

Germany (Deutschland)

Germany is the country with the largest population in the EU and was one of the six founding members of the European Community in 1957. Situated in central Europe, it has land borders with France, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria and Switzerland. To the north it is bordered by the North and Baltic Seas. It has a population of 82 million people and the national language is German. Germany has a significant minority Turkish population, who came to the country as guest workers after World War II. Having experienced enormous political upheaval during the twentieth century, the modern German political system places a strong emphasis upon stability and *consensus*.

Recent History

After World War II, Germany was divided into two nations: the Federal Republic of West Germany (West Germany) and the communist German Democratic Republic (East Germany). After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 these two states were reunified and the Federal Republic of Germany was created in 1990. After eighteen years of centre-right government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl, a Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green coalition was elected in 1998 led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Having won re-election in 2002, Chancellor Schröder continued to govern until 2005 when the SPD lost seats at an early election. From 2005-09, Germany was governed by a Grand Coalition between politicians from Germany's two main parties, the SPD and Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The Grand Coalition faced pressure to reform Germany's social model due to high unemployment and an expensive welfare system. Following the 2009 election, Germany is currently led by a coalition between the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the CDU under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU). The ruling parties agree on the need to reform taxation, but they have had to negotiate agreements on Foreign Policy and reforms to Germany's Labour Market.

The German Government

Germany is a federal republic. The head of government is the Chancellor who presides over a cabinet made up of members of the governing coalition parties. The German parliament, based in Berlin, has two chambers – the *Bundestag* and the *Bundesrat*. Currently the CDU and FDP have only a small majority in the lower house of parliament (*Bundestag*) as they lost their majority in the upper house (*Bundesrat*) after a key regional election in May 2010. The Federal Republic is made up of sixteen Federal States (*Bundesländer*) each of which has its own state legislature (*Landesrecht*). Germany's Head of State is the President, currently Christian Wulff, who has largely ceremonial duties. The highest court in Germany, the *Bundesverfassungsgericht*, plays an important role in interpreting the German constitution, known as the Basic Law. The court is based in the south-west German town of Karlsruhe.

Germany and the EU

As a founding member of the EU, the German government has frequently been at the forefront of the process of European integration. Germany has signed up to all major integration policies – including the Schengen Convention and Economic and Monetary Union. However, several leading politicians in Germany have expressed concern about further enlargement of the EU, in particular Turkish membership.

Many historians have seen the history of the EU as closely linked to the rehabilitation of Germany after World War II – often referred to as the solution to the German Question. This argument suggests the principle reason why many European politicians initially pursued the goal of a united Europe was to tie Germany into international relationships, in order to prevent a repeat of the aggression and mistrust that had led to conflicts between Germany and France in the previous century. While this is not the only reason for pursuing European integration, the resulting 'Franco-German axis' has played a significant part in the development of the EU.

As the largest member state, Germany is very influential in the EU. It has 29 votes in the Council of the European Union (the same number as the UK, France and Italy) and elects 99 MEPs. During its six-month presidency of the EU Council of Ministers, which began in January 2007, Germany successfully revived the EU Constitution project, producing a draft of the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009.

In 2010, Germany played a central role in creating a eurozone stability plan; promising money to eurozone countries whose excessive debt threatened the stability of the single currency. However, losses incurred by the governing CDU party in a local election in May 2010 were seen as a criticism of the party's action to support other eurozone members, namely Greece.

Facts and Figures

- Germany's currency is the Euro.
- Germany has the world's 4th biggest economy.
- Germans have a life expectancy of 78 years for men and 83 years for women.
- Germany's main exports are motor vehicles, electrical machinery and metals.

Quotes

'Germany stands at a crossroads where it is about whether we will preserve what makes this country strong - a social market economy - in times of globalisation.' Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, 2005

Technical Terms

Consensus: general political agreement around a majority opinion.

Links

- <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/EN/Homepage/home.html>
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1047864.stm#facts
- <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/0,2142,1432,00.html>