

## This Day in History... October 3, 1990

# Reunification of Germany

On October 3, 1990, East and West Germany were officially reunited after decades of division. This event marked the end of one of the most striking symbols of the Cold War—the separation of a nation and its people. For Germans, it was not only a political event, but also an emotional and cultural homecoming that reshaped Europe.

The story of German division began in the aftermath of World War II. After Nazi Germany's defeat in 1945, the Allied Forces—the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union—divided the country into four occupation zones. The western zones were managed by the US, Britain, and France, while the eastern zone was controlled by the Soviet Union. Although Berlin, the capital city, was located deep within Soviet territory, it too was split into four sections, with the western sectors controlled by the Allies and the eastern portion under Soviet authority. This uneasy arrangement soon reflected the growing tensions between the capitalist West and the communist East.

By 1949, two new German states were formally established. In May, the western regions joined together to create the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or the Federal Republic of Germany, commonly called West Germany. In October of the same year, the Soviets responded by establishing the Deutsche Demokratische Republik, or the German Democratic Republic, better known as East Germany. From that point on, two Germanies existed side by side, representing the larger struggle between Western capitalism and Soviet-style communism.

The division was especially difficult in Berlin. Though West Berlin was part of the Federal Republic politically, geographically it was completely surrounded by communist East Germany. For the people who lived there, life often felt like being trapped in an island within hostile territory. In 1961, East German authorities constructed the Berlin Wall, a massive barrier of concrete and barbed wire that separated East and West Berlin. Families were split, friends were cut off from one another, and thousands of East Germans were trapped behind the wall, unable to leave. The Berlin Wall quickly became one of the most powerful symbols of the Cold War.

Over the following decades, East and West Germany developed along very different paths. West Germany became prosperous, aided by US and European support, and established itself as a strong democracy. East Germany, however, remained under strict Soviet influence, with a heavily controlled economy and limited freedoms. Many East Germans longed for the liberties and opportunities enjoyed in the West. Some risked—and often lost—their lives attempting to escape across the border.

*Reagan's challenge to Gorbachev was nearly removed from his speech out of concern it could harm US-Soviet relations.*

By the 1980s, change was on the horizon. The Soviet Union, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, began reducing its control over Eastern Europe. His policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) encouraged reforms, and resistance movements grew throughout the communist world. In 1987, during a famous speech in West Berlin, US President Ronald Reagan challenged Gorbachev directly, declaring, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

Only two years later, in 1989, East Germans began organizing peaceful protests demanding reform and freedom of movement. The pressure became too great for East German leaders to contain. On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall finally fell, as jubilant crowds from both sides tore it down piece by piece. Families were reunited, and Berlin once again became a single city.

The fall of the wall opened the door for reunification. Just two weeks later, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl introduced a 10-point plan to bring East and West Germany together. In May 1990, the two governments signed a treaty creating an economic and social union, aligning their currencies and systems. On August 23, East Germany's parliament voted to join with the Federal Republic, and the agreement was formally signed on August 31.

Finally, at midnight on October 3, 1990, East and West Germany became one nation again. Celebrations erupted across the country. The German post office even issued two special stamps to mark the historic event. Since then, October 3 has been celebrated every year as the Day of German Unity, a national holiday honoring the triumph of democracy, freedom, and the resilience of the German people.

The reunification of Germany not only changed the lives of its citizens but also signaled the end of the Cold War era in Europe. What had once seemed like an unbridgeable divide between East and West collapsed in a wave of determination and hope. For many, it remains one of the most remarkable moments of the 20th century.



*Germany Surrenders Stamp from the WWII 50th Anniversary Set*



*Celebrate the Century stamp honoring the Fall of the Berlin Wall*



*Pair of stamps celebrating the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Reunification of Germany*

# This Day in History... October 3, 1990

## Reunification of Germany

On October 3, 1990, East and West Germany were officially reunited after decades of division. This event marked the end of one of the most striking symbols of the Cold War—the separation of a nation and its people. For Germans, it was not only a political event, but also an emotional and cultural homecoming that reshaped Europe.

The story of German division began in the aftermath of World War II. After Nazi Germany's defeat in 1945, the Allied Forces—the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union—divided the country into four occupation zones. The western zones were managed by the US, Britain, and France, while the eastern zone was controlled by the Soviet Union. Although Berlin, the capital city, was located deep within Soviet territory, it too was split into four sections, with the western sectors controlled by the Allies and the eastern portion under Soviet authority. This uneasy arrangement soon reflected the growing tensions between the capitalist West and the communist East.

By 1949, two new German states were formally established. In May, the western regions joined together to create the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or the Federal Republic of Germany, commonly called West Germany. In October of the same year, the Soviets responded by establishing the Deutsche Demokratische Republik, or the German Democratic Republic, better known as East Germany. From that point on, two Germanies existed side by side, representing the larger struggle between Western capitalism and Soviet-style communism.

The division was especially difficult in Berlin. Though West Berlin was part of the Federal Republic politically, geographically it was completely surrounded by communist East Germany. For the people who lived there, life often felt like being trapped in an island within hostile territory. In 1961, East German authorities constructed the Berlin Wall, a massive barrier of concrete and barbed wire that separated East and West Berlin. Families were split, friends were cut off from one another, and thousands of East Germans were trapped behind the wall, unable to leave. The Berlin Wall quickly became one of the most powerful symbols of the Cold War.

Over the following decades, East and West Germany developed along very different paths. West Germany became prosperous, aided by US and European support, and established itself as a strong democracy. East Germany, however, remained under strict Soviet influence, with a heavily controlled economy and limited freedoms. Many East Germans longed for the liberties and opportunities enjoyed in the West. Some risked—and often lost—their lives attempting to escape across the border.

*Reagan's challenge to Gorbachev was nearly removed from his speech out of concern it could harm US-Soviet relations.*

By the 1980s, change was on the horizon. The Soviet Union, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, began reducing its control over Eastern Europe. His policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) encouraged reforms, and resistance movements grew throughout the communist world. In 1987, during a famous speech in West Berlin, US President Ronald Reagan challenged Gorbachev directly, declaring, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

Only two years later, in 1989, East Germans began organizing peaceful protests demanding reform and freedom of movement. The pressure became too great for East German leaders to contain. On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall finally fell, as jubilant crowds from both sides tore it down piece by piece. Families were reunited, and Berlin once again became a single city.

The fall of the wall opened the door for reunification. Just two weeks later, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl introduced a 10-point plan to bring East and West Germany together. In May 1990, the two governments signed a treaty creating an economic and social union, aligning their currencies and systems. On August 23, East Germany's parliament voted to join with the Federal Republic, and the agreement was formally signed on August 31.

Finally, at midnight on October 3, 1990, East and West Germany became one nation again. Celebrations erupted across the country. The German post office even issued two special stamps to mark the historic event. Since then, October 3 has been celebrated every year as the Day of German Unity, a national holiday honoring the triumph of democracy, freedom, and the resilience of the German people.

The reunification of Germany not only changed the lives of its citizens but also signaled the end of the Cold War era in Europe. What had once seemed like an unbridgeable divide between East and West collapsed in a wave of determination and hope. For many, it remains one of the most remarkable moments of the 20th century.



*Germany Surrenders Stamp from the WWII 50th Anniversary Set*



*Celebrate the Century stamp honoring the Fall of the Berlin Wall*



*Pair of stamps celebrating the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Reunification of Germany*