elect 656 members, out of which 328 members are directly elected within their electoral districts, while the other half are elected through lists presented by the parties. A party obtaining less than 5% of the votes becomes excluded from parliament, even if some of its members win through direct elections.

As an example, in the last general elections, 22 parties participated, but only five parties succeeded in joining the parliament.

In spite of the difference between one party programme and another, there are certain topics, where one party is differentiated from another by the means of achieving them.

These topics represent national priorities, primarily the issues of unity, unemployment, interior security, financial & economic stability, environmental protection, global economy and international competitiveness.

Actually, Helmut Kohl and his supportive parties have entered the elections with a long list of achievements behind them that allowed Helmut Kohl to remain in power for 16 years.

This is a political phenomenon that takes place for the first time since Konrad Adenauer, who governed Germany for 16 years, upon the surrender of Germany at the end of World War II.

Foremost among achievements attributed to Helmut Kohl is the national economy and the adoption of a policy towards European unity. This together with operations of economic reform, rectifying the path of East Germany and achieving a constant and dynamic economic growth, by overcoming hardships emanating from converting a socio-totalitarian economy into a free economy.

One of the prime problems confronting the German government was the reform – or better say the rebuilding – of the infrastructure of East Germany. This involved the construction of hundreds of thousands of houses, together with the restoration of old ones.

There was also the multiplication of road and railway networks, in addition to setting up 500,000 small- and medium industries engaging nearly 4 million workers.

As for agriculture, which is the prevailing activity in the Eastern part, the government has spent, in 1995 alone, more than DM 800 million for agricultural reform and for eliminating collective farms and creating a sort of productive competitiveness linked to the market. Hence, more than DM 800 billion was spent, in total, on economic reform, between 1990 and 1996.

Among facts to be registered down in history is that Helmut Kohl was one of the greatest advocates of the German unity.

It is well noted that during his talks with Gorbachov about the German unity, it was agreed to withdraw the Soviet forces, amounting to 340,000, from East Germany, by the end of 1994. Germany paid DM 14.6 billion for the transfer of forces.

It is also known that Kohl and Yeltsin bid farewell to the last of the Soviet forces, out of Germany, on August 31, 1994.

As for Gerhard Schroeder, Head of German Socialist Party, he was governor of Lower Saxony for eight years, with Hanover as its capital. He was then elected, last March, as Head of Party and as a presidential candidate.

His slogan in the elections was the “need to change” after the same government for 16 years. Hence, he submitted a whole list of promises in the elections, with policies aiming at resolving all sorts of problems facing the unified Germany during this phase of its history. On top of the list came the unemployment problem.

Another important factor influencing the general elections was the way of tackling the European unity, in which Kohl and his advocates believed firmly, given that the German policy towards the European unity was closely related to what could be achieved inside Germany, politically and economically.

Another matter of direct impact on the general elections was Germany’s relations and policies towards the West (USA, Canada & Latin America) and towards East & Central Europe (former Eastern Bloc), in addition to Germany’s inclinations towards developing countries.

For example, it is well known that Germany offers around 50% of the assistance provided by industrial states to East European countries.

On the other hand, the German government has reassured the developing countries by alleviating their concern that Germany would sacrifice them for the sake of East European countries.

To that, the government declared that the assistance offered to these countries would not be reduced. Moreover, Germany urged EU states to raise their assistance to Third World countries and to open their markets in front of products coming from these countries.

Undoubtedly, Germany should be proud of its distinguished international status achieved at the UN level, where Germany’s contribution to the UN budget has presently risen from 8.08% in 1989 to 9.6%, thus ranking third after

USA and Japan, as well as at the level of international congregates in Asia, Africa and NATO.

This status reached its climax, when the Federal Constitutional Court agreed to let German forces participate in UN peace-keeping troops.

As for the realm of German – Arab relations, in general, and German – Egyptian relations, in particular, the friendly state of Germany has established distinguished relations with most Arab countries, primarily Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Tunisia and Palestine.

The German – Arab Chamber of Commerce, as well as German – national chambers of commerce, play a significant and influential role in developing the economic, cultural and political relations between Germany and the Arab World.

Now that the German people have said their word in choosing Gerhard Schroeder as representative of the policy of change, it goes without saying that Schroeder is the successor of a great man, who has governed Germany wisely and competently for sixteen years, leaving behind great accomplishments.

This puts the new German Counsellor in front of a great challenge, where he has not only to maintain these accomplishments, but also to achieve some of his own. Undoubtedly, Schroeder will do a lot for Germany, as has always been the case with its leaders, who are distinguished in their performance, visions, aspirations and capabilities in all domains.

In all cases the German choice is between the good and the excellent, being always, firstly and lastly, in the interest of Germany and the German people.

Finally, we do acknowledge that modern Germany has succeeded in establishing a distinguished democratic system capable of achieving social justice and of guaranteeing rights and freedoms of individuals.

The most evident proof of the success of such a system is the percentage of voters in elections, usually amounting up to 90%.

We join today our friendly unified Germany in its celebrations, hoping the best for this great country and for the friendly German people. May each progress and success of theirs contribute to creating a democratic global entity, built on free economy, aiming at achieving justice and equity among nations of the world.

We welcome Dr. Peter Denjens, new Ambassador of Federal Germany in Egypt, who has assumed his tasks a few weeks ago. These tasks aim at enhancing relations between Egypt and Germany, given the long history of friendship and warm feelings that exist between the two peoples since ages.