

GERMANY: A Pioneer Country AND TWELVE YEARS OF UNITY

By Dr. Eng. Nader Riad

THE 12th anniversary of the German unity coincided this year with the elections, which took place in a democratic and free atmosphere enjoyed by the German people who are used to the fact that any change in government does not affect, in the least, the economic situation whether in the labour market, the fair distribution of wealth or the education and health services.

The questions asked at this year's anniversary are no longer about the success or failure, or the cost of the union. They are about the role of Germany, both in the European Union and in the international arena.

Within the European Union, Germany led the discussions that resulted in efforts to reorganise before further expansion; Germany is the union's most influential and trusted element in the Middle East with large measures of confidence in the Arab World. Besides, Germany is assuming a world leadership role through its military participation in Kosovo and on the periphery of the Afghanistan war.

But it is, perhaps, inside Germany that we have to look for achievements. The German Unity, in spite of the problems it has faced, has been recently strengthened in a big way. The disastrous floods that have hit Germany have contributed to a rapprochement between East and West. The former East German Lander which often felt they were the poor relations in the New Germany, have benefited from an unprecedented degree of assistance. In the words of the head of the Red Cross "shared emotions of this kind are exactly what may encourage greater mutual understanding and increase the desire to live together".

In fact, the floods themselves reflected the natural bonds between the East and the West. They started in Bavaria and continued in former East Germany, hitting Dresden among other cities, then veered to the North. This is the united Germany's first real disaster. The compensation due as a result of the floods are estimated to be between 150 million euros and 1.6 billion euros. The Government is meeting this by redirecting money earmarked for tax cuts to repairing the damage from the floods. The Government is also offering loans at a reasonable interests. The solidarity of the former



Dr. Eng. Nader Riad

**Consultant
Parliamentary Committee
for Industry & Energy
Chairman
Industry Committee
German-Arab Chamber
of Industry & Commerce**

West Germany with the East was reflected in the technical assistance flowing from across the country; Hamburg police transported their rescue boats upriver to Dresden, while hundreds of firemen rushed from the West. Thousands of conscripts from the West were mobilised to carry sand bags and most cash donations came from the West, both by individuals and companies such as BASF and OPEL.

While Germany has always been known for its knack for perfection and efficiency, a new programme has been devised to carry this efficiency further. It is entitled "Modern Government - Modern Administration" which aims at introducing significant streamlining and savings and at producing significant increases in efficiency. This is done by having all Federal services - 3376 in number - run over the internet.

Hand in hand with this comes what is called a new "Transparency Act", a corporate governance code to ensure greater transparency and to establish standards of conduct. A new book by Hans-Olaf Henkel, former chairman of the Industrial Union and leading

member of the SPD, Schroeder's party, has just been published. It is significantly entitled "The Ethics of Success", which explains the course of conduct in a society.

An important issue which has been dealt with in a practical and pragmatic way is immigrants from many countries. In March this year, a new immigrant Bill was passed by the Bundestag, which aims "not only to do justice to the changed needs of the industry, but also to regulate the migrant workers, integration of immigrants, laying standard procedure governing hardships and joining together of families and regulating the entry of people for humanitarian reasons".

But the government goes further than this. It has approached the important issue of a multi-cultural society, which is now the case in Germany. It has been seeking a "Dialogue of Cultures", holding seminars to discuss this complex subject. German-Arab dialogues, started in 1997 and have been convened regularly. The last was in Cairo this year in cooperation with the Arab League.

Germany's policy regarding the dialogue of cultures can be summed up in the words of two German leaders. President Johannes Rau says "We call for a global alliance against hunger and poverty. We demand that the dignity and separate identities of the members of other cultures and religions be respected". That is why the dialogue between the cultures and religions is so important.

Wolfgang Thierse, the President of the German Bundestag writes: "There is no such thing as a hostile culture". Lack of knowledge about other religions is a fertile ground for prejudices and hostile projections of extremists on all sides.

Despite the fact that the Egyptian - German friendship ties are considered to be the oldest and most stable among the Arab-German relationship that held solid throughout difficult intervals, last of which forwarded by the September 11th events, yet it is believed that these ties have enough stamina, resistance and driving power to support it in the middle of the troublesome world of today.

This relationship, will further remain safe and secure due to the prevailing good care and consideration given and sustained by both Egypt and Germany equally.