

# THÜRINGEN

BLÄTTER ZUR LANDESKUNDE

The peaceful revolution in the DDR and the subsequent reunification inaugurated the renaissance for Thuringia as political administrative unit. In this sense 1989/90 signifies a distinctive turning-point in the history of the federal state. Over the centuries, the region between Harz and the Thuringian Forest, Werratal and Pleißenland is a prime example of German particularism. Yet, a sense of “unity within diversity” persisted among the Thuringian people. This relates back to the Thuringian kingdom of



the 6th century, the Ludowingian landgraviate of Thuringia of the 12th and 13th century and even earlier historic contexts. In the 19th century, demands to unify Thuringia became louder and were gradually accommodated during the 20th century. In 1920, seven duchies and principalities amalgamated to the Free State of Thuringia with Weimar as its capital. After the end of World War II in 1945, the Prussian territories were joined together and therewith the town of Erfurt became the capital of the young state. However, due to

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## *The Free State of Thuringia 1990/93*

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the implementation of the DDR’s “democratic centralism”, the Free State of Thuringia was dissolved again in 1952. In its place, the districts of Erfurt, Gera and Suhl were established.

The Thuringians, similar to the Saxons, are said to have a particularly strong bond with their country and a

deeply rooted identity. This found expression during the peaceful revolution in 1989, when one of the very first demands was the re-establishment of Thuringia as a Free State. Historians, such as Gunther Mai, have repeatedly emphasized “(...) the strong Thuringian identity and the very early calls for reu-

nification". A survey showed that within the Thuringian population the idea of unity was particularly pronounced amongst the DDR inhabitants. Evidently, even four decades of SED-rule could neither accomplish the diminution of the German identity, nor the memories of the disintegrated land Thuringia. As

it appears, it was possible to build upon lively associations and collective memory reaching far back into the 1500 year old history of Thuringia even in 1989/90. This sense of identity provided a stable basis for the 1990 founded federal state. Thuringia's constitution was drafted in 1995.

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## *The Process of State Formation 1990*

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One of the peaceful revolution's goals in autumn 1989, alongside democratization, freedom of opinion, freedom of travel etc, was the re-establishment of the dissolved states Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony and Thuringia. The local patriotism of the DDR-citizens persisted as the fifteen districts could never produce a deeper sense of identity. As artificial constructs by the SED-regime, the districts never served as an identity-fostering frame of reference. The rapid advancement of the societal changes also prompted the question on the re-establishment of the former free states.

The structural adjustments to the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD) were at the centre of attention together with a change in attitude from merely transforming the DDR-system towards the de facto re-unification of Germany after the Fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989. The transitional government of the DDR under the chairmanship of Hans Modrow (SED) merely envisaged an administrative reform on the lower level. Yet, the pressure deriving from the new political parties or those eman-

ated from the SED, from the citizens and the freely developing media continuously increased.

Against this background, a government-commission under the DDR council of ministers was formed and took up its work on December 18, 1989. The commission's task was the preparation of policies and legal texts regarding the forthcoming structure of the 'Länder'. It continued its work even after the elections to the 'Volkskammer', the parliament of the DDR on March 18, 1990 under the CDU-government headed by Thomas de Mazière. A landslide victory by an alliance of CDU (Christian Democratic Union), the DSU (German Social Union) and the 'Democratic Dawn' (Demokratischer Aufbruch) (48.2 per cent of the votes) represented a clear signal towards the uninterrupted re-unification of Germany. The election results had been particularly clear in Thuringia (district of Erfurt 60.7 per cent, Suhl 60.5 per cent, Gera 58.8 per cent).

From now on, the overarching goal was the establishment of a new "federative republic". Accompanied by major public interest, the commission discus-

sed shape and assignments of the new federal states. After the economic-, social-, and monetary union with the BRD entered into force on July 1, the Volkskammer adopted the 'Law on the Re-creation of the Federal States' on July 22, 1990. Herewith, the legal basis in co-ordination with the Unification Treaty (Einigungsvertrag) was constituted. With the realisation of the German unification process, the new federal states Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia came into existence. Despite controversial debates and a variety of proposals over the re-introduction of federalism, the re-establishment of the five formerly dissolved states was never seriously contested. Only, the partition of Saxony-Anhalt was considered. It was also swiftly decided that the three south-western districts could not be the centre of the new Thuringia. Moreover, it was written in the 'Law on the Re-creation of the Federal States' (Ländereinführungsgesetz) of July 22, 1990: "Taking into account the results produced by a public survey (...) the district councils of Alternburg, Schmölln and Atern request the integration into Thuringia". These surveys showed clear majorities for Thuringia in Artern (district Halle) and Schmölln (district Leipzig). Altenburg (district Leipzig), on the contrary together with Senftenberg and Bad Liebenwerda was an exception, mainly because the district council overrode the citizens' vote. In fact, 55.8 per cent (yet, by a low degree of participation) voted for Saxony, however, the district council (Kreistag) opted with 38 to 25 votes for Thuringia. Numerous municipalities within the districts of Naumburg, Weißenfels, Nebra and Sangershausen (all situated in the larger

district of Halle) that traditionally belonged to the Thuringian cultural area, pushed to become an integrated part of Thuringia. Nonetheless, those demands went unaccounted for in the 'Law on the Re-creation of the Federal States'. In the aftermath, all efforts towards this end by the citizens' initiative 'North-Thuringia', which included an appeal to the Federal Constitutional Court, ended without success. In contrast, 16 boroughs of the Thuringian Vogtland were allowed to join Saxony.

Parallel to the larger structural and territorial decisions, the re-establishment of the Free State Thuringia went ahead. The DDR-government installed offices of 'government authority' (Regierungsbevollmächtigte) as an interim solution to the dissolution of the districts' parliaments on May 31, 1990. Josef Duchač took this office in Erfurt, Peter Lindau in Gera and Werner Ulbrich for the district of Suhl. All of them were members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). In August, Josef Duchač, who was to become prime minister of Thuringia, took over the office of state representative that entailed far-reaching authority over the three districts. On May 16, for the first time the 'advisory committee' for the re-establishment of the Free State Thuringia convened at the initiative of the CDU instead of the initially planned 'round-table Thuringia'. According to the election-results of the DDR People's Assembly (Volkskammer) and the federal parliaments, 11 parties and unions were represented in this committee. This body had to develop and compile policy recommendations for the future state parliament and government for the areas of development, administrative structuring and on the new constitution.

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# *The Free State Thuringia 1990–1993*

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On October 3, 1990 the federal state Thuringia was reborn. With the beginning of the territorial validity of West German Constitutional Law to the new federal states on the territory of the DDR, the re-unification of Germany proceeded. Now Thuringia, as a result of the three former DDR-districts' consolidation, became an equal member-state of the federative republic. On October 11, the treaties concerning the integration of the districts Artern, Altenburg and Schmölnn were signed. Herewith, the 'Law on the Re-creation of the Federal States' (Ländereinführungsgesetz) executed. With a surface area of 16.171 km and a population of 2.6 million, Thuringia ranked on 11th and on 10th place respectively among the 16 states of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) gained a clear victory, among the five parties that made it into parliament (CDU: 45.4 per cent, SPD: 22.8 per cent, PDS: 9.7 per cent, FDP 9.3 per cent) at the first parliamentary elections on October 14. On October 25, the newly constituted parliament elected Josef Duhač prime minister heading a CDU-FDP coalition-government. Shortly after, in February 1992, Bernhard Vogel took over the office of prime minister. The establishment of the Free State Thuringia through constitutional law was completed with this procedure.

In the subsequent months and years, the establishment of a parliamentary foundation, of the ministries and governmental departments as well as the

build-up of a functional state administration took priority, often with the support by the Old Federal States (particularly by states of Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate). In June 1991, the state administrative department took office, other to the events in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt that were governed by the intermediary authority of the governmental districts. An administrative reform in 1994 reduced the total number of districts, which had been kept small by the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), from 35 to 17. Next to the 17 districts, there were six non-district municipalities: Erfurt, Eisenach, Gera, Jena, Suhl and Weimar.

At this point, the question, which of the cities was going to become capital, remained unresolved. The 'Advisory Committee for the Re-establishment of the Free State Thuringia' had already promoted Erfurt, the 'clandestine capital' of Thuringia. Soon after, the new government made Erfurt its domicile, too. The final decision, however, was to be made by the parliament. Erfurt, Weimar, Jena, Gera and Nordhausen applied for the status of capital. The "election campaign" escalated to an intense duel between Erfurt and Weimar. Weimar had first been the capital of the 'smaller Thuringia' and then of the Thuringian NSDAP-Gau in the period of 1920 to 1945. On January 10, 1991 Erfurt was elected capital and seat of the Thuringian parliament. The parliament prompted the modernisation and extension of the former district coun-

cil's building situated at the 'Arnstädter Straße'. It had been built as an extension to an administrative building of the Nazi-period in 1949/52, so that parliament and government could move from Weimar to Erfurt. Likewise, all the other government departments were located in the South of the city. In 1995, the Thuringian state chancellery (Staatskanzlei), office of the prime minister, received with the former governor's residence, built at the time of the Electoral Mainz, at the 'Hirschgarten' a prestigious domicile in the city centre. Also on January 10, 1991 the Thuringian parliament adopted a law on the national emblem, which represents a significant element of statehood and serves as external image of the new federal state. In addition to the traditional colours White and Red the emblem showing the Ludovingian Lion refers to the Landgraviate Thuringia's seven-hundred years of history. Yet, it also incorporates in heraldic manner the more recent history.

The coat of arms shows "in blue, golden crowned and armoured Lion that is eight times striped and surrounded by silver stars" (Peter Heß). This is a symbol of the distinctive Thuringian understanding of "unity within diversity". The variety of state and administrative structures within the 'model country of particularism' has to be seen alongside the persistent sense of overriding unity that was based particularly on the history of the Thuringian Landgraviate. Thus, the coat of arms not only shows the 'Thuringian Lion' but also eight stars surrounding it, which stand for the former small states and Prussian territories. With this detail, the Thuringian coat of arms differs from the similar emblem of Hesse, which also goes back to tradition of the Land-

graviate Thuringia. After the war of succession (1247–1264) the Landgraviate Hesse had emerged from the western parts of the Landgraviate Thuringia. The 'Hessian Lion' is differently striped, uncrowned and not surrounded by stars.

According to the 'Law on the Re-creation of the Federal States', the first parliament had the task to adopt a federal state constitution. A constitutional committee prepared the draft legislation. In the meantime, the daily tasks of parliament and government were regulated by a provisional statute. The constitutional draft proposals of the five state parliamentary factions were subsumed under one draft by the committee and presented to the experts and the public in order for discussions in April 1993. Some changes were made, particularly in regards to the title 'Free State of Thuringia' in relation to the tradition of 1920. In its 95th session on October 25, 1993 the Thuringian parliament adopted the 'Constitution of the Free State of Thuringia' with a two-thirds majority of the 'constitutional coalition' formed by CDU, SPD and FDP in a festive ceremony at the Wartburg Castle. The detailed text that went beyond a purely organisational statute, mirrored the sensitivities and sentiments of the historic situation in 1989/90 and provoked, due to its far-reaching social goals, criticism by West-German law experts. Parallel to the second parliamentary election on October 16, 1994, the constitution came ultimately into effect with a referendum (70.1 per cent of the population voted in favour). This way Thuringia, where in 1816 the first constitution of the German Confederation within the Grand Duchy Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach was established and in 1919 the constitution of the first re-

public was adopted in Weimar, received its constitution through a particularly intense process as the very last of the

'new' federal states. This was the last formal step towards completing the process of state formation.

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## *Thuringia since 1990/93*

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**A**fter the first democratic elections in 1990, there were prominent changes of the new federal state's political structure, despite the continuity of a CDU-dominated government. During the elections of the Bundestag in October 1994, only the CDU (Christian Democratic Union, 41.0 per cent), the SPD (Social Democratic Party, 30.2 per cent) and the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, 17.2 per cent) produced results beyond the Five-Percent-Hurdle (The Five-Percent-Rule in German politics allows only parties receiving over 5 per cent of the votes to gain seats). Since then the Thuringian parliament has predominantly been made up of these three parties. Furthermore, the PDS could maintain a constant advancement over the years (election of 1994: CDU 42.6, SPD 29.6, PDS 16.6; election of 1999: CDU 51.0, PDS 21.3, SPD 18.5; election of 2004: CDU 43.0, PDS 26.1, SPD 14.5 – all in per cent). After the CDU-FDP coalition of 1990, Thuringia was governed by a grand coalition of CDU and SPD from 1994 until 1999. From 1999 until 2009, Thuringia was governed by a CDU government. The office of prime minister for the period of 1992 up to 2005 was held by Bernhard Vogel, and from 2005 until 2009, Dieter Althaus headed the federal state's government. After the recent resounding electoral defeat of

2009 (CDU 31.2, Linke (PDS) 27.4, SPD 18.5, FDP 7.6, Grüne 6.2 – all in per cent), Dieter Althaus resigned and made place for a CDU-SPD coalition led by Christine Lieberknecht (CDU).

The economic and social development after 1990 was heavily influenced by the challenges arising from the collapsing DDR command economy. Numerous towns, municipalities and regions, which had developed to industrial locations suffered sweeping process of deindustrialisation. Whole industrial sectors such as the potash mining in the North and Southwest of Thuringia disappeared. Protest activities like sit-ins and hunger strikes at the potash works in Bischofferode in 1993, which attracted a lot of public attention and controversy, could not halt the dynamics of decline. The optical goods industry in Jena, the automotive engineering in Eisenach, the the next generation technologies (such as solar power, microelectronics or bioengineering) within the triangle Jena-Erfurt-Ilmenau and new medium-sized businesses could quantitatively not compensate for the dramatic reduction of jobs. For instance, the in 1991 dissolved car manufacturer AWE of Eisenach that produced the so-called 'Wartburg', employed nearly 10.000 workers, whereas the in 1992 newly opened manufacturing plant of Opel only employed 1.700

people. Apart from very few exceptions such as the Jenoptik AG in Jena that emerged from the VEB state combine (nationally-owned enterprise) Carl Zeiss, no headquarters of larger companies or corporate groups are based in Thuringia. On the other hand, the service and tourism sector gained in importance. Especially, the city- and cultural tourism alongside excursions to the scenic landscape like the Thuringian Forest have become a significant economic factor. Despite cutbacks in staff, public services and the dense structure of higher education and academic facilities with the Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena, the University of Erfurt, the Bauhaus-University of Weimar, the Technical University Ilmenau, the conservatoire Franz Liszt Weimar and the universities of applied sciences in Nordhausen, Erfurt, Jena, Schmalkalden play a considerable role. The farming industry with a number of medium-sized and larger corporations, which in many cases emerged from the former LPGs (agricultural productions cooperatives), smaller specialized enterprises and the food industry were able to compete relatively successfully on the market. They also deliver the most well-known food-products of the small federal state: the 'Thüringer Kloß' and the 'Thüringer Rostbratwurst' that keep on popping up as proudly presented promotional emblems of Thuringia.

Important decisions had been made for the future by implementing the transportation project 'German Unification' and the expansion of the in 1989 vastly ailing regional transportation networks. The central position of Thuringia in Germany and Europe as natural locational advantage could therefore be regained and reinforced infra-structurally. Beside the extension of the

motorway A4 (Frankfurt am Main to Dresden) and A9 (Berlin to Munich) and the new 'South-Harz' motorway A 38 (Göttingen to Halle an der Saale) together with the construction of the A71/73 (Sangerhausen to Schweinfurt/Coburg) a completely new route was built from North to South through the Thuringian heartland. Especially, the section in the South of the 'Erfurt-crossing' (Erfurter Kreuz) (Thuringian forest motorway) is with Germany's longest road tunnel – the 7916 meters long 'Rennsteigtunnel' – an outstanding engineering performance. Until 2016, the railway line project connecting Berlin and Munich via Erfurt as part of a European route network for fast trains is meant to be completed. Furthermore, existing facilities were upgraded to modern airports nearby Erfurt and Altenburg.

Despite those positive developments, the GDP of Thuringia ranged only by 75 per cent of the national average mainly due to the loss of large parts of the old economic structures-particularly in the industrial sector. The rate of unemployment at 11.8 per cent in May 2009 also remains above the national average of 8.2 per cent and also above the average of the old federal states of 6.9 per cent. After the Fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 a migration process begun from the former DDR-territories into the 'old' federal states simultaneously to the economic decline. Especially young and well-educated people felt attracted by the better employment- and living conditions of 'the West'. The number of inhabitants on the territory of the present day Free State Thuringia decreased from 2.7 million (1988) to 2.2 million (2008). This process is reinforced by the drastic decline in birth rates and by other demographic factors. Fore-

casts prefigure a further decrease in population and an increase in the average age. Economically underdeveloped and rural regions are said to be particularly affected.

Albeit all these challenges, the Free State Thuringia appears to be well positioned in comparison with the 16 fede-

ral states as there were good achievements since the Re-unification of Germany. Already at first glance, the redeveloped historic cities and towns, the economic ‘bright spots’ or the modern infrastructure.

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