Dagmar Schipanski, the minister for science, research, and art in the German state of Thuringia, and a former German presidential candidate, visited IU Bloomington in November to present a lecture on German reunification and participate in signing an agreement of cooperation between IUB and the University of Erfurt, one of Germany’s oldest universities. Schipanski was accompanied by Dietmar Herz, director of the Erfurt School of Public Policy.

In a ceremony at Bryan Hall, Herz signed an agreement pledging mutual cooperation and friendship between the two institutions. IU’s two signatories were Patrick O’Meara, dean for international programs, and David Audretsch, director of West European Studies (WEST) and director of the Institute for Development Strategies in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs.

In her lecture, Schipanski described the process of reunification between former East and West German states that has taken place since 1990. She assessed the progress made and the challenges that remain in creating a truly united Germany. Achievements include the expansion of the West German legal system to the whole of unified Germany and the granting of equal rights to former East German residents. Schipanski also described improvements made in her own state of Thuringia, such as the construction of a new five-mile tunnel, the aesthetic renewal and modernization of towns, and the environmental benefits from conversion from coal energy to gas.

The investment of American companies was crucial for many economic improvements and for the creation of jobs, said Schipanski, naming Shell and GM among others for their contribution to that development in former East Germany. The minister also stressed the role of science, research, and innovation in generating economic growth and employment, and the increase in the number of universities in eastern Germany, especially the founding of the Max Planck and Hoover Institutes.

Schipanski praised the value of the agreement of cooperation that had been signed earlier in fostering global competency among students. She described how the University of Erfurt could spur economic development by supporting industry and spoke of the need for more work in healing past divisions, citing high unemployment rates in eastern Germany as an example of the challenges the nation still faces. Reunification, she concluded, ultimately required the efforts and civic commitment of individual Germans.

—Todd Linton
WEST Newsletter, Nov.–Dec. 2003