

Contemporary History 1945 - 2000

The Social Democrats (SPD) emerged as the strongest party from the first local elections after the Second World War, followed by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU, 33.6%), the Communist Party (KPD, 11.6%) and the Liberal Party (LPD, 1.3%). The first freely and democratically elected city council since the beginning of Nazi rule convened in the large auditorium of the police headquarters on June 21, 1946. On July 25 the council voted for the chief municipal director of Düsseldorf, Walter Kolb, as their new mayor. Kolb was installed in office in the Great Hall of Frankfurt University on August 1, 1946. In 1947 Frankfurt became the headquarters for the general administration of the United Economic Area of the American and British Zones (Bizone). Frankfurt was also the venue of the German Economic and Executive Council, with representatives of the various federal states, in June 1947. In 1948 Frankfurt became part of the French zone (Trizone).

On May 18, 1948, the 100th anniversary of the National Assembly was celebrated in the rebuilt Paulskirche (St. Paul's Church). Fritz von Unruh gave his Speech to the Germans, with a critical analysis of the Nazi period. The reconstruction of the Paulskirche was seen as Frankfurt's most important cultural task. From this moment onwards it was regarded as a symbol of democracy and liberty and as the traditional site of German parliamentary democracy.

In 1949 Frankfurt became a newspaper city: after the appearance of the Frankfurter Rundschau as the first German daily paper in August 1945, the first issue of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung was published on November 1, 1949.

The first few years of the post-war period were very much dominated by reconstruction. In 1951 the city council decided to oversee the rebuilding of the centre, for which it commissioned a company called Frankfurter Aufbau AG, and defined a plan for the street layout of the historic core of Frankfurt, the Altstadt (Old Town). The last air raid gaps were finally closed in the 1980s.

In 1956 the 70-metre (230-foot) telecommunications building was erected on the rubble of a former stately home, the Palais Thurn und Taxis. Germany's first public multi-storey car park, designed by M. Meik and H. Romeick, was built at Grosser Kornmarkt, behind the Katharinenkirche (St. Catherine's Church). It was called Parkhaus Hauptwache. In 1961, Zurich House, one of Frankfurt's first skyscrapers, was completed. Built in aluminium and glass by Udo von Schaubroth and Werner Stücheli, it is located on Opernplatz. In the same year Heiningerturm was opened on Sachsenhäuser Berg - a grain silo with an observation restaurant at the top and a height of 120 metres (394 feet).

The commissioning of the first Frankfurt underground line from Hauptwache to Nordweststadt in 1968 marked a new chapter in the development of urban transport. Further underground lines were to follow, spanning Frankfurt's map in a star shape. In 1993 the underground system of the city reached 81.1 km (50.4 miles), the tram system 99.7 km (62 miles) and bus routes 448 km (278 miles). Yet despite the good range of public transport, there was also a continuous increase in private vehicles. By January 1, 1993, the registration of motorized vehicles in Frankfurt had reached 334,935.

Frankfurt Airport is a major hub of international air traffic. The Central Terminal of the airport was opened in 1972. In all, Frankfurt airport was designed to process 30 million passengers per year and 36 jets at any one time. Runway West was used for the first time on April 12, 1984, after a construction period that had been accompanied by rather fierce demonstrations. In 1992 the airport recorded 340,468 take-offs and landings and 30,758,852 passengers. In 1998 the number of passengers totalled about 43 million. The increase in passengers and freight therefore made it necessary to extend the airport even further in the 1990s. 1994 saw the completion of Terminal 2, and the same year also marked the beginning of the construction of Cargo City South on a section of the former Rhine Main Air Base. Another runway is planned in the next few years.

The population of Frankfurt increased rapidly during the first years after the war. By 1949 it had already reached 500,000. From 1956 to 1961, the figure rose from 623,172 to 683,081, thus reaching its peak in the history of the city. In 1972, after the reorganization of local government in the federal state of Hesse, four towns were incorporated into Frankfurt - Nieder-Erlenbach, Kalbach, Harheim and Nieder-Eschbach, totalling 30 square kilometres (19 square miles) and a population of 16,000. Despite this development, the total number of inhabitants in Frankfurt showed a slight downturn and dropped to

621,347 by 1982. Ten years later, however, the city had a population of 660,492, of whom 321,298 were male and 339,194 female, 183,779 foreigners and 476,713 Germans. In the mid-1990s the number of inhabitants ceased to fluctuate and totalled about 650,000. By 1987 the city had 283,451 commuters into Frankfurt and 31,329 out of Frankfurt. It had 35,457 places of employment with a workforce of 558,457, of whom 99,669 worked in industry (1992: 94,442). In 1996 the number of employees paying national insurance contributions totalled 458,454.

Since 1960 Frankfurt has concluded twinning arrangements with Lyon (1960), Birmingham (1966), Milan (1970), Cairo (1979), Tel Aviv (1980), Guangzhou (1988), Toronto (1989), Budapest (1990), Prague (1990), Cracow (1991) and Granada in Nicaragua (1991), as a reflection of its growing international significance..

In the 1977 local elections the Christians Democrats (CDU) gained an absolute majority, with 50 seats on the council, while the Social Democrats (SPD) gained 38 and the Liberals (FDP) 5. Walter Wallmann became mayor of Frankfurt. Hilmar Hoffman (SPD), who had headed the city's cultural department since 1972, won Wallmann over for his "centenary project", the Frankfurter Museumsufer (Frankfurt Museum Embankment). Several museums were built that can be regarded as showpieces of cultural prestige: the German Architectural Museum (1984), the Film Museum (1984), the Museum of Applied Arts (1985), Kunsthalle Schirn (an art gallery, 1986), the Jewish Museum (1988), the Museum of Prehistory and Early History (1989), an extension to the Städel (1991) and the Museum of Modern Art (1991). Located on either side of the river Main, the museums were linked by a new pedestrian bridge, the Holbeinsteg, in 1991. Also, 1983 saw the opening of several houses built in their original historic styles on the east side of the Römerberg, as well a house called Zum schwarzen Stern (The Black Star).

In the 1989 local elections the CDU gained 36.6%, the SPD 40.1, the Greens 10.1, the National Democratic Party (NPD) 6.6% and the FDP 4.9% of the vote. This gave the SPD and the Greens a clear majority on the council, and they therefore formed a coalition, with Volker Hauff (SPD) as mayor. In March 1991 internal party squabbles caused Hauff to resign from office. He was succeeded by Andreas von Schoeler. Despite significant SPD losses in March 1993, the Red-Green coalition narrowly kept its majority: the SPD gained 32% of the vote, the CDU 33.4%, the Greens 14%, the FDP 4.4% and the Republican Party 9.3%. In spring 1995 Andreas von Schoeler resigned as mayor, after the re-election of the head of the health department, Margarethe Nimsch (Greens) had failed on account of four votes against her in the SPD. For the first time, direct mayoral elections were held, in which von Schoeler came second after the CDU candidate Petra Roth, who received 51.9% of the vote. In the 1997 local elections the downward trend of the SPD continued, while the CDU, FDP and the Greens increased their shares of the vote. On March 2 that year the CDU attained 36.3%, the SPD 29.1%, the Greens 16.9%, the FDP 5.6% and the Republicans 6.2%. The lack of any clear majorities subsequently led to a series of different coalitions. The Red-Green coalition came to a de-facto end when the SPD and CDU agreed on a joint political platform, to ensure the city's ability to act. This platform, however, came under considerable strain in early 1999, when the CDU of the state of Hesse launched a campaign against the national government's plans for new citizenship regulations. Finally, in early 2000, it collapsed altogether, when it was discovered that the CDU had been involved in sleaze money and undeclared party donations both in the state of Hesse and in the city of Frankfurt. When the SPD had terminated their joint platform, the SPD mayor, Petra Roth, decided to redistribute the functions of the various departments. As a result, some important responsibilities were removed from several SPD committees.

In the early 1990s Frankfurt was increasingly shaken by a financial crisis. A relatively large share of the population was living on supplementary benefits, so that the city was faced with a rising burden in benefit payments, while at the same time losing in taxes. By 1995 the city had an annual budget of DM 6bn and debts totalling DM 8bn. Large parts of the city's budget therefore had to be earmarked for debt repayment. It was only at the turn of the century that the situation began to relax a little, with a downturn in interest rates on the capital market and a gradual increase in tax revenue.

The necessity to save money affected all areas of public life, particularly the cultural scene. A number of major plans had to be put on ice, such as the reconstruction and extension of the Museum of Ethnology. Linda Reisch, who had succeeded Hilmar Hoffmann as head of the cultural department in 1990, was unable to continue Hofmann's culture policy, which he had started in a time of plenty. The municipal theatres of Frankfurt began to hit the headlines with internal squabbles and clashes between artistic directors and the city council. Linda Reisch had only just been elected for a second term of office when, in 1996, her responsibility for the municipal theatres was withdrawn again. A short time later Sylvain Cambreling, who had been appointed by Reisch as manager of the Frankfurt Opera House, announced his resignation for the 1996/97 season. Lack of support within the SPD finally led to Reisch being voted

out of office in 1998. She was succeeded by Hans-Bernhard Nordhoff, until then head of the cultural department in Aachen.

Yet despite the tense financial situation, culture continued to play an important part in Frankfurt's public life throughout the 1990s. Having been destroyed by a fire in 1987, the Frankfurt Opera House was reopened in April 1991. In the same year Johannes Grützke completed his pictorial cycle at the Paulskirche. In 1992, during excavations for the renovation of the Cathedral, the grave of a five-year-old girl from the Merovingian period was unearthed. The grave showed that a stone church must have been in existence on this site as early as the year 700. The renovation of the cathedral was concluded in 1994. In the same year Frankfurt set up a large-scale historical exhibition at the Bockenheimer Depot, to celebrate the 1200th anniversary of the year when it was first mentioned in public records. In 1997 Frankfurt completed the reconstruction of the Deutsche Bibliothek (German Library) in Adickesallee and the structural alterations of the Goethe Museum in Grosser Hirschgraben. In 1998, at Kunsthalle Schirn, there was an exhibition entitled *Aufbruch zur Freiheit* (Revolutionary Beginnings of Freedom), for the 150th anniversary of the first German National Assembly at the Paulskirche. In 1999 numerous festivities were organized to celebrate the 200th birthday of Johann Wolfgang Goethe. In spring 2000 the rebuilt and renovated Städel was reopened.

Since the late 20th century the Frankfurt skyline has been increasingly dominated by skyscrapers, of which the largest number can be found on the western rim of the centre. The completion of the Messeturm (Trade Fair Tower) in 1991 marked the largest office building in Europe at the time, rising to a height of 256 metres (840 ft.). Further skyscrapers were to follow. 1997 saw the opening of the twin blocks Castor and Pollux on Friedrich-Ebert-Anlage and the Commerzbank building on Kaiserplatz. If we include its aerial, the Commerzbank Tower is nearly 300 metres (984 ft.) high. The Japan Centre and the Helaba Tower were built in Neue Mainzer Gasse.

The Fall of the Wall and the reunification of Germany in 1989/90 marked the end of the Cold War. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, from 1991, were followed by the partial withdrawal of US forces stationed in Europe. Over the next five years this included most of the 28,000 Americans stationed in Frankfurt. Gradually, the various barracks and army offices were vacated. In 1995 the first new tenants moved into the former US housing areas, and a year later the State of Hesse bought the IG Farben House which had become vacant after the withdrawal of US troops. It now houses part of the university.

Throughout the 1990s Frankfurt hit the headlines several times in the areas of commerce and industry. In early 1993 several accidents occurred at Hoechst AG. On one occasion the suburb of Schwanheim was engulfed by a chemical cloud. The contaminated area had to undergo expensive treatment. In subsequent years Hoechst AG was restructured until eventually, in 1999, it merged with the French chemical group Rhône-Poulenc. The new company, called Aventis, is based in Strasbourg. The original premises in Höchst were used for an industrial park, housing several subsidiaries of Aventis, the former Hoechst AG and a number of other enterprises.

In late 1993 Metallgesellschaft (The Metal Company) was driven to the brink of bankruptcy through a number of forward deals. The subsequent restructuring of the company led to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. Several months later the German property market was shaken by the collapse of the corporate empire of the building tycoon Jürgen Schneider. Schneider had become known through a large number of new business buildings and expensive redevelopment projects of historic buildings. All these projects had been financed through loans. This biggest bankruptcy in post-war history led to the loss of billions of deutschmark among lenders, particularly Deutsche Bank. In 1999 the collapse of the construction company Philipp Holzmann could only be averted through the intervention of the German federal government.

In October 1993, after lengthy negotiations, the decision was finally taken in Brussels that the future European Central Bank should have its head office in Frankfurt. In 1994 the European Currency Institute opened in the former building of the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft (trade union bank), and, in June 1998, the ECI gave rise to the European Central Bank. The ECB has been working on the launch of the common European currency, the euro, and will be controlling European monetary policy in the future. The first president of the ECB is the Dutchman Wim Duisenberg.