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GERMANY:

Party Links Multiplying

The two Germanys are rapidly expanding political and economic ties, and Chancellor Kohl's visit on Tuesday may accelerate this trend.



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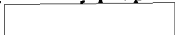
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Official links also are expanding rapidly. West German Economics Minister Haussmann met yesterday with East German Premier Modrow and other officials and agreed to form a joint economic commission to expand trade and investment. East German Foreign Minister Fischer and West German officials also met Wednesday to discuss unspecified security issues; earlier this week Bonn and East Berlin agreed to hold their first high-level military talks.



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Other groups have been even more ambitious. The East German opposition group Democracy Now yesterday proposed a three-stage plan for a united, neutral Germany.



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Comment: The expanding network of links is outpacing formal policy decisions and moving the two Germanys toward de facto unity. The root cause is the weakness of East German institutions; for example, West German support probably will play a major role in determining which East German parties can compete effectively in the election set for 6 May.



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Kohl will finalize the joint economic commission proposal during his visit and probably complete agreements on infrastructure projects. He may offer a major aid program. He also will use his visit to advance his proposals for confederal political structures, but plans like those of Democracy Now make it more difficult for him to retain public support for measured progress toward confederal institutions. The growing economic ties he is arranging will in any case push East Germany toward a more market-oriented economy and lay the economic groundwork for reunification.



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