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Helmut Kohl: Facing the challenge of history

Abstract. In modern history, when reality is subject to rapid and radical change, the role of personality – whether a statesman or a politician – can be very significant in the process of making such changes and in achieving specific results. This is true of the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who in 1989-90, as described in this article, by his actions and policies led the Germans to unity after forty years of Germany's split.

Keywords: German policy, Chancellor Kohl, perestroika, Berlin Wall, GDR, united Europe, CDU / CSU

Introduction

At the meeting with the USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev in July 1990, the Chancellor of Germany Helmut Kohl quoted Otto Bismarck: “A person cannot achieve anything by himself, he can only wait until he notices the divine omen on the way to the accomplishment of events, then step forward and grab onto the red mantle of the Lord, that's all that is in his power”. The negotiations took place in Arkhyz, in the Stavropol Territory, in the homeland of Mikhail Gorbachev, who admitted that he had never heard this statement of Bismarck but immediately agreed with him,



adding the favorite expression “everything flows, everything changes”¹.

There followed a lot of changes. But if Mikhail Gorbachev could not grab “for the red mantle”, having lost everything soon, Helmut Kohl made it into history as the ‘Chancellor of German unity’, standing in line with Otto Bismarck and Konrad Adenauer².

To approach the evaluation of any historical personality objectively, it is not enough to analyze the external factors that guided their actions. It is worth paying attention to the person, their formation, to the life journey and experience that was passed and acquired by the time of making the most important choice – in response to the challenge of history³. There are not so many works specifically devoted to Helmut Kohl in domestic German studies⁴; often the judgments about him and his political activities are presented in the works on Germany devoted to broader topics by A. Y. Vatlin, A.I. Patrushev, N.V. Pavlov and others⁵.

Amongst the German publications, we would highlight the biographical research of Hanns-Peter Schwartz, the biography written by Klaus Dreyer, as well as other books by the biographer Werner Maser and the political scientist Guido Knopp⁶ published in Russia, and of course Helmut Kohl's own memoirs⁷. He referred to himself as a representative of the ‘post-Hitler generation’⁸, emphasizing that his views and persuasions had formed after the collapse of Nazism. The writers of Kohl called the former chancellor ‘the grandson of Adenauer’, as Spiegel's editor W. Bickerich did in

¹ *Mikhail Gorbachev and the German question. Coll. Documents. 1986–1991.* Moscow, 2006, p. 495.

² Petelin B.V. *German policy of chancellor Helmut Kohl 1982–1990.* Vologda, 2004, p. 17.

³ Dunaeva Yu.V. Historical biography: Decline or rebirth? *Historical biography: Modern approaches and methods of research. Coll. Reviews and reports;* RAS INION. Moscow, 2011, pp. 8–9.

⁴ See: Iistyagin L.G. *Political Portrait of Helmut Kohl.* Moscow, 1985; Markov V. N. Chancellor of Germany. *They are Talked About: (20 Political Portraits).* Moscow, 1989, pp. 321–342; Vyatkin S.K. Helmut Kohl. *Questions of History*, 1995, vol. 3, pp. 46–66; Petelin B.V. Helmut Kohl: Factors of political longevity. *Historical Thought in the Modern Era: Materials II Inter-University Readings in History Dedicated to the Memory of V. A. Kozyuchenko.* 2–4 April 1996. Volgograd, 1997, pp. 28–33; In 1990, Erlangen published an essay biography of Kohl written by the Russian historian A. Frenkin, in which, per the German biographer W. Maser, the chancellor appears in a rather ‘distorted image’ and “is not at all a good specialist in any field”. Maser W. *Helmut Kohl: Der deutsche Kanzler. Biographie.* Frankfurt am Main, 1990, s. 111–112.

⁵ Vatlin A.Yu. *Germany in the 20th Century.* Moscow, 2002; Patrushev A.I. *Germany in the 20th Century.* Moscow, 2004; Pavlov N.V. *Russia and Germany: The Failed Alliance (A Continuation Story).* Moscow, 2017.

⁶ Schwarz Hans-Peter. *Helmut Kohl. Eine politische Biographie.* München, 2012; Dreher K. *Helmut Kohl von Leben mit Macht.* Stuttgart, 1998; Maser V. *Helmut Kohl: Biographie.* Moscow, 1993; Knopp G. *History of Triumphs and Mistakes of the FRG Leaders.* Moscow, 2008.

⁷ Kohl H. *Erinnerungen 1982–1990.* München, 2005.

⁸ See: Maser W. Op. cit., p. 18.

his book⁹, or as O. Fehrenbach, for example, claimed that he was not “only aware of himself as the ‘grandson of Adenauer’, but was the one indeed”¹⁰. However, Kohl himself did not often correct the journalists (Adenauer was 54 years old on his birthday). To some extent, he could be considered his ‘grandson’.

Helmut Kohl was not only the Federal Chancellor, but also chairman of the Christian Democratic Union – the largest party in Germany, where he experienced all the ups and downs in his career. Knowing perfectly the intricacies of the party work and life, Kohl often foresaw and anticipated the wishes and aspirations of individual functionaries, trying to prevent weakening of his own positions, as evidenced by the involved documents directly related to the German policy of the CDU¹¹.

Main text

Helmut Kohl was born on 3 April 1930 in Ludwigshafen am Rhein. His full name was Helmut Josef Michael Kohl. His father Johann Caspar Kohl was a financial officer, a typical representative of this social stratum of the interwar period. He had a strong character, showed diligence in his work, an incorruptible sense of duty and loyalty to serving the state. The family was religious Catholic, but its members tolerated the Protestants. There was no big income, however, as Kohl himself recalled: “We did not know the worries about the daily bread. Nobody had to starve”¹².

The future chancellor separated himself from the National Socialists, among whom were his peers, but he certainly had certain views and persuasions at this age. The family did not pay tribute to the Nazis, although his father and brother Walter had to go off to war. The elder brother Walter died at the front. Helmut was called up for military service in Wehrmacht whilst being 15 years old. Hitlerjugend – the last reserve of the Fuhrer, was to stop the Red Army and the Western allies. The fanatically minded youth fought and died, but Kohl was not a fanatic at all. The war ended when the US troops arrived. His native city passed into the French zone of occupation. Hard post-war time came.

Kohl’s biographer Maser writes that in his childhood and youth, Helmut was distinguished by a clear desire to be a leader, a ‘small Fuhrer’, practicing “the art of

⁹ Bickerich W. *Der Enkel: Analyse der Ära Kohl*. Düsseldorf, 1995.

¹⁰ Fehrenbach O. *The Collapse and the Revival of Germany. A Glance at the European History of the 20th century*; Transl. from German. Moscow, 2001, p. 229.

¹¹ *Deutsche Einheit: Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989–90; Bearb. von Hanss Jürgen Küsters und Daniel Hofmann*. München: Oldenburg, 1998; *Lexikon zur Geschichte der Christlichen Demokratie in Deutschland*; Herausgegeben von W. Becker, G. Buchstab, A. Doering-Manteuffel, R. Morsey. Schöningh Verlag Paderborn, 2002; *Bericht zur Lage 1989–1998. Der Kanzler und Parteivorsitzende im Bundesvorstand der CDU Deutschlands*. Droste Verlag Düsseldorf, 2012.

¹² Cit. by: Maser W. *Helmut Kohl: Der deutsche Kanzler. Biographie*, p. 19.

guiding his peers”¹³. The matured Helmut seemed to many a very good-natured person, accommodating and inclined to compromise. In fact, it was different: he was characterized by a rare sense of purpose, inherent in people with a strong character. The straightness of his character was not the simplicity characteristic of the simpletons. In 1946, Kohl joined the CDU, and in 1947 he actively participated in the creation in Ludwigshafen of the local branch of the Young Union of Germany (the Junge Union Deutschland’s). The choice was conscious, although he did not hide his sympathy for the social democrat Schumacher, compared to which Adenauer seemed “a politician from the past”. In the summer of 1950, Helmut finished gymnasium, showing excellent profound knowledge in the final exams, especially in history, literature and language.

In the winter of 1950–51, Kohl became a student at the University of Frankfurt, but studied there only for two semesters. Then he moved to Heidelberg University, where he studied law and philosophy. In the process of studying, Kohl specialized in history and political science. It was then that the choice was made in favor of politics. Political activity attracted him, he felt that he had aptitude for this sphere. Helmut loved discussions, various kinds of debates and was active in student seminars. The fascination of history was a conscious choice. He was interested in its practical side. Such an approach remained for life. Even in his youth, Kohl realized that one should not abandon history, whatever it was; and for this reason one cannot “overcome the past”.

When and to what extent did the German question become part of his views? One of the first strong political impressions, which he admitted himself, was the speech of Kurt Schumacher, delivered in 1947, imbued with a passionate desire to see Germany as a united country. But many people, including those in the SPD, said those statements were untimely. Willy Brandt noted even ‘aggressiveness’ in such speeches by Schumacher about the reunification of Germany¹⁴. Maser writes that Kohl believed in this idea even in the upper class of gymnasium¹⁵. He carried this passionate desire to see his homeland united through his entire future life. Another fact was that many people in their childhood and adolescence dreamt of a career and of the heights that they could reach. Kohl was no exception there. The journalist B. Heimrich wrote that for the first-time Kohl expressed the desire to become chancellor while he was still at school; and then in 1959, when he became a member of the Landtag, where he was the youngest of his age¹⁶.

He continued to rise across the party and the state ladders quickly, becoming ‘the youngest’ in relation to his predecessors and the others. He became Chancellor at the

¹³ Maser W. Op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁴ Brandt W. Memories. Moscow, 1991, p. 38.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁶ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 15. 1. 1983.

age of 52, which was not surpassed by anyone in the 20th century (his successor, G. Schroeder was elected chancellor at 54). Naturally, Kohl's career was somehow accompanied by luck, but most of the success came because of hard work, especially since almost always Kohl began to 'climb' whilst in the ranks of the opposition.

In Rhineland-Pfalz, Kohl received a good 'schooling'. Having successfully passed all the intermediate party-state posts, in 1966 he was elected chairman of the land organization of CDU, and in May 1969 he became Prime Minister of the land government. There was one more feature in Kohl's activity as the prime minister. He skillfully shaped the coterie, which would play a significant role in the subsequent development of the FRG – R. von Weizsacker, H. Gaisler, B. Fogel, N. Bluhm, H. Telchik and others, perhaps less important politicians, who eventually became the main people in the apparatus of the Federal Chancellor. In 1967, Kohl contributed to the appointment of B. Heck as Secretary General of the CDU and the election in the same year of K.-G. Kiesinger as chancellor of the FRG. Admittedly, Kohl's 'land government' had successfully addressed the socio-economic issues by undertaking several necessary reforms.

Moreover, Kohl did not forget the main idea, as evidenced by the following fact: in the government statement issued on 20 May 1969, he recalled the belonging of Rhineland-Pfalz to the united Germany. Unlike other politicians of the time, it was Kohl who consistently reasoned and judiciously defended the idea of the German unity. At the same time, his words were not perceived as a duty or a common reminder; they sounded like a hope for reunion. The CDU authority 'Zonda' wrote in 1972: "The CDU finally needs the chairman who will be engaged in the party work, and this post will cease to be only nominal. Thus, Adenauer had no interest in the party, Erhard wanted to stand above it, Kiesinger had no desire, and Barzel had no time for the party work"¹⁷. In June 1973 at the congress in Bonn, Helmut Kohl was elected chairman of the CDU and remained in office. The record time was 25 years. Under him, the party acquired its modern look, and its potential was comparable to the SPD. By 1982, the CDU had over 710,000 members, and the total number of members in the social committees and the youth union was more than one million. A year later, the party had 835 thousand members – the highest figure in its entire history. In 1983 in CSU there were 185 thousand members – the third result in the history of the union (in 1989 there were 185,853 members and in 1990 – 186,198 members)¹⁸.

After the failure of the CDU / CSU in the elections to the Bundestag in 1976, Kohl moved to Bonn and headed the parliamentary fraction. His flexible and skillful tactics played a role in the disintegration of the SPD-FDP coalition and the latter's transition to the CDU / CSU side. On 1 October 1982, after voting in the Bundestag

¹⁷ Grafe P.J. *Schwarze Visionen: Die Modernisierung der CDU*. Hamburg, 1986, s. 29–30.

¹⁸ Lexikon der Christlichen Demokratie in Deutschland, s. 708.

on the issuance of a vote of no confidence to chancellor H. Schmidt, Helmut Kohl was elected the new chancellor, who formed the government based on the CDU / CSU-FDP coalition.

With Kohl's election as Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, they started talking about a 'new beginning' in the political circles. But in what way did it become 'new' indeed? Here is how Maser wrote about this: "With the advent of Kohl to power, both in the FRG and in the GDR, the discussion of the issue of the unified Germany resumed. The patriotic passion of the Chancellor, his sentimental attitude towards Berlin and the active statements on the German question helped awaken the sense of belonging to one nation among all Germans, not only in the FRG. The debate had revived on the very actual topic since the Tacitus, which had been however specifically burdened since 1945 and became the unprecedentedly protracted topic - what is Germany, what does it mean to be a German, what is the essence of the German nature, the German nation and nationality¹⁹?"

This initial period was not only important in the work of the new chancellor, but also extraordinarily difficult in the elaboration of his own political line. Collaborating with such an experienced, independent party politician and well-known international figure as Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Kohl could fall beyond the foreign policy sphere²⁰. At first, it seemed so. Per K. Hacke, the professor at the Hamburg University of Bundeswehr, the author of many works on the history and foreign policy of the CDU / CSU, Kohl "was not cosmopolitan, and foreign policy was not his passion ... Kohl showed very little intellectual disposition to foreign policy topics, but he owned a good, confident and sensitive scent for the fundamental interests of the FRG"²¹.

This played an important role in shaping the goals of the foreign policy for the 1980s. Kohl, as head of the Cabinet, defined his foreign policy in the traditions of Adenauer (it is not that Kohl intended to be a 'copy' of Adenauer in the German politics.) This was defined as the exact fault of the GDR leadership, as A. Filitov noted in his monograph²²). Thus, it was placed on the usual conservative foundation and limited the possibilities for proceeding with the foreign policy within the social-liberal framework, the supporter of which was Genscher himself. Hacke believes that it should be agreed that the return to Adenauer's foreign policy 'covenants' greatly facilitated the ties with the West, but with respect to the Eastern European states, where it

¹⁹ Maser W. Op. cit, p. 210.

²⁰ The first publications on the new chancellor noted that in the field of eastern and German politics Kohl "is not a theorist", he is inclined to act as a 'pragmatist' guided by the principle of 'utility'. KAS. ACDP: Abteilung Pressedokumentation 1/190 CDU. 21. Okt. 1983.

²¹ Hacke Chr. *Die Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Weltmacht wider Willen?* Berlin, 1997, s. 281.

²² Filitov A.M. *The German question: from split to unification. New reading.* Moscow, 1993. 211 p.

was required to act within the policy of detente, the CDU / CSU had no traditions; they should have been created, and this was the main problem.

At first glance, it seemed insoluble, because as per Adenauer, “the German policy was to be the core of all foreign policy”²³, which was difficult to combine with the continuation and normalization of relations with the eastern neighbors and the GDR. However, Kohl at the very beginning of his chancellery, repeatedly advocated adherence of the new Cabinet to the concluded treaties and agreements and appealed to avoid any attempts to revise or reject them. In fact, this consisted of the so-called Realpolitik of Chancellor Kohl, with the amendment that the CDU / CSU declared the need to place the Eastern treaties in the legal framework of the FRG legislation.

“The German question is open in the legal sense” – this was the ruling statement in the 1980s. It did not become a cunning trick of conservatives. They had their own vision of ways to solve the German problem²⁴. And this immediately gave the German policy an opportunity to enter a new level of understanding and content, and most importantly it became offensive but not reactionary or revanchist at all. Even the fact that Rainer Bartzel became the first minister for inter-German relations in H. Kohl’s government, given his position during the debate over the eastern treaties, was generally perceived as positive²⁵.

Thus, since 1982 the German question became an actual topic. The main normative document was the Program and Principles adopted at the 26th congress of the CDU held on 23–25 October 1978 in Ludwigshafen, where the Secretary General of the CDU Heiner Geisler called the document “the decisive spiritual renewal of the CDU in opposition”²⁶. In Article 132 of the Program and Principles, the main task in the German policy of the CDU was defined as follows: “the achievement of freedom and unity for all German people”. At the same time, it was explained that “overcoming the division of Europe and, together with this, the division of our fatherland” was only possible only under the conditions of peace. Article 133 defined the approaches of the CDU to the German question, which “remained open”. The party assumed the responsibility to support the national feelings about the united fatherland in all parts of Germany. The party was ready to support the negotiations and agreements that would improve the living conditions and the situation with human rights in the di-

²³ Adenauer K. *Reden und Gespräche 1946–1967*. Köln, 1998, s. 29–30.

²⁴ The fact that the German CDU / CSU policy was formed on a legal basis is evident from the nature and content of the interpretation of the Eastern treaties, which per the West Germany side, did not “close the German question”. In this respect, even the ruling Social-Liberal coalition, on whose behalf these agreements were signed, left a ‘legal clue’ in the form of the famous ‘Letters on the Unity of the German Nation’ dated 12 August 1970. To learn more about this problem, see: *Deutschlandtheorien auf der Grundlage der Ostvertragspolitik*; Georg Teyssen. Frankfurt am Main, 1987.

²⁵ Hacke Chr. *Op. cit.*, p. 303.

²⁶ *Deutsches Monatsblatt*. Sonderbeilage, 1979, no. 3, s. 1.

vided Germany and with what should become the foundation for the future unity²⁷. Further it was stated that “all treaties of the Federal Republic of Germany with other states and with the GDR were binding”. Article 134 read as follows: “Berlin is the capital of the whole Germany”²⁸.

As a long and substantial period was implied, the question of periodization with regards to the German policy was raised quite appropriately. Most researchers agree on adhering to a well-defined clear framework. K. Hacke, in the third edition of his book on the FRG foreign policy, proposed the following three ‘phases’. The first one ran through the autumn of 1982 – summer of 1985; this ‘phase’ was considered the formation of the German policy by the new governmental cabinet and the CDU / CSU coalition – the FDP. Its peculiarity was that the German policy was implemented in the context of aggravation of the relations between the West and the East, the policy of ‘re-armament’ of NATO and the reciprocal measures of the USSR. Despite the confrontation, the German policy turned out to be quite ‘constructive’²⁹. The second ‘phase’ covered the summer 1985-autumn 1987, including E. Honecker's visit to the FRG, which was the ‘highest point’ in Germano-German relations. The third ‘phase’ ran through 1987–89, when the German politics developed, mainly under the influence of the changes in the Soviet Union and the GDR. Hacke singled out the period 1989–90, that is directly implying the process of Germany reunification, which looked quite justified. In the consideration of the German policy of the CDU / CSU, its theoretical and practical content, we will adhere to this periodization with some adjustments, depending on the development of the events in 1982-90.

Helmut Kohl, in contrast to Konrad Adenauer, had ample opportunities in the formation and conduction of the German policy. First, it was connected with the functional activity of the German Chancellery, which was an institutional body of the executive power, that is, directly the head of the government. In domestic publications, there are only brief references to the existence of “Chancellor’s auxiliary apparatus”. In fact, there is no information on its structure, composition or work, which is not surprising. Among German researchers it is necessary to mention the dissertation work of Siegfried Schöne ‘From Reich Chancellery to Federal Chancellery’, published as a book in 1968³⁰. The most comprehensive description of the organizational structures of the Chancellery in the 1980s is presented in the very first volume of the ‘History of the German Unity’ under the authorship of K.-R. Korte. The “apparatus of the German policy” was represented in six main divisions (as of 15 June 15 1985):

²⁷ See: *Grundsatzprogramm der Christlich-Demokratischen Union Deutschlands*. Freiheit; Solidarität. Gerechtigkeit. Beschlossen vom 26. Bundesparteitag Ludwigshafen 23–25. Oktober 1978. Bonn: Konrad-Adenauer-Haus, 1978.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Hacke Chr. Op. Cit, pp. 311–312.

³⁰ See: Schöne S. *Von der Reichskanzlei zum Bundeskanzleramt*. Berlin, 1968.

- Central management (Leitungsebene);
- The Second administration (Abteilung 2) – “external and intra-German relations” with “the working staff of German politics” (Arbeitsstab Deutschlandpolitik);
- The Fifth administration (Abteilung 5) – “social and political analysis, means of communication” and “service speechwriters” (Redenschreiberteam);
- Permanent representation in the GDR;
- Plenipotentiary representative of the federal government in Berlin;
- Personal authorized representative of the Chancellor³¹.

The researcher will find evaluations of business qualities of the Chancellery employees in immediate circles to Chancellor Kohl in the interesting and informative book by G. Langgut ‘The Internal Life of Power: The Crisis and the Future of the CDU’³².

Along with the Federal Chancellor, the head of the Federal Chancellery expressed the central leadership. In 1982–84, the Chancellery was headed by the State Secretary Waldemar Schreckenberger, a lawyer by education, with whom Kohl was familiar from the school's bench. It was one of the most loyal officials for Kohl. In November 1984, the executive office of the Federal Chancellor was headed by the forty-year-old Wolfgang Schäuble; he was younger than his predecessor and had legal education (Schreckenberger remained in the office of State Secretary). Simultaneously with his appointment, Schäuble became minister of state for special assignments, so his functions expanded considerably; and the situation in the political leadership significantly strengthened. Schäuble took part in the work of the CDU / CSU faction and was co-opted into the presidium of the CDU. Per Korte, this helped improve the coordination between the party's central leadership and its land organizations³³.

One of the most important structures in the Federal Chancellery was the “working staff of German politics”, kind of ‘think tank’, whose overall leadership under Kohl was initially undertaken by Jenniger, followed by Schäuble and Seiters. “The working staff of German politics” existed since 1977 and was created on the initiative of chancellor Schmidt, who wanted to have a separate structure responsible for the German policy in his department. This need was also dictated by the desire of the Western allies to obtain more information about the policy of the federal government, which would allow coordinating efforts in resolving the German problem. With the advent of Kohl, the functions and tasks of the ‘working staff’ were made more specific. Mainly, the members of the ‘staff’ carried out ‘production activities’: they prepared Germano-German negotiations, meetings of the head of Federal Chancellery

³¹ Korte K.-R. *Deutschlandpolitik in Helmut Kohls Kanzlerschaft: Regierungsstil und Entscheidungen 1982–1989*. Stuttgart, 1998, 31 p.

³² Langguth G. *Das Innenleben der Macht. Krise und Zukunft der CDU*. Berlin, 2001, s. 72–99.

³³ Korte K.-R. Op. cit, p. 36.

with the GDR representatives. Then came forward the ‘instrumental activity’: preparation of speeches, statements, treaties, agreements and so on. ‘Coordination activity’ followed: the coordination of the German policy through the foreign ministry with the three Western powers in the so-called ‘group of four’ (that is, the USSR was excluded at this stage); Bonn’s consultations with the three Western powers regarding the ‘integrity of Germany’ and the ‘Berlin question’; preparation for holding meetings on the German problem. The ‘administrative activity’ included: preparation of negotiations with the GDR representatives to outline administrative, organizational, technical issues and problems. ‘Ongoing activities’ included the following: problems of management and leadership, responses to inquiries received from the public, parties and parliament³⁴.

The immediate head of the ‘working staff’ under Jenniger and Schäuble was Hermann F. von Richthofen (in 1986 he was succeeded by Duisberg). He was also a landmark figure in the field of the German politics. Being non-partisan, he worked in the foreign ministry, then in the office of the Federal Chancellor G. Schmidt. In 1969–71, Richthofen took part in the four-party talks on West Berlin, representing the West German side. After the change of coalition in Bonn in 1982, Kohl, contrary to forecasts (Richthofen was nevertheless known as a ‘liberal socialist’), left him as head of the “working staff of the German politics”.

Per the chancellor, at that time, the financial priorities and the ‘double decision’ of NATO were the top priorities in the government’s activities, so he decided to “leave it as it is”, although there were people in the ‘working’ staff, who the chancellor did not trust³⁵. Most likely, in the chancellor’s entourage there was no other competent figure rather than Richthofen, who had considerable experience and knowledge in the field of the German politics. Korte notes that Richthofen followed a cautious course in the Germano-German relations, undoubtedly softened the criticism of the GDR in the planned speeches of the chancellor, crossed out everything that in his opinion could cause diplomatic complications between the FRG and the GDR³⁶.

Helmut Kohl’s closest adviser and trusted helper in solving the German problem, including the unification of Germany, was Horst Telchik – head of the ‘second department’ in the office of the Federal Chancellor. Until 1972, he worked in the apparatus of the CDU in Bonn and then became Kohl’s adviser in Mainz. His field of interest was foreign policy. Telchik not only knew how to obtain the necessary information, for which the apparatus was established, by bypassing the foreign ministry and contacting directly the political leadership of the Western powers, but he was also considered a figure who was thinking strategically. Back in Mainz, that is prior to

³⁴ Ibid, p. 41.

³⁵ Korte K.-R. Op. cit, p. 41.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 41–42.

Kohl's election as chancellor, Telchik organized a “creative brain trust”, where scientists, publicists and politicians were brought in to discuss informally the most important political problems³⁷.

Subsequently, this form was used by Kohl for evening meetings in the ‘chancellor's bungalow’. Genscher, while retaining the post of minister for foreign affairs in Kohl's government perceived as “the guarantor of the foreign policy stability of Germany”, did not trust Telchik's undertakings. There was a hidden struggle between them, although in his position Genscher was significantly higher than head of the department Telchik, but the latter's actions in carrying out the German policy, especially in its final phase, were quite weighty. It was important that the views of Telchik and Kohl on the content of prospects in the German policy coincided, despite the resistance of some members from the government as well as some politicians in the CDU / CSU.

Michael Mertes, who headed the sector of speechwriters (group 521: public participation of the Federal Chancellor), noted that in the Chancellery, as in any other institution, the internal life took place in the atmosphere of intrigue and rivalry. Moreover, in the Chancellery the situation was more tense due to special proximity to the authorities³⁸.

The careful nature and desire to voice certain provisions of the German politics can be seen in the preparation of the first government statement by Chancellor H. Kohl issued on 13 October 1982 at the 121st meeting of the Bundestag³⁹. The chancellor could not admit any sharp attacks in his speech, therefore ‘the German part’ in the statement was small. In general, the widely-known provisions of the CDU / CSU on the German question were covered in these statements. The appeal of the chancellor could be considered unusual: “Mr. President, my ladies and gentlemen, the consciousness of the German history is subject to renewal”. Then two central statements followed: “The national state of the Germans is destroyed. The German nation has remained, and it will continue to exist”⁴⁰. This brief thesis, which split into two parts, contradicted the established approach of the CDU / CSU on the “preservation of the German Reich” and the Federal Republic of Germany as its ‘successor’.

An important position in Kohl's statement of 13 October 1982 was his words about “the possibility of overcoming the split in the historical period”. It goes without saying that he did not specify the scope of this ‘period’, but the fact that the possibility of reunion in real time was not ruled out attached importance to the words of the

³⁷ Ibid, p. 38.

³⁸ Mertes M. *German Questions – European Answers*; Trans. From German. Moscow, 2001. 104 p.

³⁹ See: Regierungserklärung des Bundeskanzlers vor dem Deutschen Bundestags. ‘Koalition der Mitte’: Für eine Politik der Erneuerung. *Bulletin*. Bonn, no. 93, 14. X. 1982, s. 853–868.

⁴⁰ Kohl H. *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*, s. 53–54.

chancellor. This goal, along with the others, became a priority in the work of H. Kohl's government. A special place in this part of Kohl's statement was devoted to his appeal to the history. It was about the jubilee dates in the German history dating back to 1983, as the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther (1983 was declared the year of Luther); the 50th anniversary of "the beginning of the dictatorship, and with it the way to the German catastrophe"; the 30th anniversary of the "workers' uprising in East Berlin against the communist domination"⁴¹.

Kohl, who was professional in history, understood perfectly well its significance and role in bringing the people divided by the circumstances closer. The GDR authorities, which expressed themselves clearer after 13 August 1961, were given the right to interpret the German history at their own discretion. All that was 'barbarian', 'dark' and 'ignorant' was associated with the FRG. The GDR was declared 'heir' to the finest and most beautiful aspects of the German history. "The historic task of the GDR," said W. Ulbricht, "is to bring the entire German people to socialism" ... because it "shapes the future for the whole of Germany"⁴².

As a forward-thinking politician, Kohl did not refuse meetings and contacts with the leaders of the GDR. Thus, they were given confirmation of Honecker's invitation to pay a return visit, which was arranged by Chancellor Schmidt before retiring⁴³. The chairman of CSU Strauss was dissatisfied with this approach, believing that Kohl should solve this issue himself and not renew the old invitation. In the telephone conversation, Kohl and Honecker said that on the Soviet side, the foreign minister A. A. Gromyko spoke positively about a possible meeting between the leaders of the FRG and the GDR. However, the subsequent events of all kinds postponed the visit of Erich Honecker to September 1987.

In addition to the political contacts with the leaders of the Socialist Unity Party, the FRG under Kohl became a financial 'sponsor' for the GDR. This was a 'billion loan' initiated by Strauss. But the 'brilliant chess move' in the Bavarian union was not supported by all. At the congress, during the re-election to the post of chairman of the CSU on 16 July 1983, Strauss received only 77.0 % of the vote, which was the lowest result, starting with the first election on 18 March 1961⁴⁴.

This loan did not allow to extinguish the Germano-German relations, which deteriorated with regards to the deployment of American missiles on the territory of Germany. It was understandable that Strauss was the intermediary in such a delicate mat-

⁴¹ Regierungserklärung... *Bulletin*. Bonn, no. 93, 14, X, 1982.

⁴² Motschmann K. Ein Volk – zwei Nation – drei Staaten? Zum kommunistischen Deutschlandbild der Gegenwart. *Wohin treibt Deutschland?* Hardenberg, 1973, s. 67–68.

⁴³ Part of the correspondence between Honecker and Kohl was disclosed in the publications of the foreign ministry of the GDR. See: *Dokumente zur Außenpolitik der DDR*. Bd. XXXIII. 1985, 1.-2. Halbbd. Berlin, 1988.

⁴⁴ HSS. ACSP: Franz Josef Strauß. Eine kurze Biographie.

ter. Despite his anti-communism, the links with Strauss had been supported by the GDR authorities since the 1950s, so he was not a ‘novice’ in such transactions⁴⁵. Crediting the GDR, as noted by the political scientist D. Grosser, allowed the republic to retain confidence in the eyes of the Western banks and to keep the social situation in the country under control. Strauss, who knew the true position of the GDR well, said the following at the talks on financial matters with the minister of state security of the SED committee, Schalk-Golodskovski: “I give you only ten years”⁴⁶. The government of chancellor Kohl continued the practice of providing loans to the GDR. In 1985, a loan was granted in the amount of 2.2 billion DM of the Federal Republic of Germany; in 1986 the amount was 600 million marks. These loans were not allocated for the salvation of socialism. There was gradual ‘embedding’ of the GDR into the financial and economic space of the FRG, thus bringing about an early denouement.

In this vein, Erich Honecker's official visit to the Federal Republic of Germany, which took place on 7–11 September 1987, should be considered. For Honecker, this was undoubted success: he could visit his homeland – Saar⁴⁷. The leadership of the CDU / CSU could record this visit as an asset of their operative German policy (the preparation of the visit was undertaken by Wolfgang Schäuble⁴⁸). Despite the deterioration of the relations between the West and the East since the late 1970s, the connections between the two German states had not only not been interrupted, but also expanded. In 1986, as Kohl noted in his memoirs, about one million pensioners from the GDR visited Germany⁴⁹. In 1987, the number of those who visited increased to five million, of which one million were young people. This meant, in the opinion of the chancellor, that millions of Germans from the GDR could form their views based on their personal experience; they could see and feel that they belonged to one nation. The facts to which Kohl referred were quite convincing: two-thirds of eastern and

⁴⁵ Marcus Wolfe writes in his memoirs: “Since the 1950s, Strauss was not incognito for us ... When Strauss became minister for atomic energy, the initiative to establish contacts came from him. He froze them, becoming defense minister, and resumed after his resignation. Therefore, Strauss's ‘help’ was not some kind of accidental, spontaneous action”. Wolf M. *Playing on someone else's Field. 30 Years in Charge of Intelligence*. Moscow, 1998, p. 149.

⁴⁶ Grosser D. *Das Wagnis der Währungs-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialunion: politische Zwänge im Konflikt mit ökonomischen Regeln*. Stuttgart, 1998, s. 29.

⁴⁷ See: Petelin B.V., Stepanov G.V. Erich Honecker. *Questions of History*, 2013, no. 9, pp. 117–128.

⁴⁸ Potthoff H. Die Deutschlandpolitik der Bundesregierungen der CDU/CSU-FDP- Koalition (Kohl/Genscher), die Diskussion in den Parteien und in der Öffentlichkeit 1982–1989. *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission ‘Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland’*. Bd. 5. F. am Main, 1995, s. 2079.

⁴⁹ Kohl G. ‘Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit’. S. 30; In his speech on 7 September 1987 Kohl cited such data from the visits of the FRG citizens in 1986: about one million pensioners as well as 550 thousand people of pre-retirement age visited the country. See: Bulletin. 10 September 1987, nr. 83.

one-third of western Germans had connections and contacts between each other. The interior door, Kohl concludes, opened so widely that Honecker's visit became possible⁵⁰.

The chancellor did not conceal (and he should have said it sincerely) that for him the ceremony of meeting the general secretary and the sounds of the GDR hymn, was a difficult test⁵¹. His biographer W. Maser writes: "He met the communist with an icy expression, and during all the television broadcasts he demonstratively stressed that this type of performance of official duties was deeply contrary to his internal mood"⁵².

Helmut Kohl, adhering to the official protocol, at the same time firmly and unequivocally made it clear that the visit did not change anything in the content of the German question. In his speeches, he not only disclosed the content of Germano-German relations at that moment, but also clearly outlined the range of tasks necessary in his opinion for the further intensification of the German policy. Let us quote the documents directly. Thus, already in his first speech at the opening of negotiations with Honecker on 7 September 1987 in Bonn, Kohl said: "The federal government firmly defends the unity of the German nation, and we are striving for the Germans to find each other in joint freedom. This position is substantiated in the Treaty on the fundamentals of relations and the letter on the German unity. We affirm the refusal to use any force, which has been and remains a central element of the policy of the Federal Republic of Germany since its inception. We respect the existing borders but want to overcome the split peacefully through agreements"⁵³.

In his speech on 7 September at the official dinner in honor of Secretary-General E. Honecker in Bad Godesberg, Chancellor Helmut Kohl tried to speak on behalf of all Germans who had conflicting feelings from the fact that there were two states. "Understanding the unity of the nation", said Kohl, "lives and the will to this is not broken, it is preserved. This unity is expressed in the language, in the single cultural heritage, in the long, uninterrupted common history". This meeting in Bonn, the chancellor continued, was "neither a final nor a new undertaking, it is a step on the road to a long-continued development". For Kohl, it was clear that mutual understanding would not be found on the principal issues of the German policy. He directly told Honecker about this. It was again stressed as follows: "The preamble of our Basic Law is not subject to any discussion, as it coincides with our beliefs. We want

⁵⁰ Kohl G. 'Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit', s. 31.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 31–32.

⁵² Maser W. Op. cit, p. 240.

⁵³ See: *Materialien zu Deutschlandfragen. Politiker und Wissenschaftler nehmen Stellung 1986–87*. Bonn, 1988, s. 147–148.

united Europe, and we call on the entire German people to achieve Germany's unity and freedom through free self-determination”⁵⁴.

The chancellor expressed his firm belief that his words corresponded to the wishes and aspirations of all the people in Germany. Two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Kohl told Honecker: “The German question remains open, but its decision is not now on the agenda of the world history, and we also count on the mutual understanding of our neighbor”. The chancellor did not conceal his rejection of the political regime that reigned in the GDR, calling for the removal of all the obstacles that people shared, since they formed an organic whole⁵⁵.

The future of Germany was decided not in the conversations with Honecker⁵⁶. Europe closely watched the progress of perestroika in the USSR. The policy of Mikhail Gorbachev's ‘new political thinking’ was accepted by the West, as it did not disagree with their interests. Helmut Kohl entered the dialogue with the Soviet leader later than other politicians. The ‘unfortunate’ utterance of the chancellor about Gorbachev in the interview with Newsweek magazine was the cause of this⁵⁷, but Gorbachev himself was looking for early access to the chancellor, so the conflict after the apology of Kohl was settled. The subsequent meetings of Kohl and Gorbachev in 1988-89 presented in detail in various descriptions and published documents⁵⁸, led to the fact that both politicians agreed on the views regarding the German question and the ways to solve it. The Soviet side decided to ‘sacrifice’ the GDR, hoping apparently that the implementation of the ‘decision’ would take years. Everything turned out differently. Kohl's German policy was offensive, and the events themselves developed so rapidly that they overturned not only the Berlin Walls, but all the real socialism in Eastern Europe⁵⁹.

“The improvement of socialism” as promised by the leaders of the CPSU obviously did not succeed. The authority of Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR fell, but in the West his popularity grew. Especially in Germany, where the Germans met ‘Gorby’ with genuine rejoicing. Gorbachev, who was not hiding, admitted it was more pleasant to communicate with the chancellor – Christian democrat Kohl than with the head of the GDR, communist Honecker. Early in July 1989, Honecker participated in the summit of the Political Consultative Committee of the States Parties to the War-

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 151.

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 153–154.

⁵⁶ Kunze T. *Staatschef a. D. Die letzten Jahre des Erich Honecker*. Berlin, 2012.

⁵⁷ Kohl H. *Erinnerungen 1982–1990*, s. 450.

⁵⁸ See: Gorbachev M. S. *How it was*. Moscow, 1999; *Mikhail Gorbachev and the German question. Coll. Documents. 1986–1991*. Moscow, 2006; Responding to the challenge of time. Foreign policy of perestroika: documentary evidence. Per the records of Gorbachev's conversations with foreign figures and other materials. *Gorbachev Foundation*. Moscow, 2010.

⁵⁹ See: *History of anti-communist revolutions of the late 20th century: Central and Southeastern Europe*. Moscow, 2007.

saw Pact in Bucharest (7–8 July). It was there that Mikhail Gorbachev stated that the ‘Brezhnev doctrine’ about the joint defense of socialism was dead. Firstly, this responded to the views of the opposition forces in Poland and Hungary, where the communist leaders could hope until then to help the USSR. After the first day of meetings, at night, Honecker had an exacerbation of kidney disease and accompanied by Krenz returned to Berlin⁶⁰.

The SED Politbüro was practically inactive during Honecker's illness (he returned to his duties on 25 September). With the approach of the 40th anniversary of the GDR, the polarization between the power that was losing support and the society was growing, the active part of which was consolidated in the new political entities. Honecker's fate was determined. In addition to the internal dissatisfaction with the SED (it was not possible to integrate the GDR under Honecker to perestroika, and therefore a variant of his replacement by someone from the ‘reformers’ was being considered), the personal dislike of the leader of the CPSU towards Honecker was also affected, as indicated by Gorbachev's biographers⁶¹. After the jubilee celebrations, on 17 October 1989 he was forced to resign. Subsequently, Honecker claimed that he had fallen ‘a victim of conspiracy’, where Gorbachev was involved⁶².

Honecker's leave sharply weakened the SED position, and the situation was clearly out of control. The fall of the Berlin Wall might not have happened if the authorities of the GDR had acted thoughtfully and clearly. And thus, the incident that happened at the press conference on the evening of 9 November, when the tired head of Berlin SED party organization Günter Schabowski, reading out the poorly prepared document on the new rules for transition to West Berlin, said that “the situation will immediately come into force”⁶³. The press conference was broadcast by the television of the GDR. But only after the television in West Germany announced this sensational message, the residents of East Berlin rushed to the border crossings to “spontaneously test the new rules for travel”⁶⁴. Only overnight West Berlin was visited by about 60 thousand citizens of the GDR. The Berlin Wall fell. This was a complete surprise for the new leadership of the GDR Egon Krenz and Hanns Modrova.

⁶⁰ See: *Revolution und Transformation in der DDR 1989–90*. Berlin, 1999, s. 503.

⁶¹ Here is how A. Grachev writes about it: “Erich Honecker also irritated him, who not only had no intention of introducing perestroika but also did not conceal his disapproval of the dangerous flood of democracy that overwhelmed the USSR and threatened to splash beyond its borders”. Grachev A.S. Gorbachev. Moscow, 2001, s. 295.

⁶² Kuzmin I.N. *The 41st year of the German Democratic Republic*. Moscow, 2004. 20 p.

⁶³ The progress of the press conference is shown in the report of Hertle at the hearings of the Bundestag Commission. See: Hertle H.-H. Der 9. November 1989 in Berlin. *Materialien der Enquete - Kommission ‘Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland’*. Bd. VII, Teil 1. Frankfurt am Main, 1995, s. 843–849.

⁶⁴ Jäger W. Op. cit, p. 42.

But Chancellor Kohl was unusually perspicacious. On 8 November 1989, he spoke at the Bundestag with the latest and, as it turned out, the last “message to state and nation in the divided Germany⁶⁵”. If, referring to the unprecedented flight of people in the center of Europe and thousands of demonstrations in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden and other GDR cities, he assured the participants and demonstrators and deputies of the Bundestag that their voice “We are the people!” would be heard. “These events unfolding in front of the whole world,” Kohl said, “showed that the division of our fatherland is unnatural, that the wall and the barbed wire do not have a longer life⁶⁶”.

Among the Russian authors, Igor Maksimychev wrote more often than others about the fall of the Berlin Wall, who found himself in the “center of the political hurricane”, which completely carried away the whole country. In his view, “the fall of the Wall was not planned, that happened spontaneously due to intertwining of several regular but unrelated episodes” and mostly “due to the oversight of several politicians who were unprepared to manage the complex East German state⁶⁷”. Indeed, to assert that the ‘Fall of the Wall’ was specifically timed to the memorable and fateful date in the German history – 9 November; would only be true for those who believe in magic numbers. This was how the history dealt with it. But one cannot agree with the fact that everything happened ‘spontaneously’ (K. Zontheimer believes that the border wall collapsed “more by chance⁶⁸”), without any internal connection (“...under the pressure of an avalanche of protests, the wall must open,” W. Jäger wrote⁶⁹).

Conclusion

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the destiny of the GDR was predetermined. Less than a year later, “the first state of workers and peasants on the German soil” ceased to exist. The Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl showed not only his tremendous activity in those months, but also determination, ensuring the German unity in the shortest possible time. At the same time, his actions did not lead to a new confrontation, although at that time armed groups of the USSR and the US were on the German soil. Yet, as the well-known German political scientist A. von Plato writes in his book, without the support of the world politicians, firstly, US President George Bush, the

⁶⁵ Bericht zur Lage 1989–1998. Der Kanzler und Parteivorsitzende im Bundesvorstand der CDU Deutschlands, s. 27–36. This ‘message’ of Kohl is included into many documentary collections, in view of its great historical importance. See, e.g.: *Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Dokumente von 1949 bis 1994*. Köln, 1995, s. 605–616; *Materialien zu Deutschland-fragen Politiker und Wissenschaftler nehmen Stellung 1989–91*. Bonn, 1991. (Auszüge).

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Maksimychev I.F. *The fall of the Berlin Wall. From the Notes of the Adviser-envoy of the Embassy of the USSR in Berlin*. Moscow, 2011. 140 p.

⁶⁸ Sontheimer K. *The Federal Republic of Germany today*, p. 81.

⁶⁹ Handbuch zur deutschen Einheit; Werner Weidenfeld; Karl-Rudolf Korte (Hrsg), s. 208.

unification of Germany would most likely ‘stall’. The American president sent a confidential letter to Kohl back in May 1989, which referred to the “opening historical chance” to change the relations between the West and the East⁷⁰. Kohl took advantage of this ‘chance’, despite the opposition of British Prime Minister M. Thatcher and the President of France F. Mitterrand. As for Mikhail Gorbachev, as A. von Plato notes, there was in fact no intelligible strategy, and all attempts to “stretch the process” of unification in time, as he said in January 1990, testified to the fact that “Gorbachev rushed from one extreme to the other⁷¹”.

It can be considered that Helmut Kohl was lucky that “happiness fell from the sky” as the journalist Oskar Fehrenbach put it⁷²; however, that happiness was possible because Helmut Kohl brought it closer to the Germans. The unification of Germany proved to be a difficult affair; a year later the chancellor was pelted with tomatoes in Dresden. But are there many today, who wish to live behind the Berlin Wall? Nostalgia for “socialism in the colors of the GDR” will probably outlive its former citizens. And yet, as Hagen Schulze stated, the historical search for the Germans in the 20th century came to an end⁷³. Germany no longer offers any alternative routes in the history.

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70 Plato A. von. The unification of Germany is the Struggle for Europe. Moscow, 2007, p. 22; In Germany, A. von Plato's book came out earlier and under a different name. See: Plato A. v. *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands – ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel: Bush, Kohl, Gorbatschow und die geheimen Moskauer Protokolle*. Berlin, 2002.

71 Ibid., p. 178.

72 *The collapse and rebirth of Germany. A Glance at European History of the 20th century*. Moscow, 2001, pp. 238–239.

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