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### Summary Article: **Germany**

From *Philip's Encyclopedia*

The Federal Republic of Germany lies in the heart of Europe. It is the fifth-largest country in Europe. Germany divides into three geographical regions: the N German plain, central highlands, and the S Central Alps.

The rivers Elbe, Weser, and Oder drain the fertile N plain, which includes the industrial centres of Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, and Kiel. In the E lies the capital, Berlin, and the former East German cities of Leipzig, Dresden and Magdeburg. NW Germany (especially the Rhine, Ruhr and Saar valleys) is the country's industrial heartland. It includes the cities of Cologne, Essen, Dortmund, Düsseldorf and Duisburg.

The central highlands include the Harz Mountains and the cities of Munich, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Nuremberg and Augsburg. S Germany rises to the Bavarian Alps on the border with Switzerland and Germany's highest peak, Zugspitze (2,963m [9,721ft]). The Black Forest, overlooking the Rhine valley, is a major tourist attraction. The region is drained by the River Danube.

### **Climate**

Germany has a temperate climate. The NW is warmed by the North Sea. The Baltic lowlands in the NE are cooler. In the S, the climate becomes more continental.

### **History**

Around 3,000 years ago, various tribes from N Europe began to settle in what is now Germany, occupying the valleys of the Rhine and the Danube. The Romans called this region Germania after the Germani, the name of one of the tribes. In the 5th century bc the Germanic tribes attacked the Roman Empire and plundered Rome. The W part of the Roman Empire split up into several kingdoms, the largest of which was the Kingdom of the Franks.

In 486 the Merovingian king Clovis I conquered S and W Germany, Thuringia and Gaul (now France), introducing Christianity. His son Charlemagne came to power in 768, established his capital at Aachen, expanded his territory to the Elbe and was crowned Emperor in 800. His empire rapidly fragmented, and the feudal system created powerful local duchies. In 918 Henry I (the Fowler) began a century of Saxon rule, and his son Otto I (the Great) established the Holy Roman Empire (first *reich*, 962).

In 1152, Frederick I founded the Hohenstaufen dynasty. Frederick II's conflict with the papacy created civil war. In 1273, Rudolf I founded the Habsburg dynasty. City-states formed alliances, such as the Hanseatic League. Charles V's reign (1519-58) brought religious and civil unrest, such as the Peasants' War. In 1517, a German monk, Martin Luther, began to criticize many of the practices and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. A Protestant movement called the Reformation soon attracted much support, and by the early 17th century Germany was deeply divided by political and religious rivalries. Catholic and Protestant conflict culminated in the devastating Thirty Years' War (1618-48) which ravaged much of the country, with Germany losing territory to France and Sweden and being split into hundreds of states and free cities. It took almost 200 years for Germany to recover

In the 17th century, the Hohenzollern family began to assume importance in E Germany, gradually extending their power and building a professional civil service and army. The reign (1740-86) of Frederick II (the Great) saw the emergence of Prussia. Prussia stayed out of the Napoleonic Wars until 1806, but, following defeats by Napoleon, lost its territories west of the Elbe. Prussia did help defeat Napoleon's armies at the battles of Leipzig (1813) and Waterloo (1815) and following the Napoleonic wars gained the Rhineland, Westphalia and much of Saxony at the Congress of Vienna.

The 19th century brought growing nationalism, fuelled by German romanticism. The revolutions of 1848 led the Prussian Hohenzollern king, Wilhelm (William I), to appoint Otto von Bismarck as chancellor. Bismarck set about strengthening Prussian power through three short wars. One conflict led to the acquisition of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark, another to the annexation of territory from Austria in the Austro-Prussian War. The third was the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1), through which Prussia acquired Alsace and part of Lorraine. In 1871, Wilhelm I was crowned the first Kaiser of the new German Empire (or second *reich*) and Bismarck became head of government. Bismarck sought to consolidate German power and avoid conflict with Austria-Hungary and Russia, but was forced to resign in 1890 when Wilhelm II (William II) wanted to establish his own authority and extend Germany's influence in the world. Wilhelm's ambitions led Britain and France to establish the Entente Cordiale in 1904, with Britain and Russia signing a similar agreement in 1907. This left Europe divided, with Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy forming the Triple Alliance.

Prince von Bülow's imperial ambitions were a cause of World War 1 (1914-18). The Treaty of Versailles (1919) placed a heavy price on German defeat. Wilhelm II was forced to abdicate, overseas colonies were lost to the victors and the Weimar Republic (1919-33) was created. Germany's humiliation under the terms of the Versailles Treaty caused much resentment, made worse by the economic collapse of 1922-23. Mass unemployment, crippling inflation, war reparations and worldwide economic depression created the conditions for fascism. Support grew for the Nazi Party and its leader Adolf Hitler, who became chancellor in 1933 and declared a Third Reich.

National socialism pervaded all areas of society, the Gestapo crushed dissent and opposition parties and elections were banned. Hitler, as *Führer*, became the father of the nation through Goebbels' propagandizing. Concentration camps were set up and armaments stockpiled. Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland (1936), aided Franco in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), and annexed Austria (1938). The Munich Agreement (1938) marked the failure of appeasement; Germany invaded Czechoslovakia (March 1939) and Poland (September 1939), precipitating World War 2. Initial success was halted by failure in the Battle of Britain, and Hitler's disastrous Soviet offensive (June 1941). The blanket bombing of German cities devastated German industry and morale. Faced with defeat, Hitler committed suicide (April 1945). Germany surrendered (May 8, 1945), and leading Nazis faced the Nuremberg Trials.

The country was left in ruins. Germany was obliged to transfer the area E of the Oder and Neisse rivers to Poland and the Soviet Union. German-speaking inhabitants were expelled and the remainder of Germany was occupied by the four victorious Allied powers, each controlling a military zone. Cold War tension increased. Following the Berlin Airlift (1948-49), American, British and French zones joined to make the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany); the Soviet zone formed the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Berlin was divided by the Berlin Wall. E Berlin became capital of East Germany; Bonn de facto capital of West Germany.

## Politics

The post-war partition of Germany together with its geographical position, made it a central hub of the Cold War, which ended with the collapse of Communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The reunification of Germany came on 3 October 1990. West Germany had become a showpiece of the West through its phenomenal recovery and sustained growth, the so-called 'economic miracle'. It played a major part, together with France, in the revival of Western Europe through the development of the European Community (now the European Union). Although East Germany had achieved the highest standard of living in the Soviet bloc, it was short of the levels of the EU members.

Following reunification, the new country adopted the name the Federal Republic of Germany. Massive investment was needed to rebuild the East's industrial base and transport system, meaning increased taxation. In addition, the new nation found itself funnelling aid into Eastern Europe. Germany led the EU in recognizing the independence of Slovenia, Croatia and the former Soviet republics. There were also social effects. While Germans in the West resented added taxes and the burden imposed by the East, easterners resented what many saw as the overbearing attitudes of westerners. Others feared a revival of the far right, with neo-Nazis and other right-wingers protesting against the increasing numbers of immigrant workers.

The creation of a unified state was far more complicated, expensive and lengthy an undertaking than envisaged when the Berlin Wall came down. In 1998, the centre-right government of Helmut Kohl, who had presided over reunification, was defeated by the left-of-centre Social Democratic Party (SPD), led by Gerhard Schröder. Schröder led an SPD-Green Party coalition which set about tackling Germany's high unemployment and a sluggish economy. Following the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, Schröder announced Germany's support for the campaign against terrorism, although Germany opposed the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 2005, Schröder was narrowly defeated in elections. A broad left-right coalition was set up. The conservative Angela Merkel became Chancellor.

## **Economy**

Despite the problems associated with reunification, Germany has the world's third largest economy after the United States and Japan. The foundation of the 'economic miracle' that led to Germany's astonishing post-war recovery was manufacturing.

Germany's industrial strength was based on its coal reserves, though oil-burning and nuclear generating plants have become increasingly important since the 1970s. Lower Saxony has oilfields, while southern Germany also obtains power from hydroelectric plants. The country has supplies of potash and rock salt, together with smaller quantities of copper, lead, tin, uranium and zinc. The leading industrial region is the Ruhr, which produces iron and steel, together with major chemical and textiles industries. Germany is the world's third largest producer of cars, while other manufactures include cameras, electronic equipment, fertilizers, processed food, plastics, scientific instruments, ships, tools, and wood and pulp products.

Agriculture employs 2.4% of the workforce, but Germany imports about a third of its food. Barley, fruits, grapes, oats, potatoes, rye, sugar beet, vegetables and wheat are grown. Beef and dairy cattle are raised, together with pigs, poultry and sheep.

**area** 357,022sq km [137, 846sq mi]

**population** 82,422,000

**capital (population)** Berlin (3,387,000)

**government** Federal multiparty republic

**ethnic groups** German 92%, Turkish 3%, Serbo-Croatian, Italian, Greek, Polish, Spanish

**languages** German (official)

**religions** Protestant (mainly Lutheran) 34%, Roman Catholic 34%, Islam 4%, others

**currency** Euro = 100 cents

## Germany



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Germany. (2008). In *Philip's encyclopedia*. London, UK: Philip's. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/germany>

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## APA

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