

**The Fall of the Berlin Wall
20 Years on**

**Implications for German Foreign Policy
in Light of the Recent Election Results**

**Reception on November 9th, 2009
German Embassy Kuala Lumpur**

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Your Excellency Ambassador Dr. Günter Gruber,
German Ambassador to Malaysia

Your Excellency The Honourable Senator Kohilan Pillay,
Deputy Foreign Minister

Your Excellency The Honourable Datuk Lee Chee
Leong, Deputy Foreign Minister

Honourable Members of the Parliament

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all allow me to say how delighted I am to be here in Malaysia once again - here with you, among friends and partners of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you - Ambassador Gruber - for hosting this evening. Thank you. Your hospitality is deeply appreciated.

I would also like to thank all of you for coming.

Mr. Harald Klein, the head of the Foundation's International Policy Department, asked me to convey his deepest regrets. Because of unforeseen events and important business in Berlin he is unable to join us tonight. Please bear with me. I will try to fill the void.

Allow me to turn to the topic of the evening, the fall of the Berlin Wall and Germany's Foreign Policy.

Exactly twenty years ago today, the border crossings between East- and West-Berlin, starting with the crossing at Bornholmer Strasse, were opened.

I admit that when we planned for this evening we were not fully aware of this historical significance but the timing could not have been better.

I find it extremely moving to read the chronicle of events that unfolded on this very day 20 years ago. Hour by hour you come closer to the errors of the press conference with Guenter Schabowski, where he made those confused statements which led to the opening of the borders.

In November 1989 I was in Rome, Italy, working for the United Nations, physically far away from those breathtaking events. But I was also emotionally distant from it.

As a native of Trier, a small town on the Mosel river in the far west of Germany, I admit to my indifference towards East Germany. My family had no relations in the east. French was more familiar to me than a German spoken with a Saxonian accent. I felt at home in Luxemburg, Nancy and Strassbourg but not in Magdeburg, Leipzig or Dresden.

I personally never believed that in my lifetime there could be anything like re-unification. I did not in the least expect that the leaders of the East German socialist

state would surrender power without a major fight or that they could fade away, just like that.

Growing up after the war, I was brought up as a good European, so why care about the east.

But of course while in Rome we discussed the events in Germany over those last months of 1989 before the fall of the wall. I remember that one of my young German colleagues was so excited that in fact he jumped on the next plane to be there in Berlin with the many celebrating Germans and sit on that wall which had divided east from west, freedom from servitude.

I am sure many of you also still recall where you were and what you did at the time. November 9th, 1989 – we just saw it in the movie - was one of those rare, special days - a day which one simply does not forget. The joy of the people in the streets of Berlin was just overwhelming and contagious, a wonderful sight, the triumph of peoples' will over repression by the state.

Other 9th of November in German history carried a rather sombre message not always to our liking.

I would like to remind you that on November 9th 1848 the first German experiment with democracy came to an end when King Friedrich William IV of Prussia dissolved the Prussian parliament.

It was again a 9th of November when in 1918 a social democrat, Philipp Scheidemann, proclaimed the first German republic from the balcony of the Reichstag, today again the seat of the German parliament. This was the beginning of the so-called Weimar republic, the

second German experiment with democracy, which ended in chaos, terror and defeat.

And again in the night of a 9th of November, this time in 1938, the Nazi henchmen unleashed terror and destruction by killing fellow Germans of Jewish faith and ransacking their properties. The night is remembered as “Reichskristallnacht” or “the night of broken crystal” and it was destined to shame all of us Germans for eternity.

Prior to ‘89 the separation of Germany – and in particular the separation of Berlin – symbolized a bipolar world-structure: A deep division between two blocks, between East and West, between Communism and the “Free World”. The Berlin Wall was the focal point and symbol of this divide.

Back then, Hans-Dietrich Genscher was Germany’s Interior-, and later its Foreign Minister. He is one of the most respected politicians within the ranks of Germany’s Liberal Party, the FDP, the “Free Democratic Party”. During the Cold War Era, Mr. Genscher helped to shape Germany’s policy of de-escalation. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, as a result of his skilful diplomacy, Mr. Genscher became known as the “Architect” of German re-unification.

For decades, this re-unification had been a vision, some called it a dream. On November 9th, 1989 this vision, this dream - became true, became a reality.

It is a truly historic date. Historic because the fall of the Berlin Wall not only reunited Germany, it also marked the end of the Cold War. 1989 changed the world’s political architecture. It paved the way to Freedom and

Democracy for millions of people in Eastern Europe. Today, they enjoy much better lives with higher living standards, and better social services. They are free to travel, air their opinions and enjoy the rule of law.

While this global transition took place, one underlying question begged an answer: Given these fundamental changes, which order will emerge? The collapse of the Soviet Union, shifted the frameworks of many countries. The United States remained as the only superpower; Europe needed direction. The answer lay in accelerated integration, in a much closer European Union.

Post-war German Foreign Policy has been and continues to be marked by one fundamental principle – cooperation.

Looking at the past 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany has played constructive roles in the United Nations, in NATO and in Europe. We value international cooperation and multi-lateral approaches. In Europe, Germany and several other countries went from being hated enemies to becoming trusted partners and friends.

European integration – in other words regionalism – brought immense benefits: stability, security, economic prosperity, freedom and democracy.

It was not easy. The war in the Balkans reminded us how badly things can go wrong. And today, “Project EU” is by no means without challenges. The de facto division of Cyprus and the question whether or not Turkey should eventually become an EU-member are difficult issues.

And, in Europe's neighbourhood, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians continues to be unresolved.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Twelve years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 9/11-terror-attacks brought us another historic day - this time, a horrible one. Since then, terrorism and the war against it have dominated world politics. The fight against terrorism was, is and will remain an important element of German Foreign Policy. That said, Germany did not agree with some of the decisions that were made in Washington when US President George W. Bush was in office.

Germany did not participate in the US-led invasion of Iraq. And when pictures of Abu Ghraib surfaced, Germany – along with many other countries –spoke up. At the time the US, a very good friend, temporarily lost its compass. - A compass which must ensure that Human Rights are sacred, universal and must not be suspended under any circumstances. The close partnership between Germany and the US was tested. It was never in doubt, though, as we all know that without US support there would not have been a free Germany in the West in the first place.

Fortunately, US-voters have made sure their country is back on the right path, a path that values the dignity of every human being.

Sadly, the war against terror is far from over. Germany contributes to the international military mission in Afghanistan. It is in our interest to make sure that

Afghanistan will not become a hideout for terrorists again.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin-Wall, Germany once again has a liberal politician, Guido Westerwelle, as foreign minister. Frankly, it feels good that somebody who as a student was supported by our Foundation, has made it to the top of Germany's foreign office. Mr. Westerwelle has also become Vice Chancellor. As you know, this (and more) is an outcome of the recent election in Germany. The election result brought our party back into government as a junior coalition partner.

The Free Democratic Party received 14.6% of the votes, our best result ever. Needless to say, we are very happy. Not only the foreign minister, but also the ministers of justice, economy, health and development cooperation are now Liberals.

The FDP has been a junior partner in several coalitions in the past. In fact, since 1945, no German party has spent as much time in government as the FDP.

However, this election in September also showed us that East and West Germany though grown together, are still deeply divided. The electoral map demonstrates these divisions. The former communist party of East Germany in its new incarnation as "Die Linke" is nowhere more successful than in East Germany.

Minister Westerwelle will continue to regard cooperation as the core of German Foreign Policy. Allow me to quote

from the Preamble of the coalition agreement, which was signed by Mr. Westerwelle as the head of our party.

Quote “We recognize our international Responsibility. We count on international cooperation. Human Rights, the Rule of Law and a market based economy define our actions in Germany and abroad.” End of Quote.

Germany’s new government recognizes that economically, the world’s most dynamic region is Asia. Stated will in another assertion from the coalition agreement is:

Quote “We will promote and support existing approaches towards regional cooperation, especially ASEAN and the EU-ASEM cooperation.” End of quote.

Regionalism has been good for Germany and for Europe. I am convinced that regionalism will be good for Asia. ASEAN is paving the way. The prospect of an ASEAN Community, including free trade, is exciting. The fact that a Human Rights Commission has been put in place, is an important step. You here in Malaysia, you have been part in this groundbreaking process.

What can we make of these events on November 9th, 1989?

Well, first, all the foreign policy experts in the West were taken by surprise when East Germany suddenly collapsed. Our political establishment was not prepared and had to come up with a new plan fast. For the communists in the east it was a tragedy. The collapse of communism was a black swan phenomenon.

In hindsight we have the privilege to connect individual and isolated events, and thereby create a chain, an explanation, and all of a sudden phenomena we did not comprehend at the time seem to make sense, ex-post at least.

Second, in the first peaceful revolution in German history the East Germans liberated themselves from bondage without help from outside and they deserve our respect and admiration.

And third, disaster was only narrowly avoided because no direct contacts and communication channels existed between the leaders of the respective countries. We have to avoid these risks and establish as many such direct channels as possible. We have to make our political leaders to talk to each other.

If asked to put what I observed from the fall of the Berlin Wall into one statement, I would propose this one:

Throughout history there have been tyrants and dictatorships, and for a time, they seem to be invincible but in the end they always fail, the people's hunger for freedom, their quest for liberty, will always prevail. Freedom and cooperation will ultimately triumph over curtailment of liberty, suppression and bondage. And this should make us hopeful and optimistic in the current situation of the 21st century.

I thank you very much for your attention.

This was my speech; now please allow me some personal remarks related to the hand over of project directorship in Malaysia.