

Integration as a challenge to unified Germany

The celebration of the 20th anniversary of the reunification of Germany held on 3 October provided an occasion to summarise the changes that have occurred in Germany over this period of time. Disparities between two parts of the country still persist. Unlike earlier recapitulations of this kind, politicians are however moving away from drawing attention to the shortfalls of reunification. They emphasise the importance of integration - both that of Germans from the old and new federal states and the integration of Germans and immigrants.

In a speech made by President Christian Wulff during the celebration festivities in Bremen, two topics in particular stood out and both of them focused on the integration of German society. On the one hand, Wulff underlined how important a closer integration of Germans from eastern and western states was, as they still did not see each other as citizens of one country (only 25% of the inhabitants of the new federal states feel complete and equal citizens of Germany). On the other hand, Wulff stressed the importance of integrating immigrants who are a significant part of the reunited German society. According to data provided by the Federal Statistics Office, foreigners make up nearly 9% of the whole population of Germany. President Wulff stated that Islam was one of the religions that belonged to culture of Germany, on a par with Christianity and Judaism, which was met with vehement criticism from several Christian Democrat politicians.

Putting emphasis on the contribution of Germans from the eastern part of the country to the reunification of the state is a relatively new current in German politics, employed already during the celebration of the reunification in 2009. The government minister for new federal states and interior minister Thomas de Maiziere also referred to this during the presentation of the report on the state of the reunification of Germany. He pointed to positive changes that have occurred in the east of the country over the last twenty years, e.g. improvements in infrastructure, the development of innovative sectors of industry. There is however a lot that is lacking in order to achieve full equality between the two parts of the country – the development of the economy of the new federal states remains dependent on funding from the federal budget and the budgets of the states (approximately 3 trillion EUR in 1990-2019) and the unemployment rate in the east of Germany is double that in the western part of the country. <zawil>