

1989: NOT ONLY EUROPE'S REVOLUTION

It seemed fitting that I was in Indonesia on the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was an event that paved the way for the spread of democracy across the world including Indonesia, a nation that has experienced an extraordinary transition to democracy in recent years. This development is sure to continue with enhanced EU-Indonesia relations, which no doubt will be advanced by the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement at the EU-Indonesia Ministerial Troika Meeting that I was participating in at the time.

I may have been far from Berlin in a geographical sense on 9 November 2009, but when I opened the *Jakarta Post* that morning and saw the headline "BERLIN: BIRTHPLACE OF MODERN ASIA", I felt as if I were there. Brahma Chellaney summed it up perfectly: "The fall of the Berlin Wall 20 years ago transformed global geopolitics, but no continent benefited more than Asia".

For us Europeans, 1989 is about Europe: it is the year that marked the end of the Cold War and allowed East and West to once again progress together. Berlin, once a symbol of division and now a symbol of democracy and freedom, has become a dynamic, vibrant metropolis situated in the heart of Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall paved the way for German reunification, which in turn led to an unprecedented level of European Union integration and enlargement. Had history taken a different course, the economic and monetary union and the Euro may never have been realised. Europeans have every reason to celebrate, yet it is important to remember that the after-effects of the collapse of communism were felt far beyond the front line of the Cold War.

Asia, which has experienced a profound economic rise, is where the success stories of the post-1989

© Jockel Finck/AP/SIPA



From left to right: former US President George Bush, the former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in Geisa, Germany, 17 June, 2005 receiving the Point Alpha Prize for their efforts leading to the German unification in 1989.

world can be found. The fall of the Berlin Wall is linked to the rise of China and India. For China, the eradication of poverty became more important than ideology; India is engaging in a strategic partnership with the US and the EU. The primacy of military power is giving way to economic power in shaping the international order.

Today we know that the Wall probably fell because of a misunderstanding: but only with respect to the date. Egon Krenz decided to open the border crossings separating East and West Germany. Günter Schabowski - then *politburo* spokesman - mistakenly assumed that this would happen on the same day even though security and other necessary arrangements were not yet in place. When he was asked during an internationally broadcast press conference when the decision would take effect, he famously replied "as far as I know



* Madam Schmid is Director of the Policy Unit of the Council of the European Union.

effective immediately, without delay". Within hours, tens of thousands of East Berliners had flocked to the Wall.

There are few occasions when one feels that history is being made. Rarer still are those moments when the course of history changes in a single day, like 9 November 1989. I was not in Berlin that day but in London, studying Russian at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. When I arrived home that evening my landlord welcomed me at the doorstep with

the breaking news. We spent the rest of the evening glued to the television screen, watching the events unfold.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 may have been due to a misunderstanding - German reunification was not. It was made possible by astute statesmanship and a great deal of political courage. It was a moving event when, 20 years later, a German television channel hosted a meeting for the three statesmen who deserve considerable credit for this: Helmut Kohl, George Bush Senior and Mikhail Gorbachev.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the EUISS