

chapter 13

German and Italian Unification, 1815–1871



The spirit of nationalism led to the unifications of two of Europe's largest ethnic and cultural populations—the Italians and the Germans—in the late nineteenth century. Masterminded in both cases by shrewd ministers of state—Cavour in Italy and Bismarck in Prussia—the unification process in both cases happened surprisingly quickly and smoothly. However, each nation would proceed very differently once unification was accomplished.

Unlike Germany, Italy had a previous history as a unified nation. Italy had been the center of the Roman Empire and had continued to exist under one central government until the sixth century A.D. The Italians had a shared language, an ancient shared history of ruling the known world, and a common culture. This made Italy a natural breeding ground for nationalism.

Once unification was completed in 1861, however, complications ensued. First, the Church refused to go along with unification, perceiving it as a threat to ecclesiastical authority. This rift between the pope and the heads of the Italian state would not be resolved for many years, and it made them into enemies, thus depriving the people of one of their most important common bonds—their shared faith. Second, a rift developed between the northern and southern

regions of the country. The northern provinces were prosperous and had gone some way toward industrialization, while the south remained poor and rural. Most men of authority in the new government—the king, the prime minister, the provincial governors, and a large majority of the high-ranking military officers and civil servants—came from the north, which caused resentment in the south.

As Piedmont became the core of Italy, Prussia was to become the core of Germany. The foundations for Prussian supremacy had been laid as early as 1640 and continued under Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck used his considerable diplomatic skills to provoke France into declaring war on Prussia, which caused the southern German states to rally to Prussia's support. An easy German victory led to unification in 1871. The new German Empire, ruled by the king of Prussia (now kaiser of Germany), established its headquarters in the Prussian capital city, Berlin. A bicameral legislature, with a popularly elected lower house and an upper house of hereditary German princes, satisfied the goals of both upper and middle classes.

CHAPTER 13 OBJECTIVES

- Locate the unified nations of Italy and Germany on a map of Europe in 1871.
- Explain the steps in the process of unification for Germany and Italy.
- Identify the major figures of German and Italian unification and match each one to his political and/or military accomplishments.

Chapter 13 Time Line

- 1852 Camillo di Cavour becomes prime minister of Sardinia
- 1859 Sardinia receives Lombardy; other northern Italian states unite with Sardinia
- 1860 Garibaldi invades Sicily, then liberates Sicily and Naples; southern Italian region unites with northern
- 1861 Italy is declared a unified nation; king of Sardinia is crowned Victor Immanuel II of Italy
- 1862 Bismarck becomes prime minister of Prussia
- 1866 Prussia defeats Austria

- 1867 Prussia annexes various German states into North German Confederation
- 1870 Papal States become part of unified Italy
- 1870–1871 Franco-Prussian War
- 1871 German Empire declared; Wilhelm I of Prussia crowned emperor

The Unification of Italy

Although it had ruled the Mediterranean region and much of Western Europe in the days of ancient Rome, Italy had not existed as a unified nation-state since the sixth century. In modern Europe, *Italy* was a geographical term that signified the Italian peninsula, and the word *Italian* referred to the people who lived there and spoke that language. The people of the numerous Italian states were regionally divided to some degree; the fertile north had evolved into a prosperous industrial society, while the wine-producing south was largely poor and rural. However, the people were culturally homogeneous, sharing a common language, a common history, and a common religion. Italy was thus a natural breeding ground for nationalism and unification.

The Congress of Vienna had divided Italy among the victors of the Napoleonic Wars as follows:

Italian State	Ruled By
Papal States	Pope
Naples and Sicily	Bourbon monarch
Lombardy, Venice, Tyrol	Austria-Hungary
Parma, Modena, other states	Hapsburg monarchs

Nationalist forces in Italy rebelled against their foreign rulers. This happened in Parma and Modena in 1831, where the uprisings were crushed, and again in 1848 with the same result. Republican forces fomented a revolt against the pope, declaring the Republic of Rome in 1848. Since France and Austria were united in the desire to maintain a divided and weak Italy, they worked together to put down the rebellions. French troops occupied Rome until 1870.

In 1852, Count Camillo di Cavour became prime minister of Sardinia, a kingdom that included both the island of Sardinia and the Piedmont region of northern Italy. Like almost all successful ministers in European history, Cavour

was crafty, clever, and entirely practical in his outlook. He used national alliances to achieve his goal of uniting the rest of Italy to Sardinia.

At Cavour's urging, Sardinia fought on the side of the British and French in the Crimean War. Having thus formed a friendship with France, Cavour joined Napoleon III in an attack on Austria. As a result, Lombardy and Sardinia were united in 1859. Later that year, most of the rest of northern Italy joined the union of Italian states.

In 1860, the fiery republican Giuseppe Garibaldi led an invasion of his followers, the Red Shirts, into the kingdom of Sicily, ostensibly to join a popular uprising. With covert assistance from Cavour, Garibaldi liberated both Sicily and Naples. Although Cavour was a monarchist and Garibaldi was a republican, they found common ground in their desire to unify their people.

Garibaldi believed that the natural next step was to march into Rome, but Cavour felt it was better to hold off rather than make an enemy of the pope. Therefore, he sent Sardinian troops to maintain peace in the Papal States. Next, with Garibaldi's full support, he held an election throughout the states of southern Italy to decide whether the people were ready to join the northern states and Sardinia as a unified nation. The nation was officially united in 1861; the king of Sardinia was crowned Victor Emmanuel II of Italy later that year.

The Papal States—a sizable region surrounding Rome—remained the only holdout. Italian unification would rob the pope of his authority as a head of state; he would be marginalized, as head of the Church only. The 1860 unification reduced the Papal States to the city of Rome and the area immediately surrounding it.

The new Italian government was closely based on the Sardinian model. The king of Sardinia became the king of Italy. The new Italian parliament, meeting in 1860, was officially referred to as “the eighth session of the Sardinian Parliament.” The vote was limited to men over the age of twenty-four who were literate and owned property—a total of about 8 percent of all Italian men in that age group.

The administrative structure and tax codes of the old Kingdom of Sardinia were extended to apply to the entire nation. Cavour felt that, for the moment, it was best to present a unified nation to the rest of Europe. Debate and factionalism might have destroyed the unity that he had worked so hard to achieve. Internal debate, he felt, could come later. This decision caused a rift between the northern and southern regions of Italy, as the south resented the dominance of leaders from Piedmont in the north. Most of the army's high-ranking officers

were from Piedmont, most of the provincial governors were from Piedmont, and more than half the top positions in the civil service were held by men from Piedmont or its neighboring provinces Lombardy and Venetia. A further divisive factor came from the Vatican; Pope Pius IX retaliated for the reduction of his authority by encouraging the foundation of Catholic political parties whose goal was to undermine the new Italian state.

When France declared war on Prussia in 1870, occupying French troops abandoned Rome. This left the pope undefended, and the Italian army immediately marched in to complete the unification process. Rome, once the center and apex of Classical civilization, had enormous symbolic importance to the Italians, and it was immediately named the new Italian capital city. This did not



The Unification of Italy

end the hostility between the Church and the Italian state; if anything, it grew more intense. It would not be resolved until Prime Minister Benito Mussolini signed an agreement naming the Vatican an independent city-state in 1929. (See Chapter 17.)

The Unification of Germany

In 1862, Wilhelm I of Prussia appointed Otto von Bismarck prime minister. Bismarck's name has become closely identified with the term *Realpolitik*, or "the politics of realism." Like Richelieu of France and Cavour of Italy, Bismarck was a very able man, both pragmatic and determined. Bismarck's focus was on a united Germany with a strong monarch.

Bismarck's belief in a strong monarchy made him a political conservative, and in the 1860s he was faced with a hostile liberal majority in Parliament. Therefore, Bismarck directed the nation's attention to foreign affairs. This would allow him to maintain control of the domestic policy, since civilian populations always accepted special government controls and restrictions during wartime.

Prussia and Austria together fought Denmark over control of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein; the result was joint Prussian-Austrian rule of the duchies. In 1866, Bismarck led a successful war against Austria, which quickly gave up its share in the affairs of Schleswig and Holstein. Prussia had now formed what would be the nucleus of a united Germany.

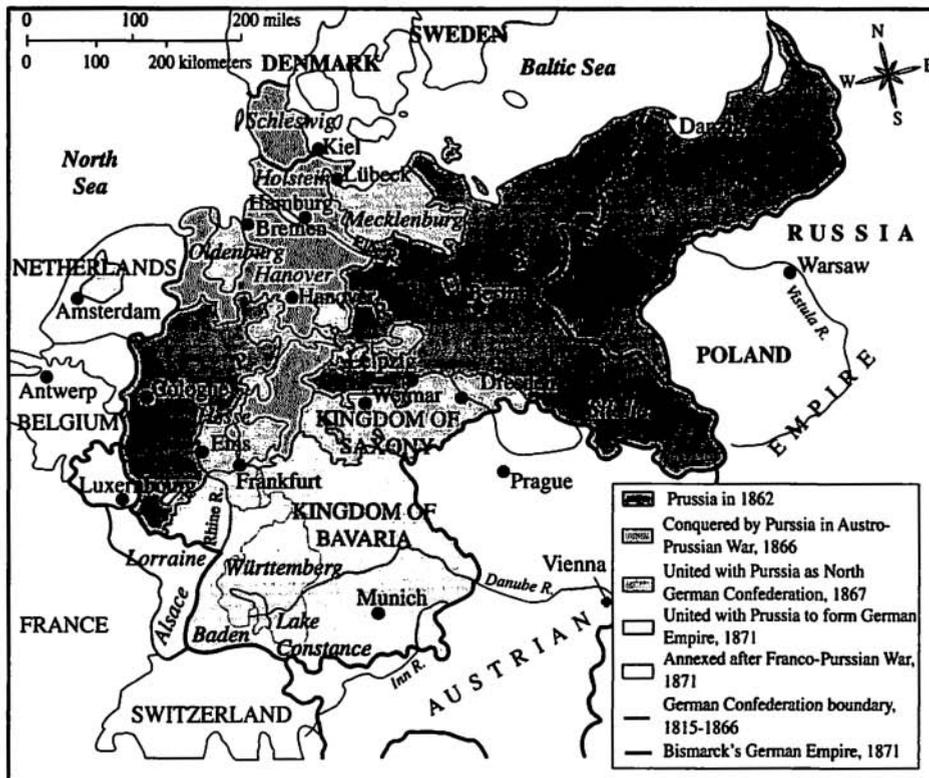
In 1867, as a result of Bismarck's diplomacy, Prussia annexed three more states and the free city of Frankfurt, thereby bringing all the German-speaking states north of the Main River under Prussian control.

The opportunity for the final step in German unification arrived in 1870. Bismarck decided to go to war with France, believing that the other German states would come to Prussia's aid. He changed the wording of a press release so that it gave the appearance of a deliberate insult from the Prussian king to the French emperor. On reading the statement, Napoleon III immediately declared war on Prussia. As Bismarck had calculated, the southern German states allied themselves with Prussia against their common enemy, France.

The war can accurately be describe as "Franco-German" rather than "Franco-Prussian" because many German states besides Prussia played a major role in defeating the French. The efficiency and superior strategy of the German military brought the French to a speedy surrender. The peace treaty gave Germany

control of Alsace and Lorraine, and provided for a compensatory payment to Prussia of 5 billion francs. Although Prussia had provoked the war, France had technically been the aggressor, and at any rate was on the losing side. This peace settlement created deep resentment in France; this resentment would become an issue during and after the First World War (see Chapter 15).

On January 18, 1871, Wilhelm I of Prussia was officially crowned emperor of Germany. In a final insult to the French, the Germans held the ceremony in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.



The Unification of Germany

The legislative assembly of the new German Empire was similar to the British Parliament; it was bicameral, with a Federal Council (Bundesrat) of hereditary nobles and an Imperial Diet (Reichstag) of popularly elected representatives. All men age twenty-five and older had the right to vote for their representatives in the Reichstag. The princes in the Bundesrat, of course, inherited their seats, just as the British peers inherited their places in the House of Lords. Both

the Bundesrat and the Reichstag had to pass any given bill in order for it to become German law. The king of Prussia became the emperor, or kaiser (from the Latin *caesar*), of Germany. Although Wilhelm I found such a pompous title silly and personally embarrassing, it was a source of pride among his subjects. The imperial title suggested a connection between the German Empire and the Holy Roman Empire, although in fact the Holy Roman emperors had ended up as the ruling family of Austria, not Prussia.

Nationalism was a major force in the creation of the German Empire. Both the nobles and the common people supported unification; troops were strongly motivated by nationalism during the Franco-Prussian War. It was nationalism that motivated the leaders to press Bismarck to demand heavy reparations from France at the end of the war, despite the minister's belief (which would be justified by future events) that the demand was vengeful and unwise.

Prussia had worked toward control of a unified German state since 1640; unsurprisingly, it became the most powerful province in Germany. The Prussian king became the hereditary German emperor; Prussian generals were in charge of the German army; the efficient Prussian bureaucracy administered the civil service; and the Prussian capital, Berlin, became the capital of Germany.

QUIZ

- 1. Which region of Italy had the greatest power and influence after unification?**
 - A. the islands
 - B. the mountain provinces
 - C. the northern provinces
 - D. the southern provinces

- 2. Pius IX refused to support Italian unification mainly because the new government**
 - A. robbed him of his status as a head of state.
 - B. abolished Catholicism throughout Italy.
 - C. wanted to make Rome the Italian capital city.
 - D. crowned the king of Sardinia as king of Italy.

- 3. Which phrase best describes Giuseppe Garibaldi?**
- A. a conservative minister of state
 - B. a popular republican leader
 - C. a liberal intellectual
 - D. a moderate monarchist
- 4. Bismarck provoked France into declaring war in 1870 with the goal of**
- A. creating an alliance with the southern German states.
 - B. making Austria part of a new German confederation.
 - C. forcing France to pay Germany a heavy war indemnity.
 - D. forcing the king of France to abdicate.
- 5. What was the main factor in the German victory over France in 1871?**
- A. factionalism within France
 - B. German military superiority
 - C. German diplomacy
 - D. French diplomacy
- 6. The German title kaiser, or emperor, suggested that Germany was symbolically connected to and descended from**
- A. the Austrian Empire.
 - B. the Roman Empire.
 - C. the Holy Roman Empire.
 - D. the British Empire.
- 7. _____ became the core of the new German Empire.**
- A. Austria
 - B. Bavaria
 - C. Alsace and Lorraine
 - D. Prussia
- 8. Which best describes the German legislative assembly?**
- A. a popularly elected house of representatives
 - B. a largely symbolic house of hereditary nobles
 - C. a parliament with one house of hereditary nobles and one elective house of representatives
 - D. a parliament with one house of royally appointed ministers and one house of popularly elected representatives

9. Which step toward German unification happened first?

- A. Prussia defeated Austria and took sole control over Schleswig and Holstein.
- B. France declared war on Prussia.
- C. Prussia annexed Frankfurt.
- D. Prussia and Austria took over the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein.

10. All these statements accurately describe both Cavour and Bismarck, except

- A. they were both monarchists.
- B. they were both conservative.
- C. they were both adept at *Realpolitik*.
- D. they both wanted to become dictators.