

## Lesson 5: Unification of Germany

### Lesson -5: Video Lecture

#### Brainstorming Question

What were the strategies that Bismarck used to unite Germany.

#### Competencies

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify the factors that facilitated and hindered the unification of Germany; and
- List down major events in the process of unification of Germany.

#### Lesson Overview

The unification of Germany was *a process of building the first nation-state for Germans with federal features based on the concept of Lesser Germany* .

#### 1.The Unification of Germany

In the 1850s, Germany was a loose confederation of 39 states called the German Confederation (the Bund). The Bund was presided over by Austria, with Prussia second. The Bund was not a satisfactory form of unity for German nationalists who wanted real political unity for reasons of German nationalism and economic reasons. German nationalism was encouraged by the success of Italian national unification between 1859 and 1861. The obstacles to German unification were: Austria, which wanted to preserve the status quo. The German princes, wanted to keep their independence and the cultural differences between North and South Germany.

In 1861, William I (r.1861–1888) was crowned King of Prussia. He and his war minister, Von Roon, proposed enlarging and reforming the Prussian army to give Prussia more influence against Austria and as security against France. But the proposal was opposed by the Prussian parliament, which refused to vote on the necessary new taxation. An important issue behind the Prussian parliament was who would control the army. The king, thus, appointed Otto von Bismarck as chief minister of Prussia. Bismarck (1815–1898) was politically conservative but a political realist and extremely able. He soon overcame the crisis by collecting additional taxation for the army reforms without the consent of Parliament. There was no resistance. German nationalism rapidly shifted from its liberal and democratic character in 1848 to Bismarck's authoritarian rule.

Bismarck knew that Germany could not be united under Prussia without war against Austria and probably France. Austria would not give up its leadership in the Bund unless it suffered a defeat. The traditional French policy was to keep Germany politically divided and therefore weak, so that France too would probably not accept German unification unless France suffered a military defeat. Bismarck also knew that his program of uniting Germany would not be possible without

good relations between Prussia and Russia. Therefore, he exerted all his diplomatic skills to maintain good relations with Russia. He was helped by the fact that Prussia and Russia had a common interest in opposing Polish nationalism. Both Russia and Prussia, particularly the first, had large areas of former Polish territories inhabited by the Poles. Therefore, during the great Polish revolt of 1863, Prussia was the only great power that was sympathetic to Russia.



Otto Von Bismarck

Source: Grade 12 History Text Book, page- 16

Therefore, Bismarck accomplished this through three military successes: He first allied with Austria to defeat Denmark in a short war fought in 1864, thus acquiring Schleswig-Holstein. In 1866, with the support of Italy, he virtually created the Austro-Prussian War and won a decisive victory at the Battle of Koniggratz, which, allowed him to exclude long-time rival Austria when forming the North German Confederation with the states that had supported Prussia in the Austro-Prussian War. The Confederation was the direct precursor to the 1871 Empire. Finally, Prussia defeated France in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). The German Confederation was transformed into an Empire with the proclamation of Prussian King Wilhelm I as German Emperor at the Palace of Versailles, to the humiliation of France.