

The German Question Continued? Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic since 1990

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Today ethnic German populations live in four countries in Western Europe and in sixteen countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Their historical origins, size, status, and degree of integration and assimilation differ greatly, not just between east and west, but also within each of these two broadly defined geographic regions. Numerically, their size has significantly decreased during this century, especially since the end of World War Two. Right after 1945 about twelve million ethnic Germans were expelled from their homelands, primarily in Poland and Czechoslovakia, and since then about another four million ethnic Germans have left their host-countries in Central and Eastern Europe and settled in the Federal Republic.

During the Cold War period, the issue of German minorities was subordinate to many other problems originating from the east-west divide and the need to prevent a military confrontation between the two blocs. After the collapse of communism in 1989/90, however, it has gained new prominence in the relationship between Germany and countries in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland and the Czech Republic. For a variety of reasons, which I will explore in greater detail below, the relationship between the Federal Republic and her neighbours has never been completely free from strains over minority and border issues. Yet, the dramatic political changes at the beginning of the last decade have opened fundamentally new opportunities for both the federal government and expellee organizations.

After outlining the major developments in relation to the formation, ascent and marginalisation of expellee organisations in the Federal Republic, German government and expellee policies towards Poland and the Czech Republic and the remaining ethnic Germans in both countries are examined as they have evolved over the past twelve years since German reunification. In doing so, the paper analyses the new opportunities that have arisen for a process of constructive reconciliation between Germany and its two eastern neighbours since the end of the Cold War, but also points out that the legacy of the past and the different and selective ways in which it has been, and is being, dealt with in all three countries is a factor that has retained its significance for bilateral and international relations in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Loss of Homeland, 1945-1955

The major problem facing German policy-makers after World War One had been the territorial truncation of German territory and the reparations to be paid to the Allied powers. A completely new challenge presented itself after 1945. Ethnic Germans, in particular from Central and East European countries, were either expelled from their traditional settlement areas, such as in Poland and Czechoslovakia, or were deported to forced labour camps in the Soviet Union, as it happened in Romania and Yugoslavia. In any event, ethnic Germans were subjected to systematic popular and state discrimination as a result of the atrocious occupation policies of the Nazis during the war, in which many of them had actively participated.¹ Although this wave of repression and expulsion had ended by the early 1950s and ethnic Germans were gradually reinstated in their citizenship rights, their situation was still not considered satisfactory by the West German government, partly because they suffered all the 'usual' disadvantages of life under communism, partly because residual bitterness from the German occupation left them vulnerable to continued discrimination.

¹ Ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union had been deported to the Central Asian Republics from their settlements in the European parts of the country after Hitler Germany's attack in 1941.

In the early years of its existence, the Federal Republic, however, was preoccupied with other issues both domestically and in its external relations. Domestically, the rebuilding of social and economic life, including the integration of over eight million refugees and expellees took priority.² On the international stage, the German Chancellor Adenauer had set a foreign policy agenda whose foremost aim was to ensure the integration of the country into the Western Alliance.

This process of integration into the West, which provided a path to political security, economic recovery, and gradually also to social prosperity, was the preferred option of the overwhelming majority of the population and politicians. Yet, at the same time, the Western alliance as a symbol of post-war developments signalled, at least temporarily, an acceptance of the status quo, which, given the German borders in 1949, found significantly less public support. While it was generally accepted that neither Alsace and Lorraine nor the Sudetenland could be rightfully claimed by Germany, the fixing of the German-Polish border along the Oder-Neisse line was renounced in public by West German politicians of almost all political backgrounds, including the Chancellor and his cabinet ministers. Simultaneously, however, it was equally clear that the federal government was in no position to offer a credible political approach as to how to revise the German-Polish border. Not only was this contrary to the interests of all four allied powers of the second World War, West Germany itself no longer had a common border with Poland. Despite the claim of the Federal Republic to be the sole representative of the German people, it was a matter of political reality that the East German state, in violation of the Potsdam Agreement, had officially recognized the new border in a treaty with Poland in July 1950.

This unfavourable position, however, did not prevent political activists among the expellees from keeping the issue of expulsions and of the territorial losses Germany had incurred after 1945 on the domestic political agenda of the Federal Republic. Expellees and refugees had not only suffered the trauma of being forced from their ancestral homeland, but they also arrived to devastating conditions in underdeveloped areas of rural Bavaria, Lower Saxony, and Schleswig Holstein. With an official ban on expellee organizations in place in all three western occupation zones until 1949, refugees and expellees began to organize themselves at the local level only and often in close association with churches. Initially, there was a duality in their organizational structure. The Central Association of Expelled Germans (Zentralverband der vertriebenen Deutschen; from 1951 on, Bund vertriebener Deutscher [BvD]) concerned itself primarily with social and economic issues of integration and compensation, while regional-cultural associations (Landsmannschaften) focused on the preservation of the expellees' distinct geographic identities, including their traditions, customs, and culture. In August 1949, nine of them, which were organized at the federal level, or in the process of doing so, formed the Union of Eastern German Regional-Cultural Associations (Vereinigung der ostdeutschen Landsmannschaften – VoL). Four of the Landsmannschaften joined the BvD in 1951, but retained their membership in the VoL. A first attempt to overcome this dualism failed later in 1951. Thus, the VoL pursued its own organizational consolidation, admitted further regional-cultural associations of expellees from Southeastern Europe, changed its name to League of Regional-Cultural associations (Verband der Landsmannschaften – VdL) in August 1952, and began to establish its branches in each of the federal states of West Germany.

The political agenda of the various expellee organizations had been laid down in the 1950 Charter of the German Expellees. This fundamental document has guided expellee demands and policies ever since and is a vivid expression of the identity of expellees as

² By 1949, about 7.6 million refugees and expellees had arrived in the western zones of occupation; by 1953, it were 8.4 million. The total number of refugees and expellees was around 12 million, with approximately 3.5 million of them being resettled in what was to become the German Democratic Republic.

a particular group in West German post-war society united by their collective experiences of suffering and their desire to correct the wrongs of expulsion. In the Charter, the expellees proclaimed their willingness to do without revenge and retribution, to support the creation of a united and free Europe, and to contribute to the reconstruction of Germany and Europe. On this basis, they demanded complete equality in West Germany, the fair sharing of the war consequences by the entire resident population, the integration of all occupational groups in the German economy, and the inclusion of the expellees in the European reconstruction effort. Despite their demands being focused on integration in West Germany, the expellees insisted on their right to their homeland and demanded that this be recognized as a fundamental human right.³ And here lies the key to understanding what united people from the most diverse geographical, professional, social, and political backgrounds: 'To separate human beings with force from their homeland means to kill their spirit. We have suffered and experienced this fate. Therefore, we feel called upon to demand that the right to homeland be recognized and implemented as a God-given basic right of all humankind.'⁴

Yet, their articulation of a common suffering and loss of homeland did initially not result in a common political platform. Between 1948/49 and 1952 two wings within the broad spectrum of expellee and refugee organizations fought for political leadership. One wing focused on the so-called 'national principle' and made the recovery of the lost homeland its political priority. Oriented towards the political far right, it did not manage to generate sufficient electoral support. In contrast, the political party, Union of Expellees and Disenfranchised (Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten – BHE; after November 1952, Gesamtdeutscher Block [BHE]) gained its profile and spectacular electoral support by addressing the specific social and economic interests of the expellees in the Federal Republic. Their successes, however, resulted in a gradual decline of the BHE: the greater the social and economic integration of the expellees, the less this population group felt the need for a distinct political party. The BHE's failure to form a permanent and stable coalition with other smaller centre parties led it to fall below the 5% threshold in the federal elections in 1957 and again in 1961 after it had been subsumed within the All-German Party (Gesamtdeutsche Partei – GDP). Despite its short existence, the BHE played an important part in the contribution the German refugees and expellees made to a post-war West German history characterized by the successful development of democracy and rule of law, and the peaceful realization of German unification.⁵

Until then, however, it was a long way, and the shared loss of homeland and feelings of suffering continued to be essential components of the expellees' identity in the Federal Republic, shaping expellee organizations in West German civil society, as they began to develop a foreign policy agenda of their own.

Maintaining the Homelands from afar, 1955-1990

By the mid-1950s, it had become clear to activists in both the BvD and the VdL that the representation of expellee interests could become more efficient if a single organization would be created within which the thus far separate entities would pool their resources. By October 1957, this process was completed, and the Union of Expellees – United

³ The existence of such a right has recently been recognized by the UN. On 28 May 1995, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, José Ayala-Lasso, affirmed in a message to the German expellees that 'the right not to be expelled from one's ancestral homeland is a fundamental human right.' Translated from: Hochkommissar für Menschenrechte der Vereinten Nationen, Grußbotschaft an die deutschen Vertriebenen vom 28. Mai 1995

⁴ 'Charta der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen, gegeben zu Stuttgart am 5. August 1950', Kulturelle Arbeitshefte 22, Bonn, 1995, p. 15

⁵ While this may seem to be self-promotional propaganda by the BdV, it is actually an almost literal translation from a speech by the German Minister of the Interior, Otto Schily, an SPD member, delivered on the fiftieth anniversary of the BdV on 29 May 1999. Schily, Otto, 'Die Erinnerung und das Gedenken findet ihren Sinn in dem Willen für eine bessere Zukunft' (Rede auf der Festveranstaltung zum 50. Jahrestag des Bundes der Vertriebenen am 29. Mai 1999 im Berliner Dom)

Regional-Cultural Associations and State Organizations (Bund der Vertriebenen – Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände – BdV) formed. It consisted of twenty regional-cultural associations,⁶ eleven state organizations (one in each of the federal states at the time, with five new being founded after German unification in 1990), and seven special interest groups.⁷ The organization's main publication, German Eastern Service (Deutscher Ostdienst – DOD), published a statement by the first president of the BdV, Hans Krüger, in which he defined the mission of his organization as being a mediator between east and west. Krüger went on writing,

In the spirit of a humanist-Christian worldview, in the spirit of the best eastern German cultural traditions, in the spirit of Leibniz, Kant, Herder and Lessing, the expellees not only do without revenge and retribution, but they seek reconciliation of the seemingly irreconcilable in order to prepare the ground for a peace of law and justice. This noble attitude gives them the right to demand justice for themselves and for all expellees and refugees in the world.⁸

Similar to the Charter of the German Expellees of 1950, Krüger also emphasized the right of the expellees to their homeland and to self-determination and their claim to contribute to the peaceful coexistence of all peoples in freedom.⁹

When Germany's integration into the western world had sufficiently progressed by the mid-1950s through membership in NATO and the precursor institutions of today's European Union, its leadership could, more confidently, turn eastwards again. As a result of public pressure and political lobbying by the various expellee organizations, the Federal Republic committed itself to a foreign policy vis-à-vis the communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe that, while avoiding an official recognition of established borders, implicitly accepted the status quo for the time being. This policy shift included humanitarian efforts to improve the situation of ethnic Germans in these countries. The possibilities of direct involvement, however, were extremely limited throughout this period until 1989 so that the major instrument of German external minority policy was to negotiate conditions with the host-states that would allow ethnic Germans to migrate to Germany.¹⁰ A precondition for this was the establishment of diplomatic relations with the relevant states in the East Bloc, a necessity recognized by the expellee organizations as well. In his 1958 contribution to the first issue of DOD, Krüger noted that an 'isolated German Ostpolitik and with it the realization of the political goals of the expellees with respect to their homeland are impossible. Both depend on the correct analysis of the geopolitical situation and they have to be executed in consideration of the policy of the western bloc. [...] Geopolitically, they depend on political détente between east and west.'¹¹

The first step in this direction taken by the federal government was the Soviet-German Treaty of 1955, followed by a verbal agreement in 1958 according to which all those persons of ethnic German origin who had been German citizens before 21 June 1941

⁶ German Balts; Banat Swabians; Berlin—Mark Brandenburg; Bessarabia Germans; Bukowina Germans; Germans from Danzig; Dobrukscha and Bulgarian Germans; Danube Swabians; Carpathian Germans; Lithuanian Germans; Upper Silesian Germans; East Prussians; Pomerania; Russia Germans; Sathmar Swabians; Silesia, Lower and Upper Silesia; Transylvanian Saxons; Sudeten Germans; Weichsel-Warthe; and West Prussia.

⁷ Industrialists, youth, students, women, track athletes, deaf, and farmers.

⁸ Krüger, Hans, 'Leitartikel in der Erstausgabe des Deutschen Ostdiensts' reprinted in DoD, vol. 40, no. 1/2, 9 January 1998, pp. 3-4, here p. 3

⁹ Krüger, Leitartikel, p. 3

¹⁰ The agreements between West Germany and some of the host-states for the repatriation of ethnic Germans included financial arrangements setting 'per capita fees' to be paid by the federal government. Average figures of annual emigration of ethnic Germans after 1950 are as follows: 1955-59: 64,000; 1960-64: 18,000; 1965-69: 26,000; 1970-74: 25,000; 1975-79: 46,000; 1980-84: 49,000; 1985-86: 41,000; 1987: 78,000.

¹¹ Krüger, Leitartikel, p. 4

were entitled to repatriation.¹² Treaties with Poland (1970) and Czechoslovakia (1973) followed, both of which specifically addressed the sensitive issue of borders, confirming that the German government of the day respected the territorial status quo. In both treaties, the signatory states assured one another of respect for each other's territorial integrity and affirmed that neither had territorial claims against the other.¹³ Nonetheless, rulings of the German Constitutional Court in 1973, 1975, and 1987, rejected any suggestion that the treaties with Moscow and Warsaw violated the assertion of Germany's basic law, which defined German territory at its 1937 borders. While this interpretation pleased the BdV, it did not have a practical impact on the foreign policy of the federal government, nor did it improve the opportunity structure for the BdV to become more actively involved in foreign policy matters. On the contrary, the insistence of its leading officials on the openness of the border question led to serious discords with the federal government in the 1980s. The political impotence of the expellee organizations became strikingly obvious in 1985, when the motto for the 21st annual meeting of the Silesian expellees had to be changed from '40 Years of Expulsion – Silesia Remains Ours' to '40 Years of Expulsion – Silesia Remains Our Future in the Europe of Free Peoples' after a personal intervention by chancellor Kohl. By the same token, in 1987 Herbert Hupka, the Chairman of the Landsmannschaft Schlesien, lost his safe seat on the CDU list for the federal elections.

Expellee organizations' lack of political power, however, was offset by a stronger interest in social and cultural issues from the late 1980s onwards, particularly at local levels. Activists, including many who had already been born in the Federal Republic, began to commit more time and funds to helping ethnic German resettlers from Central and Eastern Europe (Aussiedler) integrate in German society, to preserving their own cultural heritage and traditions (supported by a special government program for the promotion of eastern German culture initiated in 1988), and to developing and increasing cross-border human contacts with Czechoslovakia and Poland and other host-states of ethnic German minorities in Central and Eastern Europe.

In general, this period between 1955 and 1989/90 was characterized by the priority of promoting co-existence between east and west against the background of the political realities of the Cold War. This did not leave the West German government any other option than facilitating the emigration of ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe to the Federal Republic, which included primarily ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union, Romania, and Poland. German external minority policy was thus not very active between 1945 and 1989,¹⁴ partly because it had always been suspected of a hidden revisionist agenda not only by the host-states, but also within Germany itself, and partly because to remain in their host-countries was not the preferred option of most ethnic Germans in Central and Eastern Europe, nor was it seen as an acceptable alternative by the federal government.

¹² This, however, solved only a part of the problem as it included only the Germans of the northern territories of former East Prussia, the so-called Memel Germans, and those ethnic Germans who, in the aftermath of the German-Soviet treaty of 1939, had been resettled to the then German territories from the Baltic states, Galicia, Volhynia, Bessarabia, and the Northern Bukovina but found themselves again on Soviet territory at the end of the war. Thus, it did not cover the by far largest group of ethnic Germans who had migrated there, mostly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

¹³ Cf. Bulletin der Bundesregierung 1970, p. 1815 and 1973, p. 1631

¹⁴ After the change in government in Germany in 1982, there were some modest attempts to achieve a recognition and protection of ethnic Germans as a minority in Poland. However, it was only in 1989 that a joint declaration of the two heads of government, Mazowiecki and Kohl, stated that both government would allow persons who are of German or Polish origin or see themselves as part of either of these traditions or cultures to preserve, express, and develop their distinct ethnic identities.

The Challenge of New Opportunities, 1990 to the Present

The General Context of External Minority Policy after 1990

The transition to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe provided an entirely different framework of new and enlarged opportunities for Germany's external minority policy. On the one hand, democratization meant the granting of such basic rights and liberties as the freedoms of speech, association, and political participation, allowing ethnic Germans in their host-countries to form their own parties, stand for election, and actively advocate the interests of their group. On the other hand, it also meant that there were no longer any restrictions on emigration, and given the experience of the past, many ethnic Germans, particularly in Poland, Romania, and the Soviet Union and its successor states seized this opportunity and emigrated to Germany. Both developments required a measured and carefully considered policy response from Germany – domestically to cope with the enormous influx of resettlers, internationally to assure the neighbouring states in Central and Eastern Europe of the inviolability of the post-war borders, while simultaneously supporting German minorities at qualitatively and quantitatively new levels and ensuring their protection as national minorities. All this had to happen within the framework of general German foreign policy premises, such as the support for the transition to democracy and a market economy, the creation of a new collective security order embracing all states in Europe, and respect for international law and human rights.

The Domestic Response – Restriction of Immigration

The most important legal act passed in response to the vast increase of ethnic Germans¹⁵ leaving their host-states to migrate to Germany was the 1993 War Consequences Conciliation Act. Entitlement to German citizenship, formerly automatic, was revoked – ethnic Germans now had to prove ethnic discrimination in their host-states and a long-standing affinity to German culture, language and traditions in order to qualify. Furthermore, the annual intake of ethnic Germans was limited to the average of the years 1991 and 1992 within a ten per cent margin, i.e., a maximum of about 250,000 people. Since, before this, in 1990, a bill passed that required ethnic Germans to apply for admission to Germany from their host-states, the annual intake could effectively be restricted to these quotas. In 1996, authorities introduced a language test as a way of ensuring applicants' affinity to German language and culture. Together, these changed regulations have considerably reduced the influx of ethnic Germans to the Federal Republic – from around 220,000 each year between 1993 and 1995, the immigration figures dropped to 178,000 in 1996 and 134,000 in 1997. In 1998, just over 100,000 ethnic Germans immigrated; in 1999 their number was marginally up to 104,916. However, by 2000 the number of ethnic Germans immigrating to the Federal Republic was below 100,000 for the first time in more than a decade.¹⁶

The External Response – Creating an Alternative to 'Repatriation'

Realizing that the changed conditions after 1990 required a fundamentally different foreign policy approach, the German government embedded its external minority policy into the wider framework of its efforts to promote democracy, prosperity, and security in Central and Eastern Europe. Given the ethno-political demography of the region with its many national minorities, latent border disputes, and inter-ethnic tensions, it was obvious that the role of minorities would be a crucial one in two ways. The ultimate test of successful democratization would have to include an assessment of whether or not members of national minorities, individually and collectively, were entitled to full equality

¹⁵ In 1988, over 200,000 ethnic Germans 'returned' to Germany, in 1989, it was already 377,000, and in 1990, a figure of 397,000 was recorded. For the thirty-eight years before 1988, the annual average of ethnic German immigrants was well below 40,000.

¹⁶ This drop has two further reasons apart from legal restrictions – many ethnic Germans who have successfully applied for citizenship have not yet exercised their option to migrate to Germany, but keep it as a fall-back position. In addition, the majority of people from Romania and Poland who had wanted to leave had already done so in the late 1980s and early 1990s so that the demand from there is now greatly reduced.

and the right to preserve, express, and develop their distinct identities in their host-states. Furthermore, it would not be possible to operate a viable collective security system without settling existing ethnic and territorial conflicts and establishing frameworks within which future disputes could be resolved peacefully. Taking these assumptions as a starting point, the German government concluded that national minorities could play a crucial part in bringing about results in these two interrelated processes as they could bridge existing cultural gaps.¹⁷ The federal government sought to create partnerships with the Central and East European host-states and the German minorities living there that, on the basis of international treaties and bilateral agreements,¹⁸ would promote the government's 'overall foreign policy concept of a European peace policy of reconciliation, understanding, and co-operation.'¹⁹ Cultural, social, and economic measures to support German minorities, although primarily 'aimed at an improvement of the living conditions of ethnic Germans in their host-countries,' would naturally benefit whole regions and their populations independent of their ethnic origin and thus promote inter-ethnic harmony and economic prosperity while strengthening the emerging democratic political structures.²⁰ Thus, by creating favourable conditions for the integration of ethnic Germans in the societies of their host-states as citizens with equal rights, the German government hoped to provide an alternative to emigration.²¹

Not all of the projects, however, have been successful. In the early stages, there was a general lack of co-ordination because a comprehensive concept of external minority policy was still in the process of being formulated and adapted to the new conditions. Millions of Deutschmark were pumped into large-scale projects, such as the construction of houses for the settlement of ethnic Germans near St. Petersburg; yet, once the money had been allocated, there was little or no control of the progress of the project and its results in terms of increasing the willingness of ethnic Germans to remain in their host-countries. Even closer to home, the Association for German Culture Abroad (Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland – VdA) has been involved in a financial scandal about the misuse of twenty-two million Deutschmark of support funds allocated to it by the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

It came as no surprise when the new red-green coalition government began to reconceptualise German external minority policy soon after it came to power. In 1999, it decided to abandon all large-scale investment plans as they did not have any measurable positive effect on the decision of ethnic Germans whether to emigrate to Germany or not. Instead, plans were drawn up, and have since then been gradually implemented) to concentrate resources on projects to facilitate self-help, in particular through providing seed funding for small and medium-size businesses, to improve the services offered by the meeting centres for ethnic Germans abroad (Begegnungsstätten), to increase training and qualification programs, to provide more after-school German classes, to fund initiatives by communal partnerships, and to intensify social work with young ethnic Germans. Furthermore, the government decided to focus these efforts primarily on Russia and Poland.²² Aid programmes for German minorities in other countries, such as Romania or the Baltic Republics, were not phased out, but rather scaled down and concentrated on social work, as the new federal government, too,

¹⁷ Cf. Bundestagsdrucksache 13/10845, BMI-Pressemitteilung 18 May 1999 and BMI-Pressemitteilung 14 June 1999

¹⁸ The key international agreements in this context are the 1990 Copenhagen document of the CSCE and the Council of Europe's Framework Declaration on minority rights. Bilateral treaties exist between Germany and Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Romania, and Russia. Major bilateral agreements were concluded with Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

¹⁹ Bundestagsdrucksache 13/3195

²⁰ Cf. Bundestagsdrucksache 13/3428 and Bundestagsdrucksache 13/1116

²¹ Cf. Bundestagsdrucksache 13/3428

²² Cf. BMI-Pressemitteilung 1 September 1999, BMI-Pressemitteilung 10 August 1999, BMI-Pressemitteilung 25 June 1999

realizes that these programmes are an important instrument of a foreign policy aimed at 'the peaceful and tolerant coexistence of various national groups' in states that host German minorities.²³

The restructuring and partial reconceptualisation of Germany's external minority policy is, on the one hand, driven by the desire for greater effectiveness, but, on the other, also by the need to decrease spending in all areas in order to consolidate the federal budget. For the period from 2000 to 2003, annual cuts of twenty-six million Deutschmark have been proposed for 'Measures in Support of German Minorities in Their Host Countries.'²⁴

While expellee organizations generally acknowledge the need for structures that are more efficient and accept that spending cuts in the area of external minority policy cannot be completely avoided, they have particularly criticized the new concept for the promotion of the 'German Culture of Eastern Europe'.²⁵ The main criticisms have not been directed at the proposed budget cuts of around eight million Deutschmark (out of currently forty-three million Deutschmark annually), but at the plans for restructuring the entire network of organizations and institutions involved in the preservation of expellee culture and cross-border cultural co-operation with the former homelands. The new concept proposes the centralization of the network through the grouping of various organizations and institutions on a 'broad regional basis' – Northeastern Europe (Pommerania, East and West Prussia, parts of the former Soviet Union, and Baltic Republics), Silesia, Sudeten Areas, and Southeastern Europe. Despite the fact that there were numerous inconsistencies in the previous scheme of administering the cultural work of expellee organizations, including the costly duality of institutions at many levels, the proposed centralization is more likely to undermine the basis of this cultural work, most of which has been carried out by expellees and Aussiedler. The government's justifications for the centralization initiative claim that expellee organizations have not realized the post-1989 geopolitical changes, let alone reflected them in their work. Moreover, the policy presumes that, for reasons of advanced age, the actual expellees of 1945-1950 could and should, no longer be the main activists of cultural exchange.²⁶ These developments are uncomfortable reminders of past ideological battles and cast a shadow of doubt at the commitment of the new federal government to continue the cooperation with expellees in the process of reconciliation.

Two Case Studies: Germany's Relationship with the Czech Republic and Poland

In Germany's relationship with Czechoslovakia, and after 1993 with the Czech Republic, territorial issues never played a part at inter-governmental level, because all West German governments after 1949 had accepted, at least implicitly, the formula of 'Germany in the borders of 1937' as the Allied Powers had determined it in the London Protocol of September 1944.²⁷ More important was the channelling of humanitarian aid to support remaining ethnic Germans and above all to facilitate a comprehensive process

²³ Cf. BMI -Pressemitteilung 2 July 1999 and BMI -Pressemitteilung 21 October 1999

²⁴ The total of the various budget titles had peaked in 1997 at almost 115 million Deutschmark, not including the payments made to various expellee organisations to support their activities in the host-countries (DM 5.1 mill.) and also not including institutional funding for the BdV (DM 24.8 mill.) before it was cut down to DM 85 mill in 1998 and DM 75 mill. in 1999. From 1998 to 1999, there was however a significant increase in institutional funding for the BdV to DM 42 mill. These cuts account for around 1% of the total savings in the federal budget in 2000, decreasing to around 0.5% by 2003.

²⁵ This (Deutsche Kultur des östlichen Europas) is the title of a special subgroup in the Federal Chancellory's department of Culture and Media, which has been created only in 1998. The former term, German Culture of the East (Deutsche Kultur des Ostens) is no longer used.

²⁶ Cf. Rossmann, Andreas, 'Der kalte Krieger. Unter Ideologieverdacht: Naumann und die Vertriebenenkultur', Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 28 August 1999, and Müller, Reinhard, 'Nichts als Erinnerung? Wie die Bundesregierung das kulturelle Erbe der Vertriebenen tilgen will', Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 23 September 1999

²⁷ Kimminich, Otto, 'Völkerrecht und Geschichte im Disput über die Beziehungen Deutschlands zu seinen östlichen Nachbarn', in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 28, 1996, pp. 28-38, here p. 33

of reconciliation. In particular because of the role of the German minority in the inter-war period and their subsequent expulsion from the Sudetenland, bilateral relations have never been completely free from certain strains, and have several times been affected negatively by the problems associated with the Sudeten German expellees in the Federal Republic.

After years of negotiations, the German-Czech Declaration of 21 January 1997 was the smallest common denominator the two governments could find on the two most critical issues – the role of the Sudeten Germans in the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and their collective victimization and expulsion after the end of the Second World War. The German government accepted the responsibility of Germany in the developments leading up to the Munich Agreement and the destruction of Czechoslovakia, expressed its deep sorrow over the suffering of Czechs during the Nazi occupation of their country, and acknowledged that it was these two issues that prepared the ground for the post-war treatment and expulsion of members of the German minority in the country. The Czech government, on the other side, regretted the post-war policy vis-à-vis ethnic Germans, which resulted in the expulsion and expropriation of a large section of the German minority, including many innocent people. Both governments agreed that the remaining members of the German minority in the Czech Republic and the expellees and their descendants would play an important role in the future relationship of the two countries and that the support of the German minority in the Czech Republic was a matter of mutual interest. In order to fulfil this interest, a joint German-Czech Future Fund, to which Germany contributed about 140 million Deutschmark and the Czech Republic about 25 million Deutschmark, was set up, partly to be spent on projects related to the support of the German minority in the Czech Republic.

Historically, the problems between Germany and Poland have been much more complex in comparison to those between Germany and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic. German oppression of Poles had been more fierce and lasted longer than that of the Czechs, and the number of expellees from Poland (about nine million) exceeded those from the Sudetenland (about three million) by far. In addition, the so-called former Ostgebiete had only been placed under provisional Polish administration in the Potsdam agreement, a permanent settlement of their status remaining subject to a peace treaty. Thus, the relationship with Poland had a somewhat higher priority on the German foreign policy agenda, especially in relation to German unification. Within Germany's policy vis-à-vis Poland, the German minority always figured prominently in the formulation of policy objectives. As early as 1989, a joint declaration by the German Chancellor and the Polish Prime Minister acknowledged the existence of a population of German descent in Poland and of the need to protect its cultural identity.

Today, the relations between Germany and Poland have their legal basis in a bilateral treaty of 1990, in which the Federal Republic explicitly guaranteed the Oder-Neisse line as the common border, and in the 1991 Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations and Co-operation. To secure a legal framework for the development of the German minority in Poland was only one part of German foreign policy and has been complemented by substantial material aid in the areas of culture and education (the responsibility of the Foreign Office), economic reconstruction (the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior), and social and community work (the responsibility of the German Red Cross, before 1990 also through the Ministry of Inner-German Affairs). Material aid had already been committed to the German minority before 1989, but in comparatively smaller proportions. The changes in Poland in 1989/90 allowed the allocation of larger funds, through different channels, and for new purposes (see Table 1). Geographically, material support has always been concentrated on the Upper Silesian region.

Table 1: German Financial Support for ethnic Germans in Poland, 1987-1994²⁸

	AA	BMI	DRK	BmfiB
1987	--	--	2.5	2.6
1988	--	--	2.4	3.7
1989	5.5	--	2.8	5.5
1990		6.8	3.3	5.3
1991		24.2	3.1	--
1992	3.5	26.5	1.4	--
1993	6.5	25.7	1.1	--
1994	6.5	25.3	1.4	--

All figures in millions of Deutschmark.

AA Foreign Office

BMI Ministry of the Interior

DRK German Red Cross

BMfiB Ministry of Inner-German Affairs

Source: Bundestagsdrucksache 13/1036

Funding in the education and cultural sector has included a variety of activities. The German government has provided staff support to improve the quality of German language teaching in Poland. The number of teachers sent to Poland has increased from just one in 1989 to one hundred and eleven in 1994. In addition, four federal government-sponsored experts on German language teaching have been working in Poland since 1994; the German Academic Exchange Service is funding twenty-six lecturers at Polish universities, and the Goethe Institute has supplied eight lecturers for the further training of Polish teachers of German. Since 1993, members of the German minority in Poland have had access to a special grant program to study in Germany for a period of up to twelve months. The federal government also provides partial funding for TV and radio broadcasts and print media of the German minority and supplies German newspapers and magazines to the friendship circles of the minority.

The Ministry of the Interior channelled financial aid to various German minority associations. The annual amounts increased from 4.7 million Deutschmark in 1991 to 5.8 in 1992 and then dropped to 5.7 and to 5.4 million Deutschmark in 1993 and 1994, respectively. A far larger amount of money, however, has been spent on projects to support the economic recovery of the areas in which members of the German minority live, thus benefiting not only the minorities, but also these regions and their (other) population as a whole. Efforts here were concentrated on infrastructural improvements, e.g., water supply systems, and on promoting small businesses and private farms. Funding of such projects increased from 700,000 Deutschmark in 1991 to 8.7 million Deutschmark in 1994 and again to 14.8 million Deutschmark in 1996. For the distribution of these funds, the federal government uses the Foundation for the Development of Silesia, a private body registered in Opole, and partly funds three staff positions there.

In the social area, the German government has provided funds for the improvement of medical services in Upper Silesia and for the setting-up of a network of Caritas-operated centres to care for the elderly.

Irredentism or Constructive Reconciliation? A New Opportunity for the Expellees

The collapse of communism came as unexpectedly for the expellee organizations as it came for the German government. Yet, the perception of the opportunities arising from the dramatic events in 1989/90 was rather different between the two, but also within the BdV. Government policy to achieve the unification of the two German states at the price of abandoning all territorial claims and formally guaranteeing the borders of East Germany as those of the united Germany was seen as unacceptable and treacherous by many in the leadership of the BdV. Instead, activists of the organization tried to stage a referendum in Poland under the motto 'Peace through Free Choice' (Frieden durch freie Abstimmung). This raised completely unrealistic hopes among many members of the

²⁸ Since 1994, the combined annual average of all funds made available to the German minority in Poland has been around twenty-five million Deutschmark.

German minority in Poland, particularly in Upper Silesia where the response to the signature campaign in support of the referendum had been strong. These hopes were dashed when chancellor Kohl declared at an event celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Charter of the German Expellees in 1990 that the recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as Germany's eastern frontier was the price that had to be paid for the reunification with East Germany.²⁹

Even though, for historical reasons, a border question similar to that between Germany and Poland never existed in the relationship between the Federal Republic and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, the rhetoric of expellee activists has, if anything, been more aggressive on the Sudeten German issue. This became particularly obvious in a 1991 collection of essays written by leading figures of the Sudeten German community on the obligation of the Sudeten Germans vis-à-vis their homeland.³⁰ In one of the essays, Harry Hochfelder, a member of the Sudeten German Council and the Sudeten German Academy of Sciences and Arts, demanded that the 'restitution [of property – S.W.] has to be handled in a way that the ethnic group [of Sudeten Germans – S.W.] can exercise unlimited sovereignty in its homeland. Certainly there will be emigration of the non-German population currently living in the area, for which incentives have to be made available, but which must not be forced.'³¹ Roland Schnürch, Vice President of Federal Assembly of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft, stated the claim of some Sudeten Germans to Czech territory even more forcefully. He 'decisively' rejected the 'belonging of the Sudetenland to any Czechoslovak state.' From this, he concluded that 'the border question has not been solved yet.'³² Another contributor, Willi Wanka, a member of the advisory committee on foreign affairs of the Sudeten German Council, insisted that 'without the return of the Sudeten areas to the Sudeten Germans, there will be no resolution of the Sudeten German question.'³³

Maximal demands of this kind were not popular with either the German or the Czech (and Polish) governments. Subsequently, there have also been more moderate voices and more reconciliatory approaches. As early as 1993, the leadership of the BdV, at that time still dominated by the 'old guard' around Herbert Hupka and Herbert Czaja, acknowledged the positive steps taken by the Polish government to improve the situation of ethnic Germans in Poland.³⁴ Erika Steinbach, the chairperson of the BdV since May 1998 stated in a speech delivered to students at Charles University, Prague, that five decades after the end of the Second World War 'coming to terms with the past cannot be about guilt and retribution. ... We have to face the history of this century together in order to build a peaceful and prosperous future.' She even accepted the critique of the Czech ambassador to Germany that it was painful for Czechs to hear her use the term 'expulsion states' (*Vertreiberstaaten*). She emphasized that today's Czech Republic was a democracy that had not expelled any Germans; yet, she insisted that the country, as much as Germany, had to accept the legacy of the past. More importantly for the particularly sensitive relationship with the Czech Republic, Steinbach reassured her listeners that although the expellees loved their ancestral homelands, 'they respect the dignity of the people living there now. And they do not want ... that other people will

²⁹ Thereafter the BdV started two further initiatives. One was for the Europeanization of the Oder-Neisse territories, the other to enable members of the German minority in Poland to participate in parliamentary elections in the Federal Republic. Both failed.

³⁰ Eibicht, Rolf-Josef (ed.), *Die Sudetendeutschen und ihre Heimat. Erbe – Auftrag – Ziel*, Wesseding, 1991

³¹ Hochfelder, Harry, 'Über die Ziele sudetendeutscher Politik', in Eibicht, *Die Sudetendeutschen*, pp. 50-59, here p. 58

³² Schnürch, Roland, 'Konsequenzen sudetendeutscher Heimatpolitik', in Eibicht, *Die Sudetendeutschen*, pp. 83-94, here p. 83

³³ Wanka, Willi, 'Mit dem Blick auf eine wahre Lösung. Anmerkungen zur Sudetenfrage', in Eibicht, *Die Sudetendeutschen*, pp. 74-82, here p. 75

³⁴ Dobrosielski, Marian, *Deutsche Minderheiten in Polen*, Hamburg, 1992, p. 144

ever be expelled.³⁵ The new red-green government has also recognized this shift towards moderation. In her address on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Cultural Foundation of the German Expellees, the chairperson of the Culture and Media Committee of the Bundestag, Elke Leonhard of the SPD, emphasized that nobody had the right to 'discredit as revanchism the legitimate interests of the expellees in the preservation of their culture and the public acknowledgement of their fate: territorial questions that could affect national rights are no longer an issue...'³⁶

However, two issues, although not directly contradicting these statements, continue to influence German-Polish and German-Czech relations: restitution of property or adequate compensation, and a right for expellees to settle in their former homelands.³⁷ Both of these premises have strong political implications. The demand for property restitution (or compensation) entered a new phase during the summer of 1999, when first, the Sudeten German Regional-cultural association decided to support the filing of a collective court case in the US against the Czech state, and when second, ethnic German resettlers from Poland who left the country between the 1950s and 1970s brought their case for restitution or compensation to the Polish Supreme Court.³⁸ At the same time, the BdV and the Sudeten German Landsmannschaft have demanded on several occasions that accession to the EU be made dependant upon the restitution of property to expellees, or their adequate compensation. German Chancellor Schröder made it clear in March 1999 that he would not support Sudeten German property claims and that his government did not intend to make any claims itself.³⁹ Expellee organizations have nevertheless persisted in their demand to link EU accession to a satisfactory resolution of the property question, often pointing to the examples of Hungary and Estonia, who introduced legislation to this effect. One side effect of this approach by the expellees is the fact that the remaining German minorities in Poland and the Czech Republic find themselves in an increasingly awkward position in their host-countries. In this context, one of the leading activists of the German minority in Poland, Henryk Kroll, a member of the Polish Sejm, asked the BdV chairperson Erika Steinbach in October 1999 publicly to drop the demand to make restitution/compensation for the expellees a condition of EU accession.

The most controversial and potentially most explosive issue in German-Czech relations is that of the so-called Beneš Decrees, which dealt with the confiscation of German (and Hungarian) property in Czechoslovakia and citizenship issues in relation to members of the two ethnic groups. Here, too, a number of opportunities have arisen on several levels – bilaterally as well as on the European stage – and they have been exploited by expellee activists. In April 1999, a resolution was passed by the European Parliament in which its members called 'on the Czech Government, in the same spirit of reconciliatory statements made by President Havel, to repeal the surviving laws and decrees from 1945 and 1946, insofar as they concern the expulsion of individual ethnic groups in the former Czechoslovakia.' Prior to this resolution of the European Parliament, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution on October 13, 1998, in which members of the House demanded that the formerly communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe 'return wrongfully expropriated properties to their rightful owners or, when actual return is not possible, to pay prompt, just and effective compensation, in accordance with principles of justice and in a manner that is just, transparent and fair.' In the 2000

³⁵ All quotes from: Steinbach, Erika, Tschechen und Deutsche – Der Weg in die Zukunft (Vortrag vor Studenten der Karlsuniversität in Prag, 17. März 1999), <http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/politik.htm>

³⁶ Leonhard, Elke, Die Verantwortung der Politik für die gesamtdeutsche Kultur (Festrede aus Anlass des 25jährigen Bestehens der Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen am 14. Juni 1999)

³⁷ Cf., for example, the Berlin Appeal of the BdV of 1998.

³⁸ While the legal situation of both groups of claimants is different, their action was, to some extent, triggered by a resolution of the US House of Representatives in 1998 (cf. below and 105th CONGRESS, 2d Session, H. RES. 562 (HRES 562 IH)).

³⁹ BK Pressemitteilung 9 March 1999

resolution of the European Parliament on the status of negotiations on the Czech Republic's membership application, the European Parliament stated that it 'welcomes the Czech government's willingness to scrutinise the laws and decrees of the Beneš Government dating from 1945 and 1946 and still on the statute books to ascertain whether they run counter to the EU law in force and the Copenhagen criteria'.

The first European Parliament resolution was immediately seized upon by a group of members of the German Bundestag who proposed a motion, co-sponsored by the CDU/CSU parliamentary party, in which the federal government was asked 'to take appropriate action in the spirit of the [resolution of the European Parliament] ... on its own and in collaboration with the other EU member states and the institutions of the EU.' A counter-motion was introduced by the parliamentary parties of SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens in October 1999, in which the Bundestag was asked to welcome the statement by Chancellor Schroeder and Czech Minister-President Zeman of March 8, 1999, that 'neither government will re-introduce property issues [into their bilateral relationship] either today or in the future.' This motion received a majority vote both at committee stage and after a parliamentary debate in June 2000, while that of the CDU/CSU parliamentarians was rejected.

Also at the bilateral level, German dismemberment and occupation of Czechoslovakia, which cannot be separated from the events after 1945, and the expulsions have been dealt with both in the 1992 German-Czechoslovak treaty, the 1997 German-Czech Declaration and in a number of other official statements by both governments. Yet, recent comments by Czech Prime Minister Miloš Zeman on the Sudeten Germans being 'traitors' and 'Hitler's fifth column', however, considerably soured relations between the Czech and German governments in early 2002, leading to the cancellation of a planned visit to the Czech Republic by the German chancellor. The German Interior Minister's contribution to the debate has also been controversial: in his address to the Sudeten German Day in May 2002, Otto Schily of the SPD called on the Czech Republic to eliminate the Beneš decrees from its legal order, but also reiterated his government's policy that none of this implied a demand for compensation or restitution of property. Edmund Stoiber, the conservative challenger of current Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, declared that his party insisted on a repeal of the Beneš decrees prior to the Czech Republic's EU accession because their continued existence contravened the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. In contrast to the current government, Stoiber continued, a government led by him would seek a resolution of past issues rather than ignore them. The astonishing capacity that the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans has to affect Czech German relations is thus not only a matter of bilateral and international relations, but also plays a part in domestic politics. As much as government and opposition in Germany have traded blows over the issue in the run-up to the general elections in September, as much has it been a topic for Czech domestic pre-election politics. On the same day that Edmund Stoiber demanded the strict application of the Copenhagen criteria, Czech Prime Minister Miloš Zeman declared during a memorial act at the former concentration camp of Theresienstadt/Terezin that the expulsion had fulfilled the Sudeten Germans' desire, as they had wanted to go 'heim ins Reich' anyway. Czech Interior Minister Stanislav Gross, Vice Premier Vladimir Spidla and leading opposition politicians justified the post-war expulsions as contributing to European peace and stability after 1945. Zeman and Spidla have since also acknowledged that a humanitarian gesture towards Germans who were expelled unjustly should be considered. Yet the insistence that this would affect at most one-hundred people already bears the seeds of new confrontation.

In contrast to the thus rather stormy relationship between Germany and the Czech Republic, the relations between the latter and the EU seem more stable for the time being. In April 2002, EU Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen and Czech Prime Minister Miloš Zeman issued a joint statement, in which they acknowledged that 'there has been much public discussion on some of the Czechoslovak Presidential Decrees of

1945, and on some of the ensuing Czechoslovak legislation of the immediate post-war period', but also insisted that 'as was the case with measures taken by other European countries at that time, some of these Acts would not pass muster today if judged by current standards – but they belong to history.' This policy is widely supported by governments across Europe, in particular also because a Czech Constitutional Court ruling of March 1995 established that Presidential Decree No. 108/45 (on the confiscation of property) was a unique act which 'for more than four decades has established no legal relations and thus no longer has a constitutive character' in the Czech legal system, i.e., it is no longer valid or applicable. In February 1999, the Czech government stated in its Foreign Policy Concept that the decrees were 'extinct', a view that was subsequently also adopted by the Czech parliament. Officials at all levels have thus managed to find ways out of the dilemma created by the high aspirations that the EU has in terms of human rights and acts committed after the Second World War that contradict these norms. For obvious reasons, such a difficult balancing act is unlikely to please everyone involved, but the commitment of all governments and the EU Commission to leave the past behind and move on to a common future is in the general spirit of post-1990 developments of reconciliation rather than confrontation.

Likewise, the issue of a right for expellees to settle in their former homelands also regained prominence in the political debate about the accession of Poland and the Czech Republic to the European Union and the expected extension of EU principles, including the freedom of mobility, to the two countries, thus giving expellees and their children and grandchildren a legal right to return to their homelands, which has caused considerable unease in Poland and the Czech Republic. However, it is rather unlikely that large numbers of expellees or of their children and grandchildren would actually take up such an opportunity.⁴⁰

In the context of the relationship between expellee organizations and their former host-states, it is also noteworthy that the issue of expulsions is treated rather differently in Poland and the Czech Republic. While Poland has pursued a more open policy, including the engagement of expellees and their representatives in a process of reconciliation and increased cross-border co-operation, the issue is still far too politicized in the Czech Republic and has occasionally soured relationships at inter-governmental level as well.

With both countries, however, relationships have improved significantly at lower and less formal levels. This has taken the form of communal partnerships between towns in the Federal Republic and in the former homelands of expellees, especially in former East Prussia, Upper Silesia and the Czech Republic, in which expellees are often actively involved.⁴¹ Increasingly, the various expellee organizations have made efforts to foster dialogue between them and their former host-states at various levels. Joint workshops have taken place in Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic bringing together officials and activists from both sides exploring the past and, even more importantly, ways of how to build the future. Similarly, information trips (Informationsreisen) to the former hometowns and villages of expellees assess the specific needs of these regions and

⁴⁰ The interest of most expellees in their former homelands is mostly of a nostalgic sentiment – returning to the places of their (childhood) memory as tourists (Heimwehtouristen), rather than as permanent resettlers.

⁴¹ One such example is the twinning arrangement between former Preussisch Holland (now Paslek), the town of Hürth in Germany and the local association of expellees, many of whom originally came from Preussisch Holland/Paslek. The agreement covers a range of areas, including the preservation of cultural monuments, co-operation in historic research and in the area of culture, promotion of contacts in the fields of tourism and business, humanitarian aid, and support for exchange programs. For further details, see DOD vol. 40, no. 25, 19 June 1998, pp. 6-7. Another noteworthy case is that of the town of Ratibor in Upper Silesia. Here expellees got actively involved in the construction of a waste water facility, and the chairman of the Landsmannschaft Schlesien, Herbert Hupka, for years a target of Communist propaganda, was awarded the town's Honorary Medal for his efforts. Another example is that of the Kiel, Germany, based organization Aid for You (Hilfe für Euch), which, since 1984, has supported ethnic Germans in former East Prussia, primarily with food and clothing.

initiate aid programmes.⁴² Even less formally, many expellees and their children and grandchildren have gotten involved individually in projects to facilitate the reconstruction of their former homelands after decades of Communism, most of them without any intention of resettlement, border revisions, or the like. Expellees from East Prussia have started an initiative for the preservation of cultural monuments in their former homeland, while Sudeten German expellees have contributed to the reconstruction of many churches in the Czech Republic and have initiated exchange projects with their former homeland communities.⁴³ From this perspective, the work of the refugees, expellees, and their children has made a significant and positive contribution to Germany's external minority policy after 1990 – it has fostered reconciliation and has been a part of the efforts to improve the living conditions of German minorities in their host-countries. In particular, the former of these two assertions is still a matter of debate even within Germany. However, there seems to be growing consensus that the involvement of expellees has, especially after 1989/90, complemented the reconciliation policy of German governments: 'Contrary to frequent prejudice, the ethnic German expellees have, in their overwhelming majority, actively participated in the process of reconciliation between the European nations, and they continue to do so today.'⁴⁴

Outlook: The Future of External Minority Policy

The democratization of the formerly communist societies in Central and Eastern Europe opened new opportunities for Germany's external minority policy. Greater possibilities to support the German minorities in their host-states, the need to do so in order to halt the mass exodus of ethnic Germans, the commitment of the German expellees to become involved in this process, and the genuine interest of the former communist countries in improving their relationship with Germany, which was seen as an important stepping-stone towards accession to the European Union and NATO, complemented each other in a unique way. Germany's desire to bridge the gap between cultures and across history could only be fulfilled through reconciliation and mutual understanding. Part of this was the eventual unconditional recognition of the borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia. Yet, a common future of Germany and its eastern neighbours could not be secured without addressing the situation of the German minorities in these countries and the suffering of the post-war refugees and expellees. On the basis of numerous treaties and within the framework set out by the 1990 Copenhagen Declaration of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Germany and Poland, and Germany and the Czech Republic have developed relationships that allow to tackle the issue of minority protection and external support for ethnic Germans and to include representatives of the minorities and the expellee organizations in this process. Yet, for historical as well as contemporary reasons, this has remained a very sensitive problem. German external minority policy, therefore, has always only been one part of a more comprehensive foreign policy approach towards its eastern neighbours that aims at a stabilization of democracy and the creation of a market economy in these countries as the wider social framework within which harmonious inter-ethnic relationships can develop that will inevitably benefit the German minorities as well.

⁴² This, very often, takes very basic, yet all the more effective forms. The donation campaign 'Notopfer Königsberg' of the BdV state organization North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, funded the provision of running water for one family, of winter food for the cow of another family, and the repair of roofs of several houses.

⁴³ The sculptor Walter Grill, to name just one prominent case, has organized several exhibitions of his work and that of his colleagues in his former hometown of Karlsbad/Karlovy Vary. According to him, the human contact with people living in the former Sudetenland now has managed to overcome many prejudices and fears on both sides. Cf. Grill, Walter, '... for an artist, home will be wherever he can freely practise his art.' Walter Grill in Conversation with David Rock', in *Coming Home to Germany? The Integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic*, edited by David G. Rock and Stefan Wolff (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2002)

⁴⁴ Schily, *Die Erinnerung*

The integration of expellee organizations in this process has been vital despite the difficulties it has occasionally caused. For the success of the reconciliation process, it is essential that the human dimension in the relationships between Germany and its neighbours in the east be not ignored. Only the collective effort of the ethnic German minorities, the population of their host countries, and the expellees, supported by their respective governments, will provide a framework within which the further cooperation with, and integration of, the countries in Central Eastern Europe which host German minorities will not reopen old wounds but pave the way to a secure and prosperous future.