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Beyond the World news headlines

The dark side of German reunification

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Germany will mark the 20th anniversary of its reunification on October 3 - but not everyone in Germany will be celebrating two decades together.

German unity has been a shaky marriage. That may seem like a surprise to people outside Germany. But opinion polls inside Germany show that a lot of Germans are not happy. This is especially true in the east part of Germany, the part that was controlled by the communist Soviet Union.

Matthias Platzeck, the premier (governor) of Brandenburg state, says that German unification in 1990 was not a joining of equals. Instead, it was a takeover of East Germany by West Germany.

East Germans have more political freedom now, but they have also had terrible struggles because of reunification. Millions lost their jobs, their homes, and everything they were used to about their lives. Many have become wistful about their life in the old communist East Germany.

This greatly annoys western Germans who have paid " 1.6 trillion (" 1 euro = \$1.39 US) to try to rebuild and modernize the eastern part of Germany.

But there are many reasons eastern Germans are unhappy. Their population has shrunk by about 2 million as young people move away. Unemployment is sky-high. Thousands of apartments have been torn down and forests have grown back on the land.

So it shouldn't be surprising that an opinion poll published in Stern magazine on Wednesday found that 67% of eastern



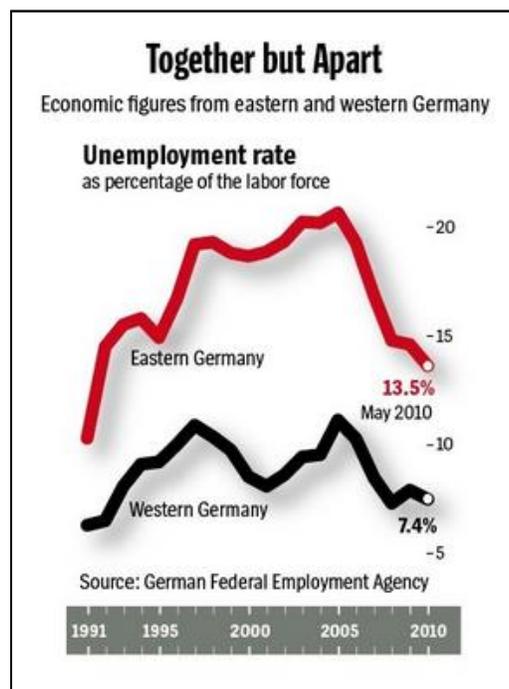
Germans do not feel like they are part of a unified Germany. Only 25% said they felt like one people.

However, western Germans see things a little differently. That same poll showed that 47% - almost half - of westerners feel that Germany is now truly united. For western Germans, the eastern attitude is confusing and annoying. They ask, "Why don't you feel like you're part of one country after all the money we spent on you?"

Some easterners go so far as to say the reunification has been a bad thing. A survey found that 8% of easterners say it would be better if the Berlin Wall were still up. And still another survey found that 25% of easterners say life in the east has gotten worse since the wall came down.

After reunification, most factories in the east were shut down. They were not efficient and could not compete with western factories. Over 70% of the population had to learn a new profession after reunification, because their old job skills didn't fit into the new economy. Half of the families in the east have been hit by unemployment.

There's also the emotional impact of rapid change. Imagine you're from a society that completely disappears and there's almost nothing left. You would feel almost homeless. Some eastern Germans got back on their feet, but many never did.



Article adapted from: <http://blogs.reuters.com/global/2010/09/29/the-dark-side-of-german-reunification/>

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Unemployment graph: <https://www.creditwritedowns.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/output-and-unemployment.jpg>