

Fall of the 'Berlin' Wall in 1989: Some Historical Introspections

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Abstract: *The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 had a profound impact on not only the German economy as a whole, but the economies on neighboring countries and countries around the world too. In the lead up to the collapse of the wall, Hungary and Czechoslovakia opened their borders and allowed East Germans to take refuge in Austria. The influx of people meant the economies of neighboring countries took a hit – whether it be a positive or negative one, the impact was likely to have been felt by everyone. In the years following World War 2, Germany was divided into four zones – the Soviet Union occupied the east, while the rest of Germany was divided amongst the United States, Great Britain and France. With hundreds of thousands of American soldiers stationed in West Germany and spending their American currency, the area flourished. The Deutsche Mark was eventually introduced in 1948 which further added to the region's growth. In the 1950s and 1960s, West Germany experienced a period of industrial growth and low inflation – only continuing to contribute to their prosperity. After 28 years, the Berlin Wall fell and East Germany was able to enjoy some of the luxuries of the West. The equivalent of around €1.6trillion was provided by the Federal Government and private German firms to bring the East in line with the West. While a great deal was invested in the infrastructure of East Germany after the Berlin Wall fell, the reunification of the regions also allowed large companies in the West to buy up property and businesses in the East. While this meant money was being flooded into the region by hungry entrepreneurs, it also meant that the West was being given an even greater role in the growth of Germany. Uwe Blien, a department head at the Federal Employment Agency, told the New Yorker, "most innovations today are done in the west, not because East Germans are not clever enough, but due to the process of unification, which gave the West German firms a larger role."*

Keywords: East Germany, West Germany, cold war, USSR, communism, capitalism, NATO, military zone, ideological barrier, western imperialism, Eastern Europe, industrial backwardness,

1. Objectives

- To narrate the genesis and development of Berlin wall
- The role of cold war in aggravating the European political culture
- Berlin wall and its implications for social life
- Germany after the fall of Berlin wall

Book review: In a latest book (2022) entitled by Alexandr Akimov and Gennadi Kazakevitch (eds.), "30 Years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall: Turns and Twists in Economies, Politics, and Societies in the Post - Communist Countries," summarised the event as "The year 2019 marks 30 years since the fall of the Berlin wall. This symbolic event led to German unification and the collapse of communist party rule in countries of the Soviet - led Eastern bloc. Since then, the post - communist countries of Central, Eastern and South - eastern Europe have tied their post - communist transition to deep integration into the West, including EU accession. Most of the states in Central and Eastern Europe have been able to relatively successfully transform their previous communist political and economic systems. In contrast, the non - Baltic post - Soviet states have generally been less successful in doing so. This book, with an internationally respected list of contributors, seeks to address and compare those diverse developments in communist and post - communist countries and their relationship with the West from various angles. The book has three parts. The first part addresses the progress of post - communist transition in comparative terms, including regional focus on Eastern and South Eastern Europe, CIS and Central Asia. The second part focuses on Russia and its foreign relationship, and internal politics. The third part explores in detail economies

and societies in Central Asia. The final part of the book draws some historical comparisons of recent issues in post - communism with the past experiences." The book brings diverse research fields into one assemblage, including economy, history, policy, law, crime, migration, media, ethnicity, consumption, and other areas of life. 30 Years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall gathers some interesting and significant chapters, written by authors with different experiences and background. The credibility of the content ... might be useful for those interested in the social, political, and economic twists and turns of communist and post - communist countries. (Mariusz Czepczynski, Eurasian Geography and Economics, December 12, 2022) "This edited volume is a timely reminder of the mixed consequences of the previous global ideological confrontation.

But by 1989, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, was convinced that the Soviet Union needed reform. He instituted disarmament and a winding down of Cold War confrontations in Europe as preconditions to his reforms. Gorbachev was also in favor of a relaxation of censorship of the press and of the central control of economic matters. This new policy of openness had already resulted in contested elections in Poland in May 1989 as well as reforms in Hungary. It was becoming increasingly clear that the Soviet Union was no longer prepared to support hardline Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Schabowski's press conference was the lead story on West Germany's two main news programs that night, at 7: 00 pm and 8: 00 pm, with the takeaway being that the Wall, while it still stood, was no longer the firm dividing line it had long been. Since the late 1950s, the two stations

broadcast to nearly all of East Germany, and the programs appeared there as well. That night, anchorman Hanns Joachim Friedrichs proclaimed, "This 9 November is a historic day. The GDR has announced that, starting immediately, its borders are open to everyone. The gates in the Wall stand open wide." (Time, 2019)

When Ronald Reagan addressed Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in June of 1987, few believed that in just two years later the Berlin Wall would actually be dismantled. It seemed like a permanent fixture, symbolizing the irreparable divide between the Cold War powers. But by 1990, all but a few traces of the wall were gone. The Berlin Wall came down on the evening of November 9, 1989, during a hastily arranged international press conference in East Berlin. Günter Schabowski, an official in East Germany's ruling Socialist Unity Party, ambled to the podium clutching some papers. Neither he nor the assembled journalists had gotten much sleep. Both had been preoccupied with the changes convulsing Communist Europe in the wake of Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev's liberal reforms summarized under the buzzwords 'Glasnost' (openness) and 'Perestroika' (restructuring). Over the summer, East German tourists in Hungary had already taken advantage of that country's newly relaxed border controls to evade their country's ban on travel to the West and poured through the border to Austria. More crowds of East Germans had been gathering at West German embassies in Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw to demand passage to West Germany. "By the time Schabowski mounted the podium, nearly 200, 000 East Germans had made their way to West Germany by these routes. In East Germany itself, the regime teetered as mass demonstrations demanded Gorbachev - style reforms. This protest movement continued to grow despite the resignation the previous month of Erich Honecker, the leader of East Germany since 1971, and the entire East German Politbüro only the day before. It was clear that East Germany was facing a crisis, but no one in the room that evening could have foreseen the historic drama that was about to unfold." (BBC Web edition, 1989)

Schabowski opened the conference, which was broadcast live on East German television, with a dull recounting of a recent Central Committee meeting. About an hour into the proceedings, an Italian journalist named Riccardo Ehrman asked a question about East Germany's travel ban. Under the circumstances the question might have been expected, but Schabowski seemed caught off guard. He fumbled through his papers, familiarizing himself with their contents on the spot. Other journalists sensed his vulnerability and began to pepper him with questions. Finally, reading haltingly from a paper he said he had just received on his way to the conference, Schabowski seemed to say that East Germans were free to travel via all transit points from East to West Germany, including West Berlin, "ab sofort" (effective immediately). Then he adjourned the conference. Clamoring reporters trailed Schabowski as he left the room. Was the Wall now truly open? Would East German border guards no longer shoot at those attempting to leave, as in the past? Would East German citizens be allowed to return after they left? Within hours such questions were swept aside by the tide of events Schabowski's comments unleashed. Aided by recent advances in cable and satellite technology, the

international media soon broadcast the news, along with scenes of joy at the Berlin Wall as people began to cross it unhindered for the first time in nearly thirty years. Near the streetcar stop of Friedrichstrasse, some in the crowd recognized Ehrman and hoisted him onto their shoulders, proclaiming him the Maueröffner, the man who opened the Wall. In less than a year, East Germany would crumble along with its Wall, and Germany would be reunified. (The Guardian, 1989)

To understand why the Wall fell it is necessary to understand why it was built. After World War II the victorious allies, known as the Four Powers, set up occupation zones in Germany—the Soviets in the East, the Americans, British, and French in the West. A special status was accorded to Berlin. It was located deep in the Soviet zone, but, like the country as a whole, was administered by the Four Powers. Originally conceived as a provisional arrangement until occupation ended, this division of Germany and Berlin soon solidified as the expedient wartime alliance between the Soviet Union and the Western powers gave way to the ideological and military confrontation of the Cold War. After the founding of two German states in 1949—the Federal Republic of Germany in the West and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East—Germany's erstwhile capital of Berlin became the neuralgic heart of the Cold War, its western half an outpost of freedom while its eastern half languished under the Soviet Union's repression of freedom in central and eastern Europe. (blogs. loc. gov)

Cold War, the open yet restricted rivalry that developed after World War II between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. The Cold War was waged on political, economic, and propaganda fronts and had only limited recourse to weapons. The term was first used by the English writer George Orwell in an article published in 1945 to refer to what he predicted would be a nuclear stalemate between "two or three monstrous super - states, each possessed of a weapon by which millions of people can be wiped out in a few seconds." It was first used in the United States by the American financier and presidential adviser Bernard Baruch in a speech at the State House in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1947. In the course of the 1960s and '70s, however, the bipolar struggle between the Soviet and American blocs gave way to a more - complicated pattern of international relationships in which the world was no longer split into two clearly opposed blocs. A major split had occurred between the Soviet Union and China in 1960 and widened over the years, shattering the unity of the communist bloc. In the meantime, western Europe and Japan achieved dynamic economic growth in the 1950s and '60s, reducing their relative inferiority to the United States. Less - powerful countries had more room to assert their independence and often showed themselves resistant to superpower coercion or cajoling. (Britannica)

The relationship between the former wartime Allies, although tense from as early as 1942, became increasingly strained as they struggled to reach agreement on the shape of post - war Europe. By 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union had begun to emerge as ideologically opposed 'superpowers', each wanting to exert their influence in the

post - war world. Germany became a focus of Cold War politics and as divisions between East and West became more pronounced, so too did the division of Germany. In 1949, Germany formally split into two independent nations: the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG or West Germany), allied to the Western democracies, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany), allied to the Soviet Union. In 1952, the East German government closed the border with West Germany, but the border between East and West Berlin remained open. East Germans could still escape through the city to the less oppressive and more affluent West.

On November 10, 1958, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev delivered a speech in which he demanded that the Western powers of the United States, Great Britain and France pull their forces out of West Berlin within six months. This ultimatum sparked a three year crisis over the future of the city of Berlin that culminated in 1961 with the building of the Berlin Wall. The division of Germany and its capital city of Berlin among the four victors of the Second World War was frozen in time by the onset of the Cold War despite the postwar agreements to unify the zones. The Berlin Wall (13 - 08 - 1961 to 09 - 11 - 1989) was an iconic symbol of the Cold War, was initially constructed starting on August 13, 1961 and dismantled in the weeks following November 9, 1989. Part of the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall was the most prominent part of the GDR border system. Conceived by the East German administration of Walter Ulbricht and approved by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, the wall was a long separation barrier between West Berlin and East Germany (the German Democratic Republic), which closed the border between East and West Berlin for a period of 28 years. It was built during the post - World War II period of divided Germany, in an effort to stop the drain of labour and economic output associated with the daily migration of huge numbers of professionals and skilled workers from East to West Berlin, and the attendant defections, which had political and economic consequences for the Communist bloc. It effectively decreased emigration (escapes - "Republikflucht" in German) from 2.5 million between 1949 and 1962 to 5, 000 between 1962 and 1989. However, the creation of the Wall was a propaganda disaster for East Germany and for the communist bloc as a whole. It became a key symbol of what Western powers regarded as Communist tyranny, particularly after the high - profile shootings of would - be defectors. Political liberalization in the late 1980s, associated with the decline of the Soviet Union, led to relaxed border restrictions in East Germany, culminating in mass demonstrations and the fall of the East German government. When a government statement that crossing of the border would be permitted was broadcast on November 9, 1989, masses of East Germans approached and then crossed the wall, and were joined by crowds of West Germans in a celebratory atmosphere. The Wall was subsequently destroyed by a euphoric public over a period of several weeks, and its fall was the first step toward German reunification, which was formally concluded on October 3, 1990.

The Wall was over 155 km (96 miles) long. In June 1962, work started on a second parallel fence up to 91 meters (100 yards) further in, with houses in between the fences torn

down and their inhabitants relocated. A 'No man's land' was created between the two barriers, which became widely known as the "death strip". It was paved with raked gravel, making it easy to spot footprints left by escapees; it offered no cover; it was mined and booby - trapped with tripwires; and, most importantly, it offered a clear field of fire to the watching guards. Over the years, the Wall went through four distinct phases: Basic wire fence (1961) Improved wire fence (1962 - 1965) Concrete wall (1965 - 1975) Grenzmauer 75 (Border Wall 75) (1975 - 1989) Satellite image of Berlin, with the wall's location marked in yellow. The "fourth generation wall", known officially as "Stützwandelement UL 12.11" (Retaining wall element UL 12.11), was the final and most sophisticated version of the Wall. Begun in 1975 and completed about 1980, it was constructed from 45, 000 separate sections of reinforced concrete, each 3.6 m (12 ft) high and 1.2 m (4 ft) wide, and cost 16, 155, 000 East German Marks. The top of the wall was lined with a smooth pipe, intended to make it more difficult for escapers to scale it. It was reinforced by mesh fencing, signal fencing, anti - vehicle trenches, barbed wire, over 116 watchtowers, and twenty bunkers. This version of the Wall is the one most commonly seen in photographs, and surviving fragments of the Wall in Berlin and elsewhere around the world are generally pieces of the fourth - generation Wall.

After Germany's defeat in World War II, the Allied Powers each took control of a section of the country. By 1949, two Germanys emerged from this occupation. The Federal Republic of Germany (commonly known as West Germany) was an independent, democratic nation formed out of the British, French, and American zones. The German Democratic Republic (or GDR, commonly known as East Germany), was a socialist state under the leadership of the Soviet Union. For nearly 30 years, Berlin was divided not just by ideology, but by a concrete barrier that snaked through the city, serving as an ugly symbol of the 'Cold War'. Erected in haste and torn down in protest, the Berlin Wall was almost 27 miles long and was protected with barbed wire, attack dogs, and 55, 000 landmines. But though the wall stood between 1961 and 1989, it could not survive a massive democratic movement that ended up bringing down the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) and spurring on the Cold War's end. The wall had its origins in the end of World War II, when Germany was carved into four pieces and occupied by Allied powers. Although Berlin was located about 90 miles east from the border between the GDR and West Germany and completely surrounded by the Soviet sector, the city was also originally divided into four quarters, but by 1947 was consolidated into east and west zones. Berlin lay deep within what became East Germany, but as the former capital of Hitler's empire, it received special treatment. The city itself was divided between the four Allied powers after the war, and so it, too, was divided into two parts once East and West Germany were created. East Berlin remained the capital of the GDR, while a new West German capital was established far to the west, in Bonn. West Berlin, formed from the British, French, and American sectors of the city, effectively became a tiny West German outpost in the midst of East Germany. It may be surprising to learn that during the first decade after the country's division, the border between East and West Berlin

remained completely open. Aside from using different currencies, East and West Berlin were relatively indistinguishable—city trams still ran between the two halves, and people could visit friends and relatives on the other side of the city.

In response to the erection of the Berlin Wall, a retired general, Lucius D. Clay, was appointed by Kennedy as his special advisor with ambassadorial rank. Clay had been the Military Governor of the US Zone of Occupation in Germany during the period of the Berlin Blockade and had ordered the first measures in what became the Berlin Airlift. He was immensely popular with the residents of West Berlin, and his appointment was an unambiguous sign that Kennedy would not compromise on the status of West Berlin. As a symbolic gesture, Kennedy sent Clay and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to West Berlin. They landed at Tempelhof Airport on the afternoon of Saturday, 19 August 1961 and were greeted enthusiastically by the local population. Between the late 1940s and 1961, more than 4 million East Germans and East Berliners took advantage of the relative ease of crossing from the Soviet zone in Berlin to one of the Western zones to “vote with their feet” not to live in the “workers’ paradise” that Moscow had been generous enough to impose upon them. This mass exodus was a huge embarrassment to both the Soviet and the East German governments. It also represented a major loss in skilled labor and in many of the professional occupations. The Soviets had been almost completely successful in keeping secret that West Berlin was to be sealed. On Saturday, August 12, 1961, 1, 573 East Germans crossed the line separating East and West Berlin and registered as refugees desiring to live in the West. They were the last group to be allowed to freely depart. The Soviets stretched barbed wire across the Brandenburg Gate facing the Western zones in the center of the city. (aier. org)

Outside of Berlin, though, the differences between the two countries were becoming increasingly stark. West Germany experienced an “economic miracle” or “Wirtschaftswunder” thanks to subsidies from the Western powers, while East Germany struggled economically. Over the course of the 1950s, several million people chose to leave for West Germany to seek jobs and a better quality of life. In response, the East German government—afraid of losing its labor force, but also ashamed of the increasing tide of emigration—imposed continuously stricter limits on travel. On the morning of August 13, 1961, Berliners awoke to find that overnight, soldiers had used barbed wire to completely close the border between the two halves of the city—catching almost everyone by surprise. No warning had been given: trams stopped in their tracks, people headed to shop or visit friends on the other side of the city were turned back, and deadly force was employed to keep people from crossing. Over the next 25 years, the GDR fortified this border by erecting a series of solid walls and barbed - wire barriers, as well as a “death strip” of cleared land with tripwires and mines, all to prevent people from escaping. Over the next four decades, more than 140 people were killed in connection with the Berlin Wall. The Berlin Wall not only prevented people from moving across the city—it also fundamentally changed how the two halves of the city functioned. Systems like water, electricity, sewer, and public

transportation had to be separated. Because the Berlin Wall went through the center of the city, urban development on each side began to focus elsewhere. What had been the city’s glittering, historic baroque city center was now located on the western outskirts of East Berlin, along the wall. It became virtually a forgotten wasteland, as new centers sprang up to the east and west. Over time, particular points along the Berlin Wall became well - known symbols of the division. Checkpoint Charlie, a border crossing between the former American and Soviet regions of the city, was famous for its sign that boldly stated, “You are leaving the American sector.” The section of wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin’s monumental baroque triumphal arch, was also often photographed. Potsdamer Platz, which had been a busy commercial center during the Weimar years but was left barren and desolate after heavy bombing in World War II, was one of the largest open areas next to the Berlin Wall. The viewing platform that was installed there on the western side became a popular destination for tourists.

As leaving East Germany became increasingly difficult, West Berlin, with its open internal border to East Berlin, remained one of the only exit routes for those who wished to emigrate. It also operated as a “show - window for the West” (that is, a beacon of Western consumerism and liberal democracy placed prominently alongside the capital of communist East Germany). Most importantly, Berlin was a major site of political confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union, whose leaders were threatening one another with nuclear war. The city became a heated microcosm of Cold War politics. In 1949, the two new Germanies were officially founded. Socialist East Germany was wracked by poverty and convulsed by labor strikes in response to its new political and economic systems. The brain drain and worker shortage that resulted prompted the GDR to close its border with West Germany in 1952, making it much harder for people to cross from “Communist” to “free” Europe. (Revisit National Geographic's reporting from West Berlin before the wall fell.) East Germans began fleeing through the more permeable border between East and West Berlin instead. At one point, 1, 700 people a day sought refugee status by crossing from East to West Berlin, and about 3 million GDR citizens went to West Germany via West Berlin between 1949 and 1961. In the wee hours of August 13, 1961, as Berliners slept, the GDR began building fences and barriers to seal off entry points from East Berlin into the western part of the city. The overnight move stunned Germans on both sides of the new border. As GDR soldiers patrolled the demarcation line and laborers began constructing a concrete wall, diplomatic officials and the militaries of both sides engaged in a series of tense standoffs. Eventually, East Germany erected 27 miles of concrete wall through the city. The Wall was actually two parallel walls punctuated with guard towers and separated by the “death strip,” which included guard dog runs, landmines, barbed wire, and various obstacles designed to prevent escape. East German soldiers monitored the barriers 24/7, conducted surveillance on West Berlin, and had shoot - to - kill orders should they spot an escapee.

The wall did not stop human flight. Instead, it forced people to be more creative. East Germans climbed over, tunneled under, and flew over. They jumped from windows of buildings along the border—which later were demolished. GDR residents used balloons, built submarines, and created secret compartments in cars. An estimated 100, 000 people tried to escape, and some 5, 000 made it. Many of those who failed in their lunge for freedom paid a high price. Tens of thousands of East Germans were imprisoned for Republikflucht. Around 200 were killed—no one knows how many for sure—challenging the Berlin Wall. Include those murdered while attempting to cross the border elsewhere, and the death toll probably exceeded 1, 000. The first Berliner to die in an escape attempt was 58 - year - old 'Ida Siekmann', who on August 22, 1961, jumped from a window in her building onto a West Berlin road (the area later was cleared and turned into a "death strip"). Two days later the first Berliner was murdered by the GDR authorities: 24 - year - old tailor Guenter Litfin was shot while attempting to swim across the River Spree. The true horror of a system that imprisoned an entire people was most dramatically illustrated almost a year later, on August 17, 1962, when East German border agents shot an 18 - year - old bricklayer, Peter Fechter, as he sought to surmount the wall. They left the conscious Fechter to bleed out in full view of residents in West Berlin. He was the 27th Berliner to die seeking freedom. The carnage continued year in and year out, even as the Soviet Empire began to implode. The GDR government, at this point under ruthless hardliner Erich Honecker, continued to murder people who simply wanted to live free. On February 6, 1989, 20 - year - old Chris Gueffroy became the last East German to be murdered while fleeing. He worked in a restaurant but was about to be drafted into the army. He and his friend Christian Gaudian mistakenly thought the order to shoot had been lifted. While climbing the last fence along a canal, he was shot and killed. Gaudian was injured, arrested, and sentenced to three years in prison. But he was released on bail in September 1989 and sent to West Berlin the following month. The four border guards who fired on Gueffroy and Gaudian received awards, but they, along with two Communist Party officials, were later tried in a reunited Germany (ultimately spending little or no time in prison). One more Berliner was to die. An electrical engineer, 32 - year - old Winfried Freudenberg, used a home - made balloon to flee. It crashed on March 8, killing him. By then communism was disintegrating in Poland and Hungary. When the latter began pulling down its border fence with Austria in May, the Iron Curtain had a huge hole. East Germans began flooding out.

People did try to escape initially, they fled from houses right along the Wall; later, those houses were emptied and turned into fortifications for the Wall itself. Others plotted riskier escapes through tunnels, on hot air balloons, and even via train. Between 1961 and 1989, over 5, 000 people made successful escapes. Others were not so lucky; at least 140 were killed or died while trying to cross the Wall. On the night of November 9, 1989, East Berlin party official Günter Schabowski announced upcoming travel reforms in response to the protests, but botched the message so badly it sounded as if the GDR had in fact opened its borders. Thousands of East Berliners flooded toward border crossings along the Wall, where confused guards eventually opened the gates.

As East Berliners pushed through, tens of thousands of West Berliners met them in a massive outpouring of emotion and celebration. As they celebrated with champagne, music, and tears, Berliners began to literally tear down the wall with sledge hammers and chisels. Less than a month later, the GDR collapsed entirely, and in 1990, Germany reunified.

The Soviet Union followed suit, and today the fall of the Berlin Wall is seen as a symbol of the end of the Cold War. Today, a double row of cobblestones marks the place where the wall once stood. What the Berlin Wall epitomized was the 20th - century idea of the individual as the property of the state. Behind that Wall the East German government told the people where to live and work, what goods they could consume, and what enjoyments and entertainments they would be permitted. The state determined what they read and watched and said. And they could not leave the country — either for a visit or forever — unless it served the goals and interests of their political masters. And if anyone attempted to leave without permission, he could be shot and left to die, alone and helpless, with others forced to stand by as horrified observers. Freedom in all its forms — to speak, write, associate, and worship as we want; to pursue any occupation, profession, or private enterprise that inclination and opportunity suggests to us; and to visit, live, and work where our dreams and desires lead us to look for a better life — is a precious thing. "The history of the Berlin Wall and the collectivist ideology behind it should remind us of how important a loss any of our freedoms can be, as we determine in what direction — toward greater individual liberty and free enterprise or more government command and control — we wish our country and the world to move in the 21st century. " Germans refer to the entire transformation—from the Berlin wall's collapse to German reunification—with a gentle euphemism, "die Wende, " or "the changeover. " This simple word embodies the massive changes that occurred after the wall came down, including opening the Stasi's huge archives to the public. Since 1989 many scientists who suffered behind the wall have taken stock of this past. "Under the GDR [the previous, communist German Democratic Republic] everyone had a job. You stayed in that job. You felt part of a group. And that's what the older easterners who come here today tell us: 'I miss the feeling of being in a group at work. ' They lost that feeling after the Wall came tumbling down, " Haley said. Hundreds of state - owned companies were sold off to the private sector after reunification and many subsequently collapsed because they could not compete in a market economy with a much stronger currency. Many of the workers who lost their jobs felt they were the victims of the new, heartless, West German owners. "The firm I worked for had a staff of 2, 500, " said Dieter, a factory worker, "The new owners just bulldozed the plant. Why? Because we were making the same sort of things that they were making in the West. They just wanted our contacts and order books. But as for the staff here ... they didn't give a damn about us. "

On Nov.9, 1989, in East Germany, Holger Wenschuh already had cause to celebrate. He was nearing the end of his post - grad chemistry studies at the Friedrich - Schiller University of Jena, and it was his 25th birthday. But before the day was out, Wenschuh would have another reason to

party. "I was in the basement of our dorm, celebrating my birthday with a couple of friends and somebody came in, shouting out: 'You won't believe it! The wall is gone. And people are dancing on the wall!'" Wenschuh said. "This was it. We knew this was a big event. So the party went on until early in the morning." Film footage of people dancing and cheering on the Berlin Wall went around the world, along with another more sobering image: a long cavalcade of Trabants, the noisy and polluting East German car, snaking into West Berlin, belching plumes of acrid black smoke and heralding an historic exodus. Hundreds of thousands of Easterners were to flee to the West, not only because of the political repression and human rights abuses they'd suffered under communist rule, but also because of dire economic conditions in the East. "The productivity of the East was maybe 25% of the productivity of the West. And the wages were much much lower. The pensions were much much lower, too. Life expectancy was 10 years lower than in the West," said Christian Hirte, the government minister responsible for the eastern states. The East German currency — the 'ostmark' — was virtually worthless and the easterners demanded West German deutsche marks in exchange.

The people in the East said: 'If the West German mark doesn't come to us, we will go to the West.' And the people did," said Hirte. To prevent East Germany emptying, the West Germans agreed a one - for - one currency conversion rate and began ploughing billions into rebuilding East German infrastructure. "Highways, railroads, sewage systems, public buildings were all in urgent need of repair, if not reconstruction," said professor Reint Gropp, president of the Halle Institute for Economic Research. "If you drove around East Germany just after the wall came down, it was frightening. The roads were at the same level as before the Second World War. In fact, you could still see war damage in many parts of East Germany. That's damage that had gone unrepaired for more than 40 years," Gropp said. Since 1989, West German taxpayers have poured more than \$2 trillion into the East, repairing the infrastructure, paying pensions and welfare and supporting new companies. Since 1989, the unemployment rate of the East Germany region has roughly halved. According to the New Yorker, the state - owned banking group KfW "reported that the differences between eastern and western Germany, as measured by factors such as per - capita GDP and employment rates, are finally within the range of regional differences found in other industrialised countries like Canada, Japan and the United States." However, there is slight controversy around the question of whether or not the East and West regions are now on par with each other in terms of economic growth and the financial situations of their citizens. Some will say that yes, they are now on equal terms and the East has managed to catch up to the West. They claim that while there was once a stark contrast in terms of the infrastructure and appearance, the regions are now almost indistinguishable. However, many others will argue that the West still holds a vast amount of the German wealth. They say that the East has not yet managed to catch up to the prosperity of the West and that it's still possible to tell which side of Germany someone has come from based on their background and upbringing. Some also argue that East Germany will never be able to catch up to the West. While

significant improvements have been made to the area and the people are flourishing, the West continues to grow too—meaning it may be impossible for both sides to become entirely equal.

Anna Funder came to Berlin from Australia to meet the Wall's veterans, and while the subjectivity in Stasiland isn't to everyone's taste, I marvel at her graceful interweaving of interviews. From politically repressed musicians such as the late Klaus Renft, to retired Stasi officers mourning the glory days of their Normannenstrasse fortress, East Berliners tell what it was like and is like in a book that runs the gamut from Potsdam to Prenzlauer Berg and from amusement to despair. East is east, but the "East of the West" was — and remains — gritty, working - class Kreuzberg. Two novels set there capture the days immediately preceding that fateful 9 November. When Garton Ash returned to Berlin 15 years after living there and requested his Stasi binder, it was passed to him with the words: "You have a very interesting file." Thereby hangs a tale, and we join him in disinterring the entries, skipping between his former life as a research student and later confrontations with the friends and colleagues who had once informed on him. Shortly before Garton Ash revisited Berlin, Kaminer arrived, emigrating from Russia to later become Berlin's most famous DJ and then a best - selling author. His gently sardonic Russian Disco is a collection of wry sketches best summed up by its subtitle, Tales of Everyday Madness on the Streets of Berlin. This East Berlin is closest to the trendy but still edgy east side of the city as it exists today. Witty, angry, lyrical and moving, these books — like the few pieces of that heartless barrier still standing in Berlin — make the oppressive Wall real and its fall a cause for celebration not to be missed.

Little is left of the Wall in Berlin, which was destroyed almost everywhere, except for three locations: an 80 meter (300 ft) section near Potsdamer Platz, a longer section along the Spree River near the Oberbaumbrücke nicknamed East Side Gallery, and a third section in the north at Bernauer Straße, which was turned into a memorial in 1999. Even the parts that are left standing no longer accurately represent the Wall's original appearance: they are badly damaged (since so many people attempted to pick up "original Berlin Wall" pieces), and today graffiti is prevalent on the eastern side of the Wall, which obviously would not have been possible while the Wall was actually guarded by the armed soldiers of East Germany. Previously, graffiti was exclusively on the western side. Fragments of the Wall both with and without certificates of authenticity are a staple on the online auction service eBay as well as German souvenir shops and are found on mantle pieces and desktops throughout the world. Even people in the US and China wanted a fragment of this time period. Fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a private museum rebuilt a 200 metre (656 ft) section close to Checkpoint Charlie, although not in the location of the original wall. They also erected over 1, 000 crosses in memory of those who had died attempting to flee to the West. The memorial was installed in October 2004 and demolished in July 2005. Even now, some years after reunification, there is still talk in Germany of continuing cultural differences between East and West Germans (colloquially Ossi and Wessi), sometimes described as "Mauer im Kopf" ("The wall in the head").

The fall of the Wall did not entirely end Germany's division. Germans still speak of a Mauer in den Köpfen, a wall in people's minds. Thirty years after joining one of the world's most advanced economies practically overnight, many eastern Germans continue to feel like second - class citizens as they grapple with rapid social and economic change. This sense of alienation has contributed to the growing appeal of populist movements in the region. In the West, many have long resented the billions of euros in subsidies that have flowed to the East since reunification and wonder if it was a good thing after all. These mutual doubts and resentments show that Germans continue to struggle with the trauma of national division and the legacy of the Wall that so brutally reinforced it. (blogs. loc. gov) Though the "fall" of the Berlin Wall did not mean its complete physical destruction, the consequences of its opening were indeed lasting. Gorbachev agreed on negotiations with the U. S. President George H. W. Bush and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to permit the reunification of the two German states, almost completely on West German terms. On a global level, the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the symbolic end of the Cold War, famously prompting the political scientist Francis Fukuyama to declare it the "end of history." (Time, 2019)

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 laid the groundwork for new institutions, new states, and, in some cases, new conflicts. In the more than three decades since Germany's reunification and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the European Union (EU) has taken shape but suffered growing pains along the way. A look back at the postcommunist years recalls the swift expansion of the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the mounting challenge Russia posed in response to both. The continent has had to grapple with economic crises, migration pressures, and rising nationalism, as well as the ongoing repercussions of the COVID - 19 pandemic. Transatlantic relations have also become a source of strain, with the core tenets of U. S. - EU ties coming into question amid new divisions over tax, energy, and defense policy. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union accelerated the push for deeper European integration, a project that had begun in earnest in the wake of World War II, with the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and the European Economic Community in 1958. The EU was formally established by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Maastricht established a framework for a common currency and a common defense and security policy; the 2007 Lisbon Treaty created the EU's current structure. Under these treaties, the twenty - seven member states agreed to pool their sovereignty and delegate many decision - making powers to the EU. Among other changes, this allowed for the creation of a passport - free zone, known as the Schengen Area. The free movement of people is one of the bloc's "four freedoms," along with that of goods, services, and capital. (cfr. org, 2022)

The reunification of Germany paved the way for former Eastern Bloc countries to join the EU. Between 2004 and 2007, EU membership jumped from fifteen countries to twenty - seven, with the addition of Central European nations including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, as well as the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and

Lithuania. Many policymakers hoped this would fulfill a vision of a united Europe, "whole and free," as first articulated in 1989 by U. S. President George H. W. Bush. But enlargement has since slowed as the bloc has struggled with economic crises, migration pressures, and rising nationalism. Croatia has been the only new admission since 2007, joining in 2013. Turkey's candidacy, already contentious due to concerns over the country's size, its human rights record, and the stability of its economy, has come to a halt amid President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's growing authoritarianism. Further expansion efforts, largely focused on the Balkans, have stalled over France and Bulgaria's opposition to applications from Albania and North Macedonia; in 2021, EU states reaffirmed their commitment to eventually welcoming six new Balkan members, but the timeline remains unclear. Anxiety about Germany's role in Europe resurfaced after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Despite the optimism of the time, some Western leaders opposed German reunification, fearing it would once again make Germany a dominant power. Indeed, slow growth driven by the costs of reunification was soon countered by extensive labor market reforms and a manufacturing boom that made Germany the undisputed economic powerhouse of the continent. Many analysts have seen the creation of the EU in large part as an effort to constrain German influence, by tethering the country's economic strength to a common currency and a supranational alliance. That dominance has increased German leadership in European affairs but also led to new tensions. Under Chancellor Angela Merkel, in office from 2005 to 2021, Germany drew the ire of many crisis - stricken states by insisting on strict austerity policies and structural reforms as a condition for EU bailouts. In 2015, Merkel upended European politics by allowing more than one million refugees from Africa and the Middle East to enter Germany, sparking a debate over migration policy that continues to rage. (cfr. org, 2022)

Birchy's Berlin offers one - of - a - kind Berlin tours and sightseeing events. We have a great team of expert guides that we think are some of the best in Berlin. Our walking tours are created, researched, and designed by Aaron Birchenough and this awesome team of Berlin history professionals. Aaron is an archaeologist and professional tour guide. He has combined thousands of hours of research, amazing local partners, and other Berlin experts, to offer a very unique, fun and original Berlin experience. These Berlin tours and sightseeing events can only be found here! (birchysberlintours. com). Even today, tourists are made to experience the past of the Berlin in a 'Berlin tour' and here one can "See the Berlin Wall Memorial and former Death Strip, See the location of Tunnel 57 and 29, two of the most successful tunnels dug under the wall, Take a ghost train ride from the Cold War years and discover how people lived in the divided city for almost 50 years. Learn about the Palace of Tears, a former East German transit building, Visit the Admirals Palast - location where the East German SED political party was formed, Learn about the "Stasi" and their methods of torture and surveillance, Go to the Church of Reconciliation, hear why the old church was blown up in 1985" (insidertour. com). According to Ronald Reagan, "We welcome change and openness; for we believe that freedom and security go together, that the advance of human liberty

can only strengthen the cause of world peace. There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace. General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this Wall!" (The Telegraph, 1989).

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