

# Unification by Absorption or by Incrementalism (*Sunshine Policy*)?: A Comparative Enquiry 25 Years after German Reunification

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*In the history of Korea two concepts of reunification have developed: Unification by absorption and an incremental concept of unification. This paper tests the two concepts for their effectiveness by analyzing historical examples for both. As criteria for effectiveness were set: 1. the criterion of comparative living conditions, 2. the criterion of satisfaction with the outcomes, 3. the criterion of integration and the lack of prejudices and discrimination. The comparison was considered admissible, if the comparison produced typical differences for the two methods. All historical examples of unification by absorption show deep splits in the societies even more than hundred years and many generations after reunification or unification. Some of the examples, however, show good scores on the creation of comparable living conditions. All examples of incremental unifications have succeeded much better in creating integrated societies with satisfaction and mutual respect and acceptance yet with much variance in living conditions.*

**Keywords:** reunification, Sunshine Policy, history of reunifications, Monnet method, Brandt's Ostpolitik

## Introduction: The Concepts of Reunification in Korean History

When Korea was divided along the cease-fire line immediately plans for reunification began to be worked out. At first both sides were set on *liberating* the other side: unification by absorption. This meant historically and conceptually that one side would totally absorb the other and force on it its own institutions, values, and economic, social, and political practices on the other side and replace theirs with its own.

In 1989 the Roh Tae-woo administration of South Korea developed a more sophisticated, incrementalist two tiered concept. Its nickname was *Nordpolitik* after the model of *Ostpolitik* of Willy Brandt. On the first tier confidence-building policies should reduce tensions and create enough understanding between the two sides to enter the second tier. This would be a merely formal reunification without really changing anything. In the plans of the South it was called *the National Commonwealth of Korea*. This formal reunification to a common State and Nation was supposed to be without common powers at first. It consisted of empty institutions and was to function like a container, empty at first, but capable of being filled step by step with more and more common real institutions and powers until a real reunification would be achieved.

This incrementalist, gradual unification is conceptually characterized first of all by a relationship of the two sides on an equal level. Both sides accept the differences of the two sides and their right to differ. No side would threaten the other side with traceless extinction as envisioned by the concept of unification by absorption. On the basis of this mutual acceptance and recognition the two sides would and could approach each other. Until *real* unification was achieved, the two states of North Korea and South Korea, their governments, their opposite political, social, and economical systems would continue to exist side by side under the umbrella of the *National Commonwealth of Korea* without any institutionalized agenda to develop communalities. It was a very diplomatic concept, because its entrance threshold was extremely low but created an institutional setup that could house anything that came up at its own speed allowing for ups and downs. It was taking Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* to a new level: These empty institutions created a forum in which the two sides could meet and use the undefined character of these shells to adapt to the developing needs.

North Korea at the time stuck to its initial concept of unification by absorption by *liberating* the South from its U.S. occupation and capitalist

aberration (Fuqua 2011, pp. 62-66).

After German Reunification in 1990 a different concept of unification came to dominate the South Korean agenda. West Germany, in the South Korean view, had absorbed the imploded GDR into its own institutional, social, and political setup. Since North Korea continually seemed to be on the verge of collapse, as well, German reunification as absorption seemed to be a much more realistic model than the still prevailing concept of an incremental reunification on the basis of growing mutual trust and institutions of consensus. So the course of German reunification was closely followed by South Korea. In the course of time it became obvious that German reunification turned out to be much bumpier than anticipated. The costs were much higher than expected: The exchange of currency, elites, laws, and owners threw East Germany into a social, cultural, and above all economic crisis comparable to a lost war and created corresponding resentment and estrangement. These findings threw grave doubts on the feasibility of the absorption model. When South Korea experienced in the years after 1997 a strangling economic crisis herself it became clear that under such circumstances one could not afford the German model and had to resort again to the incremental consensus model of the years before German Reunification (Moon 2012, p. 174).

Therefore, when in December 1997, Kim Dae-jung, up to then leading politician of the opposition, after a turbulent political life of imprisonments, death sentences, attempts on his life and exile, came to power in the first peaceful change of power in South Korea, he could set into practice his long propagated turn in South Korean reunification policy, the *Sunshine Policy*. It derived its name from an Aesop fable about the North Wind and the Sun. As the North Wind and the Sun once were disputing who of them was the more powerful they saw in front of them a hiker with a heavy overcoat. They agreed that he should be declared the victor who could strip the hiker of his overcoat. The North wind blew with all his might and tugged at the coat and shook the man and nearly pushed him over. But the stronger the North Wind blew the tighter the hiker wrapped his overcoat around him. So finally the North Wind gave up and challenged the Sun to try his luck. So the Sun shone with all its warmth and soon the hiker started to sweat and loosen his overcoat and then voluntarily took it off. Similarly the icy North Korean position should be melted away by the South's assurance that it would not attempt to absorb it and by a continual stream of offers of cooperation, economic support, and common ventures. This policy was inspired by Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* as well (Kim, Geon-wo 2007).

Kim Dae-jung's *Sunshine Policy* was sensationally successful because it did not insist on reciprocity. It instead flooded the North with benefits. Like in the fable the heat drove the Northern regime to take off some of its diplomatic armor and even to agree on a meeting of the two Presidents in June 2000 in North Korea's capital, Pyongyang. It was the first meeting of the two Presidents in the history of the divided Koreas. On June 15 the two Presidents issued a Joint Statement on the future course of reunification:

“The North and the South agreed to solve the question of the country's reunification independently by the concerted efforts of the Korean nation responsible for it. ... The North and the South, recognizing that the low-level federation proposed by the North and the commonwealth-system proposed by the South for the reunification of the country have similarity, agreed to work together for the reunification in this direction in the future.” (Fuqua 2011, p. 62)

Kim Dae-jung was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize the same year for his *Sunshine Policy*. Yet it didn't result in any real progress towards reunification. The insurmountable difference in opinions was cloaked by the similarities mentioned in the Joint Statement. The *low-level federation proposed by the North* cited in the document, actually meant a construct in which the North and South would have an equal vote in matters of foreign and military policy, which would enable the North to block any cooperation of the South with the United States and any other Western power.

After the attack on the USA by Al-Qaeda on September 9, 2001 and George W. Bush's declaration of North Korea as part of the *Axis of Evil* the North declared talks with the South as fruitless and cut them off. Strangely enough one criticism of the *Sunshine Policy* in the South was that in arranging the meeting of the Presidents several hundred million dollars had been paid to North Korea (Moon 2012; Fuqua 2011). This criticism seems somewhat absurd, since what the rays are to the Sun, money is to foreign policy.

The successor to Kim Dae-jung in the South Korean Presidency, Roh Moo-hyun, however managed to arrange another meeting of the two Presidents of North and South Korea in 2007, where not only the Joint Statement of 2000 was reiterated but a plan to establish lasting peace between the two countries was agreed upon (Fuqua 2011).

But already in 2008 relations between North Korea and the World around it deteriorated again and the new South Korean President Lee

Myung-bak from 2008 onwards initiated a return to the absorption concept of reunification. This currently is the dominant political concept for reunification in South Korea, supported by the US.

## Methodological Considerations: The Admissibility of a Comparative Enquiry and its Criteria

With this fascinating and unique history the question forces itself upon the mind, whether it is possible and methodologically admissible to test the two concepts that have developed in Korean history for their comparative effectiveness by studying other historic processes of unification or reunification in order to draw conclusions for the Korean case. Before this question can be answered processes of unification and reunification must be exactly defined and differentiated from other international relations.

### *Definition of Reunification and Unification*

Historical examples shall be deemed examples of *reunification*, when previously separated parts of an entity that was generally considered to be a whole are separated into two or more sovereign countries and are then brought together again whether by force or voluntary agreement into one single nation. Processes of *unification* shall be delineated from colonization, invasion, conquest and imperial subjugation by the voluntary process of joining the new entity. The added entity must clearly desire of its own to become part of the bigger entity like for example much of the unification process of Italy, Germany or Greece and the expansion of the United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the expansion of the European Union in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Methodological Admissibility of Comparison*

A comparison of the unification or reunification of countries over a wide span of historically vastly different economic, social, and cultural conditions of political processes may seem methodological mayhem. To compare present day Korea with the conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Italy or the irredentist movements on the Balkan does not consider the vast differences in values, economic, and historical circumstances. Yet in the context of this paper it is only the question whether the unification took place by voluntary agreement

and mutual step by step adaption to each other or whether it was executed by the subjugation of one side under the dictate of the other that counts. It is a question of the method of unification irrespective of the specific historical economic, social, or political circumstances. If the comparison would show a distinctive difference of outcomes in the two different methods of unification and reunification whatever the historical social, economic, or political circumstances might have been, a transferability of the results to the Korean situation can legitimately be considered.

### *Criteria of Comparison*

Criteria by which to judge the outcomes of such processes of unification or reunification in comparison as success are taken from the goals proclaimed in the processes themselves. They are: 1) objective available data about the degree of comparable living conditions attained in the unified or reunified parts (e.g., life expectancy, health status, income, wealth, employment, educational attainment, productivity, similarity in values, consumption pattern, tastes etc.), 2) data about the subjective evaluation of the process (e.g., the satisfaction of the people with the outcomes of unification or reunification expressed in polls or in data about emigration), 3) data from polls and other sources about the subjective relationships between the people of the two sides, the extent of prejudices and discrimination against the other side.

### The Case of Germany as an Example for the Application of Both Concepts

The original German constitution of 1949, *Grundgesetz* (basic law), contains both concepts of reunification, the incremental concept as well as the concept of unification by absorption. The original preamble ends with the words: "The whole of the German population is called upon to fulfill in free self-determination the German unity and freedom." And the then last article, Article 146, of the constitution clearly states: "This basic law loses its validity on the day on which a constitution is put into force which has been decided by the German people in a free plebiscite." Both clauses clearly assume that both parts of Germany develop a new constitution as equal partners in a process of consultations and present it to the voters for decision.

Article 23 of the *Grundgesetz* contains the concept of unification by

absorption: “This basic law is at first valid for the Länder ... (there follows a list of the Länder that took part in the acceptance of the original *Grundgesetz*). In other parts of Germany it is to be put into force after their accession.” There is no mention of *free self-determination* or a free decision of the German people, including those from these *other parts*. Historically this Article was not put into the original constitution to regulate a possible reunification of the Eastern part of Germany into the Bundesrepublik, but to make the integration of the Saarland and West Berlin possible without having to decide on a new constitution. That it was used for the big expansion in 1990 certainly was not what the founders of the new Germany had intended.

Thus the German constitution sets the stage for both policies of unification and both were applied in the course of German history after World War II.

#### *The Neue Ostpolitik of Willy Brandt as a Policy of Unification by Incrementalism*

The *Neue Ostpolitik* of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr is seen worldwide as the model for an incremental process of unification. In fact it is itself a copy. It has been inspired by the concept of Jean Monnet, the founder of the Montanunion, the Europeanization of the steel and coal industries in Europe. According to Wilkens (1999, p. 81) Brandt and Monnet were in close collaboration when the *Ostpolitik* started in 1969 (Lippert 2005, p. 157). Both the *Monnet method* and the *Ostpolitik* followed much the same principles: 1. starting from common interests one would go step by step as equal partners without a preconceived goal or roadmap or timeline except the goal to guarantee peace. 2. acceptance of diverting interests and institutions as a mutual guarantee of the right to exist. 3. the use of the growing economic interdependence and trade as a lever for finding compromise and develop common positions (Lippert 2005).

After a series of epochal treaties and spectacular visits the *Ostpolitik* stagnated with the change of government to a liberal-Christian coalition under the chancellorship of Helmut Kohl. Willy Brandt then initiated in a letter to Erich Honecker a dialog between the SED, the communist party governing the GDR, and the SPD. So *Sunshine Policy* could continue on a lower level yet with equal significance. Between 1984 and 1989 eight rounds of dialog between the SPD Commission on Basic Values and members of the Academy for Social Sciences of the SED and several other institutions of the GDR took place. It resulted in a common Policy Statement in 1987 with the Title *The Dispute of Ideologies and the Common Security*, which caused quite

a sensation in East and West. Peace, it said, cannot be kept by a continuing arms race but by mutually guaranteeing it. The former enemy must become a partner in peace. The differences in ideologies were to be accepted but should not hinder the dialog and competition between the two sides. Both sides agreed that reforms were necessary in both systems (Reißig 2014). This was very similar to the statement issued by the two presidents of Korea on their first meeting. It was a manifest for an incremental process and the founding of common institutions as containers in which communalities could grow.

After November 9, 1989, when the wall had been opened, there happened a sudden change in the political situation. The makers of the peaceful revolution in the GDR up to then had worked for a change in the GDR from socialist feudalism to a real democracy and functioning market economy. All over the country initiatives for direct democracy had sprung up and were beginning to take over the institutions. With the opening of the wall most of the energy of that movement was sucked into exploring the West. Millions crossed the borders encouraged by the 100 DM that the West German government gave to every person as *Welcoming Money*. The peaceful revolution in the GDR dissipated and fell apart. At the same time the big and well organized Western parties streamed into the now easily accessible GDR and founded their satellite organizations there, well financed and well administered by the West. It was a takeover of the political scene by the West.

But still the incrementalist concept prevailed. On November 28 Chancellor Helmut Kohl proclaimed in the West-German parliament a ten-point program in which further cooperation and assistance to the GDR was announced, if the GDR initiated fundamental and irreversible reforms of its system. In the speech Kohl also made the offer of a confederation of the two countries until unification would be reached.

### *The Switch to Unification by Absorption by Kohl in 1990*

Shortly afterwards the conservative parties in both countries switched to the concept of unification by absorption on the basis of Article 23 *Grundgesetz* that made accession to an otherwise unchanged basic law and unchanged legal, economic, and political system possible. Their calculation was, that the majority of East Germans after having seen West Germany wanted to be part of West Germany and get rid of the GDR as quickly as possible. And they were right. The conservatives gained a sensational majority in the elections of March 18, 1990 - and the activists of the peaceful revolution lost out.

Officially it was argued that the speed of the unification by absorption



was inevitable because only a very narrow *window of opportunity* existed, which could disappear at any moment e.g. with a coup in Moscow. However, Germany could easily have followed the Korean example and could have used the *window of opportunity* to establish a formal unification like the *National Commonwealth of Korea* with at first empty institutions that could have been filled in a continued incremental process and finalized in a plebiscite on a new common constitution as prescribed by the then valid version of the *Grundgesetz*.

Instead the pressure on the GDR continued to increase day by day because still so-called *refugees* from the now democratic GDR were treated the same as during the time of East German dictatorship. The *Grundgesetz* had been proclaimed valid for all Germans in 1949. So throughout the years of separation, refugees were treated as if they had lived in the West all their lives, which worked as a tremendous attractor to become a *refugee*. The continuation of that policy even after the first free elections in the GDR caused more people to move from East to West Germany in the years 1989 and 1990 than ever before in the history of the GDR. The threat that the GDR was about to be depopulated was taken as a reality and used as means to portray reunification by absorption as an imminent necessity without alternative. Therefore on August 23<sup>rd</sup> the parliament of the GDR declared that on October 3<sup>rd</sup> the GDR would be dissolved by its accession to the German Federal Republic. *Sunshine Policy* in Germany thus was discontinued by the Kohl government and replaced with a strict policy of absorption. There was no mentioning of necessary reforms of the West German system any more. Instead the existing sometimes highly controversial laws and institutions of the old West replaced all East German laws and institutions.

#### *Application of the Criteria to Germany 25 Years after Unification*

Germany 25 years after reunification presents a paradoxical situation. Using the first criterion of comparable living conditions also defined by the German constitution in Article 72 *Grundgesetz* as a constant goal for German governments, reunification has succeeded. In the yearly report on the state of German reunification the German Government reported for 2013 that life expectancy had become equal in East and West, which meant that in the 25 years in the East men had gained 7,4 and women 6,3 years of life expectancy. East German birth rates that had dramatically dropped after reunification in 1989 have caught up and are now equal or even higher than in the West. Working incomes in the East still are nearly 20% lower than in the West. But

productivity also is 20% lower in the East. There is a much higher unemployment rate in the East, but this is mainly due to the higher willingness in the East of women to work. If one calculates the number of persons employed per 1000 inhabitants, often enough the number of people working is higher in the East than in the West. If one considers the economic structures, especially the size of businesses, incomes are comparably equal in East and West. Small businesses which dominate the East pay lower wages. If one considers the socio-economic position of persons and compares similar milieus, tastes and behavioral norms do not greatly differ any more between members of comparable social groups in East and West. Additionally in the years since reunification the social composition of the two parts of Germany has become very similar in the subjective definition of what social stratum people define for themselves: In 1992 Cramér's  $V$ , giving a percentage of the maximal possible variance between the sets of data of two groups on the same variable, was 0,278; in 2012 it was 0,193 (my calculation on the data supplied by ALLBUS 1992 and 2012).

Applying the second criterion of satisfaction with reunification, the reunification of Germany 25 years after the opening of the wall presents itself as a success, as well. Statista reports in a 2015 survey that 42% of West Germans and even 56% of East Germans considered themselves as winners of German reunification. 22% of West Germans, and 24% of East Germans categorized themselves as losers. 30% of West Germans and only 17% of East Germans decided that they were neither/ nor (Statista 2015). So only less than a quarter categorized themselves as losers and were critical of the outcome of the reunification process. However, the statistics of young people, especially well educated young women, moving from East Germany in general but especially from the scarcely populated Northern East German states *Brandenburg* and *Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* to jobs in West Germany tell a different story. The population of the territory that once was the GDR has massively decreased and is projected to shrink by 35% of the present population in the year 2060.

Applying the third criterion, the degree of integration measured by mutual respect and acceptance, the picture looks very different: About half of East Germans consider the conflict between East and West Germans as strong or very strong (ALLBUS 2010). In Thuringia, a Southern densely populated state in East Germany, more than 50% continually agree to the statement: *West Germans treat East Germans as second rate humans*. Even in the youngest Generation there is throughout the years the same or even more agreement with this statement as among older persons. There is no prospect

of a resolution of the subjective misgivings between East-West for the coming generations (Wagner 2014). For the past 10 years Allensbach (2012) found a remarkable consistency in mutual stereotypes between East and West. Respondents were presented cards with attributes like *honest*, *thrifty*, *superficial* and were asked to place each card in one of three fields. One was headed: *This applies more to West Germans*, another: *This applies more to East Germans*, and a third field: *There is no difference*. Consistently more than 40% of East German Respondents placed the card *honest* in the East German field. Only 1% placed it in the West German field. More than 50% attributed themselves as being *ready to help*, but only 1% saw West-Germans as being *ready to help*. Over 60% of East Germans categorized themselves as *modest* and again only 1% gave this label to West Germans. Over 70% of East Germans placed the card *arrogant* in the field for West Germans, but only 1% of East Germans placed it in the field of East Germans.

This combination of feelings of being discriminated and feelings of moral superiority is typical for groups who see themselves as losers in a social and political process.

In the German case unification by absorption of East Germany into the old West without any substantial acceptance of East German institutions, laws, traditions etc. caused a veritable culture shock for East Germans (Wagner 1996). It was as if they had been transplanted into a foreign country without having moved a mile. The shock was vehemently intensified by the virtual breakdown of the Eastern economy. East Germany was deindustrialized, its traditional markets in Eastern Europe broke away with the currency union with the West and the internal market broke away with the possibility of East Germans to buy the long sought after Western good. Unification by absorption had an effect comparable to a lost war with a drop in the GDP in the area of the former GDR of 46% from 285,3 billion DM in 1989 to 153,8 billion DM in 1991 (Erber 1992). Prejudices and resentments in the East stem from this traumatic experience. Differing from individual culture shock in which persons quickly adapt to the new culture, if a whole population is placed in a new culture, the resentment and feeling of discrimination can carry on for generations.

## The Case of Vietnam as an Example of the Application of both Concepts of Reunification

The reunification of North and South Vietnam is a twofold process. In

the years 1976 until the Renewal (Doi Moi) in 1986 it was a brutal unification by absorption and subjugation of the South. The revolt of South Vietnamese Communists leading up to the 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress introduced a new relationship between North and South as an incremental process of unification of the country. The two sides now treated each other as equals and allowed a great diversification between North and South.

### *Reunification by Absorption 1976*

The North originally had planned to wait with reunification for five to ten years in an incremental process of reunification, with the South at first keeping its privately owned market-economy. The North even allowed the South its own foreign policy and to continue having its own seat of membership in the UN.

But then the Communist Party of the North realized that there was a strong cultural as well as economic problem. The North Vietnamese economy was at an all-time low point and the North Vietnamese soldiers were utterly poor as they entered wealthy South Vietnam. There they encountered an American world. All the imported American wealth was still there. Soon the North Vietnamese soldiers started to spend all they had on the luxuries of the South: Music, Literature, Comics, Films, watches, cameras. Whole busloads filled with such goods made their way to the North and spread there like an avalanche. The Communist Party of the North realized that this situation meant an economic and cultural threat to the very existence of the Communist regime. So a quick reunification by absorption was decided and put into practice in 1976 (Canh and Cooper 1983, p. 18; Corfield 2008, p. 102). The reunification by absorption was radical: With the exception of agriculture, all businesses were nationalized and all leading positions were filled with North Vietnamese cadres – even those of South Vietnamese Communists. The Westernized elite of South Vietnam in civil service and the military was asked to come with a week's supplies for a short *reeducation training* – and disappeared for years. Absorption was quick and thorough and was tremendously successful, if one uses the criterion of creating comparable living conditions: In the course of a year South Vietnam was just as poor and suppressed as North Vietnam.

Applying the second criterion of satisfaction with the outcomes of reunification, for most South Vietnamese reunification was a failure. There are no polls available, but millions fled the country under the most dangerous circumstances as *boat people* and thousands perished in *reeducation camps*.

The third criterion is even harder to apply because of a total lack of reports on that subject. Yet the fact that in 1986 hundreds of Southern Communists who had fought for the Viet Cong passed a resolution for the 6<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and demanded an end to the discrimination of the South and a basic turn-around of politics is a strong indication of the prejudices and tensions between North and South.

### *Doi Moi – Renewal 1986 as the Beginning of an Incremental Process of National Unification*

With this revolt came a turn-about in Vietnamese politics. Both sides were given equal representation in the leadership of the Communist Party by taking turns in top positions. The collectivization of agriculture was repealed. Private farms and businesses, even foreign direct investments, were reintroduced. This started an incremental process of unification of North and South Vietnam in which eventually the South became the economically and politically more vibrant part (Wagner 2014). The criterion of comparable living conditions was much less fulfilled with this incremental process in which the two parts were allowed to take differing developments. But the criterion of satisfaction with the process undeniably was much better fulfilled than before for both sides. The North also experienced unprecedented growth. The poverty rates in the North were more than halved. Vietnam again became a rice-exporting country and people started to come back to Vietnam. The third criterion integration and lack of prejudice and discrimination is hard to test. However my visit on site in 2005 let me see considerable prejudice between North and South possibly because of the years of discrimination before. The South which had been the loser of the first period of reunification now was the undisputed winner.

## Cases of Unification by Absorption

### *The Case of Italy*

*Italy* was unified in 1861 by absorbing more and more of former Spanish and Austrian territories and finally incorporating the Vatican State in 1871. *Risorgimento*, the re-arising of the Italy of the Roman Empire, was initiated by the bourgeois nationalistic elites of Northern Italy, especially Piedmont, and was executed by an absorption step by step of new territories under the elitist

rule and constitution (only about 2% of the population had the right to vote) of Piedmont. Most of the common people in the absorbed mainly agricultural territories of the South remained alien to the process until today. The first criterion of establishing comparable living conditions is far from fulfilled. The second criterion of satisfaction with the outcomes of unification also has been failed as is shown by the attempts of Northern Italy to split off from the South. The third criterion of integration and lack of prejudice and discrimination has spectacularly been missed. Northern Italians frequently point out to strangers like me, that Africa starts South of Rome. The split between South and North still is today a dominant feature of Italian politics.

The Italian case shows that unification by absorption can fail in all three criteria. Italy never even came close to establishing comparative living conditions in the North and South and of ending the discrimination of the South. Satisfaction with process continued to be very low.

### *The Case of Czechoslovakia*

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after World War I, the collapse of the double monarchy of the Austrian Kaiser and Hungarian King led to the unification and independence from Austria of territories that had been part of KuK-monarchy for centuries.

Czechoslovakia, then Bohemia, had come under Austrian rule in 1620 during the Thirty Years' War. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century strong nationalistic tendencies developed mainly in the Czech part of the area. It was also Czech politicians in exile who since 1916 had worked out an agreement with the Triple Entente that after the war Czechs and Slovaks would have a common national State. The economically and politically dominant Czech side practically absorbed the Slovak side into the new nation and continued to dominate it throughout its existence. Twice during that time, first in March 1939, after the Munich agreement, and then on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1993, the Slovak part became an independent country. Both split-offs were accompanied by complaints on part of the Slovaks of having been disadvantaged under Czech domination. Unification by absorption in the case of Czechoslovakia did not lead to an integrated sustainable union and also failed in all three criteria.

### *The Case of Yugoslavia*

*Yugoslavia* is an especially bitter lesson in the disadvantages of reunification by absorption. In its irredentist ideology Serbian radicals in the time

leading up to World War I proclaimed the goal to *reunite* Serbia in its original borders of the 13<sup>th</sup> century when all of Croatia and Bosnia allegedly had been part of Serbia. This Irredentism led to the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and eventually, to World War I. Serbia fought the war at high costs on the side of the Entente and therefore was counted as a winner and grandly compensated by nearly fulfilling its dream of Grand-Serbia. Since this Serbian Grand Principality only existed in mythology the whole process cannot be categorized as reunification but must instead be categorized as a unification.

On December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918, Serbian Prince Regent, Alexander of Serbia, proclaimed the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes under King Peter I of Serbia. From the beginning the kingdom was plagued by the deepening conflict between the new non-Serbian parts' demand for more autonomy and the strictly centralist, authoritarian, and domineering policy of the Serbian leadership. The country soon became ungovernable and flew apart as soon as it was occupied by the Nazi army. The second unification, now as a reunification, after World War II, was held together by the strong leadership of Tito and his policy of sharing resources between the conflicting ethnicities according to their percentage of the whole population. This helped for the moment, kept, however, the ethnic competition alive and deepened the multiple divisions between the ethnic groups and therefore of the country. The result was the bloody civil wars in the nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its ethnic cleansings and breaking up of the country into its ethnic parts.

The first criterion of comparable living conditions had been reached in the Tito era although Slovenia was far ahead of the rest of the country. The second criterion of satisfaction with the unification was shown not to have been reached by the cascades of split-offs and the resulting civil wars between the parts. The third criterion of integration and lack of prejudices and discrimination was functionally reached under Tito, but was soon debunked as fake when the country fell apart in bitter ethnic competition and murderous prejudice.

## Cases of Unifications by Incrementalism

The comparative literature about unifications and reunifications (Ahn 2005; Cieslik 2001; Kelly 2011; Kim, A Joo 2012; Kim, Min Jung 2009; and Roos 2009) strangely enough only refers to unifications by absorption. Incrementalism as developed in South Korea as *Sunshine Policy* never is

considered for comparison as if there were no historic examples for it. Yet in many respects the historic growth of the United States in the early 19th century and the recent expansion of at first the European Economic Community and then the European Union may well be examples for such incrementalism. Therefore these possible examples shall be studied more closely.

### *The Case of the Growth of the United States of America*

The growth of the United States during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19th century is a good example for the functioning of the *empty institutions* in the process of unification by incrementalism which serve as a container for a multitude of possible developments towards unification as envisioned in South Korea's concept of the *National Commonwealth of Korea* and of the *Sunshine Policy*.

Already at independence, the United States covered considerably more land than the territory of its 13 founding States. In the Treaty of Paris of 1783 which gave the United States independence from Great Britain the Western border was established as running from the Lake of the Woods at the Southern border of British North America to the Source of the Mississippi River and from there along the river to the Ohio River and the Northern border of Virginia. It was declared at first as *unorganized territory* under the sovereignty of the United States and then established as the first *organized territory of the United States* by an act of the Congress of the Confederation of the United States in 1787. It was this territory that Article 4, Section 3 Clause 2 of the Constitution of the United States refers to: "The Congress shall have power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States." Clause 1 regulates the future unification of such territories to the United States: "New States may be admitted by the Congress into this Union; but no new States shall be formed or erected within the Jurisdiction of any other State; nor any State be formed by the Junction of two or more States, or parts of States, without the Consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress." Unification by absorption thereby is excluded by the US constitution as a regular course of action.

In 1789 the first President, George Washington, signed into law a new "Northwest Ordinance" now based on the new Constitution. It determined that all *unsettled lands* were to be ceded to the federal government and administered by congress until they became new states. Before an *unsettled area* reached 5000 voters (only free white men) it was called a district and



Congress through the president would appoint a governor, a secretary, three judges, and a non-voting Delegate in the House of Representatives. With more than 5000 voters the area became a territory and could elect its own legislature and its non-voting representative to Congress, but not its governor (Palmer 2011). When a territory reached a population of 60 000 it could apply for full statehood.

This formal set-up was a perfectly empty institution especially since the United States government at the time was extremely weak. It had no means to really control and steer what was going on in the vast territories of the West. Paul Frymer (2011 and 2014) shows very clearly that under this formal umbrella a multitude of developments took place very much determined by the local circumstances. The means by which these processes were led into directions seen as appropriate to the local circumstances was a *Sunshine Policy* leading to slow but continual growth of the United States. The *Sunshine* of the Aesop fable in the case of the United States was land. As circumstances demanded land was appropriated or withheld. If, for example, an area was heavily contested between local Indian tribes and the settlers, potential settlers were offered land for free, if they settled in areas deemed to be dangerous and stayed there for several years. In other “safer” areas, where the native people had already been removed land was sold at an attractive price determined by the local authorities and upheld by the local courts. To steer settlers into certain territories land was withheld in other areas. Paul Frymer (2014, p. 119) summarizes the process:

“The importance of federal land policies in securing and incorporating territorial borders illuminates an underexamined mechanism by which developing nation-states, even those with limited bureaucratic and military capacity, can successfully assert power over a vast and difficult geographic terrain.”

The first criterion of comparable living conditions was fulfilled whenever the land was distributed equally, yet only for white settlers. Native Americans were disowned without compensation and driven off to the worst areas of the country. Black people were slaves. The second criterion of satisfaction was well fulfilled for white people, because they could determine the setup of institutions and businesses by themselves. The third criterion of integration and lack of prejudices and discrimination again was well fulfilled for white settlers since only individual success counted and not where one came from. Additionally the frontier made mutual assistance and protection

indispensable. Yet prejudice and discrimination against non-whites was and continues to be extreme.

### *The Case of European Unification*

The unification of Europe was inspired by the French multinational grand seigneur in Cognac, Jean Monnet. He never ran for office or was part of a political party. However he was a perfect communicator and diplomat with a vast network of connections and a passion for peace in Europe. He developed a new concept of how to unite Europe which was later called the Monnet Method. Its main points, in our context, are that instead of designing constitutions and grand master-plans for a United Europe one should start with small concrete and manageable projects which created new common interests and therefore solidarity. National competences should be transferred to common institutions in small concrete steps. What would become of it was consciously left open like in the empty institutions of *Sunshine Policy* to allow for flexibility in response to real developments. The main lever for unification should be the growing common economic basis which would automatically undermine the sovereignty of the nations and create more and more common interests. This was the birth of incrementalism as a conscious method for unification (Wessels 2001; Wüthrich 2011).

Incrementalism was very successful and in its own way developed step by step with each wave of new entries into the EU into an intricate system of small steps of encouragements and supports for countries seeking to join the EU, a veritable *Sunshine Policy* (EUR-Lex 2014). Once a country has been formally accepted as a new member, *Sunshine Policy* really sets in. As long as the average income in the whole country or in one or more of its regions is below 76% of the European average, the country is eligible for tremendous European funding.

This has led in all past enlargement processes to such growth in the countries that with the opening of the borders for free travel and employment in the Schengen area, the feared flood of cheap labor into the rich areas of Europe did not happen. Instead the *Sunshine Policy* had created such a lot of opportunities in the new member countries that most people preferred to make use of them in their home country although income was much lower than in the rich European countries. This is a remarkable result for the context of Korea where the economic differences between the two parts form the biggest threat in a potential reunification process.

This leveling out of differences in living conditions below the threshold

of 76% by subsidies is the same instrument that Germany employs to create comparable living conditions in the country. So the first criterion is guaranteed to be fulfilled. Yet the process of European unification works on the principle that each country should keep its cultural, political, and economic peculiarities. So there are as many systems of education, social security, health care, civil and other laws as there are member countries in the EU. The EU only sets minimum standards and standards to guarantee the freedom of mobility, but once these are fulfilled each country can do what it wants. This guarantees the fulfillment of the second criterion of satisfaction. People mostly remain in their known world. They hardly ever notice anything European and therefore tend to be satisfied. This policy also tends to prevent prejudice beyond traditional stereotypes. In all conflicts the third criterion of integration and lack of prejudice and discrimination is guaranteed by the European institutions especially the European Court of Justice.

So the incremental method of unifying Europe has succeeded in fulfilling all three criteria for a successful unification.

## Conclusions

In the discussion about the methodological admissibility of a comparison over such wide differences in the history and circumstances of cases of reunification and unification the point was made, that if the comparison would show a distinctive difference of outcomes in the two different methods of unification and reunification across the board whatever the historical social, economical, or political circumstances might have been, the admissibility of the comparison would have been proven and the transferability of the results to the Korean situation could legitimately be considered.

The comparison in all of these cases showed that there was a consistently similar outcome for the cases of unification or reunification by absorption. Only - if any - the first criterion of creating comparable living conditions was fulfilled in the cases of unification by absorption. In all cases of unification or reunification by the incremental method a very similar and very different result could be seen. Incrementalism was worst for the first criterion of creating similar living conditions. But it consistently fulfilled the second criterion of satisfaction since it included all sides on an equal level and for the same reason the third criterion of integration and a lack of prejudice and discrimination.

The comparison has shown the heavy costs and long-lasting alienation of the absorption model of reunification with Yugoslavia as the worst example. But even Germany has all the marks of such a unification by absorption with deep rifts in mutual perceptions of each other and of the process of unification between East and West Germany after 25 years of unification. In the case of Germany and Vietnam the only possible advantage of unification by absorption became apparent. In both cases the goal of creating comparable living conditions was reached, yet at the cost of a continuing alienation between the unified parts.

An incremental process of unification as envisioned in the *Sunshine Policy* of South Korea promises much better results as especially the example of Europe shows. If the process is carried by mutual respect and growing common interests as a basis for development, the speed of the process can be adapted to the circumstances. If there is enough support for the economically weaker side, migration between the parts can be controlled and can be adapted to the growth of common institutions. This has happened in the European process of unification without any lasting alienation and without major population movements between the parts.

For Korea the conclusion would be to attempt a return to the concept of *Sunshine Policy* with elements of the incrementalism of the European Union. A policy of reunification by absorption can have such grave drawbacks that in the view of the author of this paper it should be avoided even in the case of a sudden collapse of North Korean governmental structures. Even then incrementalism could work with a democratically elected provisional government in North Korea and its representation in the empty institutions of a new *National Commonwealth of Korea*. Before a real reunification can be realized, North Korea should have cleared internally how to deal with its history and with the atrocities committed during the time of separation. This is one of the many lessons to be learned from German reunification.

(Submitted: March 12, 2015; Reviewed: May 3, 2015; Accepted: May 26, 2015)

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