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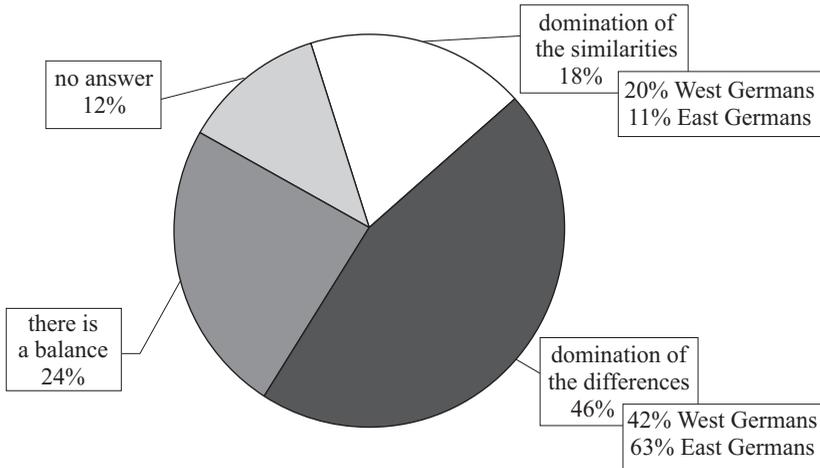
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**Do the Media Really Support  
the German Reunification?  
The Content of the German Mainstream  
Influential Press During the Period  
of the East German Breakthrough  
and 20 Years Later**

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of German reunification was commemorated on October 3, 2010, and since that day in 1990, when the Berlin Wall fell, a completely new generation of people, who were born in a reunited German state, has grown to maturity in the Federal Republic of Germany (*Die Kinder*, 2007). Meanwhile, in the 2009 commemoration of the same event, public opinion research results indicated a rebirth of an internal splitting in German society into the so-called *Ossis* (former East Germans) and the *Wessis* (former West Germans) (*Ostdeutsche-Westdeutsche*, 2009). The conviction that significant differences exist between the inhabitants of the former East Germany and the former West Germany is markedly stronger in the eastern part of the reunited country, where some 50% more of the respondents were convinced of the domination of these differences, than in the western part of the country, i.e. the former West Germany (see. fig. 1).

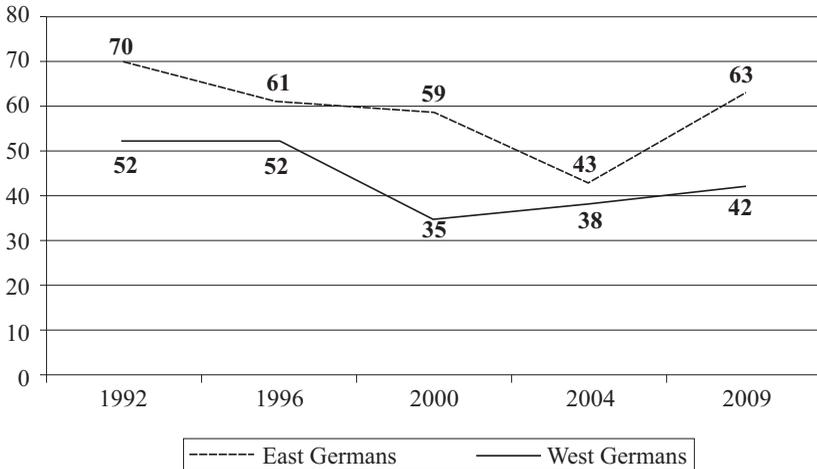
What is equally essential, is that the research results unequivocally confirm, that over the last five years preceding this anniversary (prior to 2009), this conviction has been significantly increasing among inhabitants of the former East Germany (see. fig. 2) and in 2009 is was more intense, than in the mid-1990s. (sic!). This state of affairs indicates that the reunification was a success politically, but that by 2009, this success was yet to be achieved in the social sphere. What could be the causes of such a persistent, internal-German splitting? Is there only one cause which should be sought only in the economic crisis of the last several years?

**Fig. 1. The state of German unity in public opinion research (2009)**



**Source:** Allensbacher Archiv, IfD Umfrage 10036, April 2009. The research question was: *If you were to compare East Germans with West Germans, are there more differences, or are there more similarities?*

**Fig. 2. German Unity in Public Opinion Research (1992–2009)**



**Source:** Allensbacher Archiv, IfD Umfrage 10036, April 2009. This data concerns Germans who are 16 years of age or older, the values are in percentage points. People submitted their opinion as to whether they thought that there were more differences than similarities, between East and West Germans.

In literature on the subject, one may come across opinions the German reunification in 1990 should be evaluated rather in the category of a gift from history to the German people, and not due to the merits of a specific government or the result of some kind of exceptional political strategy. The reunification achieved by the German people was not due to the merits of some kind of national movement, but rather was achieved as a part of a more extensive process, which included all of East-Central Europe (Gillissen, 1991). The dynamics of the events of 1989 surprised everyone, including the political leaders of both German states in existence at that time, obliging them to significantly accelerate their decision-making processes. The growing avalanche of refugees, fleeing from East to West Germany in the summer and autumn of 1989, as well as the unexpressed uncertainty and fear of the Bonn politicians regarding the permanence of the achievements of the *perestrojka* initiated in the Soviet Union in 1986, as a rule, did not leave any time for consideration. It was evident, that the course of events of the German “springtime of nations” could not be stopped, and at the same time, it was necessary to direct them. The pace of these events oftentimes disoriented the politicians themselves, who – similarly to the man in the street – required support regarding the proper interpretation of the situations, as well as an evaluation of those events as they were occurring (Teltschik, 1992). In this context the question arises, as to what degree the message transmitted by the media, and especially that message found in the so-called influential media, could have possibly assisted in this process?

It must be admitted that the role of the media and its influence on the course of events in Germany during this period, was essential. One may even find a term known as the *Medien-Wende* (Schneider, 1999, p. 602), which suggests, that the presence of the media substantially aided the (political) breakthrough. Many observers of the events at that time, were of the decided opinion that, the image transmitted in West German television was one of the most important catalysts of the transformations taking place. Even if the television didn't initiate these transformations, the coverage given to them by television stations, further activated East German society, and in this manner accelerated and energized anti-regime activities, and essentially expanded the dynamic of those events (Kepplinger, 1998, p. 393–394). However, was the manner in which the mass media managed information, in itself, manifested by its selection of the content and transmitted evaluations of the events occurring, really so stimulating as to influence the process of reunification, not only in the political sphere, but in the social and cultural ones as well? What could have been the true

influence of the media not only on the course of events, but on the effect of transformations taking place? If so, which were these elements of the mass media, and why could they have influenced the failure of German reunification in the social sphere? And finally, and not less important, what influence did later media transmissions have on the permanence of the internal-German division regarding the question of national reunification? Did the content of the message transmitted by the media at that time, decrease or rather increase this already-existing division? Or perhaps it was neutral in face of it? In other words, over the course of the last twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, did the media draw any conclusions from the omissions and errors committed earlier (Janßen, 1996, p. 318) and did the media do a review of the manner in which information was managed regarding this problem?

The intent of this article is above all, to establish if, and to what extent, as well as with what result, was the manner in which the presentation of the question of German reunification modified in the German media discourse in 2009. With this in mind, a presentation will be made of the results of an content analysis of various publications, which appeared in Germany to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as of those which in whose content in whatever manner, refer to the question of German reunification and/or the events of the German “spring-time” of nations, in this instance, to the Berlin Wall. These will be preceded by a short presentation of selected results of previous content analyses of the media image of East German events during the breakthrough period, that is the years 1989/90 (Szymańska, 2010, 2004a, 2000). Such a designation of research goals, as well as which parts of the media are to be analyzed, will enable a better understanding of the dependencies arising between the content of the media message, and the appearance of attitudes in German society regarding the question of German reunification and which concerns the specific position of this subject in the German media “landscape” (Szymańska, 2004b). Two prestigious West German periodicals, with opposing political worldviews, that is, two weeklies, *Die Zeit* and the *Rheinischer Merkur* (*Die Zeit* is left of center in the German media landscape, whereas the *Reinische Merkur* is to the right of center<sup>1</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> Research of transmission in 2009 was the last opportunity for this type of comparative analysis, as starting in December 2010 the *Rheinischer Merkur* weekly ceased to appear as an independent publication. Currently it appears as a supplement (under the name of *Christ und Welt*) of the Hamburg-based *Die Zeit*.

The timeframe of the research is an approximately seven-month period concerning these events just prior to reunification (September 1989–March 1990) as well as the media message of these two periodicals, which was published to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Research of the media message from 2009 has a qualitative character, hence the scope of the material to be researched was limited only to those events which took place at the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the fall of the Berlin Wall (see. fig. 3.).

**Fig. 3. Size of Samples and Research Time Frame**

	Die Zeit		Rheinischer Merkur	
	1.09.'89– 23.03.'90	5.11.2009 (No 46)	1.09.'89– 23.03.'90	5.11.2009 (No 45)
Research time frame				
Number of publications	204	9	202	14
Number of issues	30	1	30	1

Source: A. Szymańska.

### **The Media Content From September 1989–March 1990**

As the quantitative and qualitative results of the content analyses of the media message transmitted in 1989 and 1990 indicate, the media acted in a manner which was decidedly restraining, concerning the reunification in its social sphere, regardless of the relation of the media to the question of German unity (reunification) itself. The main cause of this state of affairs was above all, the exceptionally high level of *politicizing* the message conveyed, which means saturating its content with questions linked solely with politics. The politicizing of the message as a result led to a significant deformation of the image of social reality as presented (by the media), including the creation of a series of information gaps concerning essential problems, as seen from a multi-level viewpoint with respect to the future reunification.

In the realm of quantitative analysis, an indicator of the politicization of the media's message at that time is, amongst others, the section of the publication which was concerned with the research: results indicate that in both casus of the periodicals analyzed, 4/5 of all publications taking up the subject of German reunification, were published in the *Politics* section (see. fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Publication Location (09.'89–03.'90)

Publication Location	Die Zeit		Rheinischer Merkur		
	number of publications	% publications	number of publications	% publications	
Front Page*	37	= 163	47	= 159	79
Politik ( <i>political section</i> )	126		112		
Wirtschaft ( <i>economics/business</i> )	22	11	17	8	
Other sections	19	9	26	13	

\* The front page is from the politics section, however with regards to exposure, the response is right where the values were highlighted, DZ n=204, RM n=202.

Source: A. Szymańska.

Regarding qualitative analysis, the indicator of politicization was amongst others, being able to identify the party affiliation of the author of a given text, and also percentage of publications which dealing only with the political aspects of the events which were occurring at that time. Regarding the latter of these, it was confirmed that in both publications, in the period immediately preceding German reunification, more than a quarter of articles took up only the political nature of the question, omitting other aspects of these events (see. fig. 5). What appears to be most essential, is that in the debate conducted at that time in both these publications, there was a lack of reference to the question of costs (social and economic) of the prospective reunification. In addition, political question dominated in articles, which dealt with other than just political matters (Szymańska, 2010, p. 79, 86–90).

Fig. 5. Number of Publications Directly Referring to Politics (09.'89–03.'90)

Die Zeit	Rheinischer Merkur
58 publications	52 publications
28% of content	26% of content

Source: A. Szymańska, DZ n=204, RM n=202.

An analysis of the party affiliations of the authors has revealed that from among the 71 authors researched, who took up the subject of German reunification on the pages of *Die Zeit*, there were 7 politicians (the weekly printed 14 publications authored by them), five of whom were members of

the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and two from the CDU (Christian Democratic Union). In the instance of the *Rheinischer Merkur*, there were 8 politicians (who were the authors of 10 publications) from among 98 authors of publications on the subject of reunification. Four of the politicians were from the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), one was from the CSU (Christian Social Union), one from the FDP (Free Democratic Party), and two from the SPD (Social Democratic Party) (see. fig. 6). In accordance with the *hypothesis of opportune witnesses* (ger. *opportune Zeugen*) of Lutz M. Hagen (Hagen, 1992, p. 444–460), establishing the party affiliation of the authors of the articles steadfastly affirmed the supposition concerning the political line of these two publications.

**Fig. 6. Party Affiliation of the Authors of Publications (09.'89–03.'90)**

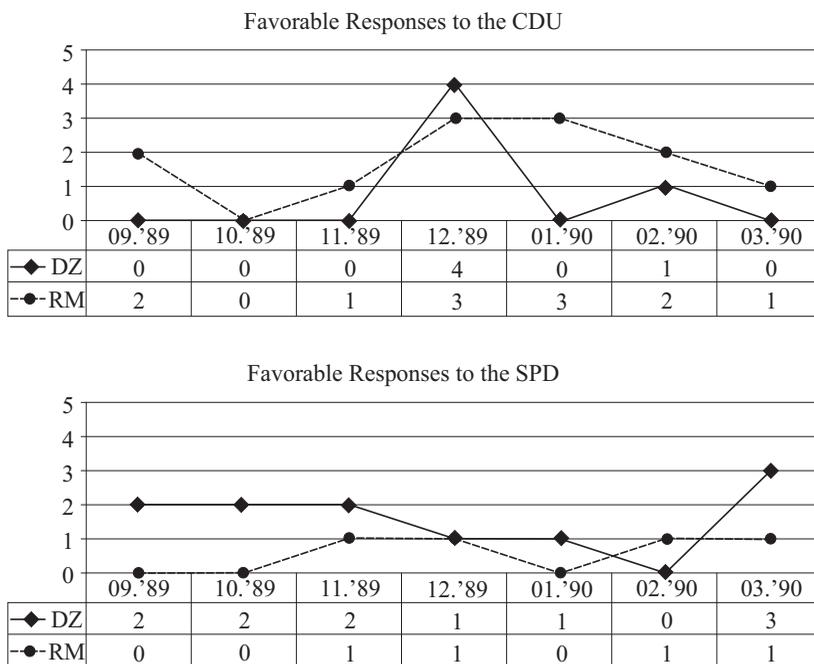
<b>Die Zeit</b>	<b>Party Affiliation</b>	<b>Rheinischer Merkur</b>
W. Brandt E. Eppler I. Matthäus-Maier H. Schmidt x 6 J. Schmude	SPD	P. Glotz M. Stolpe
M. Berger G. Bucarius x 3	CDU	K. Biedenkopf x 2 H-R. Laurien G. Stoltenberg x 2 E. Brok
-----	CSU	G. Diehl
-----	FDP	C. Schmalz-Jacobsen
<b>7. authors / 14 publications</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>8. authors / 10 publications</b>

**Source:** A. Szymańska.

The results of the qualitative analysis reveals, in addition, that the discourse of these two publications match the political discourse of the two largest political parties in West Germany at the time, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and the SPD (Social Democratic Party). The political line of the editorial staffs of these publications turned out to have crucial significance for the manner of perceiving, portraying, and interpreting the reporting of events, and also the evaluation of solutions proposed, the proof of which lies in the principal discrepancy between positions of these two weeklies regarding the very question of reunification in general, and also in relation to the politics of the two parties. The results obtained from a quality analysis of the content published by these two weeklies, indi-

cates, that during this period, the message conveyed by the *Rheinischer Merkur* was clearly more allied to the politics of the West German Christian Democrats, while articles published in the Hamburg-based *Die Zeit* was more supportive of the Social Democrats. This may be attested to by the layout of these two publications, which contained unequivocally positive evaluations of the political maneuvers of these two political parties (see. fig. 7).

**Fig. 7. Number of Favorable Responses to the CDU/SPD in Die Zeit and Rheinischer Merkur (09'89–03'90)**

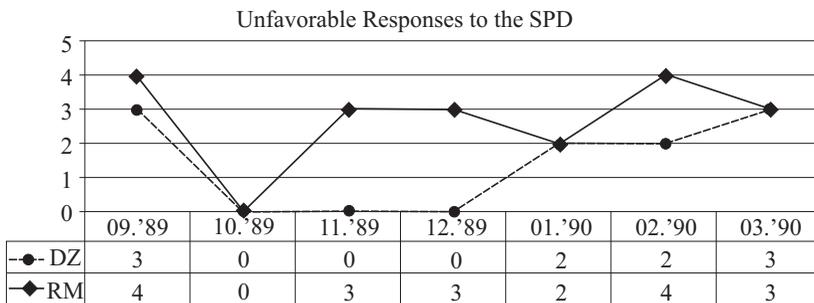
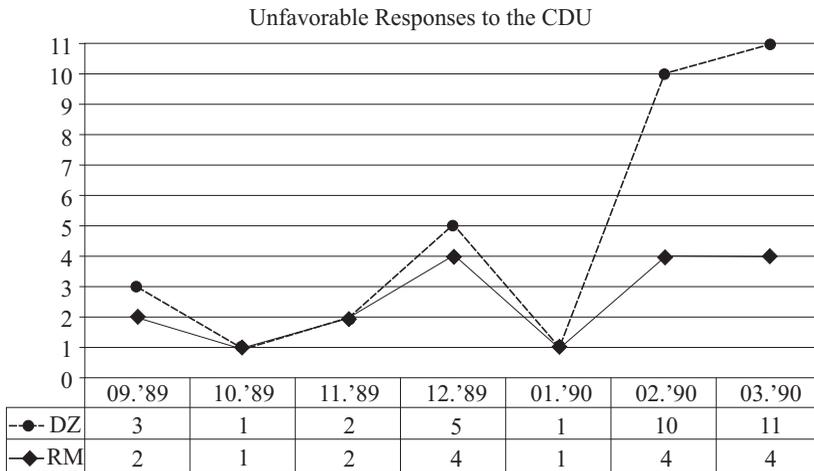


**Source:** A. Szymańska.

At the same time, and rather contrarily, but in accordance with the logic by which the media functions, the political sympathies of these two weeklies have turned out to be even more legible, when one takes into consideration the layout of the publications, which simultaneously contain negative opinions of the policies of the two aforementioned political parties. This is because the maneuvers of the Christian Democrats are decidedly more often criticized on the pages of *Die Zeit*, than in the *Rheinische*

*Merkur*, whereas the Bonn-based *Rheinischer Merkur* is more critical of the policies of the Social Democrats than the *Die Zeit* (see. fig. 8).

**Fig. 8. Number of Unfavorable Responses to the CDU/SPD in *Die Zeit* and *Rheinischer Merkur* (09.'89–03.'90)**



**Source:** A. Szymańska.

As mentioned above, during the period immediately prior to the German reunification, the discourse of these two German publications differed most of all in their relation to the reunification itself, which in light of the results of the content analysis conducted, should be perceived as the guiding light of their editorial policies. The *Die Zeit* weekly, maintained the position that in 1989, reunification was no longer necessary. Europe and Germany itself were to have been post-national, and uniting Germans,

not the two German states, was supposed to have been possible only under a common European roof, that is, within the existing structure of the European Community. The *Rheinischer Merkur* expressed another opinion at this time, whereby a reunited Germany was to have been a value in itself, a historical obligation of the German people for whom there was no alternative solution. This disparity entailed a whole series of discrepancies in the sphere of demands of solutions of the situation at that time, which were expressed on the pages of these two weeklies.

Regarding the internal situation in East Germany at that time, *Die Zeit* argued for an outright reform of the (East) German Democratic Republic, while the *Rheinischer Merkur* opined that the only real way to rectify the situation was the reunification of the two German states. There was also a difference in the manner in which these two periodicals perceived Germany's obligations in the international arena as being. In the face of events unfolding at that time, *Die Zeit* was of the opinion, that the very nature of these obligations prohibited reunification. *Die Zeit* stated that Germany, in the face of a unifying Europe, should retreat from its own national aspirations, because these aspirations are blocking the process of European integration. Meanwhile, the *Rheinischer Merkur* presented an absolutely contrary viewpoint, according to which German reunification was to significantly reinforce the whole process of European integration.

The editorial policy implemented in the period from September 1989 to March 1990 regarding the legitimacy and form of a prospective German reunification, is therefore marked by a deep asymmetry, being at least partially, the guiding light of the political policies of these two publications. In addition, their discourse contained a whole series of information gaps, which included, amongst others, the social and economic costs of German reunification. This type of asymmetry in information transmitted in the media, occurring during a situation when there was decidedly greater need for exactly this type of information, such as is required turning a period of a political breakthrough, was not indifferent for the consciousness of German society at that time. Therefore when calling attention to the discrepancies of the postulates raised by the media, a response to the disquieting question to the inhabitants of the two German states, as to whether they support the idea of reunification or not, remained unanswered. This asymmetry in the media's message, interacting with the incompatibility of the messages presented by the politicians, led, as a consequence, to a deeper, and is evident until today, more intensely felt polarization of the society of a united Germany.

There is no doubt that this negative significance lacked a perspective of any wider possibility of being transmitted by the (former) West German mainstream media, on the scale of the eventual results of reunification, especially with regards to the inhabitants of the former East Germany. All the more so, that this period immediately prior to the reunification, was often accompanied by a discrediting of the media's achievements (Kepplinger, 1998, p. 393–415).<sup>2</sup> Such a manner of presenting the news could not remain indifferent to the success of the future reunification, as the situation of the two Germanys, on both sides of the former Iron Curtain, was quite varied. Such a media message, which did not take into account the East German perspective, was one of the reasons why West German society, after a brief period of “national” euphoria, returned rather quickly to its day-to-day life, neither perceiving nor comprehending the scale of the changes and difficulties, which the inhabitants of the former East Germany had to contend with, after October 3, 1990. This disruption in communications, concerning the essence of the transformations taking place and their significance, in the social as well as in the economic, cultural and psychological spheres, fortified the existing differences between the inhabitants of the two reuniting German states, instead of helping them reunite.

What's interesting, is that after a certain period of time, representatives of the media themselves began to detect the effect of these disturbances. In a book published in 1996 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of *Die Zeit* Karl-Heinz Janssen, one of the leading publicists of this weekly, in a chapter dedicated to the events of the German (reunification) breakthrough in 1989/90 called attention to the need of a scientific study on the causes of the lack of perceiving these events by the West German media. When attempting to find, on his own accord, a clarification of these causes, he recognized the mistake of erroneously interpreting the needs and possibilities existing at that time and what's interesting, is that after a certain period of time, representatives of the media themselves began to

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<sup>2</sup> The author presents here the results of research performed concerning the manner of presenting the motives of people who fled from East Germany, as show in West German television, where more or less till December 1989, the dominating motive for escaping was the desire of freedom, whereas from January 1990, the desire to improve one's material status was show quite a bit more often. The results of this research are consistent with the results of a qualitative analysis of the content of the two weeklies researched.

detect the effect of these disruptions. The members of the editorial staff of *Die Zeit* were so closely linked to the European, i.e. post-national identity regarding the type of those events unfolding at that time, that in Janssen's opinion, there was a desire to prevent the expected dissent – in the instance of reunification – by the Christian Democrats who were in power at that time, as this would dissuade them from continuing to work on further European integration (Janßen, 1996, p. 317–318).

All of these facts therefore, seem to indicate that in 1989, representatives of the mainstream, opinion-leading elite didn't completely comprehend the essence of the East German breakthrough, which was composed of two factors intrinsically linked with each other: the former East German society aspired to **achieve both freedom and reunification at the same time**. Meanwhile, in the time frame immediately before reunification, the West German mainstream public-opinion leading media manifested a long-ranging tendency to accentuate, on the whole, solely one of the elements of this aspiration, while simultaneously omitting or understating the other. The choice of the viewpoint presented was determined by the shape of their own political convictions. The elite linked with the left were amazed by the courage and determination of East German society, in their pursuit of democracy, while propounding the necessity of supporting these aspirations. Collaterally, they manifested however, a tendency to assume the position of positioning the demands of the masses demonstrating for reunification in some sort of post-national identity of the then contemporary West Germany, being the motor propelling the process of European integration. Be that as it may, the West German public opinion-creating milieu that was closer to its adherents found on the right side of the political spectrum, recognized verily the legitimacy of the East German postulates regarding reunification, they nevertheless manifested a tendency to instrumentalize these demands: that is they recognized these ambitions as proper, because they confirmed the righteousness of their own political worldview. Regarding the East German aspirations for democracy, East German society appeared to be, in the eyes of the West German political right, incapable of attaining this goal on their own. In other words, East German society could independently put forth demands for reunification, but couldn't autonomously determine its configuration (Probst, 1998, p. 3–8).

Such a mechanism defined the information strategy accepted in the situation of the German political breakthrough and executed as a result of reunification, finds an application in the instance of both weeklies re-

searched as well. In the same manner, the adherence of the West German public opinion-creating elite to their own way of thinking, i.e. to an analysis of a situation arrived at in rather specific, and therefore not very flexible worldview-categories, became one of the principle causes of the “identity” failures of the German resolution in the period immediately prior to reunification. Has anything changed in the twenty years following these events?

### **The Media Content in November 2009**

The results of the analysis of the content of the publications of both these weeklies, which appeared to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall indicate, that the manner in which they portrayed the reunification in 2009 was still asymmetrical. An attempt was undertaken in both periodicals to summarize a balance sheet of their own accomplishments and failures. Nevertheless the manner in which this balance was accomplished, as well as the evaluation to which they arrived, were in certain places extremely varied.

There were a total of 14 publications which appeared on the pages of the *Rheinischer Merkur* on November 5, 2009, which dealt with the question of German reunification and/or the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The author acknowledged the success of reunification on the title page of the introductory article. He reminded the readers however, that in 1990 there were no other alternatives to reunification, and proposals to reform East Germany – if one takes into consideration the instability of the international situation at that time, which ultimately led to Boris Jelcyn’s putsch – nonsensically. The author stressed however, that the success achieved, was merited by all Germans, and those *Jammer-Ossi* (Lamentation-*Ossi* – East Germans) and these *Besser-Wessie* (better/more knowledgeable *Wessis* – West Germans): “East Germans fought for their freedom on the streets, while the West Germans as a result didn’t do anything more than fix the streets and renovate the buildings” (Öhler, 2009a, p. 1). The author admitted at the same time, that there is still a lot to be done, for example, the question of the relation to foreigners in the new (former East German) lands (sic!), however he was of the opinion above all, that it’s necessary to commemorate what has already been achieved, including the level of education in Saxony and Thuringia. What’s interest-

ing, is that the questions of education and attitudes towards foreigners in the new (former East German) lands, has also appeared on the pages of *Die Zeit*, however in the instance of the Hamburg-based weekly, the post-reunification successes were presented in an entirely light than in the pages of the *Rheinischer Merkur*. Moreover, they were referred to as an example of lack of understanding and stereotypical thinking of the so-called *Wessis* who eagerly forgot some of the dramatic events which occurred in the past, such as in the (West German) city of Solingen (Otto, 2009).

The authors of the next two texts published on the pages of the *Rheinischer Merkur* called attention to the fact that the reunification was possible, thanks to the straight-forward and consistent policies of Helmut Kohl, who never gave up on the idea of reunification, and whose merits should be considered as enormous (Rutz, 2009a, p. 2; Mishra, 2009, p. 2). One of these authors, who praised the wisdom and historic foresight of Chancellor Kohl, Michael Rutz, also had an article in the special supplement to the *Rheinischer Merkur* (Rutz, 2009b, p. 7). At the same time, in addition to these three publications, which were exceptionally warm in their description of the services of Chancellor Kohl on the pages of the *Rheinischer Merkur* in 2009, we may find an article by an author who was not a member of the editorial staff of this periodical, which was an unusually penetrating analysis of one of Willy Brandt's speeches, where he uttered the words, the paraphrase of which became the symbol of German reunification. The author of this article, Georg Schneider, a historian and lecturer at the University of Bonn, stressed Willy Brandt's significant participation in the events surrounding reunification, and how Brandt (and quite a bit better than Kohl) deftly handled himself in this situation of the East German breakthrough (Schneider, 2009, p. 7).

There was also an interview with Andreas Rodder a young historian from Mainz, on the pages of the *Rheinischer Merkur*, dedicated to the, already historic press conference, during which Günter Schabowski announced the opening of the East German border (Kuhlmann, 2009, p. 8). In Rödder's opinion, this course of events emphatically attested to the incapability of the authorities of the East German government at that time, to make a cogent evaluation of the situation, and this inability ultimately led to their losing contact with reality. The author of the next publication, Lutz Rathenow, a writer from the former East Germany, when recalling these events stressed that, he was convinced at that time, that the communiqué issued during this conference concerning the opening of the border,

was a provocation, and was intended to lead to an armed confrontation (Rathenow, 2009, p. 8). When evaluating these events with a 2009 perspective, Rathenow also opined, that the reforms postulated at that time by some circles, for a reform of East Germany, were not a good solution.

An noteworthy concept, from the viewpoint of this article's subject, was given by Andreas Öhler in his text, which made an attempt to summarize German accomplishments achieved in the 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Öhler, 2009b, p. 9). The author speculated as to why the reunification became the source of a deep dissatisfaction on the part of some intellectuals, especially of those in the former East Germany. He came to the conclusion that this occurred because German reunification deprived them of the privileged position, which they enjoyed in East Germany as they were an elite group in this country. Öhler was also of the opinion, that the dissatisfaction of the East German intellectuals could also have resulted from the fact that during the Autumn of 1989, as the number of participants in demonstrations at that time grew, the initial ideological character of these demonstrations took on a decidedly materialistic-livelihood (sic!) undertone. At the end of his considerations, Andreas Öhler also referred to a quote from Wolf Biermann, an East German dissident, who said that he wouldn't call neither the reunification itself, nor the form in which it took place, a solution which would completely satisfy him, nevertheless, he considered it to be better than anything which existed before: "even this vulgar *Anschluß* with West Germany is better than anything which existed before. Naturally, I'm not referring to it [reunification]. But then again the history of the world doesn't have an obligation to make an insignificant Biermann happy". Moreover, in 2009 Biermann considered that the "*thriving landscape*" (ger. *blühende Landschaften*), to which Chancellor Kohl referred in one of his speeches, are today, an all too humble a description of that which happened: "thriving landscape? – I consider that designation to be quite an understatement" (Öhler, 2009b, p. 9).

There was also a lengthy opinion, which appeared on the pages of the *Rheinischer Merkur* weekly, concerning Egon Krenz, the last secretary general of the East German Social Democratic Party, who – in spite of the fact that he was sentenced in court for the death of four East German citizens, who were shot when attempting to cross the border – continued to deny his involvement in any criminal activities of the East German regime (Wallendar, 2009, p. 20). The destructive character of the East German regime was also portrayed by the *Rheinischer Merkur* in publications de-

scribing a series of suicides amongst personnel of the East German military and police, which occurred in the Autumn of 1989 (Baum, 2009, p. 10). Other text were concerned with research concerning the significance of various Christian denominations during the East German breakthrough period (Hummel, 2009, p. 24).

It's worth mentioning two reports at the end, which were in the anniversary issue of the *Rheinischer Merkur*. The first of them told the story of Mödlareuth, a village located near the former East-West German frontier, (on the border of Bavaria and Thuringia), where 20 years after reunification, the former border still exists in the consciousness and behavior of the local population (Weinhart, 2009, p. 27). The second report was similar and recounted the history of the former border, this time on the Elbe River, where the former border is slowly disappearing, but its presence is still strongly felt (Thiede, 2009, p. 32). Both authors however, refrained from indicating the causes of these various states of affair, limiting themselves only to a description of the current situation.

In No. 46 of the Hamburg-based weekly *Die Zeit*, dated November 5, 1989, there are 9, some rather extensive, publications dealing with German reunification and/or the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. *Titlestory* of a supplement ZEITMAGAZIN, was also dedicated to this topic. The results of an analysis of the contents of the weekly *Die Zeit* indicate, that the editorial staff of the Hamburg-based periodical evaluated the reunification in a decidedly more critical manner, than the authors of the Bonn-based *Rheinischer Merkur*. The authors of the publications in the anniversary issue of the weekly *Die Zeit*, decidedly more often referred to the intense polarization of the society of the newly united Germany, delineating what its probable cause was, and considering its presence to be an indication of an identity-failure in the process of German reunification.

*Die Zeit's* position was clearly made known on the front page of the reunification anniversary edition under a very eloquent title *20 Years After the Breakthrough. What Do You Know About Our Life?* (ger. *20 Jahre nach der Wende. Was wisst Ihr schon von unserem Leben?*) where the editorial staff of the weekly stressed that "the majority of people in the West until today, have no idea to what degree the fall of the Berlin Wall turned people's lives upside down in East Germany" (*20 Jahre*, 2009, p. 1). The exposition of this phrase was augmented by a series of photographs, portraying famous personalities of the public life of the united Germany (including of Chancellor Angela Merkel), dating back to the former East Germany in 1989/90, as well as contemporary figures. There was also

a signature to a photograph on the cover of *Titlestory* in ZEITMAGAZIN which was unequivocal in its eloquence: “actress Corinna Harfouch and her son Robert Gwisdek have a lot to say, while many East Germans and West Germans still don’t listen” (*Unsere*, 2009).

Stephan Lebert, the author of a multi-page, lavishly illustrated article presaged in this manner (a total of 12 pages + the cover of the magazine) attempted to show to readers, as much as possible, a rich, multidimensional, and very diverse picture of day-to-day life in East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The author at the same time also affirmed, the phenomenon of reunification is such, that twenty years later “people in the old lands of the former West Germany still don’t have any idea, what the loss of their [former] life meant for the East Germans” (Lebert, 2009, p. 19). The author was also concerned that the inhabitants of the new lands are obliged to quietly forget their youth, because in the official public discourse in the reunited Germany is dominated by the West German point of view, which considers the East German view as being null and void. In his view an excellent example of the workings of the mechanism of its elimination was the wide-ranging debate which was held in all the most important branches of the German media on the anniversary of the university student protests of 1968. The university student movement of 1968, which was certainly an exceptionally important event, however it decisively overshadowed, and outright excluded the events related to the Prague Spring of 1968 from the German public debate. One could say that the events of the Prague Spring were at least as important as the student protests, from the viewpoint of their existence and personal experience, for the inhabitants of the former East Germany (Lebert, 2009).

A similar overtone was to be found on the title page of the weekly’s issue commemorating the fall of the Berlin Wall, in the FEATURE section (ger. FEUILLETON). The author of the first of these publications, Alexander Cammann, who hails from the new (former East Germany) lands and is a representative of the younger generation of *Die Zeit*’s political writers, who in spite of the optimistic subtitle to his article: *Why Is the Fall of the Wall the Most Exalted and Happy Moment in the History of German Democracy?*, called attention to the fact that 20 years after reunification, the historical viewpoint is still different on both sides of the German-German border. In Cammann’s opinion, the essential burden which is disabling an authentic unification, that is the creation of a common German historical consciousness, and therefore a common identity, was the importance attached in the official public discourse, to the events which

took place at the time of reunification. In the author's opinion, in as much as everyone in the former West Germany in 2009 knew who Ulrike Meinhoff was, there were very few people in the old (former East German) lands who could mention the name of any of the former East German dissidents. After all, the fall of the Berlin Wall, which changed the course of history on both sides of the former border, should have also changed the scope of history, thereby enriching it with historical events which are important for all Germans, from both the former West and East Germany (Cammann, 2009, p. 44).

Erich Loest, the next political commentator from the former East Germany of *Die Zeit*, who made an attempt to make an evaluation of the accomplishments of the last twenty years, said already in his article's subtitle that German unity was not achieved (Why Was the Revolution of 1989 Not Completely Successful?). The author was disturbed by the fact that the main obstacle blocking the road to German unity, the fact that not everyone wanted reunification, during successive commemorations of the Fall of the Wall. Instead, energy is constantly expended on vacuous declarations as to who was the first, greatest, and most important dissident, and who most deserves a statue in his honor (Loest, 2009, p. 45)

And by no means not less significant opinion in this timely, anniversary debate, from the viewpoint of this article's subject, was voiced by Evelyn Finger, another young publicist of *Die Zeit*, also from the new lands. When making an evaluation of German unity she made an appeal for, instead of the universal criticism, which is obligatory in the official public discourse of the reunited Germany, which is formed with the inhabitants of former East Germany in mind, with their affectionate memories of East Germany, an attempt should be made to establish, what is the cause of this nostalgia? The author pointed out that the concept of German unity did not mean the same thing to all Germans, while the balance of social and psychological costs of the whole process was not equal as well: "the transition to a democracy was accomplished for many East Germans together with a worsening of their economic situation or at least the appearance of heretofore unknown remedies to prevent a deterioration (of their existence)" (Finger, 2009, p. 45).

A book review of the memoirs of Christian Führer, the pastor of the *Nikolaikirche* (St. Nicholas Church) in Leipzig, found in the commemorative issue of *Die Zeit*, also merits the attention. When mentioning the great events of the Autumn of 1989, the author of the review stresses that contemporary historians concur that Pope John Paul II and Mikhail Gorbachev

should be in the first rank of those who deserve acclaim, and then Vaclav Havel, Gyula Horn, and Lech Wałęsa. The author here extends recognition to people such as Christian Führer (Neumann, 2009, p. 48). Contrary to the writers of the *Rheinischer Merkur*, there is no place however, amongst those who deserve recognition, for Helmut Kohl (sic!).

The next anniversary in the evaluation of the achievements of the last twenty years appeared in a discourse of both of these weeklies, in an extensive article by Jeannete Otto, in *Die Zeit* in the *Chancen* section. The author took a look into the education system in the former East Germany, which in 2009 was associated solely with brigades of communist pioneers and other symptoms of the pathological presence of a state ideology. Meanwhile, the East German model of education was also characterized, and maybe above all, by the high level of instruction in various types of specialized schools, especially in secondary schools with a polytechnic profile, the lack of which is very much felt in the contemporary, united Germany. The replacement of the East German model of education with a Western one, which took place without any type of public debate (why wasn't an attempt made to simply de-politicize and remove the ideology from East German schools?), which was not the best solution in the author's point of view. If for no other reason, than in by so doing, an opportunity was lost to make corrections in the West German solutions, which was a pity for the education system, on both sides of the former internal-German border (Otto, 2009, p. 75).

In addition, *Die Zeit* as well as the *Rheinischer Merkur* also printed texts commentating on the phenomenon of constantly quoting, in various publications, paraphrases of the words of Willy Brandt, voiced by him on November 10, 1989 as the Berlin City Hall (Drösser, 2009, p. 38). *Die Zeit* also printed a reply by Ingo Schulze, an East German writer, who in a suggestive manner, recounted the climate and course of East German street demonstrations (Schulze, 2009, p. 44–45).

The editorial staff of *Die Zeit* when covering the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, did not forget about its youngest readers. In a supplement entitled *KINDERZEIT* an article by Wolfgang Thierse, the vice president of the Bundestag and also someone who comes from the former East Germany, was published, which in a manner that was geared to young readers, explained just what East Germany was (Thierse, 2009, p. 41).

As may be observed, in the year 2009, that is 20 years after reunification, the message transmitted by both these weeklies was still characterized by a deep asymmetry. The message of the *Rheinischer Merkur*

fundamentally differed from the message provided by the Hamburg-based periodical, *Die Zeit* with regards to subject choice, as well as the transposed evaluations of the post-reunification reality and achievements of a united Germany. The view that reunification was a resounding success dominated on the pages of the *Rheinischer Merkur* in 2009, and the person who deserved the most credit for this was Chancellor Kohl. At the same, something that was extremely crucial from the viewpoint of the goal of the research undertaken, regarding the Bonn-based weekly, was its unique 'propaganda' of the success of reunification, which was evident in this publication, but was still accompanied by a lack of broadening the discourse to include the East German point of view, and at times even denigrated that which was East German. In their publications, the writers of the *Rheinischer Merkur* portrayed the intellectual elite of the former East Germany as being deprived of realism, East German society as a whole as being deprived of idealism, and the East German Democratic Republic as an evil and demoralized state, governed by incompetent people who continuously broke the law. The choice of subject matter of this publication, as well as the message it conveyed, indicate that the editorial staff of the Bonn-based weekly evidently didn't perceive, or didn't pay attention to the internal German division of identity of *Ossis* and *Wessis* as essentially constricting the social life of a united Germany. In its 2009 anniversary issue it presented a similar lack of awareness of this question, which it displayed from the Autumn of 1989 till March 1990.

At the same time, in comparison to the research results obtained in the period immediately preceding German reunification, the message of the Hamburg-based *Die Zeit*, and as should be concluded, and the attitude of the editorial staff to German unification, underwent a significant evolution. In the anniversary issue of *Die Zeit*, which appeared just prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a debate was launched in the periodical, which featured<sup>3</sup> above all staff writers from the weekly who hailed from the former East Germany. In addition, the subject matter, as well as the content of the publication attested to the fact that the editorial staff of *Die Zeit* possessed a high level of awareness concerning the existence of deep internal social splitting in the united Germany, which in their opinion constituted an essential problem. Hence the content of specific

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<sup>3</sup> Next to each author's name, regardless if he is a member of the editorial staff or not, is a short biographical note, which contains information on his background.

publications in 2009 contained their own unique appeal for a broadening of a German, national public discourse also about the East German point of view, and listening to the opinions of the inhabitants of the new (former East German) lands, and extending the generally obligatory discourse to include events important for East Germans. Otherwise the success of such a unification, achieved at such great cost, would continue to remain deformed.

The results of the content analysis therefore indicate, that the media discourse regarding unification, which in a certain period was a reflection of the public discourse and itself shaped this discourse, 20 years after German reunification continued to be characterized by a deep asymmetry, whose appearance could not be indifferent for the consciousness of German society on both sides of the border which had previously divided it. In 2009 the division into *Ossis* and *Wessis*, was still accompanied by a deep rift in the media discourse, the best example of which, was the debate on the pages of both of these aforementioned periodicals. On the one hand, the *Rheinischer Merkur*, contained praise for the unification, calling it a great success, in which however, the East German opinion was not taken into consideration, and West German perspectives dominated. On the other hand, as occurred in *Die Zeit*, one had to deal with critical reflections, which although appreciated the historic significance of the unity acquired, nevertheless pointed out its frailty and above all presented the East German viewpoint, thereby dismissing the West German perspective. In this context, it's difficult to deny the editor-in-chief of *Stern* magazine, Thomas Osterkorn, his own rationale. Mr. Osterkorn, in a letter from the editor, opened a special edition of *Stern Extra*, to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, by stressing that "Germany will be united only when, everyone will be able to show each mutual respect and esteem" (Osterkorn, 2009, p. 3).

*Translated by Titus Ferenc*

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**Czy media rzeczywiście pomagają zjednoczeniu?  
Przekaz niemieckiej prasy opiniotwórczej  
w okresie wschodniemieckiego przelomu i 20 lat później**

**Streszczenie**

W 2010 r. obchodzono 20. rocznicę niemieckiego zjednoczenia, a od dnia, kiedy upadł mur berliński w RFN zdążyła już dorosnąć i osiągnąć pełnoletniość cała generacja ludzi, którzy przyszli na świat w zjednoczonym państwie niemieckim. Tymczasem,

w poprzedzającym ten jubileusz 2009 r., wyniki badań opinii społecznej ponownie wskazywały na odradzanie się wewnątrz niemieckiego społeczeństwa podziału na tzn. *Ossis* i *Wessis*, które w dodatku najmocniej odczuwano w tzw. nowych landach. Sytuacja ta oznaczała, że zjednoczenie z sukcesem dokonane w wymiarze politycznym, w roku 2009 nadal nie znajdowało urzeczywistnienia w wymiarze społecznym. Jakie mogły być powody takiej trwałości wewnątrzniemieckiego podziału? Czy jedynej przyczyny upatrywać należy wyłącznie w kryzysie ekonomicznym ostatnich lat? Celem artykułu jest analiza znaczenia przekazu niemieckich mediów opiniotwórczych w kontekście wspierania niemieckiej jedności. Autorka omawia wyniki własnych badań empirycznych przekazu mediów w okresie wschodniemieckiego przełomu i 20 lat później.