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## **Nation, Customs Union, Political Union**

*Collective Identity, Economy, and Politics in Germany 1771-1871 in a Non-Structualist Perspective*

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**SERIES OF OCCASIONAL PAPERS**

**Nation, Customs Union, Political Union - Collective Identity,  
Economy, and Politics in Germany 1771 - 1871  
in a non-Structuralist Perspective**

**Wolfgang Zank**

## Contents

Contents .....	3
1. Introduction .....	5
2. 'Germany' at the End of the Eighteenth Century .....	5
3. The Effects of the Napoleonic Conquest .....	8
4. The Peace Order of 1815 and the German League .....	10
5. The Prussian Bureaucracy and Polish Territories .....	11
6. The <i>Zollverein</i> and Economic Unification .....	13
7. German Nationalism and the Abortive Unification from Below .....	15
8. 'Unification' from Above .....	17
9. Conclusions and Comparisons .....	20
Notes .....	24
References .....	26



## 1. Introduction

The course of European Integration has repeatedly placed the question of the connection between cultural, political, and economic integration on the agenda. A great deal of the controversies have centred around the problem whether it is feasible to support political union by tighter economic and especially monetary union, or whether tighter political union is a precondition for the envisaged economic and monetary union. Many political practitioners and theorists follow explicitly or implicitly a kind of structuralist argumentation, according to which politics, economics, and the cultural sphere are mutually interdependent and have a tendency to form a congruent unity.

In these debates, besides much sophisticated theoretical reasoning, rather crude historical analogies sometimes seem to play a powerful role. Here the German experiences of the 19th century, especially the customs union of 1834 (*Zollverein*) can be mentioned. The sequence 'Zollverein 1834 - foundation of the united German Reich 1871' gave powerful support to the idea that successful economic integration paves the way for political union. This was a source of delight for pro-European politicians; others, e.g. adherents to partisans of unlimited French independence, used the German example of 1834 to warn against the allegedly dangerous consequences of the Rome treaties.<sup>1</sup>

Authors as diverse as the nationalist historian Heinrich v. Treitschke and the socialist theorist Friedrich Engels regarded the *Zollverein* as a prefiguration of the German Reich. John Maynard Keynes with his remark of 'Coal and Iron,' as the driving force behind German unification may perhaps be mentioned in this context as well. More recently, the German monetary integration prior to the founding of the Reich has attracted the interest of researchers analyzing the contemporary problems of monetary integration.<sup>2</sup>

It seems justified to look again upon the process leading to a unified German state in 1871, and to study the relationship between the cultural, economic, and political systems in this process.

## 2. 'Germany' at the End of the Eighteenth Century

By 1771 Central Europe was consisted of a political conglomerate called the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation'. The Empire, of medieval origin, formally

constituted an entity, but in reality, the 314 sovereign territories and 1475 knightships (*Reichsritterschaften*) were independent. Wars between them were frequent, and so were alliances with other European powers against German rivals.

The two principal powers within the Empire, Austria and Prussia, were heterogeneous constructions themselves. Austria united the German- and Czech-speaking populations in the southern and southeastern fringe of the Empire, scattered territories in southern Germany, and the Austrian Netherlands (now Belgium). Austria ruled additionally over large territories, which formally lay outside the Holy Roman Empire (mainly Hungary and parts of northern Italy). Prussia occupied the regions around Berlin, some territories in western Germany and large provinces east of the border of the Empire.

The confessional gap dividing Catholics from Protestants ran through the Empire. The majority of the inhabitants spoke German dialects, but these dialects were usually not inter-communicative. The use of German standard speech was restricted to the thin layer of higher bureaucrats, clergymen and *Bildungsbürger* (see below). Latin was still widely used in scientific and theological texts, and many aristocrats preferred French. Large sections of the population spoke non-German languages, e.g. Polish.

The economic sphere was equally divided. Historians have counted 1800 customs barriers, in Prussia alone there were 67. The export and import of certain goods were in many parts strictly forbidden.<sup>3</sup>

But there was one factor working for a closer cultural and linguistic unification: the comparatively high level of education. At the end of the eighteenth century, there were between 42 and 50 universities in the Holy Roman Empire (the exact number is a question of definition). In France, with a larger population, there were 22, and in England only 2. As to basic education, already the school statute of Weimar (*Weimarer Schulordnung*) of 1619 contains the principle of obligatory education. Württemberg introduced obligatory education in 1649, Prussia followed in 1717. Between the theory of obligatory education and social reality there was a large gap, but around 1800 perhaps 50 percent of the age groups liable to schooling attained some sort of regular teaching. In international comparison, this was a high figure.<sup>4</sup>

The position of the German states between the great powers of Austria, France, and Sweden (later Russia) was shaky. This notion of insecurity stimulated the princes to consolidate their power internally. Most successful in this respect were the Elector Dukes (later kings) of Brandenburg-Prussia. The basic means for consolidating their power internally were the mobilization of financial resources, the organizing of permanent armies, the building of administrative bureaucracies, and the strengthening of the loyalties of their subjects. In this respect the support of Protestant churches were of great value.

Especially Prussia established a comparatively efficient bureaucracy. Around 1800,

there were in Prussia about 1700 civil servants with a higher qualification and 4-5000 servants in auxiliary functions.<sup>5</sup> Despite its numerical smallness the bureaucracy became an influential political factor because its representatives had an unparalleled bulk of professional expertise, and they were united by an intense communication links.

The growing state bureaucracies meant a growing demand for qualified manpower; the same was true for the royal domains and the other sectors of the economy. Additionally, the princes had a strong political interest in having their subjects 'properly' socialized in schools. Furthermore, Luther and the reformers had placed strong emphasis on reading the Bible. Taken together, these factors can explain the growth in educational activities. These in turn significantly contributed to the spreading of Luther's German, because, besides religious instruction, it was used for other subjects (writing, choir-singing).<sup>6</sup> Gradually, this Luther-based standard speech filtered into the Catholic areas as well in spite of some resistance by the Catholic clergy.<sup>7</sup>

The universities of the Protestant areas, especially Göttingen and Halle, displayed a remarkable intellectual vitality. This was partly due to the political fragmentation: Almost every prince wanted a university (or several), and every theoretical doctrine, every intellectual mode, was represented somewhere. Thus, the political 'polyarchy' created a 'polyphony' of opinions.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the idea of religious tolerance was, at least in the Protestant parts, well implanted. Reformation had deprived religion of its status of unquestioned faith, and its more shaky base made it less prone to serve as legitimation for repressive actions. Additionally, in many of the German states religious repression would have been politically suicidal, given the heterogenous populations. In Brandenburg (later Prussia), in 1613 the ruling dynasty converted to Calvinism, whereas the majority of the population remained Lutheran. Other parts were Catholic. After the expansion of Prussia into Polish territory two fifths of the Prussian subjects were Catholics. Not surprisingly, the duke electors/kings of Brandenburg-Prussia early developed a policy of religious tolerance. This policy strengthened Prussia considerably, when waves of religious intolerance swept over the neighbouring countries. Thus, about 20.000 French Huguenots found a new home in Brandenburg after 1685.<sup>9</sup>

All in all, the picture was contradictory: Politically, Central Europe was more divided than ever, and the political divisions constituted severe obstacles for the economic development. On the other hand, the Protestant regions were characterized by a high educational standard, and culturally and linguistically strong unifying tendencies were visible. The agents of this cultural unification were first and foremost the *Bildungsbürger*, people with further education, such as teachers, priests, physicians, booksellers and editors, or state officials. They spoke and wrote standard language and communicated across the political borders. But the commercial bourgeoisie was still quite small. Unlike



England, there was no economically powerful class to support the growing ideas of bourgeois emancipation. And as a consequence of the numerous political and economic divisions, the educational and commercial bourgeoisie was scattered all over the Empire (not concentrated as was the case with Paris in France), and therefore politically weaker than their colleagues in France.

Especially the *Bildungsbürger* developed a growing feeling of belonging to a common ethnic group. In these circles regrets could be heard about the political situation.<sup>10</sup> Gradually, sentiments of this kind got condensed into nationalism. Johann Gottlieb Herder developed a philosophy according to which nations, united by language, were the subject of history; nations were not aggregates of individuals, but organisms, with a soul of their own, and with a definite life span.<sup>11</sup>

It should perhaps be emphasized that the word 'Germany' was imprecisely defined at that time: It could mean the territory of the empire, or, more frequently, the territories inhabited by German-speaking people. No one thought of the construction which in 1871 became the 'unified' German *Reich*.

The group participating in the national discourse was relatively small, in 1770 perhaps some 20.000.<sup>12</sup> The political significance of this discourse was next to zero. For the ruling groups 'Germany' was a sentimental category, but not a political guideline. For them German territories were ground for conquests or barter objects, in the same way as some parts of Poland or Turkey. The policy of Prussia can illustrate this: In 1740, Prussia conquered the rich province of Silesia (mostly inhabited by Germans). In connection with the three partition of Poland (1772-1795) she got a considerable share of Polish territory. In 1795 Prussia signed the treaty of Basel with revolutionary France. Secretly she accepted that France could annex the whole German territory on the left bank of the Rhine, in exchange for French support for compensations elsewhere, which she got in 1803.

### 3. The Effects of the Napoleonic Conquest

In 1797 France annexed Belgium and the whole territory to the left of the Rhine. France accepted in turn that the worldly German princes could get compensations, mostly at the expense of ecclesiastical territory within the Empire. This was realized with the so-called *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* in 1803. Practically all the ecclesiastical territories with 3.2 million inhabitants (one seventh of the population) were handed over to different states. The same happened to most of the Free Cities and, in 1805, with the so-called Empire knights (*Reichsritter*), roughly 1500 dwarf states with 350000 inhabitants. In 1807



Napoleon extended the French border to the Baltic Sea.

The German medium-sized states like Bavaria, Württemberg or Baden gained considerably in territory, and some of their rulers could from now on call themselves 'king'. In these medium-sized states Napoleon had very reliable allies. In 1806 he united them in the Rhine League and the Holy Roman Empire got formally dissolved.

After the dissolution of the Empire a reform wave with longlasting effects swept through most of the German states. In the medium-sized states like Bavaria the main impulse stemmed from the necessity to unite the newly acquired territories with the old ones. Often after French model, the judicial system and the state apparatus were considerably modernized. In Prussia, after the military disaster of 1806/07, high-ranking civil servants and officers initiated an ambitious reform wave: Serfdom was abolished, the peasants were legally freed and the principle of freedom of commerce introduced. The aim was to strengthen the country by liberal economic reforms, to 'beat Napoleon with the help of Adam Smith'. The towns were granted self-government, the army was reformed and compulsory military service introduced, the educational system was modernized and expanded.<sup>13</sup>

The establishment of French supremacy was registered with apathy by the German population at large. But within a few years the hardships of the French occupation created a bitter hatred. Nationalism (often not to be distinguished from xenophobia) became a political factor, as shown e.g. by the volunteer formations in 1813.

The nationalist historiography of later decades depicted the wars 1813-1815 as a gigantic patriotic outburst. But the argument has to be strongly justified: Still in 1812 all the German states supported Napoleon's invasion of Russia. When in March 1813 Prussia declared war on France, the result was a *German civil war*: The Rhine League states continued to fight on the French side. Bavaria joined Napoleon's opponents in September 1813. Most of the other Rhine League states did the same some months later - after Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig. Saxony remained loyal even then because the French emperor had linked Saxony's King Friedrich August in personal union to the Grand Duke of Warsaw.

During the battle of Leipzig, Saxon army units defected to the anti-Napoleon coalition. This was perhaps a sign of German patriotism. But when in 1815 the Saxon troops heard that the northern part of Saxony was to be ceded to Prussia according to the decisions of the Vienna congress, they broke out in revolt. Many shouted 'Vivat Napoleon' or other pro-French slogans, Prussian insignia were torn down, and some units discharged their officers. As a reprisal, three Saxon grenadier battalions were disarmed, their flags burned, and seven leading rioters shot.<sup>14</sup> The loyalty to Saxony was surely stronger than the one to a (non-existing) 'Germany'.

The existence of 25000 volunteers in Prussia indicates a sense of patriotism (presumably more towards Prussia than towards 'Germany'). But among armies mounting to hundreds of thousands of people, they were a small factor. Their recruitment was socially significantly biased: Pupils, students, highly educated people and town craftsmen were strongly overrepresented, but people from the countryside, at that time still three quarters of the population, were hardly seen.<sup>15</sup> Many Prussian men had to be threatened by sanctions before they unenthusiastically fulfilled their compulsory military service, and there was considerable avoidance.<sup>16</sup>

Basically, the years 1803-15 saw a complex series of wars and political manoeuvres. The main actors on the German side were the ruling groups of the different states, who followed state-egotistic lines. The people at large were mostly bystanders. Nationalist sentiment was a political factor, but an inferior one, modifying only slightly the course of events.

#### **4. The Peace Order of 1815 and the German League**

At the congress of Vienna the main structure of the peace order after Napoleon was decided upon. Matters were solved according to the principle of the balance of power, not according to national or cultural principles. Some severe conflicts had to be solved, e.g. when in the autumn of 1814 the Russian and the Prussian governments jointly demanded that Poland should be incorporated into the Russian Empire, and Saxony into Prussia. The other European powers were afraid of Russian dominance and rejected the project. On 3rd January 1815, Great Britain, France, and Austria signed a secret military defence alliance, which the Netherlands, Bavaria, Hanover and other states shortly afterwards joined. If it would have come to war, the front would have run straight across Germany. The conflict was solved by the following compromise: The larger part of Poland ('Congress Poland') was given to Russia. Prussia acquired the northern half of Saxony and another part of Poland ('Grand Duchy Posen').<sup>17</sup>

Ideas entertained by some German patriots of a transfer of Alsace-Lorraine from France to the German League were no serious issue in Vienna - no one was interested in weakening France so much. Out of similar reasons Denmark could keep her position in Northern Germany. On the other hand, large territories in western Germany were granted to Prussia as a counterweight to France. Prussia came to consist of two separated halves.

As to the future of Germany, the following considerations were essential: Some form of common organization was necessary because an unconnected conglomerate of small states would endanger the stability of the whole European balance system. But a close

unification of the German-speaking territories would, *inter alia*, presuppose a division of the multinational Austrian Empire and the de facto end for several dozen of ruling dynasties. This was not seriously discussed in Vienna. A more realistic alternative was the partition of Germany, whereby the north would come under Prussian, the south under Austrian domination. Hereby Prussia would gain much more than Austria because the Prussian domination over the northern mini-states would be much stronger than the Austrian one over medium-sized states like Bavaria. Thus, Austria rejected the idea.

The solution was a loose federation with some few, weak common institutions, the German League (*Deutscher Bund*), to be jointly dominated by Austria and Prussia; Austria was the first-rank power, for instance holding the presidency. It had to be a loose federation because a stable Austrian-Prussian block would create a power centre which again would endanger European balance.

The borders of the German League were almost identical to those of the old Empire. The major exception was Belgium, which in 1815 was assigned to the Netherlands. The borders were nowhere corrected to make them fit better with cultural cleavages. And, as in the old Empire, both Prussia and Austria controlled large areas on the other side of the borders.<sup>18</sup>

The European governments agreed upon mutual support against revolutionary dangers. This implied military intervention. Additionally, Christianity was proclaimed as a binding element and legitimating base for the whole system ('The Holy Alliance'). It was presumably this ideological point which introduced a dangerous, and, at the end, crippling flaw into the system: The Ottoman Empire was not included. This omission created a zone of instability in the East, into which Russia later intruded, thereby threatening the British and French position in the Eastern Mediterranean. This led to the Crimean War and the collapse of the whole European security system.

## 5. The Prussian Bureaucracy and Polish Territories

Cultural borders did not have a great significance in the eyes of the decision makers, but they were not completely irrelevant. To mention one example, the British liberal public opinion demanded the reconstruction of Poland, and Lord Castlereagh introduced the problem on the agenda of the Vienna negotiations. The Russian-Prussian and Russian-Austrian treaties, which were incorporated into the Vienna documents, contained an article, according to which the Poles should be granted special institutions. In fact, until 1831, Congress Poland kept a considerable degree of autonomy.<sup>19</sup>

As to Prussian policies towards Poland, a clear evolution is to be noticed. In the

eighteenth century, Prussia collected all kinds of territories, no matter whether they were German or Polish. The Prussian bureaucratic apparatus got simply extended to the new regions. The incorporation of Silesia went quite smoothly. The same, although to a lesser extent, was true of the regions between Pomerania and Eastern Prussia, which Prussia gained in 1772. One reason was the comparative efficiency of the Prussian bureaucracy. The populations experienced a more efficient and less arbitrary administration than before. Additionally, large sections of the population were German, especially in the towns.

But the regions gained in 1793 and 1795 belonged to the core of Poland. Underrating the cultural factor, the Prussian government again mechanically extended its institutions into the new parts, neglecting traditional Polish structures. Furthermore, psychological blunders were made, for instance police regulations were published only in German. Dissatisfaction among the Poles became widespread. When in 1806 French troops entered these provinces, the Prussian bureaucrats were forcefully thrown out. Newly organized Polish troops supported Napoleon.

The Prussian bureaucrats learned that Polish territories should be handled with care. When in 1815 Prussia again gained a large section of Poland (Grand Duchy Posen), King Frederick William III promised a special constitution, respect for the religion, equal use of the Polish language in official affairs and equal access for Poles to posts in the administration. Indeed, in the first years the Prussian policy was comparatively liberal.

During the Polish uprising in 1830/1831 against Russia, the Prussian provinces remained calm, but large sections of the Polish nobility and the clergy had supported the uprising in Congress Poland. This led to a systematic shift in Prussian policies: germanization, albeit to be practised slowly and with care, became the guide line of Prussian policies.

In 1831, Tsar Nicholas I proposed to Prussia a division of Congress Poland and offered territories. Berlin said no.<sup>20</sup> This was one of the rare examples when a state said no to the possibility of expansion. It was a matter of political calculation. More Polish territory would have absorbed much energy and thereby in the end weakened Prussia instead of strengthening it.

Here is the point in time when cultural borders enter into the calculations of political decision makers: Experience showed that regions which were culturally similar, were easier to incorporate. In principle, it was possible to integrate culturally different regions successfully. But it took much longer time, much more energy, and it could cause long-lasting problems. So, if a state could choose the direction of expansion, it was, within the expansionistic logic, more appropriate to expand into culturally similar regions. This is the key to understand Prussian politics some decades later.



## 6. The *Zollverein* and Economic Unification

In 1818, as part of the reform wave which started in 1807, Prussia introduced a new customs system (slightly to be modified in 1821). Thereby all internal customs barriers were abolished and moderate tariffs introduced at the Prussian borders. Import or export restrictions were, with some exceptions, abolished, and the import of raw material became practically free.<sup>21</sup> Protectionists regarded the new tariffs as being too low, and patriots like the economist Friedrich List criticized Prussia to erecting new barriers within Germany. But the leaders of the Prussian bureaucracy simply followed their own interests, and in this perspective the new system was logical: it simplified administration, it eased commerce within Prussia, and it fostered the integration between old and new Prussian territories. Tariffs were a main source of income for the Prussian state, and therefore they had to be at medium level: protectionist levels would strangle cross-border trade and thereby reduce income from tariffs to zero; tariff incomes would be zero as well in case of free trade.

Prussia had an interest to enlarge its system in order to build a land bridge between its geographically separated halves. The relative magnitude of the Prussian market and the importance of Prussian territory for trade routes gave Prussia a strong position at negotiations with neighbouring states. And most decisive in the specific situation: A joint tariff system could increase state income considerably and cut administration expenses drastically, because the borders to be guarded got enormously reduced.

After a process of complex negotiations, on the 1st January 1834, the *Zollverein* treaties came into force. Thereby Prussia and most of the German states formed a joint customs union, in which internal tariffs were abolished and a common tariff established at the external border. Austria did not take part; the Austrian leaders regarded the economy of their empire as being too inhomogeneous and weak to be opened to competition from the outside. Many historians have later regarded the formation of the *Zollverein* under Prussian leadership as the first step towards the *kleindeutsche* solution of the German question, i.e. unification without Austria. It should perhaps be emphasized that the founders of the *Zollverein* didn't act in order to foster German unification. As William Oscar Henderson put it: 'The States concerned fought for their own narrow interests and many joined the *Zollverein* only when economic depression and lack of public revenue made further resistance to Prussia impossible'.<sup>22</sup>

As a device to increase public revenue the *Zollverein* was plainly a success. But as a means to faster economic progress in general or to German unity, its importance has often been exaggerated. Following the terminology introduced by Jacob Viner, the

immediate effects of a customs union can be classified as 'trade creation' and 'trade diversion': the abolishing of the tariffs inside the union creates trade and thus has a positive effect on specialization and economic growth. On the other hand, tariffs at the border impede trade. The net effect of a customs union is the combined result of those positive and negative effects. In general, studies show that the growth effect of a customs union (including the EEC) is very limited. As to the *Zollverein*, the total income growth effect did not exceed one percent.<sup>23</sup>

The *Zollverein* had perhaps a positive effect on the building of the German railways, and thereby upon growth and economic integration, but the connection between railways and *Zollverein* is difficult to assess. Unless more sophisticated studies are available, it is most reasonable to estimate the stimulus to railway building as being of the same magnitude as the stimulus to trade in general because railway building is mostly a function of trade expectations.

The practical problems in connection with collecting and redistributing the tariff revenue led to treaties establishing fixed exchange rates for the currencies. This led to two separate monetary regions, the Taler in the North and the Gulden in Southern Germany. At the end the Taler prevailed. This process of monetary unification surely had positive effects on intra-German trade. The *Zollverein* had eased it, but it is impossible to assess how much, and its impact in the end on economic growth in general.<sup>24</sup> In general, the economic effects of the *Zollverein* seem to have been rather modest.

The negotiations between the *Zollverein* member states trained the bureaucracies involved in jointly handling complex matters. This, together with a tighter economic integration, made the administration of the Reich after 1871 much easier. But neither economy nor common bureaucratic experience led to the Reich.

In 1834, large areas of the later German Reich stayed outside the *Zollverein*. Hanover, Oldenburg, and Schaumburg-Lippe joined in 1853. The town states Hamburg and Bremen, ruled by resolute free-traders, did not join until 1888 i.e. after the formation of the unified Reich in 1871 (of which Hamburg and Bremen were members right from the start). Seen in this perspective, the process of German integration was realized at different speeds.

To maintain her dominant position within the *Zollverein*, Prussia successfully torpedoed all initiatives to include Austria. A brilliant move in this respect was the free-trade treaty with France in 1862 (and thereby with Great Britain). The Austrian economy could not compete successfully on a free trade basis (at least, the Austrian leaders thought so), therefore Austria had to give up her last attempt for membership. Prussia thereby deliberately maintained high economic barriers between e.g. the industrial regions in Saxony and Austrian Bohemia. Politically this made sense, but it was detrimental to

economic growth. The forces of production, to use a Marxian term, could not press any union between these regions about. And, as shown below, in most of the major political issues the medium-sized states, albeit economically closely cooperating with Prussia, supported Austria.

## **7. German Nationalism and the Abortive Unification from Below**

The decisions of the congress of Vienna were a severe disappointment to German patriots. Nationalist enthusiasm turned into political opposition. Unification and constitutional rights were the main aims. In the beginning, the authorities had little problems in repressing the movement, but for several reasons nationalist and democratic sentiment gained momentum: A high demographic pressure and severe economic conditions impoverished large sections of the population, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the authorities and weakening old ideological concepts; categories like 'nation' could create new collective identities and fulfil demands for transcendency.

German intellectuals were quite busy creating new symbols and evoked especially history, the alleged German greatness in medieval times, as a source of common identity. Additionally, the number of people being able to read grew from some 15 percent in 1770 to 40 percent in 1830; thanks to the educational efforts of the state bureaucracies the number of potential readers of subversive literature grew considerably.<sup>25</sup> And last but not least, the demand of state bureaucracies for money kept growing. This meant growing taxation, and therefore a growing resistance among the population, if taxation continued to be imposed without the people (or at least a part of it) having political representation. For a long time princes and bureaucrats tried to avoid political control by the rudimentary representative institutions (in e.g. Prussia provincial estate representative assemblies) by keeping expenses as low as possible. But in the 1840s, credit-financed activities to stabilize the food and employment situation were unavoidable.<sup>26</sup> Credits were only available if a tighter parliamentary control over state finances would be accepted. Thus the demand for constitutional reforms could not be ignored for ever.

In March 1848, social desperation and deep-rooted political discontent exploded in almost all German capitals and residences. After violent riots and barricade fighting the princes entrusted liberal politicians to form the governments; many, including the king of Prussia, promised democratic changes and the incorporation of their states into a German nation state. Citizens formed militia units; the colours of democratic unity, black-red-golden, were seen everywhere. Parliamentary deputies from southern Germany organized elections on the basis of universal and equal franchise for men, and, on 18th May 1848



in Frankfurt the *Nationalversammlung* started its deliberations. The state governments and princes accepted its authority, and, on 28th June 1848 a provisional German government was installed; the works for a common German constitution began.

For a short while it looked as if the Germans could create a united democratic nation from below, without guillotines or military dictatorship. This did not happen for a variety of reasons: The democratic camp was very heterogeneous, ranging from moderate constitutionalists to radical republicans. The spectre of social revolution emerged in numerous riots, and better-off citizens began again to support the traditional authorities. Additionally, the *Nationalversammlung* lost a lot of prestige at an early stage when it failed to organize massive help for Schleswig-Holstein, being in rebellion against the Danish Crown. The *Nationalversammlung* had no troops and asked Prussia to support the Schleswig-Holstein rebellion. The Prussian army did so, a move which in turn induced Russia and Great Britain to intervene diplomatically. The intervention mechanism established in 1815 still worked and the European powers regarded German unity as detrimental to their interests. In order not to risk a war with the great powers, Prussia retreated and signed the Malmö armistice. The *Nationalversammlung* could do nothing but endorse it.

A unification of Germany (understood as the German League or as a linguistic entity) would have meant the dissolution of the Austrian empire. The Austrian crown and bureaucracy would have been the losers of such a development. In October 1848 they ordered loyal troops (mostly Croats) to storm democratic Vienna; with the assistance of Russian troops they could crush the Hungarian rebellion, and with French help the uprising in Italy. The alliance between the great state bureaucracies proved to be much stronger than the widespread national and democratic sentiment.

Additionally, the national democrats in Frankfurt were not too consistent in their principles: On 28th July 1848 they voted for all Austrian territories within the borders of the German League to be incorporated into the new German state - including e.g. the Czech areas. Limburg, a Dutch province, was also on the list, as well as the German-speaking parts of Posen.<sup>27</sup> Later, out of political expediency, they restricted the claims to the territories of the German League. The *Nationalversammlung* thereby accepted the borders drawn in Vienna in 1815 as the borders of 'Germany', although these borders diverged considerably from the borders of the area inhabited by German-speaking people.

The victory of the Austrian counter-revolution made all these deliberations obsolete. As a meagre substitute for the *grossdeutsche* project, the National Assembly opted for a *kleindeutsche* solution: On 3rd April 1849 a delegation offered the crown of German Kaiser to the Prussian King Frederick William IV, to be ruler over a torso-Germany without the Austrian territories. The king said no, not wanting to accept a crown from

below.

In April 1849, 28 German states collectively accepted the constitution endorsed by the *Nationalversammlung*. But the major states were not among them. A second movement from below (*Reichsverfassungskampagne*) tried to force them to accept it. The movement gained impressive strength and was victorious in some places (Saxony, Pfalz, Baden). The regular army of Baden, volunteers and sections of the Prussian Reserve Guard (*Landwehr*) supported it, but it could not prevail against the loyal (mostly Prussian) troops. On 23rd July 1849 the fortress Rastatt had to surrender.<sup>28</sup>

## 8. 'Unification' From Above

The revolution was repressed, but it had left traces. Practically all German states (not yet Austria) were constitutional states from now on. The case of Prussia is instructive: on 8th November 1848 the Prussian king used troops to dissolve the Prussian National Assembly. But then he introduced a constitution from above incorporating essential elements of the draft of the dissolved National Assembly. Prussia got a parliament with two chambers, one of them (*Abgeordnetenhaus*) to be elected on the base of universal, but unequal franchise, differentiated according to the tax basis (*Dreiklassen-wahlrecht*). The parliament had the right of budget control. The Prussian political system was still authoritarian, and government, bureaucracy, and army were not under parliamentary control, but the system was regulated by constitution and laws. Secondly, in the course of the revolution the remaining feudal burdens of the peasants were abolished, a move which had a strong pacifying effect on the country-side. Thus, Prussian crown and bureaucracy reacted flexibly to the threat from below, never relying on repression only.

While Prussian troops still were involved in crushing the *Reichsverfassungskampagne* Prussia tried to engineer a *kleindeutsche* unification of Germany from above under her leadership. Negotiations with other states ended in a draft common constitution. 26 German states accepted the programme. The larger ones - Bavaria, Hanover, Saxony, Württemberg - did not and formed instead an alliance on their own (*Vierkönigsbündnis*). Another line of division appeared: Small states joined Prussia - large states, having a stronger feeling of sovereignty, stood aloof. Also this front line did not coincide with membership of the *Zollverein*.

In autumn 1850, the Prussian project was stopped by a massive diplomatic intervention by Russia and Austria; in the treaty of Olmütz (29th November 1850) Prussia had to retreat. Once again (for the last time) the mechanism of foreign intervention worked to prevent a united Germany.

But in 1853 the Crimean War broke out, the international system collapsed, and Prussian diplomacy got an enormous chance to improve relationships with Russia. In 1863, the new axis Berlin - St. Petersburg got strengthened by Prussian collaboration to crush another Polish uprising.

The Franco-Sardinian-Austrian War of 1859 worked as catalyst for a revival for nationalist agitation. Large sections of the public opinion demanded active participation on the Austrian side, and the Austrian government tried to play the patriotic card.<sup>29</sup> But Berlin followed a cool line of neutrality. Public pressure could not induce Berlin to sacrifice own interests for alleged German causes. Austria was beaten, the international intervention mechanism, which still in 1848/1849 rescued her position, did not exist any more. France, which in 1848/49 had been Austria's ally in repressing the Italian uprisings, now followed an expansionist course.

In 1864 the parliament in Copenhagen formally incorporated Schleswig into the Danish monarchy. This was a breach of the London protocol from 1852 and therefore gave Prussia (and Austria) the pretext to conquer Schleswig-Holstein. In contrast to 1848-1850 Denmark stood alone. Prussia and Austria treated the provinces as annexed territories, not as liberated German lands. This caused outrage and bitterness among patriots in Schleswig-Holstein. But the majority of the population accepted the Prussian conquest tacitly.

The governments in Berlin and Vienna had by now changed their way of treating public opinion: Newspapers were not censored or forbidden any more, instead the journalists were fed with manipulated information, or bribed. But this does not mean that Berlin or Vienna let themselves be impressed by public opinion when vital interests were at stake. This became apparent during the Prussian *Verfassungskonflikt*: The military establishment embarked in 1860 on an ambitious reform programme to modernize and enlarge the army and to strengthen its political reliability.<sup>30</sup> But the liberal majority of the Prussian parliament said no. King William I made Count Otto v. Bismarck, known as die-hard defender of authoritarian principles, prime minister to execute the programme against parliamentary resistance. Bismarck became for a while the most-hated man in Germany. His reputation became even worse in 1866, when he escalated up to the point of war the conflict with Austria about the future of the German League.<sup>31</sup> All major German states, from Bavaria over Hanover to Saxony, although being members of the *Zollverein* together with Prussia, supported Austria - a fact seemingly overlooked by those authors who saw the *Zollverein* as the binding element prefiguring united Germany.

Prussia's military victory reflected the general advanced position she had in building up modern social structures. She was much more industrialized than Austria; due to the efficient educational systems, the soldiers were, at least against outer enemies, brave and

loyal, even the recruits from Polish-speaking areas. Her railway net was dense, allowing for the first precisely planned and rapidly executed railway mobilization in military history.

Austria was forced to leave Germany (now to be understood as German League minus Austria) and had to give Venice to Italy, but was otherwise left intact. Prussia annexed Schleswig-Holstein and four states (Hanover, Nassau, Hesse-Cassel, the town of Frankfurt), thereby uniting the geographically separated halves. The territories north of river Main were united into a federation (Northern German League) under Prussian dominance. Bismarck accepted a national parliament (*Reichstag*) elected on the basis of universal and equal franchise, and with the right of budget control, thereby supplying the otherwise authoritarian political structure with some democratic legitimacy. The princes were represented in the second chamber, the *Bundesrat*, which thus represented both the federal and the authoritarian principle.

Bismarck imposed moderate peace terms on Austria and stopped at the Main because he wanted to end the war before any other power (especially France) could intervene. But he concluded defence alliances with the four states south of river Main, and economic integration was agreed upon. In the course of the reconstruction of the *Zollverein*, a common parliament (*Zollparlament*), composed of the members of the Northern German Reichstag and southern delegates, was installed to produce common legislation, with a *Zollbundesrat* as second chamber. Still, there was no automatic trend towards German unity: The elections in the South showed clear majorities against a unification under Prussian dominance. The strong anti-Prussian resentment was fed by democratic-liberal, Catholic and *grossdeutsche* sympathies.<sup>32</sup> Many of the enemies of Prussian dominance expressed hopes that the French army would smash the Northern German League; the Guelfs, loyalists to the dethroned king Georg V of Hanover, whose country Prussia had annexed, even organized a Guelfic legion (700-1000 men) to fight side by side with the French army.<sup>33</sup> The process of further unification, except in economic matters, seemed to have come to a standstill.

French policy changed everything. On 19th July 1870, France declared war on Prussia. The French declaration of war caused a nationalist outburst throughout Germany, of an intensity never experienced before. This radically weakened the political anti-Prussian base in Southern Germany. Although most of the leading figures of the South disliked it, they felt that they were forced to accept Bismarck's offer to join the Northern German League, which then was transformed into the German Reich.

The threat of a French invasion has since Napoleon been a German nightmare, particularly in 1840 (when French press and diplomacy demanded the border moved to the Rhine), and in 1859. The French declaration of war, intending to impede German



unification, placed the security problem on top of the agenda, especially for the weaker Southern Germany, and thereby provoked a political unification, which otherwise perhaps never would have come.

## 9. Conclusions and Comparisons

The Reich of 1871 contained only a fraction of the area inhabited by German-speaking people. Austria was left out, and in this respect the years 1866-1871 can be described as the final division of Germany as well. After 1871 *grossdeutsche* dreams in both Germany and Austria still existed, but they did not become operational (apart from furnishing Bismarck with another card to play in case Austrian diplomacy should join Germany's enemies).<sup>34</sup> The question remained latent until 1918, when the Austrian Empire finally collapsed. The Austrian National Assembly voted in December 1918 unanimously for unification with Germany. This was forbidden by the Allied powers. The Austrian Hitler realized the unification in 1938, using his methods. It was only after 1945 that most of the Austrians insisted on having a distinctive national identity.

On the other hand, the *Reich* of 1871 contained large territories with a non-German population: Poles in Posen, Mazurians in East Prussia, Danes in Northern Schleswig, French in Lorraine. In short, the German Reich was a political construction which united the majority of the Germans, but whose borders ran across all previous definitions of Germany. It took a process of many decades before the conception of Germany got adapted to the political construction of the new state.

The inferior position of the national minorities led to bitter strife throughout the history of the Reich. But at the referenda in 1920, the majority of the Slavonic Mazurians in East Prussia, one third of the Poles in Upper Silesia, and the vast majority of the inhabitants of e.g. Flensburg town (clearly Danish in 1864) voted for Germany. Thus, the German nation, understood as a unit of collective identity, had clearly expanded, presumably mostly due to the educational system, and fitted the geographical borders better at the end of the *Kaiserreich* than in 1871. This can be interpreted as a case, where the cultural system gradually adapts to the political system. But at the same time, at least during World War I, German politics was dominated by a massive expansionist ideology. In case of a German victory, the borders of the political system would have been expanded enormously.<sup>35</sup>

The authoritarian structure of Prussia and the Reich was in conflict with the attitude of the population at large, as shown by all the elections in 1848 and from 1867 onwards. If we group liberals (greatest party in 1871), socialists and a large part of the Catholic

*Zentrum* Party together under the heading 'democrats', then these held constantly a vast majority. This forms an interesting contrast to France. In December 1848, 75 percent voted for Louis Napoleon as president, and in December 1851 a vast majority of the population endorsed his *coup d'état* and self-promotion to Emperor Napoleon III. And in 1871, the elections to the National Assembly showed again a strong majority for monarchist parties. To put it simply: In 1871 most Germans were democrats, but had to live under an authoritarian political system; the Frenchmen had in 1848 and 1871 democratic systems (due to the strength of the democrats concentrated in Paris), but sympathized with authoritarian monarchies. After a while, the Frenchmen turned democrats as well, the political culture became synchronized to the political system. But political systems can show a gigantic inertia. In Germany, in spite of parliamentary tendencies, the authoritarian structure of the *Kaiserreich* remained basically intact until 1918. It needed the shock of the defeat in World War I to make it crumble - as the French defeat in 1870 was needed to make the regime of Napoleon III crumble.

In the time span between 1771 and 1871 the feeling of a collective German identity had grown from a current among intellectuals to a mass phenomenon. But it was still a 'soft' factor. When power interests of state bureaucracies collided with national sentiment, it was always the sentiment which had to give way. The case of Austria shows this most clearly. And national sentiment was strongest when there was an external enemy. National sentiment was a 'negative' factor, working against external forces, but hardly able to create anything constructive internally.

The connection between the political system and the economy is perhaps even more complex. On *some* fields strong pressures from the economy on the political system can be discerned. In a world characterized by state rivalry, survival depended to a large extent on military strength, which in turn depended on economic growth. Liberal internal reforms such as the Prussian in 1807 supported economic growth. A policy of status status quo retarded economic growth and weakened political power. The changing balance between Prussia and Austria from 1815 to 1866 illustrated this point.

Economic growth meant permanent social change and thereby permanent pressure on traditional cultural values and patterns of legitimation. Economic failure could become an enormously dangerous source of political instability, as the riots prior to the 1848 revolution demonstrated. For the sake of their political survival, internally as well as externally, state bureaucracies had to devote a large section of their energies to the economy and adapt their policy accordingly.

Economic growth gave rise to new classes, such as the industrial bourgeoisie and the working class, and thereby changed the social and political balance within the states. Because of the growing demand for money, the state bureaucracy had to raise taxes and

take up loans. This was only possible if the state apparatus accepted control of its financial transactions and tax revenues by representative assemblies. Therefore, absolute monarchies were in the long run incompatible with economic growth.

In the case of Germany, the abolishment of numerous internal trade barriers were imperative for economic stabilization. In this respect, and in this respect only, the economic system pointed towards unification. But the *Zollverein* was no necessity. A more free-trade oriented policy would presumably have produced better economic results.<sup>36</sup> The second best solution was chosen because it suited the interests of the state bureaucracies better than free-trade. The *Zollverein* was not intended as a step to political unity, and it never created an interest pattern tight enough to enforce unity. Nor showed events in 1848 that the *Zollverein* had shaped perceptions of Germany significantly. The German public and the *Nationalversammlung* thought in *grossdeutschen* categories including Austria. Only after 1871 the *Zollverein* became a 'unifier': It gave the patina of tradition to Prussian policies, 'proving' that Prussia had had a long mission as unifier of Germany.

The most important actors were the state bureaucracies. Of course, they had to take mass sentiments into consideration (as a minor factor), and they had to formulate an internal policy that stimulated economic growth, even if this meant the abolishment of some privileges. In the course of time they had to accept that representative bodies looked over their shoulders and they had permanently to work to stabilize their legitimation. Strong educational activities were an instrument to foster both legitimation, internal homogeneity and economic growth. In particular the Prussian bureaucracy used this instrument. The development of a legal system, with independent courts, strengthened both the continuity, functionality, and legitimation of bureaucratic power.

The state bureaucracies could not act arbitrarily. But it was mostly up to them to act. They were stable organizations with accumulated expertise, and they controlled the means of power such as the army.

State bureaucracies, in the time period considered here, tried, if possible, to expand. The international system established in 1815 had a moderating effect in this respect, but it did not abolish expansionism. France expanded into Algeria in 1830; Russia expanded into the area of the Ottoman Empire. Prussia concentrated mostly on Germany. German territory was much easier to integrate. Here, in making conquest easier, the cultural sphere and, the common German identity, became a political factor.

But many German states were stable units with collective identities of their own. Prussia could annex some of them in 1866, but they did not crumble by themselves as their Italian counterparts in 1860. In 1867/1870 the remaining German states accepted Prussian dominance, but the bureaucracies of the German states kept most of their



functions. So Germany turned into a federation, not a centralistic unitary state after the French model.

The case of Italy was different. Culturally, Italy was much less integrated than Germany. Most Italian dialects were not intercommunicative, and in 1860 only about 2.5 percent of the population mastered Tuscan, the Italian standard language.<sup>37</sup> The general standard of education was in a lamentable stage, worst in the Papal State.<sup>38</sup> Social conditions were often abhorrent, and most of the Italian states were extremely weak. In 1848-49 they survived only because Austrian and French troops stabilized them by force. After her defeat in 1859, Austria could not stabilize the Italian states any more. National agitation and social unrest exploded, and most of them simply crumbled. In Southern Italy only a small additional shock from the outside (Garibaldi's march) was enough to produce the same effect. Only the Pope's control over Rome was saved by French troops until 1870. The violent social rebellion made the better-off classes looking for a new source of stability. In this constellation the state of Sardinia-Piedmont could simply annex the other states. No foreign power impeded that. On the contrary, Britain actively supported the process in order to create a counterbalance to France and Austria. The Piedmontese state apparatus was extended over the whole country. Italy became a politically enormously centralized state with a culturally very inhomogeneous population. In comparison, the population of the German Reich was culturally much more homogeneous, but the political structure was a federation with large policy fields to be handled by the regional units.

In Italy and in Germany a strong conquering state was necessary to create unity. This was lacking in Scandinavia. Scandinavianism in the 19th century, as a cultural intellectual movement, was perhaps comparable to German or Italian nationalism.<sup>39</sup> But there was no powerful expansionist state using this ideology as cover for conquest. So, it remained a harmless intellectual mode.

If we lift the discussion to a more abstract level, the following conclusions can be drawn: The interdependence and interaction between the cultural, the political, and the economic system is complex, and various ways of mutual influence can be discerned. But there seems to be no congruence, at least not in the case studied here, between the spheres in the sense that politics, economics and culture form a harmonious entity, as some structuralist theorists claim. Some structuralist analysts use the model of 'time lag': The different spheres of society move towards congruity, towards an equilibrium, but since changes take time, at a given date there is disequilibrium, at least temporarily. Such time lags and such moves towards congruence could be observed in this case. But events showed as well massive disturbances of any congruence between e.g. culture and politics, due to the power interests of ruling bureaucracies. The principles 'balance of power' or 'expansionism' created time and again facts and solutions which were strongly at variance

with any equilibrium between culture, economy, and politics. Not the move towards equilibrium, but the disturbance of equilibria, dictated by power interests seems to be the general trait of the development studied here.

## Notes

1. See Dumke, p. 101.
2. See e.g. Fischer, 1961; Henderson, 1981; Holtfrerich, 1989.
3. Böhme, 1973, p. 9.
4. Wehler, 1985, pp. 287ff. and 292.
5. Wehler I, pp. 261ff.
6. König, 1978, p. 103.
7. *ibid.*, p. 104.
8. Wehler I, pp. 50ff.
9. Valentin, 1960, p. 281.
10. Schulze, 1986, pp. 58f.
11. Iggers, pp. 50f.
12. Schulze, 1985, p. 61.
13. Wehler I, pp. 368ff. and 397ff.
14. Klessmann, 1966, pp. 173f. and 298ff.
15. Schulze, 1985, pp. 67f.
16. Wehler, 1985, pp. 525f.
17. Burg, 1984, pp. 9ff.
18. See Burg, pp. 51ff. and 142ff.
19. Broszat, 1972, p. 84.
20. Broszat, 1972, p. 96.
21. Henderson, 1984, pp. 29ff.
22. Henderson, p. 95.
23. Berding, p. 83.

24. Tilly, p. 47.
25. Schulze, p. 74.
26. Tilly, p. 36.
27. Schulze, pp. 91f.
28. Wehler II, pp. 753ff.
29. Siemann, pp. 171ff.
30. Siemann, pp. 200ff.
31. See e.g. voices quoted by Schulze, p. 117.
32. Stürmer, pp. 65ff.
33. Engelberg I, pp. 577ff.
34. Engelberg II, pp. 77ff. and 173.
35. The expansionist policy of Imperial Germany before and during the First World War was the subject of the most famous controversy in (West) German historiography, the *Fischer-Kontroverse*, following the publication of Fritz Fischer's book *Griff nach der Weltmacht* in 1962. Not the least thanks to the research done by Fritz Fischer and his collaborators, there can be no doubt that the German government, backed by large sections of the public opinion, followed a policy of massive expansionism during the First World War; an expansionism though which aimed not so much at open annexions (to some extent as well intended), but at the erection of German supremacy via more hidden forms of domination. The (still open) debate centred around the problem whether this expansionism was the guideline of German politics already before the war, thereby being the main cause for its outbreak.
36. It must be remembered that the *Zollverein* erected artificial economic barriers between the member states and the outer world. It has very often been argued, that this was a necessary protection against superior British competition, which allegedly had a devastating effect on the German economy in the decades after 1815. This argument had been rejected by many economic historians who studied the matter lately, pointing to many positive effects the European commerce with Great Britain had. To quote Sidney Pollard: 'English children ... were exploited in the cotton mills so that the consumers in the less developed countries could buy cheap cotton clothes'. Pollard, p. 20.
37. Olesen et al., p. 46.
38. Engelberg II, p. 94.
39. This paragraph was inspired by a newspaper article by Danish historian Uffe Østergaard, 'Hvornår opstod Norden?', in: *Information*, 15.6.1993, p. 2.

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