



Unification of Italy and Germany:

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The unification of Italy and Germany sounds surprising to a reader. Many people think that nations have been everlasting. But that is simply not the truth. For example, in the early 19th century, there was no such thing as Italy. It instead had several competing Italian speaking states such as Sardinia, the Papal States, Lombardy, Sicily etc. In the place of modern day Germany, there existed German speaking states such as Bavaria, Württemberg, and most powerful of all, Prussia. As you can see there never existed Germany and Italy before. So how did they unify? Let's find out.

ITALY:

The Italian peninsula was home to Italian speaking states after the fall of the Roman Empire with different dialects, laws, culture etc. Many of them fought wars against each other instigated by superpowers such as France, the Holy Roman Empire and Spain. In fact, the region was known as "the battleground of Europe". Another war broke out, but this would have long lasting consequences for Italy. The French revolutionary forces after establishing a republic at home, invaded Italy as part of their plan to spread liberty and democracy throughout the continent and defeat their foes who eagerly wanted to crush this dangerous political experiment.

Despite the bloodshed and destruction caused by the French, they fundamentally changed the Italian states. Napoleon Bonaparte, the commander of the armies and later emperor of the French conquered Italy and introduced modern ideas and efficient legal authority such as Napoleonic Code which removed all privileges based on birth and

established equality before the law and secured the right to property. He simplified administrative divisions, abolished the system, and freed peasants from serfdom and manorial dues. In towns too, guild systems were removed. Transport and communication systems were improved and peasants, artisans, businessmen and workers enjoyed the newfound freedom. According to British historian

Andrew Roberts: "The ideas that underpin our modern world—meritocracy, equality before the law, property rights, religious toleration, modern secular education, sound finances, and so on—were championed, consolidated, codified and geographically extended by Napoleon. To them he added a rational and efficient local administration, an end to rural banditry, the encouragement of science and the arts, the abolition of feudalism and the greatest codification of laws since the fall of the Roman Empire".

All this however, was not to last. Napoleon was defeated at the battle of Waterloo in modern day Belgium and thus the victorious powers such as Austria, Prussia and Great Britain gathered at a congress in Vienna to formulate a treaty to establish long-lasting peace (Congress of Vienna). Figures essential to this were Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh from Great Britain and Foreign Minister Klemens von Metternich of Austria. What these two men did is essentially restore the map of Europe to the way it was before Napoleon. Austria gained control of Venetia and Lombardy. The other Italian states were also largely controlled by Austria and only the state of Piedmont-Sardinia was truly independent. The congress also suppressed the ideas of the French revolution and further cemented the power of conservative monarchies of Europe.

However, the ideas of the French revolution had not yet perished as many wanted liberal and democratic reforms to their countries but were suppressed by conservatives. The dissatisfaction of liberals with the Congress of Vienna led to outbreaks of revolt.

A revolution in Spain in 1820 inspired an armed regiment in Sicily to revolt, but were crushed by the Austrians. In 1821 a revolution in Piedmont broke out, and the King's regent approved a constitution to satisfy them but the king returned and crushed the revolutionaries and reversed the regent's changes. In 1830 in France, the French revolted against the monarchy and set up a liberal constitutional monarchy under Louis Philippe. Italian onlookers wished for the same and soon several revolts broke out all over Italy. Insurrections began all over the Papal states.

Louis Philippe had promised the revolutionaries to intervene on their behalf but Metternich stopped him, warning that any French intervention would not be tolerated. Austria marched across Italy and crushed all revolutionary activities

Unfortunately for Austria, it later faced its own revolution in Vienna , the capital city in 1848.

France also faced a revolution where Louis Philippe was overthrown and a democratic republic was established. Thus another wave of revolution swept across Italy. Pope Pius IX of the Papal States was overthrown by Giuseppe Mazzini, a radical revolutionary who wanted a democratic republican Italy.

Let's tell the background of Mazzini. Mazzini was born in 1805 in Genoa, then part of the First French Empire. As a child, he was a brilliant learner, having a particular interest in Politics and Literature. After graduating from university, he wrote for several newspapers such as *L'Indicatore Genovese* and *L'Indicatore Livornese*, which were unfortunately shut down by local authorities. He later joined the Carbonari, a secret liberal revolutionary organization furious at the Congress of Vienna. He was arrested due to his revolutionary activity and later travelled to France, where he created a new organization called Young Italy, whose slogan was "One free, independent, republican nation". Mazzini and Young Italy desired to unify Italy into a single Italian republic

He and his supporters established the short-lived Roman Republic as France under President Louis Napoleon AKA Napoleon III (later emperor of the French) arrived to successfully crush the rebellion and restore the Pope, thus stationing French Troops in Rome. In the Italian speaking cities of Milan and Venice in Austria, many Italians wanted independence. A revolution in Sardinia forced King Charles Albert to give a constitution and also supported the revolt by invading Lombardy, where Milan was located. The Sardinians initially won victories, but were eventually defeated by the Austrian Marshal Joseph Radetzky, due to the Austrian's massive numerical superiority, forcing Charles Albert to abdicate and was succeeded by Victor Emmanuel II, whose Prime Minister was the Count of Cavour in 1852.

Cavour was a liberal but opposed revolution as he was more interested in modernizing the country by implementing economic reforms such as free trade, infrastructural and agricultural development. These policies helped make Piedmont prosperous. Cavour made an alliance with Napoleon and both of them supported a revolt in Modena in 1859 which forced the Austrians to intervene, thus starting the Second War of Italian Independence.

Giuseppe Garibaldi, a military commander and follower of Mazzini launched a guerilla campaign against the Austrians and won several victories despite being overwhelmingly outnumbered. Garibaldi was already experienced in the art of war due to his participation in several South American Conflicts. He was previously involved in an uprising in 1835 in Piedmont, but narrowly escaped imprisonment by

fleeing to South America. He later returned in 1848 to participate in the unification of Italy. Several other Italian states revolted forming the United Provinces of Central Italy.

The victorious battles of Solferino and Magenta ended in Austrian defeat. Shocked at the bloodshed at Solferino and worried about Prussian intervention, Napoleon signed a peace treaty with Austria which enraged Cavour so much that he resigned. Piedmont annexed Lombardy and later the United Provinces whereas France received Nice from Piedmont. Another revolt broke out in Sicily and Garibaldi exploited the situation by taking only 1000 men and successfully capturing Sicily and later Naples. Piedmont invaded the Papal states. In 1860 Garibaldi handed over Victor Emmanuel II Naples and Sicily, setting aside his dislike for monarchism for the sake of Unification thus declaring the Kingdom of Italy. Nonetheless Venetia and the Papal States were not yet annexed.

In 1866 Austria and Prussia declared war on each other with Italy supporting Prussia. The war ended in victor for both of them and as a result, Italy gained Venetia. Prussia fought another war, this time with France, forcing the French to withdraw their forces from the Papal States. And as a result, Italy invaded and annexed the Papal States.

GERMANY:

The German region also had several German speaking states. They enjoyed the same reforms of Italy during Napoleon and it also was affected by the Congress of Vienna, as it was made into the German confederation, a loose collection of German states. However it was largely controlled by Austria and was very weak.

Civil liberties were suppressed by conservative monarchs which dissatisfied and angered the liberals and the general populace. Young Germany, a group of German intellectuals, began seriously questioning the absolutism and authoritarianism of the day, and desired a liberal democracy. Their ideas would have a grand impact on the German populace. Several student organizations were formed seeking to protest against the general decay of liberty and freedom. An assassination of a conservative dramatist August von Kotzebue by a militant student forced Censorship laws such as the Carlsbad decree to be enforced, making the German Confederation extremely unpopular.

German states sought to increase economic cooperation by creating the Zollverein, a German customs union that eliminated tariffs between German states. Due to their initiative, deteriorating roads were improved and several railways were established. Wilhelm Raabe, a novelist once remarked "The German empire was found with the construction of the first railway." Several Germans sought to create a national

German culture. The Grimm Brothers, a pair of anthropologists compiled a series of German fairy tales that remain popular to this day. Germans such as August Heinrich Hoffman and Heinrich Heine exhibited the amalgamation of Germany.

Liberals strengthened by these cultural and industrial progress, revolted in 1848 in an attempt to unify the German States. The King of Prussia, Frederick Wilhelm IV conceded to the liberal demands who formed a parliament by free and fair elections at Frankfurt and drafted a constitution which essentially guaranteed civil liberties and contained a liberal constitutional monarchy with the king as a figure head. The Frankfurt Parliament offered the crown to Wilhelm, which he refused and crushed the liberals. The unification attempt failed. Though he did give them a constitution, it had nothing that the liberals wanted. He was succeeded by Wilhelm I in 1861.

Wilhelm found the new government set by the constitution fighting between themselves. The trouble started when Otto von Bismarck, member of the Landtag (Prussian Diet) and a diplomat, was appointed the Minister-President of Prussia. Bismarck was a conservative statesman who supported the unification of Germany. To do this, he felt that all the German States had to be conquered militarily. So his government proposed a tax designed to fund the army. The liberal dominated Diet vetoed the bill. But Bismarck quickly found a loophole to get what he wanted. According to the constitution, a bill would be passed only if the king and the Diet agreed. Since the proposed tax was vetoed, Bismarck argued, they should continue collecting the old taxes thus successfully accomplishing his aim.

With the help of Albrecht von Roon, Minister of War and Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the General Staff, Bismarck transformed the Prussian army into a force to be reckoned with. The process of Unification of Germany started in 1863, when the reigning Danish monarch passed away. Two people emerged to succeed the throne, the first being staunchly loyal to Danish interests, and the other one being sympathetic to the Germans.

What had this succession crisis have to do with Prussians?. Well, between Denmark and Prussia were two German speaking states, Schleswig and Holstein. Denmark and Prussia wrestled for control over these, but eventually came to an agreement called the London Protocol, which made the provinces under Danish control, while simultaneously giving them self governance. The staunch Danish king Christian IX succeeded the throne and annexed Schleswig and Holstein. Bismarck used this as an excuse to ally with Austria and invade Denmark in 1864, crushing the country and dividing the spoils of war between themselves.

Austria received Holstein and Prussia got Schleswig. But Bismarck was unsatisfied, and publicly mocked the Austrians conduct during the war, and also sent troops to occupy Holstein. This started the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, where Prussia's

modernized army annihilated the Austrians and their German allies in just 6 weeks. Bismarck negotiated a peace treaty (Peace of Prague) where Prussia annexed all the northern German states, forming the North German Confederation. Now only the southern states were left, but they refused Bismarck's attempts to cajole them to join the German union.

Bismarck decided to provoke another war on an external enemy and emerge as the protector of the German brethren to achieve unification. The monarch of Spain was overthrown in a revolution in 1868, and the Spanish offered the throne to Wilhelm's nephew, Prince Leopold. Leopold was hesitant, but Bismarck pressurized Leopold to accept the throne. France loudly opposed this, and sent Count Benedetti to Wilhelm I to ask him to stop Leopold's ascension. Wilhelm had previously opposed Bismarck's wish and convinced Leopold to renounce the request.

Benedetti, upon meeting the Prussian King, demanded a guarantee that no Hohenzollern (the royal house of Prussia) would ever ascend to the Spanish throne. Wilhelm replied that he had already forbidden Leopold's candidacy, so the matter was closed and he could not make any further promises. After both of them departed, Wilhelm sent a telegram to Bismarck narrating the incident, and requested him to inform the press. Though Bismarck did inform the press, he edited the telegram to make the French look as if they made demands under the threat of war if they were not accepted.

This caused fury among both the Germans and the French, who interpreted the published telegram as an insult on their ambassador and subsequently declared war. The southern German states quickly allied with Prussia and Bismarck's wish came to. The Franco-Prussian war was a complete disaster for France, as it was obliterated in just 6 months and lost 1 million men. The French, under Napoleon III, surrendered in 1871. The new government replaced the monarchy with the Third French Republic and signed the Treaty of Frankfurt, paying 5 billion francs as war indemnity and recognizing the new German empire.

So, on January 18th 1871, Wilhelm I was declared Kaiser (emperor) of Germany in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. Bismarck later became the Chancellor of Germany, whose policies rapidly modernized Germany into an industrial, military, and scientific power and maintained peace throughout Europe for 2 decades through complex alliances. He also laid the groundwork for the first welfare state, introducing universal healthcare, accident insurance, and old age pensions.

Nonetheless, he resigned in 1890 after furious disagreements with Wilhelm's grandson Wilhelm II, who became emperor in 1888. Bismarck felt underappreciated

and that Wilhelm was interfering in his policies which were suppressing socialists. Bismarck retired and died in 1898. He became a hero to German nationalists, who praised his efforts in unifying Germany and keeping peace in Europe after it.

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