

What Europe Must Learn From the Berlin Wall

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The fall of the Berlin Wall on Nov. 9, 1989, was the most visibly symbolic event to have signaled the looming end of the Cold War. A quarter of a century after this momentous event, it is important to think about the aftermath of the collapse of communism and what has since developed in Europe.

Official speeches about the event often refer to the end of the Cold War and the evils of communism. European integration and the development of a European superstate is mostly viewed as a reasonable alternative to a divided continent. It is assumed that the nation state was the source of all evil in the past century and that now European Union officials have found the key to peace and wisdom. The EU's leadership and bureaucrats utilize all the political tools and practices at their disposal to block any discussion about alternative structures.

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of the European construct.

Earlier this month, on Nov. 2, I attended an event in Berlin's famous Adlon Hotel. All attendees of the discussions, including the British, American and French ambassadors to Germany, praised the achievements of 1989 and hailed the freedom that emerged through the break in history. Yet, there was no reference to Europe's current problems such as untenable levels of youth unemployment in Southern Europe, increasing debt burdens and shrinking economies. Moreover, no consideration was given to the utterly flawed post-1989 financial system. All three ambassadors gave standard talking points, such as the need to implement structural reform and win over youth, and a shared interest in the well-being of the euro zone and the EU as the only guarantors of peace and cooperation in Europe.

The peoples of Eastern Europe freed themselves from regimes that told them its way was the only way to prosperity and peace. Out of the ashes of the communist regimes arose new countries and a new Europe that had every chance to build newer, freer and more just societies.

Yet, old sentiments and geo-strategic rationale returned. Former French President Francois Mitterrand gave his agreement to German reunification on the condition that the Deutsche mark was to be abolished in favor of a single European currency. The intent was to keep Germany in chains and buffer its economic might. France expected Germany to remain economically strong but politically weak enough for France to remain the leader in the European Community. This did not work because it was an attempt to defy economic laws and political interests. The idea of creating a political union by economic means and engineering a European identity is as absurd as the Soviet wish to create a socialist superhuman. The more the EU seems to integrate, the more regional identities seem to surface.

The financial crisis of 2008 triggered an avalanche of events that displayed all the flaws and erroneous assumptions about the euro zone: the lack of currency exchange rates, the inability to depreciate one's own currency and the failure of centralized government.

A striking parallel between today's EU and the East German regime is that for many years the regime promised that things would finally get better. Throughout the euro-zone crisis, we have heard that it is time for deeper integration and more power transfers to Brussels. Yet, nothing has improved. The Eastern Bloc eventually defaulted on its debt, most particularly East Germany, which had been dependent on loans from West Germany since the 1970s. Today's European rescue packages and bailouts are driving up debt and liabilities for the European taxpayer.

The euro currency is the most visible problem of the EU, but certainly not the only one. The Soviet and East German regimes survived on non-convertible currencies for many years. Although two consequences of this was the deprivation of goods and no access to foreign currencies, their local currencies endured much longer than many imagined possible.

The real problem lies within the increasingly apparent democratic deficit of the European construct and the treatment of people who desire alternatives. The fierce protection of the

status quo is the reason populist parties gain power. Ultimately, it will be the dogmatic ignorance of the mainstream parties that will cause social unrest and economic collapse.

Just as the communists in Eastern Europe did not want their world view destroyed, the current European system is supported by and produces people that cannot and do not want to see a different and more democratic Europe.

Dispossession in communist Eastern Europe was carried out by force and radical physical coercion. Dispossession in the EU and the euro zone happens with extremely low or negative interest rates, bailout packages, interbank loan liabilities and guarantees that are not followed by true economic recovery and innovation.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain in Europe ended the dictatorship by the proletariat as well as a dangerous and dehumanizing ideology. The heroes and achievements of those times must be praised and cherished. However, we must never assume that just because the communism of the Cold War is over and Europe reunified, freedom has been guaranteed.

The Peaceful Revolution of 1989 must remain a triumph for the victims of communism as well as a warning to the world about the cause of discontent and decay within a political system.

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