



Triumph of Democracy

After the Fall of the Berlin Wall

An anthology with introduction
by Foreign Minister Carl Bildt

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THE TRIUMPH OF DEMOCRACY

After the Fall of the Berlin Wall

An anthology with texts by Claes Arvidsson, Walburga Habsburg Douglas,
Gunnar Hökmark, Elisabeth Precht, Cecilia Stegö Chilò and Richard Swartz.
With an introduction by Foreign Minister Carl Bildt.

Translated from Swedish by Carl Henrik Ehrenkrona

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1989

When the lights of Europe were once again turned on

Carl Bildt, Minister for Foreign Affairs

It was the year when reports of the Polish spring crowded the news sections of Europe's newspapers. Solidarność was first legalized in January and then a second time in April. Meanwhile, it was announced that free elections were to be held in June. On the 4th of June, for the first time on the far side of the Iron Curtain, an opposition movement succeeded in winning an election. The Polish Solidarność movement had initiated a series of peaceful revolutions that would culminate in the fall of the Berlin Wall in November of that year.

On the 19th of August in Sopron – on the border between Hungary and Austria – 600 East Germans broke through the Iron Curtain when they passed the border, while the Hungarian guards refrained from intervening. The same day, in Warsaw, the first non-communist Prime Minister in 42 years was nominated.

75 years had passed, almost to the date, since the First World War broke out in Europe and plunged the continent into darkness. Three quarters of a century of war and strife ensued for Europeans. For those living in Eastern and Central Europe, the end of the Second World War meant the beginning of more than four decades of oppression and dictatorial rule.

But then came 1989, when the course of European development changed. It was the year when oppression was replaced by emancipation and when people thirsty for freedom, in country after country, assumed power by peaceful means. A tidal wave of freedom swept over our continent which, in a matter of months, made communism and socialism history.

What only a few deemed possible had come to pass and suddenly the prospect of European reunification emerged, after the long decades of division.

At the time, the European Community consisted of twelve states in Western and Southern Europe. Today, twenty years later, fifteen new members have joined, bringing more than a hundred million people into the European fold. And there are others still waiting to gain admission to the new, reunified and free Europe.

Thus, the European revolution of 1989 heralded the wondrous development we have witnessed since.

I personally remember passing the Iron Curtain at Sopron during the Cold War. I remember the barbed wire, the fences and the border guards. All those things that reminded us of how we were passing a border designed to keep those unfortunate enough to live outside of the community of the free states locked in and to keep us, who wanted to extend our ideals of freedom, democracy and societal openness to the people of Eastern and Central Europe, out.

Today, there is no more barbed wire, no fences and no passport checks. Passing the Austro-Hungarian border is not any more dramatic than passing a Swedish county line.

We have achieved what only a few believed possible and what millions dreamt of. We, who had the privilege of making concrete and resolute contributions to European reunification, have learned the importance of never giving up on the vision of a better future. ■

The Rising that Made Walls Fall

The Road to the Fall of the Berlin Wall

By Cecilia Stegö Chilò

My first trip to Eastern Europe was in the late 70s. We were a bunch of girls studying German in Munich who got hold of a used Volkswagen van and set course for Hungary, where the prices were more suited to a student's budget and where there were, maybe, somewhat different and more exciting experiences to encounter. That was really all we thought of it. Communist Eastern Europe was as abstract as it was unknown to us. Once past the border, however, it was not long before our naivety waned.

Our first stop was in a little village in the vicinity of the border town of Győr. As it happened, we literally stomped right into the night life of the local youth. There was dancing in the gymnasium. The girls were seated alongside a wall and the boys were on the opposite side. This was my first impression of an Eastern Europe where time had stood still since the Interwar Years and of a way of life reminiscent of some movies – black and white, subdued, languid and deeply problematic. Ten years later, when I first started travelling systematically in the region, this feeling would recur many times.

The rest of the night in that village outside Győr was filled with faltering conversations. It was not self-evident that we would be able to communicate with these East German youths. In fact, had it not been for their parents bravely defying the decree that all children should learn Russian – and only Russian as a second language in school – we would not have been able to understand each other. The parents had sought out the old German teacher in the village and he tutored the young boys in his own home. This story of the parents and their sons, struggling with German grammar just like us, was my first experience of a subtle uprising in Eastern Europe and of intractability and moral courage on a small scale. There would be more such experiences.

Seven in the morning and the camp fire next to the van was put out. Saying good-bye was painful. We were the same age and mutual sympathy had the grown between us as wood was heaped onto the fire and stories were told of

life in the Socialist Republic of Hungary. The border to the West was only a few minutes' drive off, but we would never meet again. We were separated by the Iron Curtain, cool and cruel like a Russian winter's night. One of the girls remarked that we might as well have spent the night in Siberia. The ensuing silence was compact. None of us thought, even for a moment, that the Hungarians wanted to live under Communism. It was more like a prison than anything else! Life was hell at worst and dull at best. This was a realization that we made in one night and it seemed just as obvious to us as it was controversial amongst Western intellectuals who thought they knew everything.

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On the road to Budapest, I tried to accommodate the events of the past night with the notion I held of the world. One largely acquired from school books. The Second World War. Yalta. A divided Europe. Was this the cost for getting rid of Hitler's Germany? A political necessity in a continent weary of war. Somehow it made sense.

But then what? Why were the Russians allowed not only to win but also to occupy? How could Western Europe stand idly watching while half of the continent slipped into an economic, social and humanitarian coma? And how did people bring themselves to tolerate Stalin?

Part of the answer was of course the Cold War with its terror balance based on nuclear warheads. Again, a political necessity. But this was no excuse for us to forget these people. Nothing stopped us from marking their villages on classroom maps, acknowledging their attempts to make something of their lives, travelling there, getting involved and thereby supporting the quiet rebellion.

Surely, this would not have precipitated a nuclear war.

The truth was simple. We chose to forget Europe, history, the cultural ties and our compassion. This was not a political necessity. At worst it was ideology or indolence, at best ignorance, but in all three cases it was ignominious.

While the bus passed ox carts and hay trailers, dilapidated houses and people in worn out shoes and outdated clothes, I made a resolution. I would return if it was at all possible. Words like duty and responsibility came to my mind and they felt strangely unpretentious. And the boys by the fire had taught me that "less is more". Safeguarding rhyme and reason and doing the right thing despite its futility in the grand scheme of things, this is what motivated their brave parents and it would surely come to motivate them. At the time,

I could hardly suspect that it was these attitudes that would combine into a force that would create one of the most civilized revolutions in world history, a revolution that toppled totalitarian regimes like dominoes and almost without bloodshed.

On the 9th of November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. It was to be a magical night in what was a grotesquely divided city and many like to think of this event as a splendid finale of the year of revolutions in Eastern Europe. However, it was not so. The peaceful wave of protests that swept over Central Europe in the autumn of 1989 ended in tragedy. In Romania, security forces fired at demonstrators and the Communist dictator was executed without having stood trial. 1989, this peaceful and hopeful year, ended with a blood bath. Almost as a premonition of what would happen later on further south in the Balkans.

To me it is also important to remember and to remind others of the history leading up to 1989, of the five decades that passed before Eastern Europe was liberated. Because by remembering the heroes and their feats, big and small, the people who did what they could in order to defend themselves and their fellow men from an inhumane ideology and the oppressive exercise of power, they are kept from falling into oblivion. Many of them lost their lives and countless others got their lives ruined. The least we can do is to remember them as the champagne flows and the TV-images from that jubilant night in Berlin flash in our living rooms.

Eastern Europeans never accepted that their destiny was sealed in Yalta. While the Soviet military occupied itself with outlining the stretch of what would become the Iron Curtain, dividing villages, valleys, fields and ancient European landscapes, the war-weary populations struggled to make sense of what was happening. Some reached a conclusion quickly. The post-war years were marked by a steady stream of refugees in a westward direction. And in the early 50s, when the Soviet intentions to occupy got more evident, there were open protests in places such as Eastern Germany, Poland and Hungary.

However, these uprisings were poorly organized and they were easily struck down by the ruthless potentates with their security forces. It was at this early stage of false promises of democratic elections and mock trials of oppositionists that Western Europe should have reacted. But who cared about the deplorable conduct of judicial proceedings as evidenced by the Slansky

trial, for example? Almost no one. When Arthur Koestler, the radical, tried to reappraise the situation, with the Moscow Trials still fresh in mind, by writing the book “Darkness at Noon”, many of his intellectual friends renounced him while defending the Soviet Union.

It was not until Soviet tanks thundered through the streets of Budapest and Prague that political protests and the outraged cries of a wider public were to be heard from the West. In 1968, even parts of the Left faced up to reality. Soviet imperialism – always this emphasis on imperialism – could not be tolerated. As if this “imperialism” was something separate from Communist ideology. The rebellion in Hungary in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968 were about altering political development by reforming the Communist Party. Imre Nagy, the Hungarian, as well as the Slovak Dubček were both Communist leaders who strived for a greater degree of autonomy from the Soviet Union and envisioned a “socialism with a human face”.

The Soviet tanks made it clear that no such thing was tolerated by the potentates in Moscow. In the early 80s, when the same pattern was repeated in Poland, general Jaruzelski thought it wiser to deploy his own military in order to quell Solidarność and its many followers clamouring for extensive reforms of society. On the night of the 13th of December 1981, Poles were once again forced to withdraw to their churches and their underground resistance. And the sun set over Eastern Europe. Once again. However, this time, things were different in the West.

A new brand of politicians was on the rise, starting in the US, via Britain and on to continental Europe and West Germany. They were of a liberal orientation and made no bones about their commitment to freedom, democracy and market economy. Nor were they ready to ignore the iniquity of communism and Soviet rule.

In West Germany, Helmut Kohl ascended to power. A political burst of effort of rare proportions ensued. In the United States, Ronald Reagan was convinced that the Russians could be goaded into giving concessions. In a breach of protocol, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher engaged in opinion making. When she made an official visit to Poland, she specially requested to visit sites connected to the Polish resistance. The Communist leaders were shocked, but dared not turn down her request, thus granting the Poles a new political idol.

At last, the free world started to convey its message. The new generation of Western politicians talked past the Communist potentates and directly to the people in Eastern Europe. They showed that they understood. They talked about what should have been the self-evident rights of all Eastern Europeans: freedom and political autonomy. Furthermore, unlike the radical politicians of the 70s, the West now subjected the Soviet system to moral, political and military pressure while also showing a genuine interest in “doing business” with the new and reform-minded Soviet leader Gorbachev.

Political analysts of recent years are not in agreement on the importance of the ideological shift in the West. But there is no doubt that the change of power in Kremlin was crucial, as was the election of a new Pope of Polish origin. On the surface of things, the politicians of the 80s were a motley crew. In Eastern Europe, for example, a new generation of oppositionists was emerging with the intention of throwing communism on the “wasteyard” of history. I will come back to this later.

In despite of all the superficial differences, however, there was in reality a group of politicians as well as religious and civil leaders who in many regards were quite similar. None of them owed their position to fawning over critics and adversaries. Nor did any of them lose heart in the face of what many called the “politically impossible” or “unsuitable”. All of them were motivated by a desire to bring about real and lasting change. All of them – except maybe for Gorbachev – held strong convictions encompassing unconditional support of the ideals of freedom and democracy. They were outspoken and gave the impression that they had assumed their positions of leadership not for personal gain but for the benefit of others.

It was a beautiful confluence of personal destinies and certainly a very fortunate one from the perspective of Eastern Europeans.

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If I were to single out a course of events that precipitated the changes in Eastern Europe that would culminate in the fall of the Berlin Wall, then I would settle on the first wave of protests by the Solidarność movement in Poland during the years of 1980-81. By no means does this, however, imply that the more gradual and often Communist-led reforms, in for example Hungary, were insignificant. Or that the troubles and travails of the group of persistent supporters of Charta 77 in Czechoslovakia were in vain. On the contrary. These experiences would later combine in unforeseen ways.

But for now, let us return to Poland in the beginning of the 80s where the number and strength of the protesters had grown to unprecedented proportions. Up to that fateful December night, the Solidarność movement counted its members in the millions. The massive influx of members was, of course, very encouraging for the movement's leaders and it contributed to delegitimizing the Communist Party. However, it also meant that the opposition shifted its orientation.

Let me explain.

Throughout the 50s, 60s and 70s, whenever reforms were attempted in Eastern Europe, it was usually within the framework of a system thought immutable and with the goal of decreasing Communist and Soviet influences. Thus, the opposition consisted mainly of reform Communists committed to pragmatism.

Initially, even the events at the Lenin shipyard in Gdańsk conformed to this pattern. Dialogue with the politicians concerning price increases and union rights was the principal demand. Relatively soon, however, the explosive word "free" was added to the demands concerning trade unions and presently a wide array of demands were made. By the time martial law was declared, the list of demands included such items as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and democratic reforms.

Today, it might be difficult to grasp the wider implications of this radicalization. But the electrician from Gdańsk dumbfounded the world. Did he really say democracy? Indeed he did, and behold – the people rallied to his call.

Just as important, however, was the fact that a circle of intellectuals was forming alongside Lech Wałęsa, a circle which drew conclusions from the success, and later also the set-backs, thereby laying the groundwork for a new strategy for the country's opposition.

Disentangling the elements of this process, which occurred throughout the 80s and not only in Poland, is not easy. However, two major upheavals stand out. The first is that Eastern oppositionists for all intents and purposes gave up on trying to reform Communism from within. It was simply not considered worth defending. Socialist freedom did not exist and socialist democracy was a joke. The planned economy lay in ruins after years of stagnation. The state, which was supposed to provide for everything, provided less and

less. Civil society survived out of necessity due to the fact that the oppression and the scarcity created a need for human contact and cooperation.

Naturally, there were still people who considered themselves Socialists or Western-styled Social Democrats, but in principle, the East European opposition went from being oriented towards reform communism to embracing Western liberal democracy.

The second upheaval was a consequence of the first. As long as the opposition was dominated by reform friendly Communists, it was only to be expected that it would focus its efforts on influencing the Communist Party. Now, however, when a different society was being envisioned, the focus shifted in a different direction, towards the people and the civil society that existed despite of everything and which in many ways displayed a remarkable strength.

The new opposition developed somewhat of a new philosophy concerning life in the totalitarian state as well as a new strategy for change – “the politics of antipolitics”. In this way, intellectuals approached ordinary people who had given up on Communism long ago and discovered that the best way of undermining was by trying to lead a life “truthfully” or in “dignity”, as the oppositionists Václav Havel and Adam Michnik put it.

This was precisely what the parents of those Hungarian boys had realized when they insisted that their children learn German, just as people had done in that area for ages.

The East European opposition was fundamentally transformed through these upheavals in the 80s, thereby preparing itself to contribute decisively to the future development.

If the opposition had previously erupted into fierce protesting on sporadic occasions with demonstrations in the streets, it now consisted of a growing body of people who “just did things their way”. Different kinds of cultural expressions showing alternative ways of dealing with the complicated aspects of life under Communist rule, merciless social criticism and increasingly clear signals from the West were three building blocks of a braver and more self-assured civil society. Step by step. Without a single banner and without the Communists ever realizing what was happening.

When I returned to Poland in 1988, this made a strong impression on me. Underneath the grey socialist exterior there was now buzzing activity in society itself. People were visibly less afraid of the regime and were not in the least reluctant to ridicule it. A feeling of moral superiority had been established.

Maybe this contributed to revitalizing even the Communists, or maybe it was due to Gorbachev's insistence on glasnost and perestroika. In any case, the opposition had made such progress that it was in a position to pressure the regime into liberalising the system and bring them to the negotiating table. And this was exactly the goal of the new strategy: "turn your back on them until they come crawling". Now it was coming to fruition.

After crisscrossing Eastern Europe for two weeks, I was ready to pronounce my verdict. The situation in GDR was pitch black with scarcely a glimmer of hope. The regime was ruthless and the fragmented opposition was stuck in the old mindset of reform communism. Things were gloomy in Czechoslovakia as well, where the Communist Party purged itself of all dissenters after the events of 1968. Therefore, most of the political talent was gone and there were few left capable of generating new ideas. However, the opposition was more dynamic, just as in Hungary where even the Communist Party had started to warm up to the idea of reforms. As for Poland – well, Communism seemed like a closed chapter and the regime was ready to negotiate.

So my conclusion was this: It is not possible to tell how or when things will happen in Eastern Europe, but happen they will. And it will be big, bigger than anything we have seen for a long time.

Looking back, I have a hard time understanding the wide spread opinion about the Eastern European revolution being a bolt out of the blue, that it happened so fast. It is one thing that the East Europeans themselves were hesitant to believe in real change until it was evident, but that the West failed to see it coming is symptomatic of the disinterested approach to the region throughout the entire post-war era.

Nevertheless, as the year of 1989 begins, Eastern Europe is clearly ready for change. Like a fruit, ripe for the picking.

I am packing my bags. I have asked the editorial page of Svenska Dagbladet for the opportunity to go to Eastern Europe in order to cover what I hope – and firmly believe – is to be the peaceful dissolution of the Eastern bloc.

One thing I decided to leave behind was that Western indifference ridiculously masked as journalistic distance. The Eastern Europeans deserved better. Instead I would write about the dignity and the courage, about the Eastern European right that no one thought existed and about the bankrupt Communist system.

It was high time for me to pay my debt to the boys around that Hungarian camp fire and the insights they gave me, to honour those who struggled but also – if only indirectly – expose the Swedish indifference.

Event after event of historical importance happened in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the GDR and at such a high rate that I have a hard time keeping track of all the travels I made. Now, 20 years later, it is impossible to properly describe everything that happened. However, I have tried to convey some of it by digging out my old notebooks and articles. As I leaf through them, a general picture emerges of that year, 1989, when Europe freed itself of Communism and millions of people were liberated from a system so oppressive it boggles the mind thinking such a system ever existed on our continent. ►

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Entries from a notebook

1989

January:

11 • Hungarian reform Communists grant freedom of association and freedom of assembly.

15 • What a coup! During the official memorial service for the Communists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht who had been murdered 70 years earlier, a few hundred demonstrators seized the opportunity and demanded freedom of speech and freedom of assembly in the GDR. Must go there! Maybe it is in Leipzig, rather than in Berlin, where the Eastern German opposition is to be found. (This turned out to be true.)

16 • The Polish parliament lifts the ban on Solidarność.

19 • Erich Honecker tells the party congress that the Wall will stand for another hundred years. (This turned out to be false.)

February:

10 • The central committee of the Hungarian Communist Party votes to allow a multi-party system by a thin margin.

21 • Standing outside the court in “Prague, district 10”, waiting for the verdict of Václav Havel. Only two Western journalists have been allowed inside. They report back to us of what is obviously a mock trial. Dinner with dissidents later that day. Extremely interesting. (Havel is sentenced to one month in prison, but it is the last time he is to be convicted.)

25 • The Polish opposition reacts quickly to the arrest of Havel. Went to see Havel's "Audience" at the Powszechny theatre in Warsaw. Surprisingly, the Polish Communist Prime Minister is attending, but he is rebuked by the author Adam Michnik after the performance. The Prime Minister hastens to leave the theatre while people are laughing.

March:

7 • Poland allows its citizens to carry foreign currency.

12 • Protests in Leipzig again. Must definitely go there!

April:

5 • The Round Table Agreement between the government and Solidarność include economic reforms and the establishment of a second chamber in parliament which will be subjected to free elections.

22 • The youth association of the Hungarian Communist Party votes to dissolve itself.

May:

17 • Poland's religious orders are allowed to hold seminars and start newspapers and radio stations.

June:

7 • The chairman of the Hungarian Communist Party condemns the massacre in Tianmen Square in Beijing.

8 • A long day with Václav Havel. Interview until noon and then theatre in the evening. Interesting discussions concerning the "politics of antipolitics", the development in Poland and the many signs of an awakening of the Czechoslovakian opposition. Deeply moved by the story of the poet Jozef Topol and the

labour camps. It was his poems that were read from the stage.
Unable to sleep.

July:

9 • Dinner with Czech Communists. Only lies, intense desire to leave. The hotel staff discreetly hints that my hotel room is bugged. Reading the Economist aloud for a spell before I fall asleep.

10 • By car over Erzgebirge to Dresden. Never did I see such environmental devastation in Europe. Dead forests and bombed out towns rebuilt in the realist socialist style. I go to “Budapest” for a meal, and to “Dubrovnik” for a beer and in the book store, I pick up a book on Western oppression of women. Desperately trying to make eye contact with people in the streets. Impossible.

11 • Did some research in Leipzig. Looks promising. Have to come back here in the Autumn!

13 • In a letter to the French president Mitterand, General Jaruzelski pleads for emergency economic support.

August:

1-2 • Cabinet crisis in Poland. Protests when the government lifted food price caps when goods were already short in supply. A national coalition government is proposed by the Communists.

21 • Defying the prohibition, a couple of thousands of people convene in the Václav square on the year day of the Soviet invasion in 1968. Mass arrests by the police.

24 • In Poland, Eastern Europe’s first non-Communist Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, former editor-in-chief of the Solidarność paper, is elected. Hungary grants 108 DDR-citizens exit permits after they sought refuge at the Western German em-

bassy in Budapest. (This was the first in a series of such “embassy dramas”.)

September:

12 • The Polish Parliament sanctions Mazowiecki’s government, which consists of twelve Communists and eleven Solidarność-ministers.

19 • In Hungary, this summer’s series of round table talks between the government and the opposition are brought to an end. The first free elections in Eastern Europe are to be held early next year.

25 • Arrived in Budapest. Visit to six newly formed political parties. Meeting with Jozsef Antal, the chief negotiator of the opposition. Long and pleasant conversation. Another oppositionist who says he never wanted to become a politician. I tell him that I believe he will lead his country some day and that I will write this. He shakes his head. (Six months later, Antal is Hungary’s democratically elected president.)

26 • News of protests in the streets of Leipzig after the banning of the opposition group Neues Forum.

October:

10 • I can hardly believe my eyes. The Hungarian Communist Party has just removed communism from its party programme. They are about to accept a socio-political programme which includes, among other things, privatisation of the health care system. Things are happening rapidly now. Undoubtedly, the politicians are positioning themselves in anticipation of the elections in March. Dinner with people from the opposition. Spirits are high. Some concern though over the development in the GDR. 70 000 protesters and strong military presence at the demonstrations in Leipzig.

23 • Back in Leipzig after a quick trip to Berlin where the opposition is getting organized. 300 000 people in the streets. They are grave and very resolute: Wir sind das Volk! (we are the people!) But also, an eerie atmosphere. Soldiers in double rows flank the demonstrators as they march. I get upset at a German colleague who thinks that Kohl does not want the GDR to be free since it would “probably chose a socialist path”.

29 • In Prague, at least 15 000 people are demonstrating against the Communist regime.

30 • Freezing cold in Leipzig. Once again the protesters in the streets number well over 300 000. A very tense situation. I notice a sign carrying a new message: Wir sind ein Volk. (we are one nation). None of the political correspondents here think it is a significant observation. (But it was. A majority of Eastern Germans were eager to reunite with West Germany after the Wall fell.)

November:

4 • The Czechs are once again offering free passage to East Germans determined to flee to the West. (In the matter of only five days, more than 50 000 leave the GDR by this route.) Visit to a hospital in Leipzig where I discover that seven out of ten doctors have gone abroad.

7 • A very peculiar cabinet reshuffle in East Berlin. What is going on?

9 • A relatively obscure member of the politburo unexpectedly announces that the East-West German border is to be opened. The Wall is tumbling down. Leipzig is exultant. Wonderful!

17 • Checked in at Hotel Europa by the Václav Square in Prague. Fortunately, I subscribe to two rooms since earlier, despite the

fact that no foreigners are allowed to stay here! Massive demonstrations outside the window. Violent policing. A German colleague and I make a trip by car in order to investigate a rumour that the military has encircled the city. Sadly, it turned out to be true. Frightening.

19 • Press conference in the theatre Laterna Magica. Charta 77-members on the stage and a group of journalists in the auditorium. (A couple of days later this venue would be packed.) 50 000 people in the Václav Square. I strike a deal with a Swiss colleague. Half my room for half of his, one facing the yard, where there is less noise. And I offer the balcony to an American TV-team, thereby securing 24-hour coverage of the Václav Square. Satisfied.

20 • 250 000 people in the Václav Square. A new atmosphere. Very determined but also very sober. (It is probably here that the concept of the Velvet Revolution is born...)

21 • The dour Czech Communist Party invites the opposition to formal discussions. Václav Havel is discreetly offered assistance by the Swedish embassy, thanks to the wonderful Lars-Åke Nilsson. Meeting with both of them over a quick dinner.

23 • 300 000 people in the Václav Square.

24 • 400 000 people in the Václav Square. Havel and Dubček address the crowd. The Communist Party chief Milos Jakes resigns.

25 • Train to Budapest. A popular vote is held in Hungary on a new constitution in the middle of a raging blizzard. The chauffeur refuses to drive the cab so I get behind the wheel myself. Only a couple of journalists in town since the revolution in

Czechoslovakia is still in progress. I savour the pride and joy of the Hungarians.

December:

1 • The Communist Party in Eastern German cut, from the constitution, the paragraph concerning the “party’s leading position”.

7 • The Czech government resigns.

14 • The Communist Party and the opposition reach an agreement over future presidential elections in Czechoslovakia.

18 • Romanian security forces crack down on demonstrators in the North and close the Hungarian border.

22 • The Romanian government declares state of war after widespread disturbances with several casualties. This is the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe.

23 • The dictator Ceaușescu is captured as he tries to escape.

24 • Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena are executed and their bodies are shown on television.

29 • The dissident, author and one of the leading figures of the Eastern European opposition, Václav Havel, is elected president of Czechoslovakia.

31 • Back in Stockholm. Trying to recapitulate the past year. No success. But what does it matter! ■

Between Power and Need

The Everyday Life in Former Eastern Europe
By Richard Swartz

Did I ever think that Communism would disappear and that I would be here to see it? No, I most certainly did not.

It is true that I knew that it did not work; this discovery I made already in Prague. During a couple of years as a student in Czechoslovakia, I learned that Communism did not live up to its aspirations of providing “for each and one according to his needs”, nor did it grant people safety and happiness as promised. It was more like the opposite. Without understanding it myself, I was nevertheless convinced that Communism would somehow get by, in an ever more appalling and repugnant way, according to the workings of its internal logic. Much like an alligator, which in our eyes is nothing more than a frightening predator on the prowl, when in reality it is a highly accomplished and effective creation in relation to its purpose.

And the purpose of Communism was evident: it consisted of preserving power for those who wielded it and who were determined not to share it with anyone else. Communism had proven itself capable of fulfilling this task, but the costs were high and they were paid in human suffering and pauperism. The way I saw things, there was no reason to think that tomorrow would be any different from today.

Communism was here to stay and I simply lacked the imagination to envision something else.

And boy was I wrong! Only twenty years after I gained the conviction in Prague that Communism would survive despite its malfunction, it was gone. As if it had never existed, leaving no trace (except for in people’s souls and consciousness; but that is another story). I had been seriously mistaken. My prognosis had turned out to be dead wrong, which, by the way, is often the case with prognoses. Gazing into the crystal ball only served to paralyze me; I had succumbed to fatalism and “demiurgic” beliefs instead of putting my trust in my direct experiences, in what I, despite everything, could see, hear and feel in Prague.

However, every well-established system is convincing by means of its mere existence, not so much because of the concrete results it produces, and prognoses are often extrapolations of the prevailing order rather than based on results. There is a fundamental flaw in prognosticating, as evidenced by, for instance, the five-year plans of Communism. Even humanity's loftiest attempts at imagining the future in terms of utopias often paralyze people to a far greater extent than they inspire them. Furthermore, they lead them to deny the reality that surrounds them.

But my conviction of the permanence of Communism was shared by most of those forced to live under it. Nor could they imagine that it would ever disappear. Instead of revolting, they adjusted; the few exceptions were regarded as either fools or saints. Looking back, I wonder whether the inability to imagine a different future was far more paralyzing, castrating and burdensome than the troubles of everyday life in a communist reality.

One of Communism's most peculiar paradoxes is that this society, which loved to project an image of itself with billowing smokestacks, rows of combine harvesters over the fields or molten iron pouring from furnaces, never produced anything to speak of. Almost forty years ago, in Prague, I quickly learned that all that was produced was power for the Communist Party and need for the people. Almost everything else was in short supply, ranging from matches to moral courage and ordinary decency.

For a student in economics, newly arrived in Prague, this was a somewhat ironic discovery. What I had set out to study existed only in the newsreels and the party pamphlets or as figures and statistics that no one took seriously, not even those responsible for producing them.

But one had to adapt to this impoverished economic day-to-day life. It was not long before I, just like everyone else, made sure to pocket a shopping bag every time I went out in the streets. There was no way of knowing where or when goods would materialize – as if by chance rather than according to the latest five-year plan. And without a shopping bag in your pocket, you were helpless whenever an opportunity presented itself. As soon as we spotted a line in the streets, we joined it. Better to be safe than sorry. Maybe something was for sale (“What are they throwing at us here?”, was the standard question asked to the person next in line) that could either be useful or traded for something you needed. In a way, these lines were not only symptoms of need but also unexpected opportunities; they inspired hope of getting hold of something, anything, that was not available in the depleted stores where the only things left were what nobody wanted.

In my nearest grocery store in Holešovice, Prague's 7th district, not far from the Strossmayer Square, the most peculiar things were on display. Most of them emitting a faint, odour of disinfectants or chlorine. Despite the meagreness of it all, there was an air of mystery in that gloomy store. Almost nothing could be examined more closely, no touching, pressing or smelling. Everywhere you looked, things were wrapped up, in thin cardboard paper or metal, but the thick, brown glue was of such poor quality that the labels used to come off now and then. The glass jars and metal containers were left standing, inscrutable, with no way for me of knowing what was inside.

We bought pickled cherries but ended up with plums. Not even the glass jars made things any easier. Picking them from the shelves and looking inside offered little new information; behind the glass there appeared to be some kind of mushroom, but it had lost its colour and shape, dingy and on the verge of dissolving bearing no resemblance to what they must have looked like when once harvested. Even the labels still in place failed to elucidate matters: they were often so poorly printed that the letters bled together, making the text impossible to read.

There were store clerks who expertly discerned the contents in such jars. They assured that whatever you happened to be holding was exactly what you had been asking for. When you actually opened the jar, it was not always evident whether the clerk had been right or wrong; those were also the kind of surprises that added to the mystery that hovered over such grocery stores. We were not even surprised when we opened a can and found that the contents did not match the label. Not even a completely empty can was cause for much astonishment.

I remember a kind of liver paste that we carefully avoided eating but used for greasing our shoes in the winter. There was milk with a distinct flavour of chemicals, soft drinks whose colour quickly faded as the pigments sank to the bottom of the bottle like grains of sand, lettuce that must have withered even before it reached the counter; once in the store it started rotting. Another intriguing phenomenon was all the cans and bottles that were impossible to open: the cap would simply not come off and the metal handle used for pulling tin cans open would break.

However, the beer was excellent and the sausages were eaten voraciously even though we did not know what they were made of, there being no declaration of contents to enlighten us. We owed the beer and sausages to tradition: not even Communism had succeeded in eliminating the tender love that the Czech put into making their national dishes.

The cans were arranged on shelves in the store and sometimes as decorations in the display windows. Much effort was expended by the store clerks on the latter task. They would keep the store closed for stock-taking and I could see them from the street when they crawled on all fours, busy with arranging and rearranging. Tin cans were skilfully arranged in towers or pyramidal shapes. Once a can was used as a building block for such constructions, it was no longer for sale; it was out of our reach, left there collecting dust and soot. Sometimes such delicacies as Russian sturgeon would waste away in the display windows.

I do not know if it was prescribed by the local authorities that the shop-windows of Prague should be decorated in this way, but the ardour of the clerks indicated that it was their own initiative, that they had succumbed to the temptation of embellishing their displays. Momentarily, they had forgotten that it was not in their interest to get more customers – they always seemed eager to get rid of us – and that it made no sense to tantalize the customers with goods that were no longer for sale inside.

It struck me that these store windows were subjected to the same economic laws that applied to all of Prague's economic life: they portrayed something that did not really exist and presented it with the same sanctimonious aesthetic used by the propagandists when they depicted the constant success of the planned economy.

These display window constructions were useless monuments, consumer goods turned into garbage by the store clerks (the fact that they did not even have the decency to empty them themselves added to our frustration). It seemed like everything decorative in this town served the purpose of emphasizing what was lacking and the display windows made this abundantly clear in a rather tasteless way.

But the store clerks seemed unaware of the tastelessness of these meaningless monuments as they crawled among their cans in the window, oblivious to the dead flies that lay scattered around them and the customers outside in the street.

This task must have required some imagination although this too was in short supply. Everything was scarce, except time which was abundant. But time that is not put to use or simply spent waiting changes a person, imperceptibly, and only seldom does one notice its effects. It is not long before it brings out the animal inside, a mute, vegetative being like ruminating cattle. This is a form of time with no beginning or end, where the past and the future

are equally meaningless and the present is just a transition between the two; Communism, which had styled itself as the “glorious future of all humanity” only succeeded in eradicating it, just as it had eradicated or revised the past, while it remained mute in front of the ultimate questions, such as life after death.

Thus communism had turned the whole concept of time hollow – and ironically time was the only thing in Prague that people had plenty of. Time had been emptied of all purposeful content while communism only offered a bleak alternative take on what life was supposed to be; nothing was said about the brevity of life, that it has a beginning and an end or that each and every one of us has our own life for which we have sole responsibility. Instead this perpetual talk about “the people”. The people included us, but not us in the sense that we were individuals with our own eyes, who suffered from sciatica or did not suffer from sciatica, who had opinions, bad habits or personal dreams that were distinct from everyone else’s. Instead it meant that we had been subsumed by this collective organism, a “we” devoid of all individuality.

The female sales clerks were young, but soon they grew old and heavier. As years went by they became coated with a greasy layer of dust and if it once had been a challenge to make them smile, it was now impossible. If there had been such a thing as an expiration date in this strange world of goods and if it had been applied to those who worked there, it would have shocked the customers and the sales clerks alike.

During working hours, however, they only saw and heard what they wanted to see and hear and whatever that was, it did not include the customers, the depleted shelves, or the meagre stock of goods. While still young, they were arrogant and condescending; after all it was a privilege to be a customer in their store. If you went shopping on a cold winter’s morning it was only through their indulgence that they let you in and if you asked a question you should not expect an answer. Demanding anything whatsoever was pure impertinence.

The fact that we were paying customers gave us no rights: our money did not seem to interest the store clerks in any regard, it just made their work more complicated. Supposedly, they would have preferred a system based on rationing where they, without ever worrying about prices and payments, doled out to the customers whatever happened to be available. However, as the sales girls got older, their arrogance declined. Their eyes lost their spark, their movements got sluggish and indecisive, but this was not due to age, it was due to them giving up: they seemed to have retired to an inner existence,

a concealed self which the surrounding world could no longer disturb.

This state had a paradoxical effect. It appeared to make them at peace with the store and its shelves and it was not unusual for a sales clerk who had reached this stage to actually tell you where you could find the sauerkraut or the soap. Such a clerk no longer defended the position given to her by Communism, this modest privilege of supervising the perpetual shortage of goods: she had given up, accepted that her biography had turned into her destiny.

However, Communism at the time, 20 years before it crumbled, was quite different from what it had been under Stalin during the 50s. There was no longer much talk about totalitarianism, terror or ideology. Communism had been reduced to something nobody took seriously but everybody paid lip service to. It had lost contact with reality and no longer tried to convince its citizens and hardly even scare them.

The social contract that was now on offer had replaced ideology with cynicism. It was, in a sense, progress: we (the potentates) will not bother you (the citizens), if you promise not to bother us. You let us stay in power and we leave you alone. With a few exceptions this contract remained in place in the whole of Eastern Europe up until that moment in time when it was to be revoked by the people

As a student in Prague, I had from my vantage point at the bottom of society been able to experience this almost imperceptible shift from totalitarianism to a kind of vegetative political state together with the people; later, as a correspondent in the rest of Eastern Europe, I would get the opportunity to study this shift in the representatives of power as well. What once was a youthful and forceful spirit had given way to middle-aged despondency: a typical apparatchik was a tired, asthmatic and chain-smoking man in upper middle age (although he often looked older), with a pale face wearing a faint, artificial smile as if to indicate good faith or maybe to apologize for some abstract wrongdoing.

His words were pragmatic, often sensible, but they lacked the conviction of ever being realized or even taken seriously. Principles were no longer defended. Such an apparatchik, with his melancholy and impotence, was a shadow of a man, someone who long ago had dismissed the possibility of ever reforming Communism. And though he may have regarded attempts in that direction with some sympathy, he would not exert himself in following Gorbachev's initiative to do what had been shown unfeasible already during the Prague Spring in 1968.

Communism did not tolerate reform. Any such attempt would either be put down, fizzle out or launch the beginning of Communism's end. No one knew this better than such an apparatchik, this custodian of a system that stopped working a long time ago: his resignation and weariness were only symptoms of this realization.

However, the people, who took the full blow of Communism's failures, already knew what the apparatchik were just beginning to realize. These citizens too were dejected and tired, but they differed in one crucial aspect from the bureaucrats: they were not dependent on the Communist system even though it controlled many aspects of their lives. For example, the sales clerks in my store in Holešovice were clearly affected by the shortage of goods, it set the scene for their everyday lives, but they were not forced to defend it. They had no responsibility and they suffered from the scarcity of goods just as their customers did. Despite the power they wielded over the neighbourhood as administrators of deficiencies, they did not belong to the Communist nomenklatura. As soon as the work day ended they were on equal footing with all the other citizens.

One morning on the tram from Holešovice to central Prague, I met one of the sales clerks from my store. It must have been her day off. At first I did not recognize her; the girl sitting opposite was a girl my own age, in a dark red coat and she was smiling at me. She had recognized me, obviously the change of context from a grocery store to a tram had no effect on my appearance, but she on the other hand had undergone a metamorphosis so radical that the sales girl in my corner shop seemed to have nothing in common with this young woman.

We talked for the rest of the ride. We laughed and acted as close friends and this intimacy was not only due to our youth and the attraction between man and woman, but also due to our common experiences of Communism and the scarcity it supplied us with. It was a short ride and while it was intense and intimate we both wanted to distance ourselves from what we did not speak of; she by indicating that she did not want to be associated with the store and its empty shelves, me by showing that I would not dream of holding her responsible for it.

We were obviously on the same side and Communism was on the opposing one with its oppressive system that prevented us from saying openly what we both privately held to be self-evident.

Every day, both of us were reminded of the nature of this Communism. We

were reminded of its oppressive presence and we had no illusions except maybe when it came to its remarkable longevity. Naively, we thought that it would remain in place for the rest of our lives, since it had been there for the first part. However, we avoided those thoughts; there was nothing to be done except for acting unconcerned, as if Communism had no power over us, as if it simply did not exist.

Yet it did exist and it dictated our lives but it also contributed to the intense feelings of fellowship between the two of us during that tram ride: not solidarity, not freedom, but rather that sweet, often intoxicating feeling of a common destiny, a feeling not to be found in democratic societies. ■

They Ran Towards Freedom

When the Iron Curtain Was Lifted in Hungary
By Walburga Habsburg Douglas

Thirty years ago, the European Parliament was for the first time elected directly by the citizens of the member states. Back then, no one even dared to dream that ten years later, the Iron Curtain would be lifted and the people of Eastern Europe would liberate themselves.

However, during the European Parliament's first term, a group of foresighted and brave Members of Parliament wrote a bill. A bill proposing the installation of an empty chair in the Parliament chamber as a reminder of all the countries which were, as of yet, unable to freely choose whether to participate in the European community. The motion was accepted with overwhelming majority.

Another motion in the same spirit soon followed. It concerned the Baltic States. A majority in the European Parliament voted that an inquiry should be made in the UN Committee on Decolonization, concerning the fate of these countries. This was another step in the right direction, and more such steps were to be taken. As it turned out, the inquiry was met with cool disinterest in the UN but the event helped launch a wider discussion. Hadn't Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania been turned into Russian colonies by means of the pact between Hitler and Stalin? And what about the West and its duty to help these states regain their autonomy? This made people like me, who were born after the Second World War and the treaties in Yalta and Potsdam that cemented the East-West partition of Europe, think: Maybe the Baltic States are not, after all, a legitimate part of the Soviet Empire!? History was suddenly cast in a different light.

And the European Parliament continued in this vein. Different committees started inviting Eastern European dissidents in order for them to bear witness in hearings about the status of human rights in their home countries. In this way, they got a chance – to the extent that they were able to participate – to

Speak the truth, and tell the world about the lack of freedom, the oppression, the threats and imprisonment and the coercive measures that sustained Communist society.

During the late 80s there was a revolution in information technology. Transistors were replaced with computers, it got harder and harder for the Communist regime in Moscow to keep its citizens in what the citizens of the GDR called *Tal der Ahnungslosen* (the valley of the unsuspecting). All at once, many Eastern Europeans were able to get news of the positive economic development in the West and they justly asked: Why do not we have the same opportunity? Why cannot we be a part of this development? Why cannot we travel where we want to go and work where we want to work? Disquiet started growing, dissident movements grew stronger and the interest for Europe, freedom and progress was on the rise.

In 1989, elections to the European Parliament were held. These elections reflected in one way or another many of the events taking place behind the Iron Curtain, such as the Monday Demonstrations in East Germany (see page [xx](#)). During the election campaigns, issues such as how to prepare the first free elections in Poland were discussed. My father, who at the time was president of the pan-European Union, ran as a candidate in the election. It was the third time since the first election by direct vote in 1979 that he was on the list of the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (Christlich-Soziale Union; CSU).

Only a day after the votes had been counted, a group of newly elected and re-elected members of Parliament decided to visit the countries behind the Iron Curtain. The purpose was to inform our Eastern European friends of the implications of the election results and to analyze what it meant for our divided continent. My father went to Hungary where he had scheduled two meetings, one at the university in Budapest and one in Debrecen in eastern Hungary near the Ukrainian border.

The meetings were arranged by the Hungarian section of the pan-European Union together with the Hungarian opposition party “Hungarian Democratic Forum” (MDF) – which still exists today. One topic that was discussed even after the session ended was how Hungary should indicate more clearly that it wanted to be a part of a unified Europe. It was there and then that the

idea of a “pan-European picnic” was born. A meeting at the border between Hungary and Austria was agreed upon. The border should be opened so that the mayors of the neighbouring municipalities could shake hands and talks should be held that emphasized the friendship, cooperation and the European future that the countries had in common. The date was set for the 19th of August, the day before the Hungarian national day and thus a long weekend. Two “chaperons” were proposed for the picnic – Imre Pozsgay, who was Hungary’s vice Prime Minister at the time and Otto von Habsburg, President of the pan-European Union.

Hungary, which is a country that in many ways differed from the rest of the Eastern bloc, was in 1989 led by a government that did not only contain members of the Communist Party. Even the president, Brun Straub, was an independent. A few weeks after the meeting in Debrecen, the Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn and his Austrian colleague symbolically cut the barbed wire of the Iron Curtain. This act inspired the pan-European Union and the MDF. Such a ceremony should definitely be included in the picnic.

And against all expectations, the organizers were granted permission to stage such an event at the Sopron/Ödenburg border crossing, the site of the picnic.

As the preparations for the 19th of August were in full swing, the political situation intensified. East Germans, who were most desperate in regards to the political and social situation in their country, tried to find cracks in the Iron Curtain in order to escape oppression. Industrial workers went on holiday, the schools closed for the summer and people went in masses to the “Socialist brother states” in order to savour their vacation but also looking for an opportunity to go to the West – with no plans of returning after the end of the holidays.

Once again, the Hungarians were an exception during this exodus: For the first time, a “Socialist brother state” opened refugee camps for citizens from another “Socialist brother state”. One camp was in the middle of Budapest, the Hungarian capital, and another by Lake Balaton. The camps were run by private organizations and supported by the Hungarian government.

Meanwhile the preparations for the picnic continued. With regard to the

explosive political situation, the two chaperons, Imre Pozsgay and Otto von Habsburg, decided not to attend. Instead they each appointed a replacement: Laszlo Vass, the undersecretary of Imre Pozsgay and me. At the time I was in Budapest, studying Hungarian and I also held the post of General Secretary of the pan-European Union.

The organizers in Sopron, Budapest and Debrecen printed flyers about the picnic containing extremely detailed maps of the border region, directions and of course the program. All over the country, the flyers were handed out: on the bridges of Budapest, in the camps in Zugliget and by Lake Balaton, in camping sites and parking lots. Also, the organizers enlisted their private networks in order to spread awareness of the event.

Concurrently, I was in Budapest, taking language classes until noon and then working on the preparations in the afternoon. However, it was not easy getting hold of relevant information from outside. In 1989, mobile phones were not yet pervasive – dialing abroad was an ordeal that took several hours and you had to wait in the central post office of Budapest while the connections were made. Furthermore, my Hungarian was not quite good enough for me to read newspapers or listen to the radio without difficulty. But I did get a general understanding of the situation by visiting the camps and talking to East Germans in the streets of Budapest.

On the eve of the event, the 18th of August, we the organizers had our final meeting over dinner at the Gellért hotel. We discussed both the foreseeable and unforeseeable consequences of the event. The Hungarians pointed out an important fact: A few weeks earlier, the Red Army had withdrawn from Hungary's Western border. This was a huge relief to us all, because it meant that we would only be facing Hungarian border guards. Would they allow the border crossing at Sopronpuszta to become the long awaited crack in the Iron Curtain? This was something that our East German friends eagerly awaited.

It's August 19, early in the morning and I am in a car on my way to Sopron. It is a hot summer's morning with sunflower fields flanking the road on both sides and my heart is filled with tremendous expectations. I am also very nervous: having studied Hungarian only for a few weeks, I was to hold a speech. Would I make a complete fool of myself?

The picnic started with a press conference. I was a bit taken aback by the enormous interest: TV-teams from not only Germany, Austria and Hungary but also Canada, Australia, Japan, and the United States were present. Press agencies from all over Europe, photographers and radio correspondents. There were many questions concerning the picnic and the intentions behind it, of the pan-European Union and its history of working for a unified Europe and its contributions in this direction during the spring of 1989 and of the politicians involved and their ideas.

After the press conference, we marched toward the border and the site where the picnic was to be held. I sat in the middle of a group of Germans and a thought quickly came to my mind: Where were all of our Hungarian friends? From the start it was said that they would constitute the majority of the participants. The Germans first sauntered along calmly but as we approached the border their pace quickened. Finally they started running at full speed, straight through the open gate, past the border towards freedom and a better and safer future.

The last stretch of the road was littered with abandoned cars. Mostly Trabbis – trabants – cars that cost their owners many, many year’s of savings. And they were left just standing there while their owners ran off, into Austria, through the long-awaited opening. On the other side, buses were waiting in order to take the refugees to Vienna and they were greeted with the words: “Welcome to freedom. Welcome to Europe!”

For my part, I went over to the barbed wire, with a bolt clipper in hand, acquired specially for this purpose a few days earlier in a flea market in Debrecen. I cut the wire in a joyous frenzy. Finally! The unjustifiable border between East and West was coming apart. A border that I had worked all my life to see disappear. It was an indescribable feeling.

I talked with the Hungarian border guards. They too were elated. One of them explained to me “now we have three possibilities”:

- 1) We shoot at the fugitives since they probably are not carrying passports or documents. But we will not do this because we have no such orders.
- 2) Or we try to hold the masses back using our bare hands. But this will not work. And we could not do it, even if we wanted to.

3) We sit back and share their joy. This joy of finally being able to give something back to Europe, to the West and to history.

And there I stood, together with them, watching the fugitives, signing autographs to the participating Hungarians, so that they had a memento “to remember the day when the Iron Curtain fell”.

During the actual picnic, before all the Hungarian and Austrian participants had gone home, I and Laszlo Vass gave our speeches. The Hungarian poet György Konrád also made an appearance and while all this was going on, the East Germans were headed toward a brighter future in the West.

Back in my Budapest apartment that night, a colleague from the West German embassy called and informed me that about 660 East Germans had fled during the picnic – the largest wave of refugees since the Berlin Wall was built in 1961.

Two days later, I listened to an interview with the Secretary General of the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands in GDR), Erich Honecker, on the Moscow radio. He blamed the pan-European Union of having ruined the dream of a Socialist Europe. It was then that I realized the implications of our picnic.

However, the pan-European picnic was naturally neither the first nor the most important event in the development that led to the dissolution of the Communist bloc. But it was part of a process which ten years earlier was dismissed as impossible and which now, 20 years later, is slipping dangerously into oblivion.

Today we have the opportunity to learn from our shared European history. We have a choice in working more intensely at unifying Europe and we have a duty to make this choice. And we must remember that this European dream was once so appealing to the people of Eastern Europe that they could not be held back by barbed wire or minefields and it inspired them to free themselves.

Still, today many countries remain outside the European community. Granted, there is no longer any barbed wire dividing countries, but in many peoples' mind there still is. Therefore it is important that Sweden, with the EU as a platform, works ardently at the further extension of the European Union and supports and energizes the so called Eastern Partnership¹. ■

1) EU:s Eastern Partnership encompasses Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus. The Partnership is, among other things, supporting these Eastern countries in developing democratic institutions and contributing to greater mobility by facilitating the process of applying for visa.

A Surge to Freedom

The Soviet Union in reality and as an object of scientific study
By Claes Arvidsson

Two images from 1989.

Tianmen Square in June 1989. A lone Chinese dissenter is standing in the way of four advancing tanks. In China, a massacre followed by massive repression put an end to the democracy movement. Twenty years later, China remains, despite increased economic freedom, a communist autocracy. There is very little to celebrate.

East Berlin, October 9th, 1989. A military parade march passed a stand where rows of heads of state are assembled. Next to the leaders of the GDR, among others, stand Wojciech Jaruzelski, Nicolae Ceaușescu and the party chief of the Soviet Union, Michail Gorbachev. Their smiles are forced. The empire is crumbling. The Eastern European regimes are about to fall like dominoes.

As a result of the round table talks in the spring of 1989 between the Polish Communist regime and the political workers' union Solidarność – which were held as a response to a massive wave of strikes in the autumn of 1988 – the former party chief Jaruzelski had been demoted to President, retaining only his executive power. Behind him lay an election, partly free, in which Solidarność won a landslide victory. The following year, Jaruzelski would resign voluntarily and he was succeeded by the opposition leader Lech Wałęsa.

On the 27th of December, 1989, Ceaușescu was executed. For many, revenge was sweet.

The Wall was torn down on November 9, 1989. East Germans and West Germans were dancing and smiling. On the 3rd of October the following year, Germany was reunified.

On the 25th of December, 1991, Michail Gorbachev retired from politics and on the 31st of December, the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

1989 has been dubbed an *annus mirabilis* and it was to be followed by many more of similar importance. In 1988 Kristian Gerner, Anders Fogelklou, An-

ders Åslund and I published the first book in Swedish on the reform policies under Gorbachev. It was called “The Soviet Challenge” (Den sovjetiska utmaningen) and it was an attempt to shed light on the quite astonishing development under the new party leader Gorbachev, who, with his slogans *glasnost* and *perestroika*, wanted to create a more open and dynamic state.

Today, when I reread the book, I think we were quite accurate in our descriptions of the problems and dilemmas facing the Soviet Union, such as the economic stagnation and explosive force of secessionist movements. However, none of us predicted the events of 1989 or the collapse of the Soviet Union a couple of years later. But no one else did either.

Granted, the Empire was reminiscent of a house of cards, but despite its instability, there was no way of knowing the outcome. However, brave people with an intractable longing for freedom and national independence carried the process to its only logical end.

I cannot remember where or when I first met the Norwegian professor in economics Thorolf Rafto, but it must have been sometime in the 70s. The impression that the meeting made on me is still vivid in my mind. As a person, Rafto was quite unconventional in the academic sphere, he was curious of people, enthusiastic and vibrating with lust for life. (He is the only one I know of who has tried, wearing a jogging suit, to jog past the armed guards at the Kremlin).

As a researcher with a special interest in the Soviet Union, he was even more unconventional. He would talk spiritedly about lack of freedom and oppression.

Rafto was also a political activist, as well as an experienced RAF-pilot who had joined the fight against Nazism during the Second World War. His personal network included oppositionists in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Poland. In 1979, while giving a lecture to students who had been barred from university on political grounds in Prague, he was beaten-up badly.

At first I was wondering who this peculiar character could be. But soon I realized that it was the prevailing paradigm in Soviet Union studies that was queer.

Today, it strikes me as hard to believe that a text book in political sciences on the Soviet Union, published in the 70s, failed to mention the term dictatorship while it described the electoral system as something “lacking certain features that we are used to”. This is how it was, incredibly enough. Soviet studies

focused on the similarities between Soviet rule and democracy and discussed the exercise of power in the Soviet Union in terms of elites, interest groups and the convergence of systems. These were legitimate research topics, but the researchers tended to get lost in the conceptual framework of political sciences, while missing the core of the issue.

Rafto was one of few representatives of a different perspective. A perspective that exposed the failures of the planned economy, the “priviligentia” and the Party’s dictatorship. As the political climate changed, political scientists in Sweden took heed and adopted an approach more in line with reality. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, military rearmament both at land and at sea, along with, of course, submarine 137 – ”whiskey on the rocks” – in the archipelago of Karlskrona in 1981 – all the signs pointed in one direction. Nevertheless, as late as in the early 80s, books could still be published in Sweden that discussed the Soviet Union in the terms of regional politics. This kind of research was emphatically dismissed by Rafto.

The fact that political rhetoric changed – with a number of politicians, spear-headed by Carl Bildt, starting to talk about both potential threats and the lack of freedom – helped to change the direction of much research work. Ronald Reagan was even more explicit than the Swedish politicians in his talk about “an empire of evil”. However, more important than rhetoric was the fact that the Americans started tending to their own house, ending a decade of disarmament. It has been suggested that the space defence system (Star Wars), which was extremely costly, contributed decisively to undermining the Soviet positions.

Berlin in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, Poland in 1970 and 1980-81 were events that exposed the fragility of the Soviet system in Eastern Europe. Another example, exposing this illegitimate regime, is the Forest Brethren partisans who fought against the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States well into the 50s. Showing that the power in the end rested with the guns of the Red Army.

When Michail Gorbachev was appointed party chief in the Soviet Union in 1985 it was a breath of fresh air. He was relatively young and his political style stood in stark contrast to the gerontocracy that had characterized the regime for decades. Leonid Brezhnev had been General Secretary from 1964 to 1982. He was succeeded by the ruthless KGB-boss Yury Andropov. After his death in 1984, the 73-year-old Konstantin Chernenko was seen as the fittest candidate. He too died during his term. But finally, enter Gorbachev!

Gorbachev wanted to become a winner by sparking a renaissance of pragmatic socialism. He gambled and lost everything. He attempted economic reforms that tried to conciliate the plan with the market. He opened up the political climate. As the development gained momentum according to its own dynamic, he tried to keep up, but he was always one step behind.

Although Gorbachev wanted to preserve the Soviet Union and distrusted democracy, there is no reason to doubt his commitment to a “common European home”. Concerning the empire in Eastern Europe, his response to the impulses toward change was to replace the Brezhnev doctrine, which dictated that it was “justified” to forcefully intervene whenever Communist rule was threatened in a state, with what was to be known as the Sinatra doctrine: I did it my way.

Instead of giving in to some kind of Pavlovian reflex of violence, he urged the old fogies in Eastern Europe to hop on the bandwagon of reform. Practically, this meant that dissidents were given carte blanche to protest and demand democracy. The Sinatra doctrine, however, did not apply to Russia.

According to Soviet ideology, the relations between the different constituent republics were described in terms of *sblizhenie*, a process of rapprochement. This was yet another example of the dictatorship’s Potemkin villages. The increased openness led to a nationalist awakening with the Baltic States in the vanguard. Estonia took the lead and Lithuania followed suite and the movement spread throughout the Union (sadly this rekindled old ethnic conflicts in countries such as Georgia and Azerbaijan).

Eventually, these movements spread to the Russian Soviet Republic itself and thus, the future existence of the Soviet Union became a topic on the agenda of politicians in Moscow. This development added to my fears that the Empire would strike back with brute force, thereby putting an abrupt end to the processes of emancipation.

These years were very dramatic ones. One of the most heartrending events occurred on the 23rd of August 1989 when a human chain of 2 million people spanned Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This was the 50-year day of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, with its secret amendment in which the Baltic States had been sacrificed to the Soviet Union. It was a powerful manifestation of the longing for national autonomy.

Initially, Estonia was where most of the action was. Protests were held against the planning of extensive mining operations and signatures were collected in

an appeal to the authorities. In 1987, the initiative proved to be a success. The regime looked bewildered. Meanwhile, another movement was growing, one that capitalized on Estonia's cultural heritage and it was to be a spearhead in the demands for independence.

In the spring of 1988, an old tradition from the song festival of 1869 was revived and this was the beginning of what would turn into the singing revolution. Serious, dignified people were singing incessantly – waving the Estonian flag. On the 11th of September, the Estonian People's Front organized a powerful singing manifestation. 300 000 people attended. Demands were made for the release of political prisoners and national autonomy.

In Moscow, on a completely different level, a tug-of-war with Gorbachev was going on. On the 16th of November 1988, the War of Laws, as it would later be known, started. Estonia's Supreme Soviet declared the republic's sovereignty within the Soviet Union. This meant that all federal laws had to be approved in Estonia before they could come into force. Moscow was weakened.

There were premonitions of what was about to come. The struggle for independence in Lithuania took an unexpected turn when the Communist Party fractured and Algirdas Brazauskas went his own way. In January 1990, Gorbachev personally went to Vilnius in order to entice the lost son to come back while trying to downplay the demands for independence. He was not successful. 250 000 demonstrators met Gorbachev in Vilnius.

The next set-back for Gorbachev was Saujadi's victory in the elections held in February that year, and the naming of Vytautas Landsbergis as president of Lithuania. When the Supreme Soviet of the Republic voted on the issue of independence, the result was 124 in favour and only 6 against. "The die was cast."

Gorbachev dismissed the vote as illegitimate and void and he reacted by allowing Soviet tanks to cross the border. Western diplomats were given 12 hours to leave the country. Paratroopers seized control over the premises of the Communist Party.

When the Lithuanians refused to bow down, Moscow cut the supply of oil and gas. On the 29th of June, Lithuania caved in and put a moratorium on its independence, which resulted in the blockade being lifted.

However, this was not the end. That spring, both Latvia and Estonia had declared that constitutionally they were in transition to independence. The

struggle for freedom continued in Lithuania as well. It was a very tense situation and as the year of 1991 began I thought that the dream was over. Many were those who shared this feeling with me. We were extremely nervous.

On the 2nd of January the infamous security forces of the Ministry of the Interior, Omon, surrounded the premises of the Lithuanian Communist Party. A couple of days later, it was announced that reinforcements were on their way in order to strengthen Soviet's military presence in the Baltic States. On the 9th of January, the TV tower in Vilnius was encircled. The following days, Omon forces stormed several buildings in Vilnius. Seizing control over TV and radio facilities resulted in 13 dead Lithuanians. Omon forces were also active in other parts of the Baltic States.

The violence and the bloodshed caused an uproar. Gorbachev pleaded ignorance and blamed local commanders. This did not appease the 100 000 protesters in Moscow. Later that spring, elections were held in the three Baltic States; and the outcome was overwhelming support of independence.

Gorbachev was met with fierce internal resistance from the old guard of Communists with Yegor Ligachev as their leader, but this was not the principal reason for the failure of the perestroika. For one thing, the economic reforms were only half-measures and they actually deepened the crisis. In addition, Gorbachev neither could nor would seek allies within the opposition. He could not let go of the system. However, most of his heroism lies in what he did not do, rather than in what he did. He became a hero of the transition and he deserves to be lauded as such.

Boris Yeltsin, however, was no heroic figure. To most people he was a besotted political buffoon. Crucially though, during the decisive events of the perestroika-years, he was consistently on the right side.

Yeltsin was very much a politician of the perestroika. In 1986 he was nominated party chief in Moscow, but then left out in the cold when he criticized his boss for the slow pace of reforms. He made a comeback in 1989, first as a member of the Supreme Soviet and then as Speaker of the Russian parliament. In 1991, he was elected Russian President with overwhelming majority.

Unlike Gorbachev, Yeltsin had the people's mandate in the battle of policies and power that was being fought. Gorbachev was gradually accumulating formal power, in reality, however, he became more and more a politician who reacted rather than ruled.

Yeltsin became the leading figure of the reform movement within the Com-

munist Party and he was not afraid of confrontations. Having scolded his fellow party members during the 28th party congress in July 1990, he chose to leave the party. Yeltsin was also sympathetic to the nationalist movements (as evidenced by a declaration concerning the autonomy of the Baltic States, which of course, undermined Gorbachev's position as a proponent of the continued existence of the Soviet Union). In February 1991, 400 000 people demonstrated in Moscow, showing their support for Yeltsin and demanding democracy. No one did the same for Gorbachev.

That's it, I thought, it's over. The reason for my dismay: the attempted coup of the 19th of August 1991. Communists of the old guard such as the KGB-boss Vladimir Kryuchkov, vice-President Gennady Yanayev, Defence Minister Dmitry Yazov and Interior Minister Boris Pugo, were the instigators. Gorbachev was placed in house arrest in his vacation home in the Crimea, the military was marching on Moscow.

Fortunately, the plot was poorly executed and when different factions within the army argued over who was to do the dirty work, the coup fizzled out. All went well. But one should not forget that the citizens played an important part when they defiantly put themselves in the way of the tanks. Yeltsin took "command". In a classic picture, he is standing on top of a tank, talking to the crowd.

Once the coup had been thwarted, Yeltsin responded swiftly by banning the Soviet Communist Party and dissolving its central agency. The old power apparatus was dismantled and the coup only precipitated what the coup-makers had wanted to prevent.

Concurrent with the coup, the Baltic States declared their independence anew. On the 17th of September, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became members of the UN. Freedom had returned.

On the 8th of December, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus announced the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev called it a coup, but his moaning had little effect. On the 25th of December he tendered his resignation and as of the 31st of December, the Soviet Union was no more.

While forces of freedom grew stronger and bolder throughout the empire, Sweden tried its best to stall the development in the Baltic States. The Social Democratic government repeated the mistake from the Baltic extradition; they cowered. Just like so many times before.

For example when Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize for

literature in 1970. It was out of the question that he would be allowed to travel to Stockholm and accept the prize. An informal ceremony that was planned to take place at the Swedish embassy in Moscow never happened and when the author's Nobel address was read at the solemnities in Stockholm, the last sentence was left out: "May those around this lavish table not forget the political prisoners who are presently hunger-striking for their severely curtailed and completely trampled rights."

Presumably, one was afraid of disturbing the beast that in reality was already wide awake. And things continued in this vein until the mid-80s, with a foreign policy entirely in accordance with the Soviet agenda – and all the while Soviet submarines violated Swedish waters.

During the critical years at the end of the 80s, the Swedish Foreign Minister Sten Andersson made several political statements that, had they been taken seriously in the Baltic States, could have changed the course of history. If the leaders of the People's Front or the ordinary citizens in the Baltic States, for that matter, had looked to Swedish foreign policy for inspiration, there would have been no Baltic miracle.

The policies were always thought out with the Soviet Union in mind, rather than the fate of our oppressed neighbors. Within the context of the Cold War, development had come to be associated with threat to stability rather than hope of freedom. All time low followed all time low.

In the spring of 1988, Andersson called for restraint: "Demanding of the Soviet Union, today, that the Baltic peoples gain immediate autonomy would ... be counter-productive."

The following year he expressed the same misgivings: "If their political impatience gets full impact, not only do they risk their own work, but the entire reform process in the Soviet Union." In the same vein, Sweden downplayed the importance of the freedom movement. In the autumn of 1989, Andersson told his hosts in Vilnius that "there are forces in the Baltic States that want a quick secession from the Soviet Union, but they are in a clear minority".

The lowest point, however, was when he denied that the Baltic States were occupied. I was extremely upset but my agitation was nothing in comparison with what my Baltic friends felt. They considered this statement an outrageous provocation, which of course it was.

In May 1990, Andersson sought to clarify the Swedish position by statements such as: "... the changes in Eastern Europe must not be regarded as humiliating or a defeat for the Soviet Union".

But what was it if not a defeat? And was that not a good thing?

One can describe the system in terms of an organization plan with the Communist Party as the sole participant in political life. Or one might conceptualize the system as one where there is a shortage of politics. The economy can be analyzed in terms of the production plan for shoes for the left foot and the measures taken in order to fulfil it – or it can be described by pointing to the shortage of goods and services. The queue was a symbol for the real Socialist consumer society. Another dimension is illustrated by the following joke: you pretend to pay and we pretend to work.

The Soviet Union is also the Gulag as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn described it and it is the deportations that occurred after Soviet annexed the Baltic States. The Polish officers who were shot in the back of their heads in Katyn got a firsthand experience of the very same Soviet Union that Swedish Communists were dreaming of. The “Black Book of Communism” does a good job of putting a figure on the genocide, but Václav Havel’s depictions of living with constant lying in order to evade the punishing hand of the Soviet authorities, touches your soul.

I think that the gist of the system is conveyed by the following image: A good friend of mine had fled to safety in Sweden when the Prague spring of 1968 turned into Soviet autumn. It took many years for her not to experience fear whenever the door bell rang.

And here is another one, from Pravda during glasnost. In a piece from the provinces a woman told the reporter how she had regained contact with a former class mate. It turned out that life had been more kind to the old friend than to her. She pitied herself, and wished, not to rise to same level as her friend, but that her friend should sink to her level. Another article, of the kind that could only be printed under glasnost, is illuminating: It revealed that workers, who had been promised a paid vacation at one of the state’s retreats, had been put to work instead.

In the Soviet Union, the individual was of little value. Power was everything – and it was pervasive. There is nothing in all this to be nostalgic over. However, it is important to honour the victims; those who died, those who lived but lost their lives. It is also important to remember. Renowned heroes such as Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa come to mind, but also leaders such as Vytautas Landsbergis and other prominent figures in the Baltic States.

They are leaders who, risking their own lives, dared fighting for freedom and national autonomy – their bravery is comparable to that of the early dissenters back when the regime was even tougher. People like the Russian Vladimir

Bukovsky and the Estonian Mart Niklus should be brought back from oblivion. And finally, let us not forget all those, no braver than people in general, but who nevertheless disregarded their fears and went protesting – in Berlin, Prague, Tallinn and Moscow. They are the real heroes.

Without them there would have been no celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall. And some of them are not here to partake. Like Loreta Asanaviciute. She died in Vilnius on January 13, in 1991, crushed by a Soviet tank.

The wave of freedom that swept over Europe is the most important occurrence in my life-time. Memories of what once was are intermingled with images from the struggle for freedom and of joyous people, victorious people. But the young of today have no such images in their minds and they lack the knowledge of the Communist oppression necessary in order to put this celebration into context.

While Nazi Germany has its obvious place in history classes, the Soviet Union and communism – the totalitarian twin ideology of Nazism – has been given far less attention and scrutiny. For many years, it was more like de-education rather than education when it came to the subject of the Soviet Union. Therefore it is disheartening when the Swedish authorities as represented by Forum for Living History described the Baltic States' position in the Soviet Union as “vassal states”.

And they keep adding insult to injury when the same authorities, who are supposed to inform of Communism's crimes against humanity, downplay the role of the ideology. But imagine this: what would the world have looked like if Lenin was a liberal? One thing is certain. There would have been no jubilee in 2009, and this truly would have been cause for celebration. ■

Germany Revisited

Interview with Dieter Schmidt, CSU
By Elisabeth Precht

The fall of the Berlin Wall on the 9th of November 1989, is the ultimate symbol of the triumph of democracy and the defeat of communism in Eastern Europe. But the change came gradually – in Poland, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia, in East Germany. I remember, in the autumn of 1989, when a friend phoned and wondered whether I could procure a few pieces of the Iron Curtain, since I was living in Austria at the time. The request was for some barbed wire from the part of the border between Austria and Hungary that had been cut open earlier that year. “We have won!”, my Swedish friend exclaimed and this got me thinking: Europe was changing. This was truly a paradigm shift.

In retrospect, it is always easy to see the patterns of development, the beginning and the end. However, as the events unfolded, the outcome was far from certain. Especially given the situation at the time and what it later would turn into. For example, one group of people still believed in 1989 in the reform Communism of Gorbachev. They thought Communism was finally about to be endowed with its “human face”, in concordance with dreams of the Prague spring of 1968.

However, there were also those Western politicians who were aware of the destructivity endemic to Communism. One such politician was the leader of the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU) Franz Josef Strauss, who in a conversation with Gorbachev explained that “it is easier to barbecue snowballs than to reform Communism”.

The Berlin Wall divided the East and the West. It was a symbol of the Cold War but in the rhetoric of the Socialist or Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe it was cast as an “anti-fascist wall of protection”. The blood-soaked history of the Wall is and always will be a reminder of the inhuman face of the Communist autocracies.

The construction of the Berlin Wall came as a shock to Germans and the rest of the world alike. On the morning of the 13th of August 1961, Ber-

liners could observe the barbed wire laid out along the border during the night by East German soldiers. That very day, construction began. The Wall stretched 2.5 miles of the 9-mile long border, while the remainder was barbed wire, minefields and mined stretches of water. First the actual Wall was built and then the adjacent areas were cleared in order to facilitate surveillance.

An eye-witness report:

“On the night of the 13th of August, we were awakened by a terrible uproar in the streets. It was impossible to sleep. Early in the morning, we went out and quickly realized that something had happened by Brandenburger Tor. But we did not know exactly what and went over there to see. The atmosphere was very tense and people were extremely agitated”, explains the lawyer Per Gröndahl who was then an 11-year old boy on vacation in Berlin with his family.

By Brandenburger Tor, the division of the city started, but in other places there were still cracks to slip through. Per Gröndahl saw people running from East Berlin to the West. Many with bundles in their arms.

For the next 30 years the Wall would divide East and West Berlin.

“When the Wall fell on the 9th of November 1989, I was in Munich. We had been suspecting for some time that the system in the GDR was on its last legs. But reunification was not a given outcome, there could very well have been two parallel German states instead”, explains Dieter Schmidt, Bavarian politician and former international secretary of the CSU at the time of the legendary Franz Josef Strauss.

He tells of the negotiations between the BRD (Federal Republic of Germany) and the GDR (German Democratic Republic) and of how East Germany was “reluctant to adopt our market based economic system, but they needed our cooperation in order to survive [financially].” He is of the opinion that the leaders in the GDR were aware of the fact that they were governing an “unjustifiable” state. A state where everyone was surveying everyone else. It was this awareness in conjunction with the increase in popular protests (which were a clear indication that a full-scale rebellion might break out) that paved the way for the collapse of Communism in the GDR. And, of course, the poor finances.

The events of the 9th of November 1989 were not planned in advance and there was certainly no agreement upon date. However, when the spokesper-

son of the Communist government Günter Schabowski made a statement on the TV-news broadcast *Tagesschau*, promising fewer restrictions on travelling abroad, things started happening. In her book “Die Nacht, in der die Mauer fiel” (The Night when the Wall came down), the author Annett Gröschner relates the story of Schabowski’s “lapsus” when he said that the new rules were in force *unverzüglich*, that is, without delay.

She writes: “People took him literally. I heard doors open in my house and neighbors leaving carrying nothing but their keys and identification papers for luggage.” It was at the border crossing by the Bornholmer Bridge that the Wall was first opened. People had gathered there, seeking entry to the West. A throng of voices chanted *Tor auf, Tor auf!* (open the gate, open the gate!). Annett Gröschner also describes what happened next: “When the border was finally opened the world beyond was flooded with tears, cries and stuttering voices. Out of pure happiness, the power of speech had been lost.”

Dieter Schmidt tells of his stay in Berlin during the winter of 1988-89. When he made a visit to the Wall, he had a realization. At the Western side, people had been chipping away small pieces. “Everyone wanted a piece”, he says and describes, with obvious amusement, how you could rent ladders and chisels in order to carve out your own shard! Meanwhile in East Germany, the protests grew in force...

But the people in Europe had lived with the division for decades. The blocs were seen by many as carved in stone, regardless of ideological orientation. If you asked Swedish school children about the Baltic States you were likely to get only quizzical looks in response. What happened behind the Iron Curtain was to many a well-kept secret. “Most Germans only heard of the GDR via media”, says Dieter Schmidt, confirming this state of affairs.

Born in 1937, to a father who was a regular officer, and later himself reaching the rank of major, he tells of how little direct contact there was between East and West Germans. This included primarily those who did not have relatives on both sides. When serving in the military, he got to learn “theoretically about the division and about communism”. But his instruction did not include aspects of everyday life, only ideology and weaponry etc. West German soldiers were initially not allowed to even visit Berlin or to come closer than within a one-mile distance of the Iron Curtain. “After all, we carried military secrets and we could be captured”, Dieter Schmidt explains.

“The idea I had of GDR was gloomy. We heard of attempts to escape and I could see why when I later got to visit the border with its surveillance facilities and stone-faced border guards with dogs.”

There are many who bear witness to the absurdities of the East German border control. I, for one, remember with a shudder one time in the 70s when I travelled by transit train through the GDR. The sight of the long sticks that the border guards used to probe behind and under the seats of the train (in order to make sure no one lay hidden there) sent shivers down my spine. On one occasion, a soldier discovered that I had drawn a hammer and sickle, dripping with blood, under the name of Stalin. It was the title of a book and I had been scribbling mindlessly on the page, something that I tried to explain to the best of my ability. The border guard looked sullen and unconvinced. To him, this was no laughing matter. Fortunately, I was allowed to continue my travel but I had gotten a real eye-opener: Every tiny event of everyday life could be interpreted or misinterpreted by the state for its own benefit and to the detriment of the individual. Without warning or even a reason, you could fall prey to the arbitrary exercise of power.

“Within politics, we are treated as under-aged. The potentates prescribe everything. They have everything and can do whatever they want but we are not even allowed to speak our mind...” explained an East German woman to West German TV in the early autumn of 1989. She had, along with a significant number of GDR-citizens, sought refuge in the West German embassy in Prague (it was still possible to travel from the GDR to “Socialist brother states”). Meanwhile the protests in the GDR grew stronger – a development paralleled by the political establishment’s increased inability to face facts.

“It was not in Moscow but in the GDR where the most orthodox Communists were to be found”, says Dieter Schmidt.

He tells of meeting with an East German professor and a discussion they had where it soon became evident that the professor was a convinced Communist – both in theory and in practice.

“It has something to do with our German thoroughness. First many were loyal to the Emperor, then Nazism and then Communism. And now, thankfully, we are convinced democrats!”

Today, we know that before the Wall was erected in the summer of 1961, thousands of people left the GDR daily. We also know that over a thousand

East Germans died while attempting the escape to the West. And that the West German government, ever since 1963, paid more than 3 billion D-mark in ransom for over 30 000 political prisoners. What a morally dubious way for the East German state, burdened with debts, to improve its finances!

No sooner had the Iron Curtain been lifted before a heated discussion broke out concerning the reunification of the GDR and the BRD. However, the issue had been raised earlier in the year on the political agenda. The reactions to a possible reunification were mixed, according to Dieter Schmidt. To this day, he still resents the fact that so few leading politicians wanted to achieve reunification. Margaret Thatcher, for example, warned of a “fourth Reich”. Others sarcastically remarked that they were so fond of Germany that they would love to go on having two of it.

Dieter Schmidt believes that these politicians underestimated the strength of the East Germans, after so many years of apathy under Communist rule.

In late November 1989, the Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl (CDU) presented a ten-point program pleading for a “free and united Germany in a free and united Europe”. However, it was not until the old victors of the Second World War could agree on the “end of the war” that a formal reunification could occur – on the 3rd of October the next year. Formally, the reunification was realized when the East German states applied for (and were granted) admission to the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD).

Reunification was a natural step once the Iron Curtain had been lifted. Nevertheless, Helmut Kohl had a hard time mustering the optimism of both East and West Germans on the issue of reunification. East Germans were generally for reunification, but they were anxious that they would be treated as second-class citizens with no influence. West Germans, on the other hand, were worried that the reunification would be prohibitively expensive.

Much has been written on the topic of how the reunification could have been managed more skilfully. Dieter Schmidt, however, regards the reunification as almost a miracle. He speaks of a “feeling of happiness over being able to travel freely in former East Germany, despite everything we did during the War”. Being able to visit Brandenburger Tor and Museumsinsel in Berlin. He holds the opinion that “the Second World War ended with the reunification”. And he is proud of the German people and how they “learned from history”, but he adds that the crimes of Communism

and National Socialism are issues that all Germans have to work through.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Stasi (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, that is, the secret police) archives have been opened to the public. As it turned out, many “close friends” and even family members were spying on their own. Dieter Schmidt argues that most of the former leaders of East Germany are compromised by this intricate system of informants. However, there were also West Germans who got tangled up with Stasi.

“We knew even before the reunification that academics, for instance, were forced to tow the party line [in order to get tenure]. What we did not know was that many in the West, who had done something ill-considered, had fallen prey to the extortion tactics of Stasi. These people were exploited unscrupulously.”

According to Dieter Schmidt, there are many former West Germans who are a bit uneasy over the fact that hundreds of thousands of former GDR-citizens were part of the nomenklatura. People “who knew that the system was neither right nor fair, but who accepted this for the sake of their own benefit and who were thus dependent on the system”. He also believes that this feeling, this mistrust, will not disappear entirely from German society until the last generations of the nomenklatura “die off”.

There was a pressing need for electing new officials after the breakdown of Communism in the GDR. This process is still going on.

“We must invest more in the younger generations, in those who are not encumbered by history”, according to Dieter Schmidt

Granted, mistakes were made during the reunification, primarily in the financial arena. After all, there were no previous experiences to draw upon or rule books to follow. Still, in the opinion of Dieter Schmidt, the reunification was worth whatever its cost and there are many who agree with him.

Theo Waigel, Minister for Finance in the years of 1989-98, concludes: “it is taking longer than we expected, and it is also going to be more costly. But 17 million people have regained their freedom by means of the reunification. Germany is one country and a Nato-member. Which means that the security zone of Nato has expanded considerably eastwards. The whole of Germany is a stable democracy...”

But what about a proverbial psychological border between East and West? Is there still such an obstacle in the German mind?

Dieter Schmidt says no, but then modifies his answer somewhat:

“It is not so much a matter of a ‘wall in the head’ but rather an emotional divide in the heart.”

In his opinion, the notion of a psychological border is mostly due to ignorance. Germans in the East are more flexible, he says, partly for economic reasons – they have to move where there is work. He believes that everyone is aware of the fact that something remarkable has happened. Though, something as trivial as dialects might define new borders. This is especially true in small towns and within the older generations.

Ostalgie is a term for the nostalgia that former East Germans might experience, a longing for what was, or perhaps more accurately, for what could have been. Unfortunately, the fact that people in the former Communist bloc regained their freedom is sometimes forgotten in favour of disappointment over the drawn-out process of reunification between the two states.

One cause for discontent is the economy, which is still lagging behind in the Eastern states. Many have “migrated” westwards, some just temporarily, others permanently. “I have been working here for five years and my family is still back in Dresden”, says an electrician in Austria. He is working intensely for several weeks on end and then returns home for a prolonged weekend. “Nowadays, the construction sites are filled with guest workers from the former GDR”, his Austrian boss explains.

In a German public opinion poll (Institut für Marktforschung, Leipzig), 52 percent of East Germans state that they feel like “second-class citizens”. In the same poll, however, 75 percent express content over the fact that the Berlin Wall fell and that Germany has been reunified.

Reality is complex...

On the one hand is the desire to be a nation. On the other hand, as Lennart Hellström writes in his excellent book “När DDR & BRD blev Tyskland” (When the GDR & the BRD became Germany): “They [East Germans] felt like their country had been conquered and colonized by West Germans... But West Germans in their turn, had a hard time understanding why the East Germans seemed so ungrateful.”

Despite everything, it is a simple matter.

Today, Germany is a democracy. Two countries have become one. Admit-

tedly, there remain some hurdles to overcome and there are still some pieces of the puzzle missing. However, almost everyone realizes the power of democracy and its superiority – democracy as both means and end, contributing to the freedom of the individual and granting him the opportunity for a better life.

Former Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt said, on the issue of the German reunification, that “what belongs together will come together”.

This is certainly true.

It is not a matter of whether or not it will happen, but rather how long it will take. ■

Strength Created by a Vision

Moral Courage and the Monday Movement
By Gunnar Hökmark

During the 80s I often met with representatives from different political parties that had emerged during the era of democratization in the early 19th century or with exiled leaders of regimes established during the Interwar Years which had subsequently been absorbed within the Eastern bloc after the Second World War when the Iron Curtain was lowered and thus divided Europe.

The British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey made a memorable comment when the First World War broke out. As he saw the street lights of London being lit up, he said: “The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.”

He was right. The development of democratization and the quest for freedom and national autonomy that had marked the years at the turn of the century was put on hold in most parts of Europe between 1914 and 1989. It took 75 years for the lights of Europe to be lit once again. Far longer than the life-time of Edward Grey.

Against this backdrop, the fall of the Wall takes on a wider and more significant meaning than solely that of the reunification of Germany or the collapse of Communism. It imported a revitalization of the process of openness based on individual freedom that is a cornerstone of European and national identity. The nations that were emerging before the First World War, but disappeared due to the treaties in Versailles, the invasions of the Second World War or the lowering of the Iron Curtain, have now become a part of the new Europe.

History caught up with Europe and redefined our geography in defiance of the artificial borders drawn by the politicians of old. For Sweden, this meant that we got “new” neighbours such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, along with a united and open Germany. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are examples of two other new nations in the middle of Europe.

In the Balkans, we have witnessed how the departure from the maps of the

Ottoman Empire, and later from those of Yugoslavia, was not paralleled by democratic development. This awakened old tensions that had been dormant for over 100 years. In spite of this we presently see clearly that it is by approaching Europe that opportunities are created for peaceful development.

Democracy and free societies are not defined by borders that hold people back, only by borders that distinguish one independent state or nation from another.

Outside of Ystad, a town in the south of Sweden, there is a pier, part of an old industrial harbour. It is called the “Edge of the World”. The reason behind the name is simple. The site is so remote that you could go there with someone, perhaps under a full moon, without being disturbed.

But in one sense, there was a time when it was truly the edge of the world. Here one world ended, and on the other side of the sea, there was a completely different one. Different societies, different people and different cultures.

These two worlds never came in contact with each other, the only exception being at the negotiating table and by means of trade agreements struck at the national level. Those who lived there, across the sea, in that other world, lived a life isolated from ours. Not only were they poor and oppressed, but according to the geography of the Warsaw pact, they were also potential enemies.

It was from this world, across the Baltic Sea, that marine regiments and tank divisions planned an invasion by sea, a disembarkment on the coast of Skåne. With this threat in mind, we planned our defence. They were part of another universe while we lived in a world defined by the ideals of individual freedom, democracy and market economy, translating into economic success, innovations and cultural freedom.

Our world, the first world, was unthreatened in terms of economic supremacy, knowledge and research as well as military force sufficient to act as a deterrent. It was also based on the values that would come to dominate the legal framework of the international community. It was not the Socialist dictatorships that defined the international agenda, instead they tried to adopt a democratic discourse in order to convey the image that lived up to its standards.

The other world was the Socialist’s totalitarian states, with their devastating force which was used both to oppress its citizens ruthlessly and to threaten neighbouring countries.

And then there was the Third World, it too shaped by the borders that the victors of the First World War drew. Nations that were independent, but still depended on their old colonial masters, partly because the borders that defined their sovereignty hindered a peaceful and civilized development. The Third World was a threat to itself with its ethnic conflicts and destructive regimes. Underdeveloped one-party states which opposed a dynamic and peaceful transformation of society were a threat mainly to their own citizens. These regimes, which were among the foremost in imposing debilitating restrictions on the opportunities of their citizens, were lauded by the European left as the most progressive ones.

When the Berlin Wall fell, the logic of this world order crumbled as well. After the Wall, forces such as globalization, democratization and increased freedom to move across borders combined to shape a new world. A common world, with big differences but dynamic in its development, now that it was no longer held back by the obstacles that had plagued the Second and Third World.

Consequently, since the fall of the Wall, we have had the opportunity to witness a development unparalleled in history. The number of people who have risen out of poverty into rapidly growing wealth has increased fourfold during this period. 30 years ago, only one billion people lived in relatively wealthy circumstances. Today, four billion people live a life in dignity, much due to the recent economic development.

Economic crises are nothing more than dents in a curve of long-term economic success. Poverty still remains in parts of the world where religious fundamentalism has erected new walls, where globalization and market economy have been thwarted and where oil is granting elites economic power over the people. The fall of the Wall did not only set free the dynamic forces of market economy, but also people's minds and their visions of what is possible to achieve in our world.

It is important to consider the fall of the Wall from this perspective, in order to realize that it was neither a political coincidence, nor something dictated by history as a necessity. The Wall fell because of the force drawn from the ideas of human freedom, equality and our right to a life in dignity in an open society.

It was these ideas that served to delegitimize the old order, even within the inner circles of the ruling elite. When no one could see any justification for the oppression – because oppression was all it was and certainly not the will

of the people – when there were no material, social or collective advantages to point to, just as there were no moral ones, and when it became evident that no one was fooled by appearances, then the Wall fell. A Wall that existed physically in Berlin, but came to influence the world because of the mentality it created.

This does not mean, however, that the ideas of freedom and democracy were taken for granted in Central and Eastern Europe. These ideas could not have flourished if there had not been enough people to adopt them, people who dared to stand up for and demonstrate and fight for them.

We saw it in the popular uprisings in Berlin in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, in Gdańsk in Poland in the 80s. But also, we saw it in the daily resistance of all the dissidents, authors, oppositionists and leaders of independence movements – people who made it clear that there was an alternative to the prevailing brutality. We saw it in all those imprisoned, deported and executed. The Wall did not crumble under its own weight, it was brought to a fall by all the people who persevered in their struggle for the ideals that the Communist regime did its best to suppress.

Today, we might ask ourselves how it was possible for a perverted ideology with so little public support to survive for decades, thereby defining the everyday life of a whole continent. There are several answers.

There are those who think that oppression is justified. Totalitarian ideologies impart on their adherents the belief that they have the right to the uncompromising exercise of violence without regard for human life or dignity. Everything is subsumed by the totalitarian ideals. The dreams of individuals disturb the harmony of the perfect society that is the overarching goal. This is why Swedish Communists sent congratulatory telegrams to the totalitarian regimes of Central and Eastern Europe on their anniversaries and to the congresses of the Communist Party, up until their postal addresses ceased to exist.

The oppression and the brutality were as evident as the failure of the social experiment, but in spite of this, Western Communists still thought that their Eastern comrades were making progress. This line of thinking can only make sense to someone who regards freedom and democracy as relative values, that can be suspended in favour of other goals and ideals.

Naturally, Western support helped in maintaining the oppression. It also contributed to a debate in democratic countries of the progress and merits of the

Communist regimes, which obscured the totalitarian reality. Lars Ohly, Gudrun Schyman [former leaders of the Left Party that used to be the Communist Party] and their followers were responsible for relativizing the oppression and the totalitarianism.

Totalitarian regimes live by, and survive with the help of, fear and terror. Their leaders are people reminiscent of psychopaths who are prepared to use lethal force against the innocent. And what is worse, they encourage this pathological trait in others. Those who are prepared to pull the trigger always have an advantage over those who want a discussion. Those who lack regard for human life and freedom always have an advantage over those who stand behind the principles of human dignity and the freedom to live life as one sees fit.

A small number people prepared to kill can rule many.

Another reason why the oppression managed to survive for so long is a tendency, common to all of us, to adapt to and rationalize our reality. If we are told incessantly that oppression is freedom and freedom is oppression, we adapt to this belief. We allow ourselves to be duped, sometimes because we want to but often because it is necessary to accept the illusion in order to protect the lives of our families or to protect our self-esteem.

A third answer is the fact that many viewed the oppression as a temporary shortcoming that faded in importance compared to the Utopia they had in mind, with its overarching values. The ends justify the means. Some lives have to be sacrificed in order to realize the collective project.

A final answer is that in every society there are traitors and renegades who parade their self-interest as pragmatism while maintaining that they are only trying to make the best out of the situation.

What all these answers have in common is that they do not respect people's freedom and they neglect that collective freedom begins with respect for individual freedom. If the rights of the individual citizens are not safeguarded, if we do not believe that people acquire rights by the sole virtue of being individuals, then we no longer respect the unique human being that each and every one of us is. This is why the revolution eats its children. This is why a constitutional state is based on the individual's rights, not because individuals are always right, but because we all have rights.

In the late 80s, when I was working with different independence movements in the Baltic States, it struck me how excessively formal they were, regarding

the autonomy of their state and the judicial acts constituting the foundation of this autonomy. To me, this seemed irrelevant and meaningless, since reality was so radically different. The real issue was, in my opinion, the Soviet oppression, an oppression that arrogantly disregarded legalities.

But to those who lived in the midst of the oppression, the legal framework was something to cling to, something that showed who was on right the side of things. If we are to learn but one thing from those who dared keeping up resistance, it is that, although rights can be oppressed, we must never compromise with what is right. It was this unwillingness to compromise that eventually led to the fall of the Wall.

In the mid 80s, when we in the Swedish Moderate Party demanded free and democratic elections in the East, it was considered unrealistic and much too bold. Instead, the paradigm was that the West should learn to live safely side by side with the East. Olof Palme considered the demands a regression to the Cold War mentality of crusaders.

In similar ways, the representatives of Swedish Social Democracy, along with many others, tried to play down the oppression in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by arguing that these countries were not occupied, that the people only demanded cultural independence and that the Soviet leaders in the late 80s and early 90s were Social Democrats at heart.

In a publication Ingvar Carlsson pointed out that in spite of their democratic flaws, the planned economies of the East were capable of creating just as much material wealth as the capitalist economies.

There were many who engaged in compromising and relativizing freedom, mainly the freedom of others, that is. But by relativizing the freedom of others, freedom as such is undermined. This is an important lesson from the time of the Wall. It contributed to sustaining the legitimacy of the Socialist dictatorships, at least in their own eyes. If you do not call oppression by its true name, it is likely to live on under its own.

Other Social Democratic leaders dismissed the demands for Swedish support of the independence movements in the Baltic States as a violation of the Helsinki Agreement and that this was just a campaign from the “crazy right”. I was told this personally when I raised the issue in the Swedish Parliament.

When I, together with three friends, started the Monday Movement in support of freedom in the Baltic States, it was considered an odd act which was

cause for much suspicion. But we succeeded in conveying what was right, we established contact with those on the other side who were fighting for freedom and independence and we offered them an international stage from which they could voice their demands. Thus, these people got Western media exposure and became a part of our reality.

The Wall fell because enough people spoke their mind, because they claimed that the Wall was built on an unjustifiable foundation of oppression that led to humiliation and poverty. Were it not for this critical mass of dissidents and oppositionists possessing the courage to voice their views, the Wall would not have fallen. However, even their efforts would not have been enough, had they not been seen and supported by others.

It was the liberal political parties of Europe that reminded us of our responsibility in fighting oppression and supporting those who opposed it, contrary to the policies of the socialists and the Social Democrats. Were it not for all those who exposed the true face of the dictatorships, these totalitarian states would have stood a better chance of survival, in one form or another. Were it not for the awareness of the merits of the open society, there would have been no confrontation with the reality of socialism and many would still believe in a society characterized by queues and privileges.

It is wise to remember this, when we consider the walls of our time. The degenerating democracy in Russia is creating new tensions. Regimes based on fundamentalist Islam lock people up in despotic systems. Regimes that survive because the oppression of freedom and civil rights are excused, for various reasons. These excuses foster a tolerance for oppression that may lead to a spread of these practices while also granting the oppressors a false sense of legitimacy, one that prevents them from seeing themselves as they truly are, as oppressors. The Berlin Wall was a singular phenomenon. Today, however, other regimes are erecting new walls between people and countries all throughout the world.

Presently, we are witnessing a battle between democracy and autocracy that is more obvious than during the Cold War. We must learn from those experiences that led to the fall of the Wall if we are to strengthen our ability to champion the ideals of freedom and civil rights in our time.

One key insight is that political movements that value freedom above everything else are the most suitable keepers of civilization and human dignity. It is an important obligation. This is also one of the principal challenges of the Jarl Hjalmarson Foundation (JHS). It was founded in 1994 in order to

contribute to the democratic development of the newly formed states, by means of education and opinion-making. By holding seminars, arranging conferences and encouraging dialogue, the Foundation strives to create a link between those who have lived behind the Wall for decades and us, who have been fortunate enough to experience democracy. We can all learn about democracy through the experiences of others.

We succeeded in educating a new generation of politicians who gained an understanding of the world based on European values. This was an important contribution to peaceful and democratic development. There was a time when the fall of the Wall was far from certain, and more recently, there was a time when it was not self-evident that the newly formed states would develop into stable democracies and constitutional states. In this process, the JHS has played an extremely important part, not least by supporting our friends in the Baltic States. The JHS has made concrete contributions to the stability of the institutions that have enabled economic growth on a scale that is, despite the recent crisis, unique in Europe. Also, the Foundation has increased awareness of what democracy demands of us all.

However, much work remains in this respect. Democracy must be defended persistently, lessons must be learned from totalitarian regimes continuously and dictatorships must be confronted incessantly by those who support pluralism and freedom.

This is not an abstract ideological issue, it is extremely hands-on. Ask those who lived behind the Wall or those who presently live under oppression. However, it is a task that requires a perpetual distinction between democracy and autocracy and it is up to us to make that distinction. ■

The Jarl Hjalmarson Foundation

was founded in 1994 with the objective of promoting cooperation and European development according to the principles of freedom, democracy and market economy. The methods used are knowledge transfer and education aimed at political parties and organizations.

The work of the Foundation concerns mainly politically active individuals. Special emphasis is put on youths and women, while they are the political future of their respective countries. The principal sponsor of the Foundation is the Swedish international development cooperation agency (Sida), and the funds are part of the party affiliated democracy aid earmarked for “assisting the development of well-functioning party systems in developing countries and countries in Central and Eastern Europe in order to promote representative democracy”.

The education is carried out within the following domains:

- Structuring of organizations
- Communication, campaign work and public relations
- Education in ideology
- Counseling concerning hands-on aspects of politics

The Jarl Hjalmarson Foundation is an organization affiliated with the Swedish Moderate Party.

A large crowd of people is gathered on the Berlin Wall, with the Brandenburg Gate in the background. The scene is captured in a photograph that serves as the background for the text. The crowd is diverse in age and appearance, and the wall they are standing on is covered in graffiti. The sky is overcast and grey.

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