

GERMANY'S Two Celebrations



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The Reunion of Germany seems to overshadow an important event, not only in the German history, but also of the world. Fifty years have elapsed since the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany.

It was on May 23, 1949 that the Federal Republic of Germany was born. It was also the date when the Basic Law - The German Constitution - was drawn up.

During those past fifty years, Germany has covered a significant distance getting out of the ruins of the war to become the strongest economic member of the European Union.

Germany is now a firmly established democracy, a strong economic and independent partner, and a highly prosperous country.

Furthermore, it is a leading western state, an active member in the international community of nations and second only to USA in contributions for the development of the third world countries.

The German Basic law is, to my mind, one of the most human and noble constitutions. It consists of 146 articles. Articles 1 to 19 guarantee citizens basic rights, such as human dignity, equality, and freedom of expression and of movement.

I greatly appreciate the beginning of article 1, which begins with *"The dignity of man is inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all public authority."*

Germany is a concrete lesson in the process of democratization of society. A process that has determined Germany's current profile.

One of the features of present day Germany is the plurality of the population, with the significant number of immigrants, refugees and exiles from countries all over the world.

This has given rise to an extraordinarily multi-faceted society, which is a reflection of the fairness of the Basic Law.

In the words of Germany's outgoing President Roman Herzog "Our state is first and foremost a free and democratic state, based on the rule of law, a state which grants and safeguards the rights and dignity of us citizens

Social Market Economy:

The outgoing president mentioned the challenges that confront democracy and freedom.

The first is how to continue to create wealth in a globalized economy and in doing so, how to maintain the objective of justice.

President Herzog added that, "The success story of Germany is the success story of the social market economy." There must be fruits of growth to distribute. If such fruits were not distributed, would that affect a free and democratic social order?

However, here one should describe what is meant by Social Market Economy. It is described as a social economic order in which competition and social balance are reconciled with each other. They are two sides of the same coin.

To carry this argument on a different level: how far has the re-unification succeeded in having a fair distribution of the fruits of the system? Have the pre-unification promises and aspirations been realized? Alternatively, are we facing the famous edict that rises aspirations may lead to rising frustrations?

What is really significant is that the issue of re-unification was always the forefront of the political thought of the Federal Republic. The Basic Law stipulated that the west Germans built a free democracy and an open society "also on behalf of those Germans who were prevented from participating".

Nevertheless, what made the re-unification difficult is that there was a German splitting for so many generations into two different entities. What re-unification is trying to do since then, is to revive and strengthen the idea and concept of one entity.

The repeated question remains whether the cost of the re-unification is proving to be too high.

Challenges: There are many challenges, but perhaps the first and most important is that, after 40 years of division, what is required is comparable living conditions, and equal opportunities to be afforded to all who live today in Germany.

Another challenge, according to Kurt J. Lauk, a member of the Board of Management of VEBA in Dusseldorf is the requirement of Germany to pay close attention to its economic productivity, understanding that it is the only way for the country to maintain its prosperity, to be able to compete internationally.

There is no doubt that Germany is now stepping out of its close nation-state, into a much wider concept in Europe and the world.

Apart from the European Union, Germany is now chairing as President of the 8 group, which met recently in Cologne Summit.

The Group consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, USA and the new member Russia.

What is really significant is the attitude of unified Germany to world issues.

In the Summit, the German proposal reflected the real nature of the prospective German policy. Germany introduced a number of initiations, which aimed at further alleviating the dead burden of the poorest developing countries.

The aim is being to put these countries in a position to be able to develop their own economic potential. A special attention, in the German proposals, was given to the contribution to globalization made by social and environmental policies.

In order to achieve this, the German proposal emphasized that there must be flexible labor, goods and capital markets, investment in modern education and training systems.

With the recent move of the Bundestag to Berlin, Germany has, once again, underlined its role in Europe and emphasized its unity.

This move followed by the transport of Government and Ministries can be regarded as the crowning of Germany's unity.

In a moving speech, Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder inaugurated the newly built Parliament and said, *"The move to Berlin is also a journey back into the German history, to the home of two dictatorships, which brought great sufferings to the people in Germany and Europe"*.

But to quote "The Reichstag with the old German Reich, would be as foolish as seeing Berlin as a symbol of Prussian glory and German centralism. The Federal system has proved its worth in Germany and is not in the least subject to any doubts. The Bundestag president Thierse added, "For this place is history itself, and it does not allow us to step outside of history".

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