

The fall of berlin wall



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It has been 23 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Following World War II, the area that was Germany was divided into four military sectors controlled by France, the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union. On May 23, 1949, the sectors controlled by France, the United Kingdom and the United States became the Federal Republic of Germany. On October 7, 1949, the sector controlled by the Soviet Union became the German Democratic Republic.

The two countries developed very different political and economic systems and, due to the tensions in post-war Europe, there was little contact between the inhabitants of the two countries. A protest against the German Democratic Republic's government occurred in Leipzig on September 4, 1989. More demonstrations took place across the German Democratic Republic. The protests called for political reform and to open the borders. On November 9, 1989, the checkpoints between the two countries were opened and people were allowed to travel freely. This date marked the "fall" of the Berlin wall.

Those who were around at the time, or who personally experienced what it was like to live in one of the countries behind the so-called Iron Curtain, will never forget what happened when it fell. The world changed and has never been the same since. Millions of people gained their freedom; freedom to think, speak, write, travel, express their opinion.

Moreover, two decades after the Berlin Wall fell, the spread of democracy has stalled. Between 1988 and 1990, as the Cold War was winding down, prodemocracy protests erupted far from Eastern Europe, overturning

dictatorships in countries as different as Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan and Chile. After the Soviet disintegration, even Russia emerged as a credible candidate for democratic reform.

The destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which was the ultimate symbol of the Cold War, was a major turning point in the collapse of communism which led to the unification of East and West Germany.

Summer 1989 All during the summer of 1989 the East German government had been embarrassed by a flood of refugees desperate to escape the so-called German Democratic Republic. Trying to find holes in the crumbling Iron Curtain, East Germans were going to neighboring communist countries that had borders with western European countries. It all started in May 1989, when the Hungarian government began dismantling the barbed wire fences along its border with Austria. Despite Hungarian restrictions, East Germans began traveling to Hungary in order to get to the West via Austria. Soon Hungary was forced to close its border with East Germany - but it would reopen in September.

On September 10, 1989 Hungary re-opens its border with the GDR. A new flood of East German refugees begins crossing through the torn Iron Curtain via Hungary to Austria. During the month of September, more than 13,000 East Germans manage to escape via that route. Massive protests at either side of the Berlin Wall bring about the collapse of the East German Government and the Berliners flocked to the wall, chanting "Tor auf!" ("Open the gate!"). At midnight, they flooded through the checkpoints.

After all the Cold War between East and West ends following the Malta conference and the Berlin Wall comes down.

Reunification of Germany > 1990

With the Wall having fallen in 1989, it was to be another 11 months before Germany was reunited. Germans in both German states welcomed it. In the first (and last) free elections to East Germany's parliament on March 18, 1990 the East German electorate voted by majority for those parties that demanded swift accession to West Germany.

In summer 1990 a treaty to this effect was negotiated by the two Germanies, as had the treaty concerning the German-German currency union. Parallel to this in the Two-plus-Four-Treaty West and East Germany reached agreement with the four powers responsible for Berlin and Germany as a whole, i. e., the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and France on the conditions with regard to foreign and security policy determining German unity.

In terms of the old demand for "unity in freedom" the German Question was finally solved in 1990. It could only be solved with the approval of all the country's neighbors, which also meant: with the solution at the same time of another problem that had dominated the century: the Polish Question. The final recognition, binding under international law, of the fact that the Oder and Neisse Rivers formed the western border of Poland was a precondition of the reunification of Germany in the borders of 1945.

The German Question has been resolved since 1990, but the European Question remains open. Since the expansions to the EU in 2004 and 2007,

the EU has included 12 additional nations, of which ten were under Communist rule until the dawn of the new epoch between 1989 and 1991. They are all states that belong to the former Occident – and which have been defined by a largely shared legal tradition, the early separation of religious and state powers, princely and civil powers, not to forget by the experience of the murderous consequences of religious and national enmity, and racial hatred.

It will take time for those parts of Europe that were once divided to grow closer together. This will only succeed if European unity develops at the same pace as the Union has expanded. This development requires more than institutional reforms. It hinges on joint deliberation on European history and its consequences. The one consequence that is more important than all others is an appreciation of the overall binding nature of Western values, first and foremost inalienable human rights. These are the values that Europe and America have created together, which they uphold, and by which they must at all times be measured.

These events lead to political change. Democratic elections paved the way for unity in the German Democratic Republic on March 18, 1990. The “Treaty of Unification” was signed by both countries’ leaders in August that year. Finally, Germany’s unification became official on October 3, 1990.