The timeline of 1989 in Central European countries illustrates the speed at which the socialist system fell apart in these countries. Citizens showed courage, rejecting political selfishness and defying state violence. Their revolutions for justice and freedom overcame the counter-revolution, though partly because by this point the communist ideology was crumbling. Worldwide, 1989 was a difficult year in the history of the human rights movement. Its accomplishments were neither conclusive nor fully genuine. In China, violence and lies won over plurality and dignity. The Soviet Union remained for some time yet, on the edge of collapse. Violent regimes and insurrections continued to inflict oppression, humiliation and genocide across Africa and Latin America. Much of that would change by the early 1990s. But this progress was fleeting. As remarkable as the changes of 1989 and later were, they did have underlying failures which many ignored for too long. Arguably, 1989 rather marked the end of one period more than the beginning of a new era.
Hungary

January 12th Hungarian legislature adopts “democracy package”
March 15th Huge demonstrations on Hungary’s National Day; convinces party to negotiate
April 22nd Round table talks begin
May 2nd Border fence is dismantled
September 18th Agreement for transition signed
October 7th Communist party dissolves itself
October 16th-20th Legislature schedules elections for 1990

Poland

January 18th Communist party gives General Wojciech Jaruzelski green light to negotiate with Solidarity opposition
February 6th Round Table negotiations begin
April 4th Round Table agreement signed
June 4th Semi-free elections give Solidarity resounding victory
August 24th Tadeusz Mazowiecki becomes first non-communist prime minister in Eastern bloc
September 13th Non-communist government takes power

Bulgaria

October-November Ecological protests in Sofia; suppressed by the regime
November 10th Communist leader Todor Zhikov ousted by politburo
November 16th-17th Censorship and restrictions on assembly are lifted
November 17th Mass protests
December 11th democratic elections announced

Romania

December 16th protests break out in Timisoara
December 21st Nicolae Ceaușescu organises a mass rally which turns against him
December 22nd After shooting at the people, the military switches sides
December 22nd Inter-party coup and 1990 elections announced
December 25th Execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu

Czechoslovakia

November 17th Student demonstrations crushed by police
November 18th-24th protests grow from 200,000 to 800,000
November 24th Communist leadership resigns
November 27th Nationwide general strike announced
November 28th Party announces it will dismantle the totalitarian state
December 10th Gustáv Husák appoints a largely non-communist government
December 29th Václav Havel elected president by the legislature

East Germany

September-October Leipzig demonstrations grow to 300,000
October 18th Erich Honecker replaced by the party
Early November Protests break out in East Berlin
November 9th The Berlin Wall falls
November A new government takes power in East Germany
December Round-table and agreement towards unification
The poverty of utopia revisited

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU AND JORDAN LUBER

In 1989 massive protests erupted from an increasingly restive population. The language of the intellectuals finally reached the people. The regimes found themselves unable to use tanks and bullets to maintain their utopian blueprints. Disenchantment with Marxism was a cathartic experience for Eastern Europe.

The story of Marxism in Eastern Europe begins with Stalinist fanaticism and ends with liberal revolutions in 1989. As the ideological determination of the elite faded through the second half of the 20th century, intellectuals advocated for human rights and dignity. Eventually, the wider populations revolted against communist totalitarianism, and the regimes found their pillars of terror and propaganda insufficient for ensuring continued domination. But with nationalist and fascist ideologies rising today, the journey of humanism in Eastern Europe goes on.

For decades, Marxism held Eastern Europe in its grip. Soviet tanks, Leninist parties and, allegedly, enthusiastic masses ensured there was no official politics or thought outside of the communist party dogma. Obviously there were niches, enclaves – oases in the desert, to use Hannah Arendt’s metaphor. Eventually Marxism in Eastern Europe miraculously collapsed. The dictatorships ended and were replaced by pluralistic societies and democratic governments. The triumph of common sense over utopia was possible for two reasons: elite disenchantment and dissident humanism that was often, but not always, linked to Marxist revisionism.

Transcending the paralysis

From 1944 to 1989, Marxist Eastern Europe was a strange combination of external imperialist imposition and genuine national decisions. Moscow was the
capital of the Soviet Bloc but, bizarrely and disastrously, the majority of the bloc’s population passively acquiesced in the communist project. Dissidents were few, besmirched and isolated. Thus, only once the overbearing elites lost their hubris, and only once the artists, philosophers, writers, students, professors and activists could offer something different, could Marxist power be destroyed. Once the Marxist regimes were no longer willing to engage in total public massacre, like in China, and once the citizenry had an alternative to place their trust in, could the paralysis be transcended. This is the meaning of what we can call the “poverty of utopia” (and the title of a book published by Vladimir Tismăneanu, a co-author of this essay, with Routledge 30 years ago).

Ideological hubris and epistemic infallibility represented the cornerstone of the Marxist regimes in Eastern Europe. The elite, from generals to torturers to censors to bureaucrats, had the utter and irrevocable confidence that what they were doing was right. As crazy as it was, as blatantly false and destructive as their actions were, they genuinely believed what they were doing was just for humanity. Such an attitude enabled them to lie, torture, steal, murder, rape (think of Beria, though his actions were typical), humiliate and oppress at unprecedented levels. They were ideological. While they were neither scholars nor intellectuals (unlike Marx and, it must be admitted, Lenin and Trotsky), they nonetheless, to their own satisfaction, believed they truly were doing the right thing. Novotny, Zhivkov, Ulbricht, Honecker, Encer, Gomułka, Ceaușescu, were certain that history was on their side. They had no remorse, no pangs of conscience and no regrets. The same can be said about Ion Iliescu, a self-styled Gorbachevite, who never admitted the historical failure of his belief system.

Similar to Fidel Castro or Robert Mugabe, they were actors, not doctrinaires. Yet however crude and simple they were, ideology is in the mind of the beholder, measured by an individual’s faith, not by his or her intellectual thoroughness. Their misdeeds were faithfully executed because they sincerely believed their actions were securing a classless and free society and that the human beings they trampled on were actually evil agents of the demonised West. Liberty and dignity outside the ideology and Party was always false, only totalitarian liberation could bring true justice.

Over the decades of Marxist domination in Eastern Europe, the equation changed. First, there was revolutionary fervour, the memories of the Second World War and the alibi of Eastern Europe’s laggard historic development. But after two or three decades, global revolution could not be hailed as imminent – Nazism was not a credible threat and, despite total intervention and restructuring, Eastern European production, innovation and living standards were falling exponentially behind the democratic West. All the while the elites remained brutal, privileged
and pig-headed. To the populations of Eastern Europe, Marxism, at least in its current incarnation, was clearly a lie, or at least a failure.

Even the Marxist elite could not ignore the problem. They were having trouble maintaining their faith. Unlike in Stalin’s time, as Czesław Miłosz wrote, the lie had become too big for any “captive mind” to overcome. Increasingly, they became mere gangsters, oppressing for pure shameless power rather than a righteous mission. From Lenin and Stalin we arrived at Brezhnev, devoid of anything except the apparent will to rule. Utopia was abandoned; they settled for neo-totalitarianism, often called post-totalitarianism. These circumstances brought working class unrest and intellectual dissent, endorsed by the enlightened groups within the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, for a while terror and lies rolled on.

**Elite transformation**

The story of the 1968 Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia did little to shake the elite’s faith; they believed it was a fascist counter-revolution engineered by the West. Their crushing only reasserted the delusional ideology rather than refuting it. Throughout the 1960s and 70s the elite transformed from ideological to routinized behaviour. As their failures became increasingly clear to observers – and painfully obvious to their subjects – the chance of a global revolution plainly slipped away.

Still genuinely believing that they were keeping out the evil capitalists, and at the same time abandoning all pretexts of being leftist, they became a police state violently dedicated to stability for the benefit of themselves. This became clear with the introduction of Martial Law in Poland in December 1981. Residually ideological as they were, they did not recognise their shameless transformation. Even so, it was not stable: in the 1980s they would lose all hubris. They would no longer have the skilful lies or wilful violence to preserve their system against a massive challenge coming from below. Because of their sclerosis, if that challenge came, they would not be able to meet it.

The year 1968 also affected another group: the intellectuals. With their distaste for the Leninist regimes, they turned from Leninism to Marxism, recognising the original distortion that Lenin had introduced. They went to Marx himself and then just to young Marx, and then to post-Marxism and eventually liberal humanism. This was the other key ingredient of the collapse of Marxist hegemony in Eastern Europe. Communism always needed the support of the intellectuals. Lenin was only able to get away with it because Russia was in anarchy and war, and all the Russian intellectuals had either fled, were irrelevant, or were exiled or killed by the
Cheka. Even Stalin had to court the intellectuals, spending a significant amount of his time and planning to deploy propaganda and terror in order to keep Russia intellectuals broadly supporting him (and it worked, an embarrassing testament to the potential of leftist intellectuals for cruelty).

Eastern Europe was much more liberal, intellectual and bourgeois than Russia. As crucial as intellectuals were for Soviet communism, they were more vital for the regimes in the Eastern European Soviet Empire. The regimes knew that if they lost the support of the intellectuals, they would eventually face a hostile public. At such a point, when the lies were no longer enough, all that was left was violence – not the kind that is hidden in prisons and concentration camps, but immense, public massacre, like in China. Through the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the intellectuals in Eastern Europe gradually abandoned Marxism and eventually arrived at diverse but unified theories of human rights. Once this happened, within a few years the populations of the region lost their faith in Marxism and then their fear of the regimes. Coming onto the streets as individuals – in the tens, hundreds, thousands and by 1989 the millions – they presented a challenge to the system that it could not really face.

Abandonment

How did Eastern Europe arrive at such a place? For the first decade after the war, intellectuals in Eastern Europe, fully and enthusiastically, supported Marxism. So strong was their support they not only supported communism, but Stalin and Stalinism. They were truly ideological: they believed the ends justified the means, that a revolution, a transformation and final completion of human history was being performed. All the violence was, to them, defensive and justified; they believed that all things democratic and liberal were feudal and bourgeois, tyrannical and alienating, while communism would, regardless of its evident flaws and sins, bring freedom, happiness and justice forever. Lies were acceptable, in fact morally necessary, because it hacked through the web of distortion that the bourgeois system of democratic exploitation had constructed. Propaganda was bringing education and truth to the masses, mobilisation was building a positive community and a worthwhile life, and terror was the legitimate alternative to total war and eternal slavery.

By the 1960s no serious intellectuals were communist – they were only Marxist. They left behind Soviet communism, Stalin, and even Lenin. They were hardly considering any other Marxists beyond Marx himself. And, even then, increas-
ingly throughout the 1960s they only considered young Marx. The older Marx had focused on scientific determinism and “the dictatorship of the proletariat” – two themes which easily, inevitably, Leszek Kołakowski said, led to Leninism and Stalinism. But young Marx wrote about the human spirit, alienation, rights, freedom and a society of tolerance and equality for all. Studying the supposed foundational texts of the Marxist regimes was immensely dangerous; they were discovering the outright treason being committed against Marx’s humanist ideals. Austrian revisionist Marxist Ernst Fischer even published a book titled *What Marx Really Said*.

After the crushing of the Prague Spring, no one remained any sort of Marxist at all. They were now either post-Marxist liberals (such as Leszek Kołakowski, Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, János Kis, Karol Modzelewski, Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik) or pure liberals (never having been Marxist at all, like Václav Havel). Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev could offer little to keep the intellectuals supportive of their oppressive missions. These intellectuals, after the Prague Spring, even abandoned the young Marx. They realised that the young Marx offered no antidote to the Soviet colossus because the regimes were able to co-opt him into their ideological concoctions. Through the 1970s they searched for a new philosophy and cause and found it in human rights.

**Losing credibility**

The Helsinki Accords of 1975 meant that a commitment of western democracies to uphold human rights was combined with the Eastern European intellectuals’ own search for a new moral philosophy and political programme. From the mid-1970s onward – with Havel’s *The Power of the Powerless* and Michnik’s *The New Evolutionism* – Eastern European intellectuals were decidedly rebelling against the Marxist regimes, and were advocating for universal human rights and for a society based on tolerance rather than war-like mobilisation and conservative peace.

The Soviet project was so coercively asphyxiating for human societies and unnatural for human beings that only totalitarianism could hold it together. Propaganda and terror had to be ubiquitous or the entire project would quickly unravel. Over the 1970s and 80s, the project lost all credibility – the lies could no longer cover up, excuse, or justify the oppression and deprivation. Congruently, the elite lost their revolutionary fervour and hubris. They were just as unrepentant but no longer had the will to respond to any disturbance of their fragile monolith. Mean-
while, the intellectuals were heroically and relentlessly espousing the idea of human rights. Eventually, especially once Moscow itself lost its self-assurance to use tanks against crowds, it reached its conclusion.

In 1989 massive protests erupted from an increasingly restive population. The language of the intellectuals had finally reached through and inspired the public. The regimes found themselves unable to use tanks and bullets to maintain their utopian blueprints. Disenchantment with Marxism was a cathartic experience for Eastern Europe: the elite turned to naked, shameless corruption and the intellectuals turned back to the human subject. Eventually the people were able to take advantage of the new situation. They demanded liberty and the regimes soon melted away, leaving Eastern Europeans to finally build democracy.

This project, of course, is currently in peril. The question now is: will Eastern Europeans stand for tolerance and diversity, or will they fall for new hatreds and myths? After so long and heroic a struggle, over the past 30 years, will they change their minds and decide they cannot bear the costs of universal freedom? Increasingly, from Poland to Hungary to Romania (just as in the US, Italy, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Austria), Central and Eastern Europeans seem to be saying they would prefer projects which reject the human spirit, human nature and human rights for a system of proto-totalitarian euphoria, delusions and glory. The honesty and humility of the intellectuals and the people are as critically necessary today as they were during the Leninist ordeal. The idea of human rights, with all the inevitable costs a free and pluralist society imposes upon each other, remains the only thing that is just, decent and good.

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Jordan Luber is finishing his studies as an Erasmus Mundus scholar in the European Politics and Society: Václav Havel Joint Master Programme at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. He is also an editorial intern at New Eastern Europe.
I left Poland in 1970 with no hope that things would ever change for the better. Back then, would you dare to hope that Soviet communism could implode with just a little outside help?

I first got involved in dissident activity with a group of friends in high school during the early 1960s. During my studies at Warsaw University, my engagement with the movement grew. However it was all rather innocent then – mostly discussions about the past, present and the future, and some attempts to unnerve communist activists during public meetings at the university by asking awkward questions on issues such as the Katyn massacre or the exploitation of Poland by the Soviet Union. It was innocent until Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski were imprisoned for three years in 1965. After that, our group – built around Adam Michnik – started to be harassed by the secret police. To protest against oppression and censorship, we organised student demonstrations at the University of Warsaw in March 1968 that soon engulfed almost all Polish universities, medical schools and polytechnic institutes. Many young workers joined in as well.

The communist authorities responded with mass imprisonment, and antisemitic and anti-intellectual propaganda. I avoided arrest that March and went on to participate in the organisation of protests against the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact (which included Polish troops). Only then was I imprisoned, as was my future wife – Nina. My brother, Aleksander, had been behind bars since the previous March. The witch-hunts resulted in the imprisonment of thousands of students and workers. Many were fired from their jobs and
hundreds received prison sentences. Some 15,000 Polish Jews emigrated. This was the fate I chose, as well as the fate of my wife and brother.

**Émigré publishing**

We wound up in Sweden and continued our studies in Uppsala. With my brother in Paris and a group of friends outside Poland, we slowly but surely took up a form of activism familiar to the Polish émigrés for the last few hundred years: namely, publishing. We set up a political quarterly entitled *Aneks* and later went on to publish books. It was not about *belles lettres*, it was about political thinking, and about finding an answer to the basic question asked by Jacek Kuroń: “What can be done in a situation where one cannot do much?”

What started in Sweden as a small publishing operation by a group of friends grew considerably, especially when I found myself working for the BBC in London after 1975. Annually, we smuggled thousands of copies of the *Aneks* quarterly and books we printed ourselves into Poland. We also used our channels to help other émigré publishers. As the Polish democratic opposition grew after 1976, mainly in the form of the Workers Defence Committee (KOR), we became its closest partner, supporter and ambassador.

Under communism there were different types of samizdat or underground publishing. On one level, there were writers like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sinyavsky and many others in the Soviet Union who wrote simply because they could not stand the oppression. These free thinkers – writers, journalists, essayists and poets – wanted to express themselves despite, or against, the system. They felt, without much optimism, that they could save their sanity and souls by writing, whatever happened to their bodies. The second level of samizdat, which took place in Poland throughout communism, took the form of intellectual-cum-political resistance. Most of the time, it was limited to small and often isolated groups of friends – mostly students – who trusted each other.

Finally, the third level of samizdat was related to various forms of resistance and political mobilisation of the opposition on a genuinely massive scale. This is largely a unique Polish phenomenon linked to KOR (1976–1980), later to the Solidarność trade union (1980–1981) and finally to eight years of the Solidarność movement’s underground struggle following the imposition of martial law in December 13th 1981. Since 1976, independent underground publishing grew in Poland, reaching a truly industrial level. For example, the Warsaw-based *Tygodnik Mazowsze* printed 80,000 copies per week in the 1980s! And this was just one of many. Between 1,000 and 5,000 copies of books were printed of every title.
This level of publishing was instrumental in helping independent public opinion to mature, strengthening the cohesion of the Solidarność movement, preserving the authority of Lech Wałęsa and other underground leaders. It also served as one of the instruments of the bloodless transformation of Poland in 1988 and 1989.

**The Kultura approach**

In 1964 I was in Moscow and saw, with my own eyes, the production of samizdat literature: the typing and re-typing of some literary books by a group of young, paid collaborators. I was amazed because we did not do such things. Samizdat was known since the late 1940s in Poland, but it functioned on the margins of independent intellectual circles; it only became an important part of the opposition movement after 1976. The explanation is that Poland was a relatively freer country – someone not involved in open political opposition could travel to the West. Thousands of Polish intellectuals, tourists or sailors smuggled back anything in print of importance, particularly the Paris-based monthly *Kultura* and books published under the same roof of the Instytut Literacki (*Institut Littéraire*), but also Polish magazines and books from London, Rome and New York.

If someone was determined to publish, he or she preferred to smuggle it into the West and get it published there (*tamizdat*). Polish tamizdat was significant, as some of our most important writers and poets lived in the West and published in Paris or London – Witold Gombrowicz, Czesław Miłosz and Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, just to mention a few.

Jerzy Giedroyc and *Kultura* were different from many émigrés, they re-thought the post-war reality and managed to open themselves to new ideas. Also, while describing Polish tamizdat, one needs to take generational differences into consideration. On the one hand, you had the London-based Polish government-in-exile, and many political, social and cultural organisations that represented the traditional Polish émigrés loyal to the pre-war state structures. The fact is not only did they not have much contact with what was happening in Poland, they often refused to keep in touch with the members of the opposition, fearing that anything and everything was controlled by the secret police and ultimately the KGB. Most of them believed this to be an obvious truth until 1976.

Since 1947 Jerzy Giedroyc and his small, dedicated team in Paris published a very influential monthly called *Kultura*. As different from many war-time émigrés, they re-thought the post-war reality and managed to open themselves to new ideas...
and thus better understood the social, economic and political changes taking place in Poland. *Kultura* – to loud protests from very many émigrés – accepted Poland’s post-war borders and reached out to the Russians, Ukrainians and Lithuanians. Several special issues of *Kultura* were published in Russian and Ukrainian and were met with enthusiasm within the USSR.

We all considered ourselves to be pupils of *Kultura* and there was a close co-operation and trust between *Kultura* and us at *Aneks*. We organised and co-ordinated assistance for the opposition in Poland, and exchanged texts. Very often, an article or a book would arrive in London with a note asking us to send it to *Kultura*, Radio Free Europe, *Russkaia Mysl*, *Kontinent* or *Listy*. But there were also some important differences between us. It is not just that we, the young Turks, wanted to have our own impact. When Jerzy Giedroyc established *Kultura*, he rightly believed that the road to freedom would take a long time. And since intellectual and political life in Poland was highly censored and regulated, with the secret police always in the background, Giedroyc attempted to assume the role of an intellectual-cum-political leader with *Kultura* as his main weapon.

We never did this and saw ourselves as an intrinsic part of the opposition. It is not by chance that the title of our magazine was modestly called *Aneks – Annex to the Censored Press in Poland*. We always felt that the objective of our effort in the West was to help the opposition in Poland, and later in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and elsewhere.

In various ways, we helped readers formulate their own ideas, based on the most important intellectual and political trends in the West. We believed this might – someday – lead to action, but we knew that action risked reprisal and imprisonment. We were safe in the West. To us, publishers of tamizdat, the most important medium was always samizdat and the people who produced it – the members of the democratic opposition.

On the other hand, in the 1980s in London – with Jan Kavan (later Czech Foreign Minister) and with George Schöpflin (now a Hungarian MEP) – I published an English-language quarterly *The East European Reporter* which aimed to inform westerners and the growing independent public opinion in our countries about the current developments.

**Samizdat – infrequent phenomenon**

Censorship in Poland was a bit more relaxed than other communist states. It is a known fact that, in the 1950s and 1960s, many people in the USSR learnt Polish, read Polish books and magazines because there they could find western authors
that were banned in their own countries. In Poland the atmosphere was a bit less strict and, with the exception of those blacklisted, one could publish officially if the content was not openly anti-communist. There were several heavily censored but immensely popular Catholic publications, such as Tygodnik Powszechny, Więź or Znak for which many non-Catholic authors also wrote.

This is why the Polish samizdat was a rather rare phenomenon. Most Polish writers preferred to compromise and negotiate required changes with the censors in order to get something officially published. They often accepted, with a heavy heart, the censored version and only when something was rejected would it be sent abroad to be published in London or Paris – often using a penname.

The situation changed in 1976 when KOR (and later other groups) spawned the underground publishing movement. In 1977, among the very many political publications, the independent literary quarterly Zapis appeared – the first issue left the editing table with eight copies, subsequently typed and retyped many times over. After two years, it was already distributed with around 1,000 copies, properly printed.

The importance of Zapis lies in the fact that a group of intellectuals said: “Enough is enough – we want to publish our works uncensored.” The existence of an uncensored literary magazine gave writers, poets and essayists a choice, and many decided, for the first time in their lives, to write and publish uninhibited, putting their names out in the open. For the first time since 1945, they would not be jailed, only harassed and banned from official literary or academic life. We in the West would find money and help them financially.

From underground to achievement

For the samizdat–tamizdat–samizdat interrelation, Zapis became an excellent example. We initiated co-operation with the magazine Index on Censorship which agreed to use its imprint for the edition published discreetly by Aneks. Out of the 2,000 copies of every issue of Zapis, printed in fully professional form, we would smuggle around 1,500 copies into Poland. And then some people, often far away from Warsaw, would reprint a London edition.

Our own operation was similar. We would print 2,000 copies of Aneks Quarterly and smuggle 1,500 copies into Poland. Every issue and every book would be reprinted in the underground. We reprinted some underground magazines and
books in London. *Aneks* publishers reprinted all issues of two quarterlies: the left-of-centre *Krytyka* and the more conservative *Res Publica*. This is how tamizdat was intimately intertwined with samizdat. There is a pertinent question which needs to be answered here: At what point did independent publishing activity influence public opinion to support the opposition – namely, the Workers Defence Committee (KOR) in Poland, Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, and the intellectual opposition in Hungary?

This depended very much on the nature of the regime in question, the level of repression, as well as the international context. In Poland, the determining factors were 1) the 1975 Helsinki Agreement that provided the basis for the demands to respect human and civil rights; 2) the organised action of KOR and other organisations between 1976 and 1980; 3) the massive loans the Edward Gierek regime took out in the West that made it more vulnerable to western pressure and kept it on a relatively liberal course; and 4) the massive scale of the activities of the Solidarność trade union (1980–1989).

The role of KOR was particularly significant as it not only defended oppressed and imprisoned workers, students and intellectuals, but because it fought for free speech. Consequently, its great achievement was that, during the Gdańsk shipyard strikes in August 1980, the workers, supported by KOR activists, demanded not just higher wages but the creation of the independent trade union and freedom of expression. This was a point of no return.

The radio not only produced daily news programmes, but read out on air individual articles, essays and whole novels which reached a truly massive audience in Poland.

The circle of hope

However, the circle of hope would have been incomplete without a third very important actor that had reinforced both samizdat and tamizdat. This was the western radio stations, the intertwined broadcasting activity of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the BBC, and, to a lesser extent, the Voice of America and Radio France International.

We did not only produce daily news programmes but read out on air verbatim individual articles and essays, whole novels or historical handbooks which reached a truly massive audience in Poland and in other Soviet-dominated countries. Every broadcast was repeated several times over the course of a week. The importance of this cannot be overstated – such co-operation meant that the articles published as
samizdat or tamizdat reached tens of thousands of readers and millions of listeners on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

What is important here is that Radio Free Europe and the BBC paid quite generous author’s fees which were then sent by us to the authors back in Poland, eventually helping them remain independent from the authorities. What I called the Circle of Hope was complete. It was a very dynamic process, in which one part influenced the other two: samizdat-tamizdat-radio-samizdat-tamizdat-radio…

Summing up, I left Poland in 1970 with no hope that things would ever change for the better. Who would dare think back then that Soviet communism could implode with just a little outside help? However, in time we became aware that anything we could do to help feed the cycle, to make the Circle of Hope work, would help push back Soviet communism, and make it disappear. And so it did. Good riddance.

Eugeniusz Smolar is a member of New Eastern Europe’s editorial board. His study of economy at Warsaw University was interrupted by imprisonment as a result of participation in student demonstrations in March 1968 and protests against the Warsaw Pact armies’ invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of that year. Following his release from jail, he immigrated to Sweden in 1970 and studied at the Uppsala University. In 1975 he joined the Polish Section of the BBC World Service and in 1982 he became its deputy director, and later on director (1988–1997). He was a co-founder of the émigré political quarterly Aneks (1973–1990) and the Aneks Publishing House. Following his return to Poland in 1997, he became a member of the Management Board of Polskie Radio S.A. (Polish Radio) responsible for programming (1998–2002), and later became its Programme Director.

In October 2005, he became the President of the Center for International Relations where he now works as a Senior Fellow and Member of the Board. He has been involved in the Polish-Czech, Polish-German, Polish-Russian and Polish-Ukrainian dialogue.
Today, the 1989 Round Table is still a topic of an important discussion in Poland, one that in the last years has become more intense than ever before. Many participants of the discussion are still active in Polish political life, including former presidents and prime ministers. A majority of them stresses the positive aspects of the negotiations. Yet the Round Table has always had fierce critics.

The Polish Round Table negotiations, which started in February 1989, were one of those events whose meaning was not clear from the very beginning. In a way, we can compare this moment of Polish history to Julius Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon in 49 BC, after he ignored the order of the senators who were well aware of his high ambitions and wanted to keep him away from Rome. It marked the beginning of the end of the Roman Republic, while from that moment on, the phrase “crossing the Rubicon” refers to a decision, or a historical event, which brings about irreversible consequences.

Two sides

When the representatives of the Polish democratic opposition and the government coalition sat together for negotiations in February 1989, their goal was to prepare a plan for a transition which would allow Poland to emerge from the deepening economic crisis. They had different motives to join the negotiations.
The opposition team (Solidarity) wanted to re-legalise at the lowest possible price the Solidarność trade union. Its leader, Lech Wałęsa, was not participating in the discussions, but was monitoring the negotiations. The authorities, led by the Chairman of the Council of State, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, wanted to move the burden of the government to the opposition. In other words, they wanted to introduce necessary painful changes to neutralise the opposition’s influence in Polish society. The authorities were also aware that they could no longer keep the society engaged as people were demotivated by meaningless elections and could now refuse to go and vote.

In that case, how was it possible that representatives of these two sides which, until then, could not engage in dialogue, decided to start negotiations? There are many factors explaining this decision, but the economic crisis was undoubtedly a large element. Secondly, an important role was the respect each side and the Polish society had for the Catholic Church whose representatives were continuously calling for dialogue. However, external factors also played an important role, especially the position of the US President Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms in the Soviet Union, as well as the standing of Pope John Paul II who provided Poles with strong spiritual support.

Both sides realised that undertaking negotiations was necessary because of the strikes that had erupted in 1988. Their first wave took place in the spring, lasting from April until May 1988, while the second, much longer one happened between August and September that year. Interestingly, the opposition and the authorities came to a completely different, even contradictory, conclusion. For the leaders of Solidarity, the strikes were not a threat to the system. Indeed, very few workers participated in them, and the chances of greater support in the factories were small. The authorities, on the other hand, saw the workers’ protest as a beginning of a larger wave, which could turn into a much significant and real threat. They were also afraid that the “old” opposition leaders, whom they saw as predictable, could have been removed from the decision-making process. This interpretation meant that the 1988 strikes were led by relatively young people who did not have any direct experience of Solidarity in 1980.

**Talks about talks**

The direct effect of the second wave of 1988 strikes was a meeting between the leader of the Solidarność trade union, Lech Wałęsa, and General Czesław Kiszczak. It was during this meeting when the agreement on starting the negotiations was made. These “talks about talks” started in early September 1988 and lasted
until January 1989. They took place during an extremely crucial, although often underestimated, period. It was then – before the start of the Round Table negotiations – when the decision was actually made to re-legalise Solidarność at the price of the opposition’s participation in parliamentary elections. Thus, the official talks, which started in February, were preceded by a few high-level meetings between Wałęsa and Kiszczak, as well as a few other lower-ranking officials. These talks illustrated that, on both sides, there was a sense of a common goal and trust, although some tensions which led to a serious impasses took place, lasting until the very last moment.

The Round Table talks started on February 6th 1989 and lasted for two months until April 5th 1989. Almost 600 people participated in them. There were three main thematic groups, also known as big tables (stoliki). This included a table negotiating the political reform, a table negotiating re-legalisation of Solidarność trade union, and a table discussing economic and social matters. In addition, negotiations were taking place at ten sub-tables (podstoliki). All these talks included leaders of the opposition and the communist party. However, they also involved representatives of government and state institutions, as well as organisations like the associations of farmers, teachers, students, scouts, and academics. There were also opposition groups representing illegal associations of students, farmers and scouts. During these two months, the participants discussed many fundamental matters regarding Polish politics and economy, but also some more specific issues, such as the need for better ways of delivering drugs and medicine to rural areas, improvement in health and safety conditions for miners, and the safe transportation of toxic waste through Poland. Significantly, security and foreign policy were not discussed at all.

Neither the government coalition nor the opposition were prepared for the difficult and long confrontations they were about to face. The experience of Marshal Law, which was introduced in Poland in December 1981, hung heavy for the opposition, and that is why they had little faith that the talks would produce anything substantial. Thus in the early phases of the negotiations, the leaders of Solidarity perceived elections not as a means, but a price to be paid for the re-legalisation of the trade union. This thinking was based on the conviction that it was the free and independent trade unions, not the opposition’s presence in parliament, which would lead to real change in Poland.

After the difficult negotiations, the leaders of the communist party agreed to hold free elections in the Polish Senate and partially free elections in the parlia-
ment’s lower house – the Sejm. The agreement allowed for only 35 per cent of Sejm mandates to be obtained through competitive campaigns, while the rest were reserved for members of the ruling coalition. The opposition came to the realisation that elections were not only a price for the re-legalisation of Solidarity, but a huge opportunity. In the end, both sides agreed on two election rounds. If none of the candidates managed to get 50 per cent or more in the first round, the second round would see two candidates with the highest score competing against each other. This formula, which was agreed on during the negotiations, was a combination of election rules known in both democratic and authoritarian regimes.

Both sides also agreed that subsequent elections would be completely free and that there would be a four-year transition period – something which they – nonetheless – understood in very different ways. The ruling coalition needed this time to reinforce its power through the implementation – with the opposition’s help – of socially painful and unpopular, but unavoidable, economic reforms. The opposition, in turn, needed time to organise itself and get prepared for the fully democratic elections, planned for 1993.

**The moment of truth**

From today’s perspective, it is difficult to understand why in 1989 the Polish communist authorities were certain they would win in free and competitive elections. One of the possible explanations could be that the communists were confident of their experience and certain that the opposition would not have enough time to get adequately prepared. The first round of elections was planned for early June 1989, only two months after the official signing of the agreement of the Round Table, which took place on April 5th that year.

June 4th 1989 became the moment of truth. All 261 Solidarity candidates, with the exception of eight, passed the 50 per cent threshold and thus received the necessary number of votes to take over both chambers of parliament. Those who did not get that number of votes went on to the second round. All Solidarity candidates, except one, were elected into parliament. The coalition side had a very different outcome. Only three of its candidates managed to achieve 50 per cent in the first round. Another disaster the communist party faced was the failure of the so-called national list, which had the names of the coalition’s 35 main leaders. Only two of
them managed to pass the 50 per cent threshold, and since no second round was foreseen, it meant they could not get into the parliament.

The unexpected results of the June elections completely changed the Polish political landscape. In just a few months the agreements that were established during the Round Table were outdated and the concept of the “transition period”, which assumed limited participation of the opposition in executive power, lost its validity. Even with Jaruzelski elected to the newly established office of president, the communist party faced serious obstacles while forming a government. Thus after Kiszczak’s failure in establishing a new cabinet of ministers, the opposition got a realistic chance to take part in government. The mission to form a government was then assigned to Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who asked members of the opposition and the communists to co-operate. On September 12th 1989, the composition of the new government was officially approved by parliament. Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister, since the end of the Second World War, in the whole Eastern European bloc.

One gate

The outcomes of the Round Table were a surprise for both sides, while the dynamics of future events turned out to be completely different than planned. The course of events can probably be best explained by the psychology of the negotiations. Clearly, the months-long talks, which took place both before and during the official negotiations, allowed some barriers to be overcome. As a result, both sides started treating each other more as partners than enemies. Both the communists and the opposition, during the talks, stressed the need for establishing partnership. One of the participants on the authorities’ side, Tadeusz Mrzygłód, put it this way: “When I came here I thought it would be a game where we will be shooting at two different gates, one gate will be the one of the authorities, while the other one will be the social and unionist gate. It turns out that we are all shooting at one gate.” Yet it would be a mistake to think that the situation was easy for the opposition. The words of Władysław Frasyniuk, who during a meeting with Tadeusz Zakrzewski (a journalist with state-owned media), illustrates the attitude then: “I was jailed for a few years; together with my fellow prisoner we were watching you and your colleagues programmes and was dream-
ing that the moment will come when we will be able to spit straight into your face. Unfortunately, the situation in the country is such that I cannot do that.”

Today, the Round Table is still a topic of important discussion, one that in the last number of years has become more intense than ever. Many participants of the Round Table discussions are still active in Polish political life, including former presidents and prime ministers. The majority of them stress the positive aspects of the negotiations. Their general way of thinking is well expressed by the words of the late Bronisław Geremek who said: “We had a vision of a national tragedy. We knew that the decomposition of the economy was progressing very fast and that if we did not quickly find some kind of an arrangement, alliance or agreement, we could wake up in Poland’s ruins. Had we treated Poland as an animal farm, it would have of course been better to wait until the managers finally prove their inefficiency, take it to a complete ruin, and then we could take over all power. However, we were not thinking about an animal farm, but our country.”

**Criticism**

Despite all that has happened, the Round Table negotiations have always had its critics. Historians are constantly faced with their “black legend”, which argues that the talks were participated by “red” and “pink” commies, meaning the acting and former members of the communist party. This argument states that they joined the talks in order to gain access to the state enterprise and funds. Supporters of this theory believe that the Round Table was only a show organised for the people, while the opposition and the communists signed a secret protocol. Another line of criticism argues that the opposition should not have engaged in any negotiations with the communist generals who were responsible for the earlier persecutions of the regime’s opponents. Critics who have invoked this line of argument have also stressed that allowing the opposition to participate in the negotiations meant that the authorities were weak. Negotiations with the opposition, in this way, only served to prolong the reign of the communist party. In truth, even Wałęsa agreed that the Round Table made the subsequent lustration process difficult.

Finally, some of the criticisms also have a symbolic dimension. Because of the negotiations, there was no “Storming of the Bastille” nor any symbolic moment
of change. The Polish people had no chance to experience a sense of catharsis or new order. The logic of the Round Table consisted of something else. It is probably best expressed by the words of the late Kazimierz Dziewanowski, a witness to the events, who said:

“The Round Table was an unprecedented event in the [socialist] bloc of states. It took place after decades during which we were seeing changes in various pieces of furniture, starting with the court benches [where oftentimes falsely accused would sit]... to podiums and church pulpits. And since [a round table] is such an unprecedented piece of furniture, its idea and way of setting up could not be flawless. I think that this piece of furniture raised too many expectations in the beginning and was too poorly prepared. It was the first such table where nobody was pounding it with their fist but where arguments, proposals and ideas were presented – it became a witness to many elaborated and beautifully formulated, but very general, declarations, while later it was burdened by a huge pile of details... I am perfectly aware that there will be voices that will argue that many issues were missed, ignored and forgotten. All this is true, but it is also clear that, after over 40 years of silence, you cannot, in just a few weeks, talk over every matter and solve all important problems of a medium-sized European country.”

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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The bodies of the Velvet revolution

Remembering 1989 in the Czech Republic

ČENĚK PÝCHA AND VÁCLAV SIXTA

During the 1990s, the commemoration of November 17th 1989 was dominated by the generation of witnesses and former dissidents. Today, it is mostly in the hands of the younger generation that did not directly participate in the events of 1989; they must find other ways to formulate the significance of the commemoration.

Národní Street in Prague has become a place of commemoration of the last Czech (Czechoslovak) great historical turning point – the fall of the communist regime. On November 17th 1989 a student march was violently repressed here. This event triggered nationwide social changes leading to the fall of state socialism. The two authors of this article do not have the events of November 1989 in their living memory, yet in our teenage years, the surge of our parents’ generation was the closest one can get to the so-called “great history”. Although it might seem that the current generation has not done anything that will be written into future history books, history has certainly not ended. The way the commemoration of November 17th has been changing suggests a shift in how history is understood and what the current topics of the politics of memory are.
Two levels of memory

Laying wreaths, lighting candles at a memorial plaque, showing red cards at protests against the current President, Miloš Zeman, slam poetry events, readings of Václav Havel’s works, shining torches in the hands of demonstrators calling for the resignation of the prime minister, the march of the Velvet Carnival allegorical procession, and writing messages on the wall – these are just some of the ways people in the Czech Republic in recent years have remembered the fall of state socialism. What these diverse forms of remembrance all have in common is the emphasis on their performative dimension: All who want to participate in remembrance come to Prague’s Národní Street, also because of the rich cultural programme that accompanies the celebration every year.

There are two basic ways of talking about November 1989 and memory in the Czechoslovak context. On the first level, memory was an important co-driver of the events that happened at that time and a reservoir of the symbols of the protesters. The wave of protests that occurred as early as January 1989 foreshadowed the march on November 17th where mostly students commemorated the legacy of Jan Palach, a student who set himself on fire in January 1969 in protest against the occupation of the Warsaw Pact troops (August 1968). It seems that the protesters began to remember the political activity of the late 1960s and used these symbols for their own purpose. It is the commemoration of Palach’s sacrifice, which was very clearly associated with his physicality, to which the symbolic act of self-immolation strongly refers. Palach’s face became an identifiable symbol of protest.

The second level of memory was the creation of a narrative describing the changes in 1989. November 17th 1989 is often mentioned in connection with bodies – this time with the collective body of a student march that was a victim of police violence. In the end, the police beatings were acts that mobilised society and resulted in the Velvet Revolution, which, incidentally, happened without any physical violence. Given how closely the remembrance of November 17th 1989 is associated with physical experience, we have chosen the body as a metaphor that will help us understand the changes in the remembrance.

Let us now shift our attention to the present. November 17th 2018, in the afternoon. Although Národní Street is closed off because of the celebrations, there are two tram cars with numbers 39 and 89 on them at the “Národní divadlo” (National Theatre) tram stop. Inside, every half hour visitors can learn about the history of the events they are commemorating. A video shot on November 17th 1974 is playing on a screen which depicts laying wreaths at the memorial plaque with international guests in attendance. November was also commemorated in Czechoslovakia before 1989. While today the transition to democracy is at the centre of attention,
in the period of socialism, commemorations focused mainly on the fight against fascism, commemoration of the student protest against the Nazi occupation in 1939 (a student named Jan Opletal died and another nine student leaders were executed, others died in concentration camps, Czech universities were closed). So at the very beginning of the commemoration there were bodies – dead bodies as the victims of Nazi violence and malevolence. The funeral of Opletal took place on November 15th 1939 and that turned into a great manifestation.

**Making connections**

The events of 1939 were commemorated as International Students’ Day – an international day in 1941 that was proclaimed in London in connection with the Nazi repression of students at Czech universities. This day was also remembered after the war, although it reflected the Cold War rivalry. Students and representatives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia commemorated this holiday as a day of struggle against fascism and the suffering of Czech students and teachers. However, at least according to the media at that time, the commemoration was rather awkward, mainly conveyed by laying wreaths in memory of the victims. If there was any movement on the Students’ Day, it was in the direction of restriction against direct political references, for example, celebrating in the form of an innocent student carnival.

Today’s relationship between the two dimensions of November 17th is well illustrated by the topography of celebrations that take place on Národní Street (i.e. a place connected with police violence against students). Today, Albertov (the place of Opletal’s funeral) is the place where politicians make speeches and then move to Národní Street. There the cultural programme is attended every year by tens of thousands of people.

There have been several attempts to connect the two places. The first attempt dominated the 20th anniversary (in 2009) when the Opona society organised a march called 20 Years Without a Curtain – A Thing to Celebrate!, which followed the same route as the 1989 march. A more recent attempt was a run that followed the same route; the event is now organised annually under #runjinak by the platform Díky, že můžem (Thanks that We Can). The two events focus on 1989 (the year 1939 is not that important), but their concepts differ. While the march in 2009 focused on civil society and critical engagement, the run is an apolitical way to join
The bodies of the Velvet revolution, Čeněk Pýcha and Václav Sixta

1989: A Year of Revolution and Change

The last major attempt to emphasise the importance of 1939 was a proposal to rename the day as “International Students’ Day and the Day of Fight for Freedom and Democracy”, which was approved by the chamber of deputies, only to be rejected in 2016 by the Czech senate.

There is also something else connected to Albertov – two commemorative plaques. The first was unveiled in 2006 and has the simple inscription: “When – if not now, Who – if not us?” and the date November 17th 1989. It is a quote from one of the student banners in 1989 at the meeting in Albertov. The second commemorative plaque was placed directly across the street in 2014. The dates November 17th 1989 – November 17th 2014 are engraved on it together with the explanation: “25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution and the march of students of Prague universities from Albertov to Národní Street.” This plaque is dedicated to “all the brave citizens of our country who were not afraid to express their opinion and fight for freedom and democracy”, and was unveiled by the presidents of the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia to mark the 25th anniversary.

Although a commemorative plaque is always a reflection of the official celebration and politics of memory, it is clear the two versions point to different aspects of remembrance. While the plaque commemorating the 25th anniversary will soon become outdated (although it is the more recent one), the plaque that only bears a simple inscription is far more likely to survive because it can be interpreted in different ways. The simpler plaque calls for more activity, and the inscription can be updated by one’s own political activity. This is one of the dominant symbols of how November 17th 1989 is commemorated today – a call for civic engagement. If we were to refer again to the physical aspects of remembrance, the newer plaque is rather static and refers to the so-called laying of wreaths, while the older one’s inscription can be perceived as a call for action, not just physical movement. However the question remains: what should this engagement look like?

Link to the past

Last year’s protests against the current politicians were on such scale that Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, who faces allegations of co-operation with the Communist State Security, chose to lay a flower on Národní Street in the early morning hours. Zeman decided not to come at all. Yet both of them were attacked – at least symbolically – because the flowers they had laid were thrown into the bin by protesters, an act that was investigated by the police. In this way, in the minds of some of the participants in memory acts, the two politicians became a symbol that links to the dismal past. Throwing flowers away could have been seen as act that is more in
The bodies of the Velvet revolution, Čeněk Pýcha and Václav Sixta

The Velvet Carnival is both an opportunity to celebrate and to criticise the present situation. The Velvet Carnival (Sametové posvícení) since 2012 works with political symbols in a more sophisticated way. The Czech word posvícení refers to a church consecration ceremony – so November 17th 1989 is a metaphor for the consecration of a new regime. Thus the Velvet Carnival is both an opportunity to celebrate and to criticise the present situation, when everything is overturned in the carnivalesque sense. There were masks present in the procession that are caricatures of politicians and the current political scandals along with various forms of social inequality. The body is present here wearing masks. Unlike bowing to buried bodies, the carnival bodies are a symbol of active life and political engagement. In this sense, mockery does not equal violence; rather it is a call for dialogue.

Looking back at the various forms of commemoration, we can thus distinguish between political and apolitical forms of engagement. We may ask whether the November 17th events or the particular commemorative acts (e.g. organising a run, a speech, lighting a candle, a concert, etc.) is a particular political demonstration, or a cultural celebration that puts the current political topics of today out of sight.

Important division

Let us turn back to three decades ago. It was 1989, on a rainy day in the town of Most in Northern Bohemia. A group of students are trying to persuade the local miners to join the general strike in response to the violent crackdowns on the students on Národní Street. The hostile expressions on the miners’ faces clearly show that the situation is heading towards a conflict rather than an agreement. To the question “what was the government’s greatest mistake?” the group of miners respond: “That it was too soft”. A scene from the film Něžná revoluce (A Tender Revolution), directed by Jiří Střecha and Petr Slavík in 1989, clearly shows that acceptance of the revolutionary ideals outside its centre in Prague could by no means be taken for granted. Every year, crowds walk through the centre of Prague to commemorate November 17th 1989. We can also ask how do these miners spend this day? What did the regime change for them and their children?

This picture has its counterpart in events that already happened between November 8th and 11th 1989 in the same region of Teplice. In that period, hundreds – and later thousands – of people gathered to protest against the disastrous air pollution, and through a petition they forced the city leaders and representatives of the
The bodies of the Velvet revolution, Čeněk Pýcha and Václav Sixta

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communist party to negotiate with them. The negotiation took place on November 20th, but under the influence of the Prague events, its content went far beyond air pollution in the local region. Nevertheless, here too the physical dimensions of the protest came to the fore, when the protesters were no longer willing to accept the serious effects the poor state of the environment had on their bodies.

The tension between the local and the national (Prague and the regions) is one of the central themes that links the years 1989 and 2019. Indeed, historian James Krapfl (author of Revolution with a Human Face, 2013) has shown that the key actors in the early days of the revolution were the local leaders of the Civic Forum, who collected ideas from citizens, organised protests and negotiated with representatives of the local authorities. He has referred to the period between November 17th and November 27th 1989 as a time of a true bottom-up mobilisation in most of Czechoslovakia. Neither this mobilisation, nor its main actors are much commemorated today, and the same is true for the problems that border regions face now.

The fact that local activists would neither have their voices heard nor be recognised at the national level could already be seen at the national congress of the Civic Forum that took place on December 23rd 1989 where two-thirds of the 92 delegates were hailed from Prague. Krapfl then links the disappointment of the local activists with the departure of the ideals of the revolution, which, according to him, is symbolised by two post-November politicians, Václav Klaus (the Czech Republic) and Vladimír Mečiar (the Slovak Republic). The miners from Most and the organisers of the mass mobilisation of the Czechoslovak population, in the first phase of the revolution, represent the bodies that are excluded from today’s celebrations, namely, those who stand on the margins.

The tension between the local and the national is one of the central themes that links the years 1989 and 2019.

Next generation of commemorations

During the 1990s, the commemoration of November 17th 1989 was dominated by the generation of witnesses and former dissidents. Today, it is mostly in the hands of the younger generation that did not directly participate in the events of 1989; they must find other ways to formulate the significance of the commemoration. If we want to look at contemporary remembrance from a distance, we have to remember that even our own bodies become part of particular commemorative acts.

We should think about what part of our bodies do we want to become during the celebrations – is it the static body, recognising the victims of violence in the
past, but not going any further? Another option is to take seriously the call for action that should not be only limited to one day a year. It is also important to have one's own movement under control so that it does not turn into violence, like the case of throwing away flowers or throwing eggs at politicians.

After all, non-violence associated with regime change in Czechoslovakia is still the major legacy of the Velvet Revolution, which was triggered by a violent act. But this act was eventually transformed into an activity that led to change. The insight into both the history and commemoration of November 17th 1989 leads us to the conclusion that one of the central issues of the current anniversary should be a focus on the incorporation of the currently excluded bodies into the discussion surrounding 1989.

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May 1st 1989, Gdynia campaign rally for candidates of the Solidarność trade union running for parliament in the first semi-free elections after the Round Table discussions.

Photo: Leonard Szmaglik / European Solidarity Centre Collection

May 27th 1989, a pro-Solidarity election rally in Tczew (40 km south of Gdańsk). From left to right: Olga Krzyzanowska, Szymon Pawlicki, Bogdan Lis and Lech Kaczyński.

Photo: Leonard Szmaglik / European Solidarity Centre Collection

Photo: Janusz Balanda Rydzewski / European Solidarity Centre Collection

Photo: Fortepan archive / public domain

A young Viktor Orbán addressing the crowd as a representative of the youth during the funeral and reinterment of Imre Nagy on June 16th 1989.

Photo via Elekes Andor (CC) www.flickr.com

Photo: Fortepan archive / public domain
In November 1989, East German students sit atop the Berlin Wall at the Brandenburg Gate in front of border guards. The destruction of the once-hated wall signalled the end of a divided Germany.

Photo: (Public Domain) University of Minnesota Institute of Advanced Studies / US National Guard
A December 1989 demonstration in Timișoara, Romania. The Romanian anti-communist revolution that started in Timișoara in 1989 was a chapter with many human losses.

Photo: FORTEPAN / Urbán Tamás (CC) commons.wikimedia.org


Photo: ŠJ (CC) commons.wikimedia.org
We must not forget the values we fought for in 1989

Interview with Markus Meckel, a German theologian and politician. Interviewer: Kristin Aldag

KRISTIN ALDAG: As an active member of the opposition in East Germany, you were very much involved in the events of the peaceful revolution in 1989. What was the most influential moment or event for you that year?

MARKUS MECKEL: It was a very moving year for me. At the beginning of the year, together with a friend who, like me, was a Protestant pastor, I decided to set up a social democratic party in East Germany. That was, of course, a daring idea, because establishing a political party in the communist GDR was completely illegal. On the other hand, the establishment of the Social Democratic Party was an attack on the ruling Socialist Unity Party’s self-understanding since it had defined itself as a union of the working class of social democrats and communists. But that was the way it was meant to be. It was basically a message that said “we need a different system, we need democracy, and for that we must anticipate both democratic behaviour and democratic structures”.

At that time, we did not know our decision was made only a few days before the establishment of the Round Table Talks in Poland, which started on February 6th. That was only a few weeks after Gorbachev’s speech to the UN General Assembly in December 1988. His speech demonstrated to us that Gorbachev himself was already well on the path to substantial change. He had begun with perestroika, an internal reform process with an external dimension. In 1988, elections were held in the Soviet Union which was unimaginable before. At the same time, this reform process was a signal of what was possible for Poland and Hungary, which were already much more internally in motion. In Poland, we saw the willingness of the Polish communist party to negotiate with Solidarność, naturally under the pressure of political and economic conditions. There was also some movement in Hungary. Our decision to set up a party was part of that larger movement, a dynamic that had great significance.
On October 7th we formally set up our party, still underground, and two days later we already saw the first huge demonstrations in Leipzig where 70,000 people turned up. There was a danger that the protests would be bloodily suppressed. But this did not happen and we became sure we would be successful in establishing democracy. Hence, if I were to name the most important event of the GDR as a whole it would be October 9th, because it was the moment we could say “we can make it with democracy”. Then, of course, the Berlin Wall fell on November 9th. I would call the fall something like the storming of the Bastille in the French Revolution; that is to say, the day became a symbol of the Central European revolutions where everyone witnessed something that can no longer be reversed. In this respect, I see November 9th not only as an important day in Germany, but the day of the victory of the Central European revolutions.

Were you already aware that all eyes were on Germany?

We really did not know what was going to happen then. Since October 9th we had been extremely active in demonstrations, building up the party, in structuring the opposition and in turning the party into a political force. On the other hand, we tried to increase the pressure of the public on the streets. When Erich Honecker (leader of the communist party) was overthrown in October, the state was completely thrown off track. The communist party became anxious and tried to reorganise itself. At the beginning of November, there were the first resignations within the party, the politburo and the entire leadership. From then on, the collapse of power could be observed. And it was certain that there had to be free elections.

At the beginning of November, just before the fall of the Berlin Wall, we started preparations for a Round Table in the GDR. But then the wall came down. Public awareness today often pretends that the fall would already represent German unity, but of course this was not the case. With this date it only became clear that the process of democratisation could no longer be completely separated from the question of German unity.

To what extent was the idea of a Round Table in the GDR inspired by the events in Poland?

The Round Table in Poland was a major inspiration for us. The Hungarians also imitated it in the summer of 1989. It was, so to speak, the symbol of a negotiated revolution. That, I believe, is the great merit of Poland: a model developed that could be applied throughout Central Europe, thus creating a symbol of non-violence. Some people in Poland are nowadays fiercely opposed to this narrative arguing that it was a toothless revolution. I would daresay that that is precisely what made it special!

Were you aware at that time of the reactions of other countries to the develop-
ments in Germany? Were there impulses or influences from the GDR on the other countries?

I think there was a sign in Prague in November which read: “In Poland the revolution took 10 months, in the GDR 10 weeks and in Prague 10 days.” I think there is something about this; it was a process of acceleration. The events in Poland were the first big signs that something would happen, that the communist party would be forced to sit at the table. That was also a sensation for us. And then, of course, the election in Poland (which was very decisive), made it clear where the public stands. That, too, was a huge encouragement for us that something could be done.

But Hungary also played a central role. Hungary had begun to dismantle its border structures with Austria in the spring of 1989. By the end of June there was a public presentation of this dismantling process with the Foreign Ministers Gyula Horn (Hungary) and Alois Mock (Austria) celebrating the dismantling of the border installations. This signified hope for many East Germans who did not want to change anything, but simply wished to leave. In the course of the summer, 50,000 people from the GDR arrived to the West via Hungary and then on to other countries. The situation made it possible for the opposition and those who wanted to leave in order to unite. Before that, there were tensions in the GDR between those who wanted to leave and those who wanted to change something, – as the saying went: “Don’t go away – support the fight for change here.” But in the end, both contributed to the change and those who wanted to leave also took to the streets with the others.

However I don’t believe in the domino effect, as it was depicted on a well-known poster about ten years ago. This model said it started with the first domino in Poland, the second in Hungary, then the GDR, and then Czechoslovakia. One tips the others over. One cannot say that the changes in the GDR only began when the domino tumbled in Poland. But it was tremendous encouragement.

Previously, it was assumed that nothing would change without something changing in Moscow. That was the experience of the last number of decades: 1953 in the GDR, 1956 in Poland and Budapest, 1968 in Czechoslovakia. Tanks appeared and crushed the protests by force. But now something changed in Moscow. There were new messages and the release of Central Europe from coercion. That gave us the space for freedom that we had to feel. For us in the GDR, it was already clear at the beginning of the round table that, in the end, there would be totally free elections. It was only a matter of clarifying the details of the election, the electoral law and so on. That did not mean the GDR was any better, but the dynamics that had begun in Poland and Hungary in 1989 accelerated the process. Hence, each country had its own history that led to the revolution, but the transformations in 1989 are ultimately a common event,
as if connected by pipes underground. There were also relations between the various opposition forces, but also between the public.

Is there still a common memory or a common European narrative about the year 1989?

Even within one country you don’t necessarily have a common narrative, as the year 1989 is highly controversial. Take a look at Poland. Many would certainly tell a completely different story than the one I have just told. This applies to Hungary as well. Viktor Orbán was a young student leader at the time; he became famous for a speech given in July 1989 at the reburial of the revolutionary Imre Nagy. At the time the common message was “Back to Europe”. Today, Orbán talks with nationalist tones.

Today, the forces of PiS or Fidesz are basically anti-European and they take a very sceptical view of the European values these countries promoted at the time. Freedom and liberal constitutional structures were the essence of the image of Europe back then. Today when Orbán says he wants an illiberal democracy, one wonders where the impetus of 1989 had gone. We wanted to return to this liberal, enlightened Europe – the Europe of integration, the Europe that stands for freedom, the rule of law, and a rule-based foreign policy. It is important to link our memory of that time with that as well. In this respect, memory is always a contentious issue. Memory is something very much contemporary. It is essential not only for remembering past events, but also the values we stood up for back then, together with Poland, Hungary, the Czechs and Slovaks, the Baltic states and so on.

Were these values of freedom, a return to Europe, at least from your memory, shared by everyone?

That’s the key element. When the Americans talk about the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is often with the rhetoric that Bush used at the time: “We won the Cold War”; and the symbol for this is the fall of the Berlin Wall. But it was not a victory of the West against the East, it was a victory of freedom and democracy, the rule of law and liberalism, the enlightened values of the West, which we all shared. It was not that the West ultimately defeated the East, but that the people in the East themselves stood up for these values with a great deal of risk and commitment. This was the breakthrough for a liberal, democratic Europe based on justice.

There were also various groupings within the East: the Baltic states belonged directly to the Soviet Union, while Poland, Hungary formed a part of the socialist bloc. Did that also make a difference in terms of the feeling of wanting to break out of the bloc or the Soviet Union?

It certainly made a difference, because the Soviet Union ultimately collapsed only in 1991. In addition to the internal contradictions and Gorbachev’s hesitation, it was simply not possible to
preserve this complex structure and to design it in an emancipatory, democratic way. At that time, the idea of a free, independent nation played a major role: a free Poland, a free Hungary, a free Czechoslovakia. After the First World War, many of these countries emerged as democracies. The developments also had a national dimension for the GDR, but it was not a nationalistic dimension. Instead, we fought for unification. The framework of the nation was one that was related to freedom. After the communists had suppressed much of the national history and tradition, it was now revived and revised. That, of course, was one of the reasons why there were a whole series of problems afterwards, for example in the Balkans.

Of course, it also had this dimension in the Soviet Union. Let us take a look, for example, at the will of a free Ukraine and the fight for independence of the Baltic states. Some photos of the Baltic states, which seem to remind us of 1989, were in fact already taken in 1988 when the Baltic states already had the masses on the streets calling for the independence. In this regard, there are also some underground connections and pipes. The revolutions have the same spirit, but it was always a liberal one. Of course, even then there were also nationalists in these circles, who later organised themselves and caused a lot of trouble. We must not just look at it purely harmoniously. But the impetus was definitely an emancipatory, liberal one, and in Central Europe it was clearly related to Europe.

The slogan “Back to Europe” had something very emphatic and liberal about it. I have always been critical of this catchline. If you look at European history, it is easy to forget that both National Socialism and Communism, the two totalitarian dictatorships of the 20th century, are European offspring and creatures of intellectual and political history. This “back to Europe” has somewhat ignored this negative angle. Yet “back to Europe” then referred to a return to the Enlightenment, to Christian values, back to what the Polish May Constitution already expressed at the end of the 18th century: a separation of powers with legislature, government and independent judiciary, and the rule of law.

Was there ever any doubt in the GDR, including in the opposition, that there would be a unification of Germany, that it was logistically feasible?

I grew up in the East. My parents come from the West. I always understood myself as a German in this collectivity, but until the end of the 1980s, I didn’t think it was possible to live in freedom or German unity. It was not even imaginable. One hoped for that, but didn’t really think it was possible. When it became possible to take concrete steps, we naturally took them with commitment and joy. But until I was 35, I didn’t think I could ever live in a democracy or even have freedom.

That is why I really must say that it is amazing that we Germans were able to achieve both freedom and democracy,
and then unification in 1989/90; and all of this only 45 years after the horrors we Germans brought to Europe. This was the hour of happiness for Germans. Of course, we have done something to make it happen, but in the end it is a great gift that we Germans not only live together in peace and friendship with all those whom we have caused terror, but also share these values in the European Union. We can be grateful for that, but it is also a responsibility that we share with the others, to ensure that these values continue to be upheld in the future.

Did the GDR and the other Central European states continue have a common sense of responsibility after 1989, and did they continue to work together to establish freedom and democracy?

Yes, that feeling has been present. The emergence of the Visegrad countries at the beginning of the 1990s is already a result of this common sentiment. They wanted to walk the road back to Europe and towards the European Union. There are not many politicians from the GDR who were later active in European affairs and foreign policy, but for me it was a matter of the legacy of 1989. It was important for me to make it possible for these states and peoples, who achieved freedom and democracy together with us, to share these transatlantic and European institutions. That is what I have worked very hard for during my time in the German Bundestag. It is also a consequence of 1989.

One can draw a connection from 1989 to 2004. It has been a challenge to stand up for this. In 2005, we had the Berlin Declaration on the road to the Lisbon Treaty. On that occasion, I worked intensively and successfully to ensure that not only the Treaty of Rome, which is hailed in the West as the foundation of the EU, is celebrated, but also the new members who, through their struggles and the implementation of justice and freedom, are a new source of the European Union. I find it essential that they are members of the European Union by their own right and not by mercy or charity.

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No bloody revolution

JÁNOS SZÉKY

The year 1989 unfolded quite differently for Hungary than the rest of the Central European states where there was some sort of revolution. As opposed to all other countries in the Eastern bloc, the new political system that came into place was seemingly designed in advance.

The consensual term for the historical events that took place in Hungary in 1989 is rendszerváltás. In Hungarian it literally means “changing of the system”, as in Changing of the Guards. There are two other versions: rendszerváltozás (“the change of the system”, using an intransitive verb) and rendszerváltoztatás (“making the system change”, with a transitive and causative verb), reflecting some politico-linguistic subtleties that may be hard to grasp for a non-Hungarian speaker. The word “system” has special Hungarian connotations here, meaning the constitutional order or form of state.

What is important is that rendszerváltás is a way to avoid using the word “revolution”, as there was no such focal event in Hungary of masses of people going on the streets and toppling the government. Neither does it mean “transition” in the scholarly sense, which often refers to three aspects: dictatorship to democracy; command economy to market economy; and East to West. For some reason, the rule of law (or in Hungarian usage, jogállamiság, which is a literal translation for German Rechtsstaatlichkeit) began to supplant democracy, to the extent that the pre-1989 regime is called “the non-rule-of-law system” in the Constitutional Court’s documents. The transition of the economy and international policy – involving company law, the two-tier banking system, the opening of the stock exchange, and the “trade and co-operation treaty” with the European Community – initiated by the reformed communist government actually preceded the first steps towards political transformation.
Messy transition

Even the political transition looks messy for most people. As opposed to all other countries within the Eastern bloc, the new political system was designed in advance – “in the womb of the old society,” as Marx would say. The forum where it was designed was called the National Round Table (official name Trilateral Coordinating Talks) from June to September 1989, with the governing Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP) on one side, the opposition (itself organised in a round table) on the second side, and a selection of pro-communist civil organisations on the third side (to make things more cumbersome).

Right until the very end, the wider public had only a vague idea of what the talks were about, and although all the protocols and transcripts were published around the millennium, only a few experts can say they are familiar with the real proceedings. There were also only a few people whose words mattered. At the Opposition Round Table, there was József Antall, a centre-right politician who became the first prime minister after the transition; Péter Tölgyessy, a young legal scholar from the liberal party SZDSZ (Free Democrats Alliance); Viktor Orbán of Fidesz, who at the time was a centrist liberal whiz-kid; and, maybe, Imre Boross, a lawyer, who represented the historically important Smallholders Party, but was expelled some months later as his party began to slide into demagoguery and anti-intellectualism.

Originally, these people and their friends only wanted to deal with one challenge, namely, fixing the conditions for a free election. But soon they realised they can and must co-operate with the reform-minded legal experts of the government (officially not subordinate to the HSWP anymore) in shaping the new, democratic constitution. However there was a problem with legitimacy and authority as the negotiators were not democratically elected, nor had they the mass support of Solidarity or the Polish Roman Catholic Church; on top of that, any agreement had to be passed through the non-democratic rubber-stamp parliament in order to achieve legal status.

The outcome was an overwrought compromise between democrats who were still wary of each other’s intentions. The constitution, which was formally an amendment of the 1949 constitution of the People’s Republic, was originally intended as not much more than a manual for the transition and was defined as temporary in its own preamble, but remained in force until 2011. One of its most prominent features was the multitude of “two-thirds acts”, that is, clauses about which acts must be passed or amended with a qualified majority, which for the first two dec-
ades of the new republic meant the mandatory consensus between the government and the opposition. This not just prevented adjusting the law to changing requirements, but was an obstacle to effective governance, as the opposition was prone to resist for resistance’s sake. The Fundamental Law of 2011 was not a remedy to this problem; on the contrary, victorious Fidesz used its own two-thirds majority to extend the same rule to matters of the economy, such as taxation.

Mandatory consensus was paired with probably the world’s most complicated electoral system (which was based on the German law, except without the federal checks) which meant to create an artificial balance between two large blocs. This resulted in the consolidation of two large blocs more or less in balance, but politically more and more polarised as the easiest way to define one was as the antithesis, or the enemy, of the other. In this way, Hungarian democracy from the very beginning was doomed for self-destruction. All the same, this was not obvious during those years, as we enjoyed our newly gained freedoms – freedom of movement, being able to enter into the West whenever we like, freedom of speech, and a free press. Actually, all these preceded the constitutional process of 1989; they were perceived as the results of the dictatorship’s gradual self-dismantling.

**Rehabilitating 1956**

We tend to only remember the good things, but the Hungarian dictatorship was also the most liveable during its last couple of years, so one could easily get the impression it was not toppled but evolved into a free political system. This may even be partly true. Antall was famous for mocking his ministers who complained about how “commie” strongholds prevailed: “You should have made a bloody revolution, gentlemen,” meaning, “but you didn’t”. As I said, there was no revolution as we know it. But why, after all, is 1989 such a memorable year? What was there to fight for, and to win?

One of the peculiarities of *rendszerváltás* was the large demonstrations were started with some surrogate targets in mind rather than demanding the fall of the dictatorship itself. For instance, showing solidarity with the oppressed Hungarian minority in Ceaușescu’s Romania; protesting against the building of a hydroelectric plant on the Danube that would destroy one of the country’s most beautiful landscapes; and, most of all, rehabilitating the memory of 1956. For most people who lived through 1989, the crucial moment was the funeral and reinterment of
Imre Nagy, prime minister of the 1956 revolution, and his fellow martyrs on June 16th 1989 – the anniversary of their execution in 1958.

The rehabilitation of 1956 and revealing the truth about the horrible retribution – the execution of hundreds and imprisonment of thousands – were, of course, opposition territory. By early 1989, however, the politicians of the HSWP who wanted to reap the rewards of recent and earlier reform policies, but wanted to distance themselves from the dictator, János Kádár, caught the opportunity offered by the now-legal cult of 1956.

One should not forget that these were the days following Solidarity’s victory in the Polish elections (June 4th), and HSWP realised that, although it was by far the most popular party, it must secure its advantage. So the funeral was attended by Prime Minister Miklós Németh and Speaker of the Parliament Mátyás Szűrös, and broadcasted on the state television, showing the government’s support. Everybody from the head of the government through the Round Table Opposition to non-incorporated radicals were interested in framing the event as a system changing moment. It might have been – but at a heavy price. They suggested that the regime named “the Kádár System” must fall because of the original moral sin of its founder, that is, Kádár’s reign of terror after the Soviet suppression of the revolution, rather than the general basic defects of the communist system, the lack of liberty and the economic cul-de-sac.

The funeral was originally organised by an NGO of 1956ers called the Historic Justice Committee, and political parties were not to be represented among the speakers. However there was one exception – Viktor Orbán, who was asked to speak in the name of “the Hungarian youth” rather than Fidesz. Public memory has preserved his speech as a courageous call “for the Russians to leave”, but what he actually demanded was free elections, where “we can elect a government that would immediately start negotiations about the withdrawal of Russian troops without any delay”. This implied that the current Németh government would not do that, although by then an artillery division had already left Hungary. Early the following year the same government started and signed negotiations about the complete withdrawal of troops before the free elections.

**Interpretation**

Thirty years have passed since then and the today’s Orbán government has removed Imre Nagy’s monument from the Martyrs’ Square near parliament. The pro-government media tries to destroy Nagy’s image, arguing that he was really a communist and citing historians who say he was an NKVD informant. The evidence
may be real, or it may be fake (not an uncommon Russian secret service tool), but the campaign clearly shows that the aim of today’s government is to nationalise a left-wing and liberal narrative which was central to the rendszerváltás.

The government has announced intentions to commemorate the 30th anniversary of those events. The period of remembrance began on March 15th 2019 (on that day in 1989, there was a large joint opposition demonstration remembering the 1848 revolution) and will end on June 19th 2021, 30 years after the last Soviet troops left Hungary. The government has declared, “Western Europe left Central Europe to its own fate after the Second World War, but the national communities of Central Europe grabbed the chance and achieved their freedom and independence on their own.”

This reveals a few things about how Orbán and his government see 1989. For them, it was a revolt of the victims of Western Europe. It was a cluster of national collectivist events and freedom should be understood here only in the national sense. It remains to be seen if government propagandists in Hungary will recognise the role of Miklós Németh and the then Foreign Minister Gyula Horn in the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Most likely they will emphasise Orbán’s heroic achievements – a much less complex storyline. 😊

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The 30th anniversary of the fall of communism is an important milestone for Romania. Yet this anniversary is not present within the public space. Instead, today’s challenges appear to be far more pressing for society.

For many Romanians, the fall of the communist regime in 1989 was an unexpected moment that brought hope for a different way of life and a better future. Nicolae Manolescu, a Romanian literary critic, public intellectual and politician in The Right to Normality (published in 1991) pleaded for the restoration of normalcy after the political, social and cultural “rupture” brought by the communist regime in Romania. But what did this “normality” mean, and who was asking for it?

There were numerous politicians, in particular former political prisoners or émigrés, mainly from the historical parties that were revived after the fall of communism and who maintained that the path for post-communist Romania should be found in the interwar period. The few decades between the two World Wars were a time Romania was a democratic country with rather functional institutions. It had a flourishing economy and a fruitful cultural scene that was connected, even synchronised, to the wider world. The communist regime imposed by the Soviet Union after the Second World War was considered a historical accident and an interruption of the “organic” trajectory of Romanian history.

Belgium of the Orient

Apart from politicians, there were other prominent public voices who thought the same: the inspiration for the post-communist period – social reconstruction and general development – should be found in interwar Romania. For instance,
Octavian Paler, a Romanian writer and civil activist during the 1990s and early 2000s, wrote about the interwar period, referring to it as the veritable miracle in which we synchronised with the West and managed to transform Bucharest into a little Paris; and Romania, a Belgium of the Orient.

For others, the interwar period offered not only inspiration but the key to survive during communism. Andrei Pleșu, a former Romanian foreign minister and president of the New Europe College, a prestigious institute of advanced studies in Bucharest, is a case in point. In an article written around a question asked by Bruce Ackerman – namely, how he managed to intellectually survive during communism – Pleșu explained that the most important intellectuals of his generation were the product of formative stages spent near former political prisoners. These intellectuals were arrested when the communist regime took power in Romania, pardoned only after 1964 and become the transmitters of a tradition of “intellectual normality”. As Pleșu explains, “educated before the Second World War in a democratic Romania with good schools and good teachers who had studied at great European universities – a Romania which made the appearance of Constantin Brâncuși, Tristan Tzara and later the triad of Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionesco and Emil Cioran possible – these former political prisoners were for us a guarantee of continuity.”

But this is only one side of the story. The other one was manifested and felt at the level of ordinary people who became the “social victims” of 1989. More and more, because of the protracted post-communist transitions, the communist regime was reconsidered by the general public as a lesser evil than the system of “wild capitalism” and “original democracy” – two terms used to critically and ironically refer to Romania post-1989. Many could not adapt to the new social reality – to the market economy and capitalism where one has to struggle for a living and identify opportunities. People started to long for the paternalist, yet precarious, stability they had become accustomed during communism.

To paraphrase Svetlana Boym, the communist regime began with futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia. In post-communist Romania, there were two competing registers of nostalgia felt which informed citizens’ hopes and dreams for the future. On the one hand, there was the idealised interwar period; and on the other hand, communist stability. The latter was now considered by many as not so adverse, if only Nicolae Ceaușescu, the last leader of the Romanian Communist Party, had not “perverted” it. This should be taken into account as overtones when referring to the commemoration of 1989.
This year, three decades since the fall of communism, we celebrate a significant milestone. Coming to terms with the past is still an ongoing process in Romania. Many things were done, but there is much more to accomplish. Nonetheless they come to the fore every year – and here, I shall mention a few.

The most central action over the past three decades has been the condemnation of the communist regime. In 2006 Romania became the third former Eastern European communist country (after the Czech Republic and Bulgaria) to officially condemn its communist past. In order to achieve this, the Romanian president, Traian Băsescu, established the “Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania”, headed by Vladimir Tismaneanu, a Romanian American political scientist and professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. The commission drafted an extensive report where the president in it condemned the Romanian communists as “illegitimate and criminal”. However, the condemnation did not solve the problem of its memorialisation. In December 2006 one of the commission’s proposals was to establish a national museum of communism. The proposal was accepted by the president, but so far nothing has been done due to a lack of consensus, and the tendency to politicise any proposal or attempt to reach a solution.

Nevertheless the 30 year commemoration is not very present in the Romanian public space. This is largely because it overlaps with another a significant anniversary. In 2018 Romania celebrated a century since the formation of the modern state. After the First World War, all the provinces in which Romanians were the majority in united with the Romanian Kingdom. The centenary was celebrated last year, and the government decided to extend it for two more years.

However, coming to terms with its communist past is not an easy task for Romania and it is an ongoing story. It is not only about getting a consensus on its memorialisation, but also about solving the legal criminal issues related with the 1989 revolution. The Romanian anti-communist revolution that started in Timișoara in 1989 was a chapter with many human losses. According to official records, there were over 1,100 deaths and more than 4,000 injuries during the 1989 revolution. In Romania, the commemoration always means the remembrance of those who died for freedom. But in the three decades since the fall of communism, it has still to be clearly established who should be held responsible for those victims.
Even if the Romanian communist party was condemned as illegitimate and criminal, the problem with those held responsible for the victims is still pending. The process of the revolution has been tremendously politicised. It was opened, closed and re-opened again. Certainly, it remains one of the most contentious chapters of the post-communist period. Last year, President Klaus Iohannis approved the criminal prosecution request against Ion Iliescu, Petre Roman, and Gelu Voican Voiculescu. By the end of the year, two of them – Iliescu (former president of Romania: 1992–1996, 2000–2004) and Voican Voiculescu (president of the Romanian Institute for the Study of 1989 Revolution) – were officially accused of crimes against humanity. They were officially sued in April 2019; but what could be mostly achieved by this is a symbolic condemnation. Both are rather old and the trial will certainly be a long one.

Nevertheless, today’s challenges appear to be far more pressing for society than the commemorating of the 1989 revolution. These concerns are mostly related to the current state of Romanian democracy and the rule of law. At the end of March this year, 12 embassies in Bucharest issued a joint statement on behalf of 12 countries, (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States) asking the Romanian authorities to abstain from any amendments on the judicial laws that would further weaken the rule of law in the country. Moreover there are discussions on the European level about the possibility of invoking Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union against Romania.

This is only a snapshot of 2019 – the year when Romania celebrates 30 years since the fall of communism. The commemoration should be held against the promises of 1989. Yet Romania has not become the place that has realised the hopes and dreams it had 30 years ago. For instance, the undeniable reality is that over the past ten years, almost four million Romanians have left the country. Many emigrated, mostly to Western Europe, in search of a better life. In 1989 many Romanians dreamed of a better future in their own country, but today more and more are escaping in order to seek a better way of life elsewhere. Compared to the enthusiasm and hope felt in 1989, today’s imagination about a bright future in Romania has, sadly, all but disappeared.
In recent years, Bulgarians have gained better clarity about what happened during communism because of the efforts of researchers who dared dig up the dirt and make their findings available to a broader audience. And it is only now that the crimes of communism have been included in the mandatory school curriculum. This transparency is essential for understanding the political processes in Bulgaria post-1989.

I was born in Bulgaria in 1985, but I first learned about the particularities of communism in an academic setting in 2003 when I started university in the United States and enrolled in various classes on political science and history. Until then, my understanding of communism was entirely based on conversations with my family and the obscure samizdat books which my grandfather kept in his library. Communism was only included as a mandatory topic in Bulgaria’s high school history textbooks in 2018 – a move criticised by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (a member of the Party of European Socialists and the largest opposition force) because the “benefits” of communism were not covered in the new curriculum. When asked to define these benefits, the party’s leader Kornelia Ninova pinpointed construction, healthcare, education and security.

During the communist period, Bulgaria built many roads and factories which have subsequently been closed down. Healthcare was free, but of poor quality. In fact, in 1986, the communist regime purposefully hid the news of the Chernobyl nuclear accident and did not take any measures to protect ordinary citizens from the radioactive cloud which passed over Bulgaria. May 1st (Labour Day) parades were held in major cities under the radioactive rain. Education was also free, but
all subjects were heavily ideologised. The mass surveillance and torture of critics did not contribute to a feeling of security. Moreover, it was recently established that between 1960 and 1987 Bulgaria was bankrupted three times, which the regime hid by publicising false data. The future was bright only for the members of the inner circle of the communist party who enjoyed a luxurious life and diverse privileges. Yet this is not the main point of the article. What is more important is that generations of Bulgarians could only learn about communism by themselves and not everyone assumed this responsibility. In turn, political leaders can exploit this lack of knowledge. Why is communism such a taboo topic in Bulgaria and why do statements like Ninova’s pass without public outrage?

1989

The main problem is that we do not exactly know what happened in 1989. Other former communist states had their revolutions, but in Bulgaria the regime fell under its own weight. One wing of the omnipotent party trumped another and our communist dictator, Todor Zhivkov, was forced to step down on November 10th 1989 after an inner party coup. Zhivkov’s place was inherited by Petar Mladenov, a figure from the inner circle of the communist party. Anti-regime demonstrations quickly intensified. The first mass protest in Sofia took place on December 14th 1989. Between January and May 1990, round table talks on the country’s future were held between the communist party and the opposition. Almost one million citizens famously demonstrated in support of the opposition on June 7th 1990 – the biggest mass protest to date in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria had its first democratic elections in the summer of 1990. They were won by Bulgaria’s communist party which had reinvented itself as the Bulgarian Socialist Party. It is doubtful, however, how democratic these elections were since there was little privacy at the polling stations and local party leaders supervised the process. The spirit of communism lingered on. This may explain why Bulgaria’s transition to democracy was not fully possible and why the communist establishment was never really challenged. Bulgaria’s prosecutors brought a number of charges against Zhivkov in the early 1990s, but the trials were terminated because of his death in 1998. Communist leaders, heads of concentration camps and torturers were never convicted for their actions either, despite ample evidence, including witness statements. Meanwhile, because of the refusal to include communism in the mandatory cur-
Because of the refusal to include communism in the mandatory curriculum for so long, many young people know of these crimes only vaguely. It is striking that one of the first priorities of Ninova, when she was elected as leader of Bulgaria’s Socialist Party in 2016, was to organise a pilgrimage to the house of Todor Zhivkov. It is also shocking that in 2018 Boyko Borissov, who is serving as prime minister for the third time since 2009 and is the leader of the GERB Party, referred to Zhivkov as one of two “greatest universities” in his life. Borissov was Zhivkov’s personal bodyguard. In addition, one may wonder which political party – the socialist party or GERB (which labels itself as right-wing and is a member of the European People’s Party) – has more members.

The same pattern can be observed in Bulgaria’s institutions. One of the scariest organisations in communist Bulgaria was Darzhavna sigurnost – the secret services responsible for mass surveillance and the harassment of citizens who opposed the regime. Sadly, the same circles which controlled the institution of terror have an important influence on Bulgaria’s current intelligence. In 2013, Bulgaria was shaken by mass protests because of the appointment of Delyan Peevski, a controversial member of parliament, as head of DANS (Bulgaria’s national security agency). Vigilant civil society members subsequently uncovered that his grandfather was a colonel and an influential figure in Darzhavna sigurnost. Indeed, experts argue that the establishment of DANS in 2008, which was supposed to modernise Bulgarian intelligence, rehabilitated Darzhavna sigurnost because many of the hired employees had previously worked for the repressive institution.

Critical state

After the fall of communism, Bulgaria did not carry out a substantive reform of its constitution either, which means the country still has a “Soviet” prosecution – an entirely vertical structure without checks and balances which, in the words of the President of the Venice Commission, allows its misuse for political aims. Bulgaria has lost hundreds of cases in the European Court of Human Rights and is a leading violator of the European Convention on Human Rights because of the abuses of the prosecutor’s office. The Council of Europe has called for reform multiple times. Nevertheless, the Soviet model has remained intact to this day.
Moreover, since 2017 Borissov’s government has been enacting legislation which further increases its excessive powers. As stated by the president of Bulgaria’s Supreme Court of Cassation, which fights the corrupt status quo: “Woe befalls anyone who opposes the untouchable status of [Bulgaria’s] Chief Prosecutor.” One may add that the same fate awaits inconvenient opponents of the government – political persecutions are still common.

30 years after 1989, and despite the fact Bulgaria is a member of the EU, its democracy is in a critical state; this should not come as a surprise in light of the above considerations. The 2019 World Justice Project’s “Rule of Law Index” ranked Bulgaria 54th in the world, just after Mongolia. The latest Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International ranked Bulgaria as the most corrupt EU member. In 2018 the authoritative Nations in Transit report, by Freedom House, downgraded Bulgaria to a semi-consolidated democracy – the decline started when Borissov first came to power in 2009.

**Missed opportunities**

The year 1989 symbolises hope for democracy and a better future in post-communist states. In Bulgaria, however, it stands for missed opportunities. Society is profoundly divided: an opinion poll carried out in November 2017, in commemoration of 1989, showed that 41 per cent of Bulgarians would rather live under communism while 41 per cent would rather live in the current “democratic” period. Many citizens are nostalgic for communism because they are misinformed due to years of censorship and propaganda. Poverty and economic decline have not helped either. Bulgaria has the lowest GDP per capita in the EU as well as the lowest median earnings, which has caused a huge wave of emigration. This may shed further light on why some people are tempted to romanticise the past: in communism, the regime provided jobs.

Sadly, communist nostalgia is also the perspective that key political parties promote. After all, their leaders are products of that system, so they have an interest in glorifying it. When mainstream media reports on the commemoration of November 10th 1989, their messages are succinct and vague. In stark contrast, there are Bulgarians and friends of Bulgaria looking for answers and trying to gather the pieces of the 1989 puzzle. In the 1990s and 2000s, there were noteworthy research outputs on the history of Bulgaria’s communism, but they were printed by small publishers and in limited volumes. In the past decade, however,
the internet has opened new opportunities for ordinary people and researchers to share their testimonies and archival materials. For instance, Pametbg.com and Desebg.com are two online projects aimed at ensuring more transparency about Bulgaria’s communist past.

In parallel, more established publishers have supported the effort of researchers, thus bringing their work to a broader audience. Recently, Tomasz Kamusella’s *Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria* (2018) has raised further awareness of one of the largest ethnic cleansings in Europe, which escalated in 1989 and has been largely ignored to this day. Almost 60,000 Muslims went on strike against Bulgaria’s regime in the spring of 1989. In the same year, the regime expelled approximately 360,000 Muslims.

In turn, Borislav Skorchev’s *The Belene Concentration Camp: 1949–1987*, also published in 2018, is the first large-scale study of the horrifying abuses that took place in this facility. It is the result of ten years of archival research and is longer than 900 pages. Vili Lilkov and Hristo Hristov’s *Former People* (2017) sheds light on how the totalitarian regime exterminated members of Bulgaria’s intelligentsia who resisted communism. The inquiry relies on the archives of *Darzhavna sigurnost*.

To be sure, one should not forget there is a third group which recognises the damages of communism but advocates for closing the chapter by declaring Bulgaria’s transition period completed. This is most visible in the activities of the Millennium Club, an NGO mostly consisting of young people born after 1981, which organises conferences and occasionally engages in research activities. They argue that millennials – roughly those who were born between 1980 and 1996 – are much more concerned about the future than about the past, and that Bulgaria needs to focus on a different debate.

**Challenging the taboo**

In recent years, more Bulgarians have gained better clarity about what happened during the communist period because of the efforts of scholars and researchers who dared dig up the dirt and make their findings available to a broader audience. It is only now that the crimes of communism have been included in the mandatory school curriculum. Transparency is essential for understanding the political
processes post-1989. Meanwhile, the parallels between communism and Bulgaria's current regime are inevitable – not only are some of the actors the same, they have also revived the repressive practices of the past.

Hence, it is difficult to close a chapter that has not been read to the end. To reconcile with the past we need patience and an inquisitive mind. Maybe when we have a clearer idea of the extent of violence during the communist period we will know why dissidents were not as vocal in Bulgaria as in other countries, and why Bulgaria never faced a revolution. Maybe then we will be more equipped for an appraisal of what followed, including the current deplorable state of Bulgaria's democracy. Maybe then we will be better placed to understand what needs to be done to ensure a more prosperous future. While a millennial myself, I do not subscribe to the views of some members of my generation mentioned above. I am convinced that it will take a long while before a true transition to democracy is completed. One thing seems certain, however: the taboo of identifying and calling the crimes of communism by their real names is currently being challenged on a grander scale. This is a development which could be refreshing for Bulgaria since it can be the foundation of a more substantive debate and, maybe, more sober decisions.

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The curse of perestroika

ANASTASIA SERGEEVA

Perestroika spawned entrepreneurship and readiness to undertake independent actions. It broadened access to managing the country and created the ground for creativity and innovation from one side. However from the other side it opened the Pandora’s Box of social, ethnic, national, economic and territorial conflicts.

It became common in Russia to remember Mikhail Gorbachev only in the negative sense and to blame him for the “breakup of the Soviet Union” and further troubles of Russia. Only one person was worse than him – Boris Yeltsin – and nothing was possible to do with this stereotype. However this year has seen a new trend – on March 2nd, Gorbachev’s birthday, positive comments and wishes for long life were posted on Facebook and other blogs. He was thanked for perestroika, for the freedom he gave and the opportunities he provided. At such moments one becomes witness to how eras change: a new generation is emerging. Yet, it would probably take another 30 years to bring understanding of the inevitability of the fall of the Soviet empire; the wounds would finally heal and the Weimar syndrome would release my country.

Social divisions

Life in the Soviet Union was very different. Despite the declared equality for everybody, the stratification and division of the society was visible. People were divided into Muscovites and others; urban citizens and country folk; the working class and the intelligentsia; party members and non-party; the nomenclature and the rest. Soviet society was like a large and complex pyramid made up of smaller
pyramids – every enterprise, every organisation, every sphere of life looked like a small pyramid, where the more successful people went to the top. The distribution of the benefits depended on one’s position in the pyramids.

The most curious point was that those who stayed at the bottom were the happiest and most satisfied. They had a clear and easy plan for development, while those who came to the top of their respective pyramid saw that they had no chance to jump higher (for different reasons – sometimes ethical, sometimes because of their nationality or origin), so they felt a glass ceiling and became frustrated. It was a fact that the Soviet system changed the structure of the society greatly during the 70 years of its existence. This was partly due to changing global trends and challenges and partly shaped deliberately by the authorities. The agrarian and poorly educated society with a small ruling elite in the beginning of the 20th century transformed into an urbanised and educated one, with the obvious improvement of living standards. By the end of the 1970s, the majority of Soviet citizens could read, write and count, had a stable social security system with basic medical care, a guaranteed job and minimal income and free education. For the absolute majority there were enough reasons to feel satisfied and even happy. Many of them followed the path from powerless peasant (without passports, ownership, stable income and pension), to the city limita (workers hired by quotas to the great construction projects, called “limits”), and then to the professional blue collar workers.

“All my kids have a professional education from a technical college!” proudly said one my acquaintances who is around 70 years old. “We got a three-room apartment from the state, as we had two children, we planned to buy a Moskvich (a car made on the base of Opel models) and got land for a dacha (6 acres of land, usually in the bad swamp territory near the city was possible to get for long-term use).” At the same time the unsatisfied minority was growing larger and larger. Urban dwellers who lived in town for several generations and the indigenous citizens of some republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, first and foremost) felt the invasion of a hostile culture to their area and were frustrated with the destruction of their surroundings.

Another bigger group was made up of the urban youth, children of the intelligentsia and nomenklatura. Their expectations were also higher and they felt their glass ceilings even in high school. They desired self-realisation and development, they wanted to participate in public life and have influence. And they felt themselves closed in the country while they had access to information about the other

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world – about the West. They also felt uncomfortable in the world of shortages, crowds, lines, censorship and undeveloped infrastructure.

**Special access**

The Soviet Union was a country of lines and shortages. The country was short of goods, prices were artificially undervalued and thus the market relations developed in a different paradigm than in the countries of the “decaying capitalism”. Money was less valuable than connections – which gave opportunities to get ahead, break through and solve problems. People had to find “their own” doctors, freezers, shop assistants in the butchers and groceries (the group “salesmen” was a special privileged caste, as they had access to goods and were able to distribute them). Every executive position had special access to a certain good: holiday products, opportunities to send children to summer camps, trips to the sanatorium, special access to medicines, or a car. There were special closed “distributers” (shops with closed access) for the nomenclature where they could order goods from special lists. They also had special ateliers to order clothes and shoes. They had “state dachas”, apartments in special “elite” apartment blocks (with a concierge and security service), cars with drivers in corporate garages. That is why one of the first initiatives of Boris Yeltsin in 1991 was to refuse all privileges (they would build new ones afterwards).

Another source of special access was connected to currency exchange. During the 1970–80s there was a quiet a large group of people in the bigger cities who had access to foreign currencies while the free circulation of currencies was strictly prohibited. Officially, Soviet citizens who had foreign currency from foreign trips or work outside the country had to change it to special “bonds” which were possible to spend in special shops called *Berezka*. The network was originally established for foreign tourists, so they could buy some urgent common goods, but then they became a source of speculation and half-controlled currency circulation.

Foreigners, as a social group, also had a special place in the Soviet unofficial economy. As soon as the Soviet Union started developing international tourism and actively introducing western technologies to upgrade the Soviet industry, more and more foreigners came to big cities and tourist areas. Since they were limited in the communication with regular citizens, they were circled with special people who worked in the *Intourist* service. Hotel, restaurant employees, airport and railway staff, interpreters, guides – these people used their unique opportunities for direct contact with foreigners. They established a black market for foreign currency and illegal trade of the import of goods. The market of private services was also flourishing by the end of 1970s – special girls with higher education and knowledge
of languages chose the career of “foreign currency prostitute” as a chance to live better and even to find a foreign husband and escape the country.

The majority of the people who communicated with foreigners were to some extent connected to the KGB, but the corrupted system absorbed the special services, step by step, as it gave access to goods and opportunities. Generally the incorporation of the KGB into all institutions in the country became ubiquitous. Every organisation, enterprise, university, school and small institution had secret agents and semi-official positions connected with the KGB. In the organisations with more complicated structures, those people were incorporated in every department. My parents remembered their friend who defiantly left the room or asked to stop a conversation when he felt that the topic becoming dangerous. He didn’t want to snitch on his friends. But not everybody was so sincere and the majority wrote regular reports with numerous facts against their colleagues and friends. The good reports provided career opportunities, and some of them successfully converted their positions into money or influence in modern Russia.

*Blat* (useful connections) were important not only in private life. It was a basic part of the Soviet economy. If you wanted to get the necessary piece or accessory for your production process, you had to have *blat* with the certain partners and had to do some mutual illegal business deal. Starting from the very beginning of the industrialisation process, when the system of *pyatiletka* (a five-year plan) was introduced, the ruling elite had impossible demands to increase growth. And they never wanted to hear about limits and barriers. What emerged was a massive system of statistic falsifications instead. First it was moved by fear (if you couldn’t report about the plan’s implementation you would be called *hostis publicus* and killed). After Stalin’s death and changes in the political system it turned into a profitable business.

**Black market**

By the end of the 1970s specialists and experts understood that the Soviet system had no future; that the model of a planned economy had completely failed. The worst point was that nobody knew how to change the situation – all attempts of the struggle with corruption threatened the security of the state. As a result, the country issued technically official statistics and public reporting in the media, which had nothing to do with reality, and a great black market – at all levels and in all spheres, where criminals, trade mafia, salesmen, state officials, law-enforcement officers and other numerous “infrastructure people” were involved. Finally the segment of unofficial workshops (*tsekhs*) appeared. The production of goods was
sabotaged at the official state level with the falsified statistics and the goods created in these illegal workshops flowed to the official market using various manipulations of documents. The part of this black market was also developed outside the country and was connected both with illegal mafia groups and legal industries there.

As the black market wasn’t studied, it wasn’t reported publicly, so nobody could really evaluate its scale. After the collapse of the USSR the debris of this black market was divided between the interested elites and they took control of it in their republics, legalising the funds and assets in the new economy. The current oligarchic systems were born out of this Soviet system with all the bad sides of it (including the fraud and falsifications). Even now there is a lack of complex understanding of this topic, but the first investigations, started during Yuri Andropov’s time in the Central Asian republics, have showed that the corrupted system sprouted from a very low level of every state farm to the Kremlin elite.

The sophisticated level of development of the black market explains why the first changes and opportunities during perestroika led to the country’s collapse so fast. Everything was prepared, so one light push and a change of the rules was enough to open the black market and to get rid of the burdensome obligations of the planned economy. By the time of Brezhnev’s death, the elite understood the level of instability of economics and the impossibility of intense growth. The only sphere which showed regular and effective growth was the military industry and it was explained by percentages of the budget which were spent on it. In everyday life, however, goods were disappearing, more and more cities and regions had to turn to the system of ration cards, but the cards were not an effective policy. It was difficult to buy goods even with the cards.

The life of an ordinary person in the USSR consisted of standing in lines, and the most important communication tool was the spread of rumours in these lines. Taking into account that there were no cell phones at that time, children were also an important element in communication. They could quickly run home and tell other family members where goods were available or which shop was just stocked.

Reformers not by choice

The changes in the elite after Brezhnev’s death opened the first changes. Andropov tried to fix the economic issues with the instruments and skills he had available. He started with repressions to increase labour productivity, but it was impossible while the system was based on false data. By the time Gorbachev was in power there was no chance to maintain the status quo from the previous eras. He and his team were reformers because they had no choice. The economic indica-
tors worsened, debts increased, the overall inferiority of the model and the mafia structure inside it was becoming obvious.

Uskorenie (acceleration), glasnost (openness), and perestroika (restructuring) – these three words became Gorbachev’s international mantra. The attempt to increase labour productivity revealed the level of the falsification in the statistics and accounting documents, so the acceleration demanded openness to show this information and to struggle with the ineffectiveness through the public discussions and complaints. After the level of the degradation was opened the restructuring became the only answer to the challenge. The opening of new opportunities and partial legalisation of the black market through the cooperative system (a system of small private business) caused the last point to destroy the illusion of stability for the majority of the citizens.

Perestroika spawned entrepreneurship and readiness to undertake independent actions. It broadened access to managing the country and created the ground for creativity and innovation from one side. However from the other side it opened the Pandora’s Box of social, ethnic, national, economic and territorial conflicts. It revealed the level of inequality and showed how different people lived differently. Perestroika strengthened this difference and tore the country apart.

This year is the thirty-year anniversary of the Georgian riots. They began with a series of well-known protest rallies in the national republics which were suppressed by the state. However, social and economic protests arose regularly during the whole Soviet period. There was no open information about it, but they all were spontaneous reactions to the injustice of the situation. The protests were suppressed; but it was obvious that as soon as they began in different parts of the country simultaneously there would not be enough resources to stop them. The national element of the protests in the 1980s also were not a result of Gorbachev’s action. The very first event was in Yakutia, which were riots and clashes between youth criminal gangs; between Russians and Yakut nationals (it was common for such regions to have criminal gangs of different nations). The clashes led to the protests of the Yakut youth and as a result the national issue was brought to the table.

Who gets credit

Gorbachev inherited a country which was pretending its economic and social/political well-being. Even the Chernobyl catastrophe was not a random event. The
universal practice of fraud and falsification in industry brought the great catastrophe because it was impossible to maintain safety without accurate and real data. Another element of destabilisation was the emerging youth culture. The sustainable system of criminal gangs in the cities, which clashed with each other for territory and influence, started also to fight with the militia and although still lost most battles, they already felt more empowered, becoming more fearless. In the post-Soviet countries these gangs transformed into mafia groups. But they appeared before *perestroika* and were not caused by it. At the end, the uncontrolled mafia organisations recruited more and more people who had nothing to eat and little to lose.

Do we have Gorbachev to thank for this? He certainly should get some credit. Maybe not for the freedom and opportunities, which we would have taken anyway, but for the deliverance of Russia and other Soviet republics to the horrible 1990s; for the fast depressurisation of access to power; for the opportunity of new elites; the fast opening of the country with free access to information; and of course for the closing of the threat of a third world war, for at least 20 years, when the new generation without conspiracy theories and spy-mania could emerge.

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