

The Twentieth Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and its Relevance for Germany and Europe

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The fall of the Berlin Wall opened a new chapter in world history and changed the lives of peoples and nations (and, of course, the city of Berlin) to an extent, that can hardly be overestimated. November 9, 1989 was the kick-off for a breathtaking process: only 11 months later Germany celebrated the reunification of the two German states after 40 years of forced separation. The fall of the Wall also triggered fundamental changes in Germany's neighbouring countries and the Soviet Union, which was soon transferred into Commonwealth of Independent States. The Eastern and the Western bloc ceased to exist. Politics and economics, culture and population, self-perception... nothing remained as it had been for four decades. The worldwide cold war that had succeeded Second World War in the late 1940ies came to its end – and created huge challenges for politicians and ordinary people alike. The symbol of the bipolar structure of the international system of states fell on this 9 November. Since 13 August 1961, when the Berlin Wall was erected, it had been the concrete focal point of the division of the world into two antagonistic blocks.

Very soon after these fundamental overthrows the discussions were shaped by the underlying question of how the international system should be reordered. Like any other state in the world, Germany found itself in a completely different framework – not only for its internal situation but also for its foreign policy. Many issues, such as the European Union, came on the agenda in a new quality and dimension especially after 1991 when the rationale of the Cold War and the impression of separation faded. New priorities had to be set: In the 1990s, these were first and foremost the accelerating European integration, the re-definition and establishment of relations with other nations in Eastern Europe and last but not least the Balkan conflicts. Especially the latter posed a challenge to German foreign policy, since these conflicts were the first military conflicts within Europe since the end of World War II. During the Cold War it would have been unimaginable even to think about the question of a German participation in military operations. Against the background of the developments in Afghanistan and other conflicts in the world the debate about this kind of engagement abroad is still going on in Germany - and opinions differ significantly. But it is clear that we have to bear our share of the burden, just like our partners and allies do.

The European Integration is a historically unique process and it is, after all a success story. Just a week ago, the last legal concerns against the Lisbon-Treaty were allayed, which means that the European Union has made another important step towards more democracy within the EU, more efficiency and further integration. Who would ever have imagined 20 years ago, that (then) eastern-bloc-countries like Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and others would ever be part of an association of democratic states as large as the EU with no less than 27 members, being a heavyweight in the international system? We all know that there is still a long way to go along the way to a real union: Such a group needs to be united and self-confident in order to be able to speak with one voice, promote its values and influence processes in the international system. Much has been achieved so far, but today we still have to state that there are many issues with conflicting interests of the member states, and that European Union is much too often unable to speak out with one voice. To promote and advance the process of the European Integration remains to be one of the most important tasks for German foreign policy – as it was in last two decades. We all know that very often it is a difficult decision and sometimes a sore process to pass on national competences to a supranational organisation like the EU. But in the long run

there is virtually no other option for the Europeans than to unite, if they want to be successful players in a globalized world.

The basis of the European Union is shared values, a firm conviction of freedom, of human rights, of humanism and of a mature, responsible society. But we have to keep in mind that democracy is fragile and subject of constant threats. One of those threats is the growing tendency to take democracy and freedom as a matter of course. When we think back to the times before and after November 1989 we always have to remind ourselves that absolutely nothing can be taken for granted. We in Germany have experienced (and suffered) for several times in the twentieth century how fast freedom and democracy can get lost. Mature, enlightened societies have not yet developed inside and outside of Europe. In many places the respect for the principles of good governance still must be instilled. It makes me proud that the Friedrich Naumann Foundation is actively engaged in those processes in more than sixty countries worldwide.



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