

WOLFGANG MUELLER, MICHAEL GEHLER,
ARNOLD SUPPAN, EDS.

The Revolutions of 1989: A Handbook

ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
PHILOSOPHISCH-HISTORISCHE KLASSE
INSTITUT FÜR NEUZEIT- UND ZEITGESCHICHTSFORSCHUNG

INTERNATIONALE GESCHICHTE/
INTERNATIONAL HISTORY

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UND
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BAND 2

Verlag der
Österreichischen Akademie
der Wissenschaften



Wien 2015

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Vorgelegt von k. M. MICHAEL GEHLER
in der Sitzung am 27. Juni 2014

Dieses Forschungsprojekt wurde unterstützt von:

Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur
Gemeinde Wien, Kultur
Republik Österreich, Bundesministerium für Europa, Integration, Äußeres

BUNDESSTIFTUNG
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REPUBLIK ÖSTERREICH

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Wien
Satz: Hapra GmbH, Puchenu
Druck und Bindung: Prime Rate kft., Budapest
<http://hw.oeaw.ac.at/7638-1>
<http://verlag.oeaw.ac.at>

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors would like to thank: Mikhail Gorbachev, Václav Havel†, Helmut Kohl and Condolezza Rice for supporting this project; the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Austrian Ministry of European and International Affairs, the City of Vienna, Austria, the Stiftung Aufarbeitung der Geschichte des SED-Regimes, Germany, for sponsoring the project conference and the editing of the volume; Jiří Dienstbier†, Rainer Eppelmann, Ferenc Glatz, Tadeusz Mazowiecki†, Vadim Medvedev, Horst Teltschik and Philip Zelikow for sharing their recollections at the conference; Cynthia Peck-Kubaczek and Stanley Hale for language editing; David Schriffl, Vera Machat, Ulrike Rack, Lisa Mayer, Alexandra Neubauer-Czettel and Clemens Reisner for editorial support; the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, and all the authors for contributing to this volume.

WOLFGANG MUELLER

THE REVOLUTIONS OF 1989: AN INTRODUCTION

In the May 1988 issue of *Szkola*, a Wrocław underground paper, an anonymous commentator wrote: “I think the end of our era is already close at hand.”¹ The unknown author with the pseudonym Nobelek Rusz-Czkash turned out to be among the few who correctly predicted the life expectancy of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. While since the 1920s there had been announcements of the end of Soviet communism,² neither the most prominent Eastern nor Western prophets had foreseen the sudden and momentous events that within weeks would wash away seemingly unshakable regimes in a number of countries and with them the postwar international order in Europe, thus bringing to a close what soon would be called the “short” twentieth century.³

This is not to say that there were no analysts who perceived the signs of the impending unrest. Among those who saw it coming was Georgii Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev’s advisor, who in October 1988 predicted a serious crisis in Eastern Europe caused “by concrete factors rooted in the underlying economic and political model of socialism that was first developed in our country.”⁴ To be sure, in early 1988 US intelligence also forecasted “a moderate chance” for popular upheaval in Poland, Romania, and Hungary; however, “in extremis,” the intelligence estimate saw “no reason to doubt” Gorbachev’s willingness to “intervene to preserve party rule and decisive Soviet influence in the region.”⁵

Perhaps the younger generation of dissidents (to which the commentator Nobelek Rusz-Czkash supposedly belonged), those who distributed leaflets and

¹ The author would like to thank Maximilian Graf and Arnold Suppan for their comments.

Quoted in Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 213.

² Among the authors who predicted the downfall of Soviet communism, be it for political, economic, national, or demographic reasons, are thinkers as diverse as Ludwig von Mises, George Orwell, Andrei Amalrik, Marian Dziewanowski, Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Emmanuel Todd. Cf. Seymour Martin Lipset and Gyorgy Bence, “Anticipations of the Failure of Communism,” *Theory and Society* 23, no. 2 (April 1994): 169–210, 177–81.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

⁴ Quoted in Mark Kramer, “The Demise of the Soviet Bloc,” *Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 4 (December 2011): 788–854, 811.

⁵ Director of National Intelligence, “Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe Under Gorbachev,” National Intelligence Estimate 11/12-9-88, May 1988, in Benjamin B. Fischer, ed., *At Cold War’s End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989–1991* ([Washington, DC]: Central Intelligence Agency, 1999), 151–77, 155, 171.

staged demonstrations, got it right by sheer luck. Perhaps they wanted to believe that their seemingly absurd and hopeless oppositional activities were not in vain. Perhaps people on the ground were more sensitive to societal dynamics and the shifts of popular sentiment than some of the more prominent dissidents—a phenomenon that became clear with regard to the East German oppositional elite's attitude toward German unity in early 1990. Historian Charles Maier was certainly correct in analyzing that the failure of many to predict the revolutions of 1989 and the collapse of state communism was, in some way, a “failure of democratic faith,” a failure to believe that democracy was, in the long run, strong enough to topple a coercive system.⁶

There is no consensus among historians and social scientists about whether revolutions are per se predictable or not. Unpredictability and a sudden rupture in normal or familiar practices of politics and society are often quoted as features of revolutions. Whether the East European revolutions of 1989 qualify as such, depends, as Charles Tilly remarked, upon how broadly the term is defined.⁷ More recent revolutionary theory defines a revolution as “an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and non-institutionalized actions that undermine authorities.”⁸ In this sense, the East European upheavals of 1989 are acknowledged by political scientist Vladimir Tismaneanu as a “series of political revolutions that led to the decisive and irreversible transformation of the existing order. Instead of autocratic, one-party systems, the revolutions created emerging pluralist polities. The revolutions allowed the citizens of the former ideologically driven despotisms (closed societies) to recover their main human and civil rights and to engage in the building of open societies.”⁹

In the political and social sciences it is said that as soon as a closed society starts to open, its leaders begin to lose control. More than a century before 1989, Alexis de Tocqueville had concluded from his studies on *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*: “Experience teaches that the most critical moment for bad governments is the one which witnesses their first steps toward reform.”¹⁰ As the con-

⁶ Charles S. Maier, “What Have We Learned since 1989?,” *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 253–69, 253.

⁷ Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 4, 233–37. Tilly concluded that while the situation in 1989 and the resulting events were revolutionary almost everywhere in Eastern Europe, the events can be considered revolutions in only certain countries (in Czechoslovakia, the GDR, the USSR, and Yugoslavia). For a thoughtful analysis of predictability and history, see Arnold Suppan, “Prognose und Vorhersehbarkeit in Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft,” lecture at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, 15 November 2013. I am grateful to Arnold Suppan for sharing his manuscript.

⁸ Jack Goldstone, “Towards a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (2001): 139–87.

⁹ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences,” *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 271–88, 277.

¹⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1856), 214.

tributions to this volume underscore, the unrest caught the communist bloc in a state of flux, with the struggle between reformers, anti-reformers, and dissidents still undecided. The upheavals of 1989 have, therefore, been aptly described as a “partnership of revolution from above and revolution from below.”¹¹ In the various countries, the revolutions followed different patterns: national reaffirmation of the 1956 uprising combined with reforms from above in Hungary; long-term opposition and gradually eroding communism in Poland; unrest of the masses leading to the implosion of the rigid regimes of East Germany and Czechoslovakia; demonstrations met by palace revolts in Bulgaria and Romania. Most of them were peaceful and “self-limiting”, with a negotiated transition of power. Still, popular participation and legitimacy was considered large enough to make them a “popular, genuine” revolution.¹² While some of the upheavals were interpreted afterward as steps toward political normalization after a successful modernization, others are seen by many as just another failed attempt to modernize.

The regimes that were toppled in 1989 had similar features: Their rule was autocratic, based on communist ideology, state-ownership of the economy, subordination of society under one political party, and tight control over political activity.¹³ As they matured, these regimes reduced mass coercion and repression in favor of using nationalism and an implicit social contract. Many factors explain their downfall: economic stagnation, reducing their maneuvering space vis-à-vis their own population; the resulting crisis of legitimacy, with the regimes being less and less able to deliver the material improvements they had promised in return for their populations’ political acquiescence; ideological bankruptcy, with the ideas of social equality increasingly pushed aside by human rights; the effects of reform-communist political and economic liberalization, culminating with and personified by Mikhail Gorbachev, which increased people’s maneuvering space and information sources, but reduced the regimes’ ability and resolution to bribe or coerce their people into submission; and courageous action by non-conformists. As in the case of the communist regimes’ installation after World War I and II, intentionalist interpretations of their demise are pitted against structuralist ones. While intentionalists will stress the role of Lech Wałęsa, Pope John Paul II, and Mikhail Gorbachev, structuralists point to inherent flaws that were inscribed in the communist regimes from their beginning, societal disintegration, and economic imbalances.¹⁴ Depending upon whether one chooses a systemic, society-based or

¹¹ Karol Edward Sołtan, “Purposes of the Past,” in Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob, eds., *The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 69–108, 80–88.

¹² Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 3.

¹³ Stephen E. Smith, “Towards a Global History of Communism,” in idem, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–34, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11–16.

regime-centered approach, 1989 can thus be told as a story of systemic failure, popular unrest, revolution from above or great-power politics.

Since 1990, historians and political scientists have told this story from a comparative and/or entangled perspective.¹⁵ As archival materials were released they helped us to better understand events, backgrounds and interactions.¹⁶ Bottom-up¹⁷ and top-down¹⁸ perspectives, intentionalist and structuralist explanations struggled against one another and, in the end, will perhaps complement one another. The more detailed the new insights are, the greater is the need to periodically synthesize new findings and reflect upon the larger picture.¹⁹

It is the aim of this book to give an overview over the various national revolutions of 1989 and the external reactions, thus combining both domestic and international perspectives. It is not concerned with postcommunist transition, although it includes some of the consequences of the revolutions into the spec-

¹⁵ Among the “first generation” of writings on 1989, cf. Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (New York: Random House, 1990); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Eastern Europe* (New York: Random House, 1990); William Echikson, *Lighting in the Night: Revolution in Eastern Europe* (New York: W. Morrow, 1990); J.F. Brown, *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Roger East, *Revolution in Eastern Europe* (London, New York: Pinter Publishers, 1992); Ivo Banac, ed., *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1992); J. Elvert and M. Salewski, *Der Umbruch in Osteuropa* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993); Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Jacques Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997); Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999); Steven Saxonberg, *The Fall: A Comparative Study of the End of Communism in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Poland* (London: Routledge, repr. 2003); Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, Vladislav Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Jiří Příbáň, *Disidenti práva: O revolucích roku 1989, fikcích legality a soudobé verzi společenské smlouvy* (Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2001); Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Stephen Kotkin with Jan T. Gross, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009).

¹⁹ Mary E. Sarotte, *1989. The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob, eds., *The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009); Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2009); Bernd Florath, ed., *Das Revolutionsjahr 1989: Die demokratische Revolution in Osteuropa als eine transnationale Zäsur* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); K.V. Nikiforov et al., eds., *Revoljutsii i reform v stranah Tsentral'noi i yugo-vostochnoi Evropy: 20 let spustya* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2011); Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Mark Kramer and Vít Smetana, eds., *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain* (Lanham: Lexington, 2014).

trum of issues. The volume has three parts: the first examines the revolutionary events—from above and from below—in Eastern Europe and Beijing, starting with Gorbachev’s perestroika and continuing with country studies from Poland to Romania. The second part deals with Soviet and Western perceptions of and responses to the 1989 crisis in a similar fashion by treating various countries’ leaders’ political responses to the challenges of 1989–90. The last part of this volume focuses on the aftermath of the momentous events, on societal transformations that followed, the acceptance of the new Central European democracies to NATO and the EU, and on the larger context of these changes. These chapters are complemented by country studies on the post-1989 “archival revolution” and the memory of 1989. The remainder of this chapter attempts to contextualize and link the various chapters of this volume by addressing transnational links and topics. It reflects the structure of this volume, albeit in a modified way.

The Revolutions

In his groundbreaking study of *The Gorbachev Factor*, political scientist Archie Brown stated that the sudden collapse of 1989 “requires no elaborate explanation.”²⁰ The communist regimes in Eastern Europe “existed because the Soviet Union had put them in place—by force of arms or threat of force—and had been ready to intervene to sustain them in power.” While most authors would agree that while communism had been rejected by most East Europeans as a Soviet imposition²¹ and that national communism was a double-edged sword with regard to bloc consistency, there remains disagreement about the share that long- and short-term factors such as the actions of individuals had in bringing down state communism. Stephen Kotkin has concluded that state communism’s internal crisis was the main reason for the revolutions, and he has gone as far as to claim that the role of the civil society in 1989 is a myth.²² Even if this is true, and there are many who doubt it, we need to ask (a) what made this crisis a successful revolution and (b) why it brought collapse in 1989 and not, say, in 1956, 1968 or 2050. Christoph Boyer has endeavored to develop a model to explain these questions by combining the birth defects of communism such as the absence of economic incentives, political

²⁰ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 247.

²¹ Cf. Brown, Kramer, Sebastyen. An exception seems to be Constantine Pleshakov, who claims the following: “If in 1945 communism hadn’t exactly arrived at the point of a gun, 1989 was not really about throwing off Moscow [...] Eastern Europeans were, naturally, very happy to see the Soviets go, but they were fighting not the empire [...] but their own rulers.” *There Is No Freedom Without Bread! 1989 and the Civil War That Brought Down Communism* (New York: Picador, 2009), 5–6, 236. Nonetheless, the experience of 1953, 1956 and 1968 shows that East Europeans had indeed fought the Soviet empire.

²² Stephen Kotkin with Jan T. Gross, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009).

competition, and public correctives with later emerging flaws such as the suppression of reforms in Czechoslovakia and the GDR in 1968–70 and the inability to satisfy consumer demands or to implement the Third Industrial Revolution.²³ With the Eastern economies and societies being increasingly entangled with their Western counterparts,²⁴ comparisons could be drawn whereby the flaws became ever more visible for the normal citizen. Since modernization and social as well as economic superiority loomed large among the self-legitimizing factors of the communist regimes, the inability to achieve these things to the same extent as the West fatally undermined the regimes' prestige and legitimacy.

In general, top-down approaches underline the role of perestroika among the preconditions and decisive factors of 1989. While a number of studies have emerged that stress the role of other factors, in particular bottom-up impulses, many will agree that among the preconditions for the revolutions, "the changes in the Soviet Union are overwhelmingly the most important part."²⁵ The importance of what was labeled the "Gorbachev factor" stems from perestroika and glasnost', i.e. the attempt to dynamize the ailing Soviet economy and tackle corruption as well as lethargy.²⁶ This was to be achieved by stimulating political and economic participation and reducing the costs of the hypertrophic empire. This included, as a prerequisite, the relaxation of East-West tensions. As the economic crisis became more apparent, steps intensified toward reducing Soviet interference in the East European states as well as subsidies for them.

At the same time, the importance of Western partners for alleviating East European problems increased. In parallel, Gorbachev's calls for perestroika and his support for change in the non-Soviet member states of the Eastern bloc grew bolder. He "wanted East Europeans to emulate [perestroika] but hesitated to push them too hard since that went against the spirit of his politics."²⁷ Moreover, before spring 1988, his calls did not include a public disavowal of the Brezhnev Doctrine.²⁸

²³ Christoph Boyer, "'1989' und die Wege dorthin," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 59, no. 1 (2011): 101–18.

²⁴ Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael Lutz, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; 2008).

²⁵ Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 222.

²⁶ It was an irony that the leader, who "aimed to rejuvenate communism, ended up destroying it." Peter Grieder, "'When Your Neighbour Changes His Wallpaper': The 'Gorbachev Factor' and the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 73–92, 73.

²⁷ Mary Buckley, "The Multifaceted External Soviet Role in Processes towards Unanticipated Revolutions," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 33–72.

²⁸ Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 178–256, 183.

In his chapter to this volume, *Andrei Grachev* stresses the “new political thinking” as a non-Leninist and non-confrontational approach to international policy. It was based on disarmament, non-violence, and reform. Although Gorbachev did not order it, he encouraged the Polish communists to re-legalize *Solidarność*, acquiesced (in March 1989) to the subsequent (from May) Hungarian dismantling of the Iron Curtain, granted (in August) the opening of the Hungarian border for East German refugees (in September) and agreed (in January 1990) to Germany’s reunification. He did not veto the emergence of non-communist parties, the holding of (semi-) free elections or the subsequent emergence of non-communist-led governments in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the Soviet leader had entirely abandoned the “outer empire” before 1991. When the first communist regimes began to collapse, the CPSU initially still considered immediate measures to provide their “fraternal parties” support, as *Mikhail Prozumenshchikov* shows. After the new non-communist governments were formed, steps were conceived for improving Soviet relations with them. In many instances, Gorbachev referred to the continuing Soviet responsibility as a *primus inter pares*, and even after the forming of a non-communist government in Poland, the Kremlin sought assurances that this country would remain in the Warsaw Pact.²⁹

The question of why communist leaders agreed to give up their monopoly of power can be explained in several ways: Some intended to stabilize their position by co-opting parts of the non-communist spectrum or, as Polish opposition mastermind Bronisław Geremek said about the communist leadership, “to corrupt us, divide us, compromise us.”³⁰ Others counted on confirming their own position and humiliating their contenders at the ballot box. In the round table talks, Polish communists insisted on quick elections, hoping to wrong-foot the opposition, which clearly lacked an apparatus or resources. Not only Polish, but also East German communists and even Gorbachev “did not realize how much they would be repudiated,”³¹ overestimating their chances of winning the popular vote. In the end, it turned out that in 1989 state communism lacked not only popular support, but also the ability to readjust and, luckily, the resolution to fight for power. As an alternative explanation, historian Konrad Jarausch has pointed to the loss of utopian belief and self-confidence among the ruling communists³² and Charles Maier has argued that in 1989 the communist leaders “understood that they had

²⁹ Jacques Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 240.

³⁰ Quoted in Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2009), 221. Cf. *ibid.*, 287.

³¹ Maier, “What Have We Learned since 1989?,” 261. Cf. Kramer, “The Collapse (Part 1),” 195.

³² Konrad H. Jarausch, “Moderate Modernity and the Spirit of 1989,” in Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob, eds., *The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 109–26, 112. Cf. Tismaneanu, “The Revolutions of 1989,” 279.

arrived at a dead end in terms of their own aspirations and policies.”³³ In Maier’s eyes, this disillusionment is part of what he calls “late communism,” an “ageing” regime’s era of growing complexity in which the central power loses control to its agents, the economy and official politics are less dynamic, and leaders are less prone to risk-taking.

In Poland 1989 bottom-up initiatives were most prominent: nowhere else in the Eastern bloc was the opposition so powerful, nowhere else did so many different oppositional initiatives emerge, nowhere else did they establish such a widespread network of transnational contacts and activities supporting oppositional groups in other East European countries. In his path-breaking study of grassroots opposition, historian Padraic Kenney has stated: “The regime did not agree to negotiate because this or that opposition leader showed indefatigable determination (nor, of course, simply due to economic decline and Western pressure, both of which had been the case for a long time). The catalyst to dialogue was the broad social unrest on dozens of stages.”³⁴ As in Kenney’s study, bottom-up approaches stress the importance of East European dissidents and opposition groups for bringing about the revolutions of 1989. While Stephen Kotkin as well as historian Tony Judt³⁵ have doubted the impact of dissidents, Kenney and Timothy Garton Ash argue that the “reassessment of the notion of citizenship” was launched by the example of intellectuals and their ideas.³⁶ Vladimir Tismaneanu has stated that the revolutions

cannot be understood without an emphasis on the significance of civil society as a set of fundamental ideas, a political myth, and a real, historical movement [...] those who took to the streets, the thousands and thousands who were ready to die because they wanted to be free, did not act as the puppets of uncivil society. They believed in civility, decency and humanity, and they succeeded in rehabilitating these values.³⁷

Opposition comprised a wide range of interests and activities: While *Solidarność* and a few dissidents had held a virtual monopoly of the opposition in the early 1970s, in 1989 the groups ranged from human rights committees, religious and social groups, peace movements and conscientious objectors (e.g. Charter 77; Freedom and Peace, the first major opposition group in Poland since the founding of *Solidarność*; the Peace Group for Dialogue in Hungary; the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights in the GDR), to cultural- and nature-protection as well as anti-nuclear and ecological awareness groups. These included the Velehrad initiative

³³ Maier, “What Have We Learned since 1989?,” 259; 267.

³⁴ Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 300.

³⁵ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin, 2005), 576. The author refers to “immediate” impact in the 1970s.

³⁶ Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern*, 131–56. Garton Ash dismisses Kotkin’s interpretation. Timothy Garton Ash, “1989!,” *The New York Review of Books*, 5 November 2009.

³⁷ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Rethinking 1989,” in idem and Bogdan C. Iacob, eds., *The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 15–32, 32.

of 1985; János Várgha's Danube Circle, which collected more than 10,000 signatures against the creation of the gigantic Nagymaros dam; and *Ekoglasnost*, which became famous for its protests in Sofia in October 1989 and whose crushing contributed to Todor Zhivkov's downfall.³⁸ Their activities comprised street theaters, summer camps, pilgrimages, student activism, raft expeditions, the collecting of signatures for petitions, street protests, hunger strikes, leaflet distribution, sit-ins and happenings, the cleaning and restoring of historical sites, the occupation of endangered natural sites, singing songs, forming human chains, the commemoration of historical dates, and campaigns against pollution or homelessness.

In many places, it was young people who were leading the protests. Since the nineteenth century (not in 1789), students had played a vanguard role in many, if not most, revolutions.³⁹ In the Eastern bloc, communist propaganda had contributed to keeping ideas of "revolution," "powerful demonstrations" and "meetings" popular.⁴⁰ As *Karsten Brüggemann* shows in this chapter on the revolution in the Baltics, opposition was conducted mainly by representatives of a generation that only knew about massive state violence through hearsay or personal family history. They therefore believed in the "possibility" of change. Music played a large role, not only in the Baltics, where the singing of songs became a major means of protest. Rock or punk music had always been perceived by communist authorities as potentially subversive. Indeed, in 1976, the arrest of the rock band Plastic People of the Universe became the trigger for formulating Charter 77; twelve years later, a rally in Czechoslovakia in the memory of the death of John Lennon turned into a demonstration for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country.⁴¹

In Bulgaria and Romania, as *Ulf Brunnbauer* and *Anneli Ute Gabanyi* show, political dissent was less significant in comparison to Poland or Czechoslovakia. Here opposition groups of ethnic minorities were remarkable: the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, which opposed the forceful assimilation campaign to which it had

³⁸ For a transnational survey of the role of churches before and in 1989, see Christian Halbrock, "Kirche und Kirchen im Vorfeld sowie in den Revolutionen: Handlungsvoraussetzungen, Einübung und Praxis des Widersprechens," in Bernd Florath, ed., *Das Revolutionsjahr 1989: Die demokratische Revolution in Osteuropa als eine transnationale Zäsur* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 149–64.

³⁹ Robin Okey, "Echoes and Precedents: 1989 in Historical Perspective," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 33–52. Cf. idem, *The Demise of Communist East Europe: 1989 in Context* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

⁴⁰ James Krapfl, "Afterword: The Discursive Constitution of Revolution and Revolution Envy," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *The 1989 Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe: From Communism to Pluralism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 271–84.

⁴¹ Sebestyen, *Revolution*, 208. Cf. György Dalos, *Lebt wohl, Genossen! Der Untergang des sowjetischen Imperiums* (Munich: Beck 2011). On opposition in Czechoslovakia, cf. E.G. Zadorozhnyuk, *Ot krizhneniya Prazhskoi vesny k triumfu "barhatnoi" revolyutsii: Iz istorii oppozitsionnogo dvizeniya v Chehoslovakii (Avgust 1968–Noyabr' 1989)* (Moscow: Indrik, 2008).

been subjected and which was supported from 1988 by Bulgarian intellectuals; in Romania, the Hungarian minority, which resisted the forceful razing of their villages and was inspired by their spokesman Pastor László Tőkés of Timișoara (Temesvár), whose arrest helped trigger the uprising in 1989.

Although created for collective action, most of these groups were “rooted in an individualistic concept of freedom, programmatically skeptical of all ideological blueprints for social engineering, [...] liberal and non-utopian.”⁴² Jürgen Habermas has therefore labeled 1989 the “rectifying revolutions,” revolutions that restored Eastern Europe to the “normal” liberal democratic trajectory.⁴³ By “living in truth,” as Václav Havel put it, they strove to reject a system which they perceived as a lie.⁴⁴ Ideas in general, the ones of human and civil rights in particular, loomed large among their foundations.⁴⁵ They aimed at belonging to what they imagined as the free, independent, wealthy and happy mainstream of the West; “return to Europe,” be it to a functioning economy and/or to civil society, was one of their mottos.⁴⁶ This may be one of the reasons why what political scientist Marie Elise Sarotte called “prefab” models prevailed in defining the post-1989 international order.⁴⁷

In the early 1980s, the image of West European society being wealthier and happier than communist ones seems to have been widespread in the East, both among the masses and in the higher echelons. In the wake of détente, perestroika, and the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe, intensified East-West entanglement,⁴⁸ the exchange of visitors, and the media had achieved a great deal in deconstructing enemy images and shaking ideological convictions. In his memoirs, Gorbachev wrote that simply by the West being able to provide a higher standard of living for its citizens and legitimacy for its governments, his own “faith in the advantages of socialist over bourgeois democracy was shaken.”⁴⁹ Détente and

⁴² Vladimir Tismaneanu, “The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences,” *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 271–88, 272.

⁴³ Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution*, Kleine Politische Schriften VII (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990); idem, “What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left,” *New Left Review* I, no. 183 (September-October 1990), <http://newleftreview.org/I/183/jurgen-habermas-what-does-socialism-mean-today-the-rectifying-revolution-and-the-need-for-new-thinking-on-the-left>.

⁴⁴ Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in idem et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), 10–59, 20.

⁴⁵ Wolfgang Eichwede, “Don Quichottes Sieg: Die Bürgerrechtler und die Revolutionen von 1989,” *Osteuropa* 59, no. 2–3 (2009): 61–84.

⁴⁶ Judt, *Postwar*, 630.

⁴⁷ Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1–10.

⁴⁸ Poul Villaume and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Détente, Transatlantic Relations, and the Cold War, 1965–1985* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010).

⁴⁹ M. Gorbachev, *Zhishn’i reformy* 1 (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), 169.

Ostpolitik had contributed to the Western image improving greatly. As memories of the war faded and West Germany emerged as an economic partner, anti-German propaganda which had been used for decades to keep the Eastern bloc together was toned down. The picture of Willy Brandt kneeling in front of the Warsaw uprising memorial did more to deconstruct the communist enemy image of West Germany than decades of Western counterpropaganda: “After the Berlin and German treaties were signed at the beginning of the 1970s only the most stubborn and hidebound state socialist leaders [...] might still believe that a commonwealth of workers was menaced by an imperialist conspiracy.”⁵⁰

While Poland is often cited as a case in point for the importance of bottom-up initiatives, *Klaus Bachmann* underlines the emergence and temporary toleration of semi-legal non-communist political actors in Poland as well as of liberalizing steps taken by the late-communist regime. All the more, the story of Hungary in 1989 is often described as a top-down process, a “revolution from above,” whereby reform communists participated in dismantling the one-party system, as shown by *Andreas Oplatka*. As in the Polish case, pre-1989 liberalization as well as round table negotiations loom large. After multicandidate elections had been held in the USSR in April 1989, Gorbachev neither vetoed the holding of partially free elections in Poland nor the subsequent emergence of a noncommunist-led government. However, in March 1989 he did not welcome Hungarian Premier Miklos Németh’s proposal to hold multiparty elections in Hungary and he disapproved of the emerging Hungarian interpretation of 1956 as a popular uprising and not, as Soviet communism had preached, a “counterrevolution.”⁵¹ But it was to Gorbachev’s credit that he stressed that such decisions were within the national responsibility and that he fulfilled Hungary’s demand for a quick Soviet withdrawal of forces.

Doubtlessly, Gorbachev’s greatest achievement was non-violence as a consequence of his and his East European colleagues’ restraint. In twentieth-century Europe in general, political violence had played a large role;⁵² in Eastern Europe and the communist bloc this role was particularly large.⁵³ The revolutions of 1789

⁵⁰ Maier, “What Have We Learned since 1989?,” 261. Cf. Odd Arne Westad, “Beginnings of the End: How the Cold War Crumbled,” in Silvio Pons and Federico Romero, eds., *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War: Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 68–81, 69–71.

⁵¹ Kramer, “The Demise of the Soviet Bloc,” 818.

⁵² Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Martin Sabrow, ed., *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Arnold Suppan, *Hitler—Beneš—Tito: Konflikt, Krieg und Völkermord in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013).

⁵³ Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartosek and Jean-Louis Margolin, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge,

and 1848, both of which included large-scale violence, were followed by military interventions and wars. In contrast, many historians have pointed to the 1989 revolutions' surprisingly peaceful character. Timothy Garton Ash is certainly correct in assessing that "Where the guillotine is a symbol of 1789, the round table is a symbol of 1989."⁵⁴ In his groundbreaking study, Jacques Lévesque states that "the most surprising event of that fateful year was not, in itself, the collapse of the East European regimes [...] The most remarkable and least expected event of 1989 was, in fact, the Soviet attitude."⁵⁵ Indeed, other uprisings and upheavals in Eastern Europe in 1953, 1956, 1968 had started peacefully before they were violently suppressed by Soviet forces. Mark Kramer has argued that three crucial events helped shape Gorbachev's rejection of force: the Afghanistan disaster, the Soviet crackdown on demonstrators in Tbilisi in April 1989 and the Chinese massacre of students on Tiananmen Square in June.⁵⁶ Even more importantly, humanitarian considerations spoke against the application of force. The Soviet leader was likely influenced by what historian James Sheehan has described as Europe's postwar transformation into a pacifist mainstream consensus.⁵⁷ In addition, from the cycle of liberalization, East European unrest, and Soviet hardline response as had emerged in 1953–56 and 1966–70, Gorbachev drew the conclusion that the use of force would not only discredit perestroika internationally but also wreck it domestically. In the end, the Soviet leader was remarkably successful in avoiding violence, as well as in safeguarding a peaceful but rapid transition to a new political order. Since communism had not taken roots in Eastern Europe, a civil war could be avoided.

Yet, when demonstrators took to the streets in 1989, none of them could know for sure what kind of response they might expect from the police, or even from the

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). Cf. Hermann Weber and Ulrich Mählert, eds., *Terror: Stalinistische Parteiauberungen 1936–1953* (Paderborn: Schöningh, rev. exp. ed. 2001); Norman Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); David Svoboda and Coilin O'Connor, eds., *Crimes of the Communist Regimes* (Prague: Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, 2011); Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

⁵⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, "Conclusions," in Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu, eds., *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and their Aftermath* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 395–402, 398.

⁵⁵ Jacques Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

⁵⁶ Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 2)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 3–64, 22–41; "The Collapse (Part 1)," 188, 191. Sergey Radchenko has argued that Gorbachev's rejection of the application of force did not prevent him from "utiliz[ing] Tiananmen to expand relations with Beijing at US expense." Sergey Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries: The Soviet Failure in Asia at the End of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.

⁵⁷ James Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).

Soviet forces. In earlier decades, the Kremlin had sent out seemingly arbitrarily freezes and thaws, and in 1989 nobody was able to tell when the next “climate change” was due. In contrast to earlier claims, no documentary evidence has hitherto emerged that Gorbachev had, prior to 1989, informed his East European comrades about his decision not to send troops should their people rise against them.⁵⁸ Except for public announcements of the freedom of choice, such as Gorbachev’s 1988 address to the United Nations, the public knew very little about the leader’s intentions.

Still, in 1989, thousands of people were intimidated, taken into custody, or beaten up by communist police. Force was never ruled out entirely. Padraic Kenney has shown that in 1989, it was still risky to demonstrate in the streets. Even in the most liberal parts of Poland, uncertainty remained; in October 1989, Soviet police organized a “pogrom” against opposition demonstrators in Ukraine⁵⁹ and in November demonstrating students in Prague were mercilessly beaten up by Czech police. Polish communist leaders seriously considered imposing martial law in August 1988 and after the elections of June 1989; Czechoslovak communists considered doing the same in November 1989.⁶⁰ In the GDR police vans were deliberately driven into the demonstrating crowd, Stasi boss Erich Mielke gave the order to “shoot troublemakers” and the East German Politburo discussed crushing the mass demonstrations. As the brief episode of Soviet force in the Baltics shows, until 1991 “no one could exclude the possibility of an attempted crackdown.”⁶¹

The fact that appalling bloodshed happened on Tiananmen Square, many observers claim, is one of the reasons it did not happen in Europe. But the opposite chain of causality may hold true as well, as *Peter Vámos* suggests. From the developments in Eastern Europe, Chinese leaders drew the conclusion that ruthless action was needed in Beijing. While Gorbachev had started to tolerate public dissent, not the least in order to create momentum for his reforms, the Chinese party decided first to quell the student demonstrations on Tiananmen Square and then to return to their reforms. Afterward, again, fundamentally differing conclusions were drawn at the other end of the communist world: While members of the Polish

⁵⁸ Kramer, “The Demise of the Soviet Bloc,” 788–854. In a contribution to the conference “The Revolutions of 1989” at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, on 2 October 2009, Vadim Medvedev stated that abandoning the Brezhnev Doctrine was “first announced at a working meeting of leaders of the Warsaw Treaty countries in Sofia in October 1985.” Similarly, earlier literature claims that Gorbachev informed Eastern leaders in 1985 or 1986 about the abandoning of the Brezhnev Doctrine. In contrast, William Taubman and Svetlana Savranskaya argue that this happened at the July 1989 Warsaw Pact summit in Bucharest. However, this argument rests solely on memoirs. William Taubman and Svetlana Savranskaya, “If a Wall Fell in Berlin and Moscow Hardly Noticed, Would it Still Make a Noise?,” in Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 69–95, 85.

⁵⁹ Kenney, *A Carnival*, 273.

⁶⁰ Kramer, “The Collapse (Part 1),” 195; Sebestyen, *Revolution*, 375.

⁶¹ Steven Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, updated edition 2008), 92.

and Hungarian opposition were among the fiercest critics of the bloody crack-down and in the Kremlin an appalled Gorbachev may have felt confirmed in his commitment to non-violence, in Bucharest and East Berlin, Nicolae Ceaușescu and Erich Honecker watched with interest how what their hardline advisors would soon recommend as “the Chinese solution” was being implemented.⁶²

However, as *Anneli Ute Gabanyi* argues, it is far from clear who is responsible for most of the about 1,000 dead in Romania, when a group of people around Ion Iliescu seized power in a coup d'état following popular unrest in Timișoara. Ceaușescu's suppression of the uprising cost many lives, but many more people died in fighting after the dictator had been arrested. He was the only communist leader who was executed in 1989.

Police brutality did not rescue the communist GDR either. After a brief climax in October, the violence was toned down and, soon thereafter, the SED state disappeared. The mass exodus of East Germans through the recently opened Hungarian-Austrian border, ongoing demonstrations at home and quickly approaching bankruptcy had caused so much confusion in East Berlin that it unwillingly opened the Wall and, later, consented with round table talks and free elections. Interestingly, even as the GDR increasingly resembled an air mattress with a hole, some of its most prominent dissidents continued to believe in the existence of a reformed communist state. Yet, this idea was rejected among the masses and the emerging drive for German unity prevailed.

Hans Hermann Hertle stresses the role West German television (which could be seen anywhere in the GDR except in the so-called Valley of the Clueless) played in East Germany's “October Revolution” by reporting the opening, first, of the Hungarian Iron Curtain and, then, prematurely as it turned out, of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, the fall of the Wall is the first world-historic event to have become reality because it was announced by the media. When in the evening of 9 November 1989 West German television declared that “the gates of the Wall are wide open” this was not yet the case.⁶³ However it turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy, since it drew more and more crowds to the border. Even earlier, West German reports on the rigged GDR elections in May 1989 had helped spark demonstrations in the East. The transnational effects of the first “televised revolution in history” did not end here. Victor Sebestyen writes: “When people in Prague saw the Berlin Wall come down, they began to believe they too could overthrow their leaders. [...] Nicolae Ceaușescu lost power the moment his face was seen on Romanian television looking first confused, then petrified and finally weak as crowds booed him at a Bucharest rally.”⁶⁴ Similarly, media reports about the alleged death of student Martin Šmíd at the hands of Czechoslovak riot police on 17 November helped to swell the protesting crowd in the “Velvet Revolution.” Further impulses for the uprising had been

⁶² Cf. Radchenko, *Unwanted Visionaries*, 307; Kramer, “The Demise of the Soviet Bloc,” 826.

⁶³ Sarotte, *1989*, 38–41.

⁶⁴ Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989*, xx (quote), 278.

received by the presence of thousands of East German refugees in the West German embassy in Prague. After massive strikes and the emergence of opposition groups such as Václav Havel's Civic Forum, a coalition government with a non-communist majority was formed and it was agreed to hold free elections.

As *Jiří Suk* reminds us, many of the demonstrations of the "Velvet Revolution" were organized in commemoration of two crucial phases in Czechoslovakia's recent history: Nazi suppression (as signified by the death of Jan Opletal in 1939) and the Soviet and Warsaw Pact crackdown on the "Prague Spring" reform policies of 1968 (an invasion that was protested most tragically by the self-immolation of Jan Palach in 1969). Both historical events were understood as powerful symbols in the fight for national sovereignty and resistance against foreign domination. By the same token, in 1989 events commemorating the Czechoslovak declaration of independence 1918, the 1848 revolution and the 1956 uprising in Hungary (both suppressed by Russian forces), Ukrainian independence 1919, and the 1939 signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact as the stab in the back of Baltic statehood, were organized to create a "national" consensus against what was increasingly depicted and perceived as "foreign" (i.e. Soviet) communist regimes. These served as points of departure for the 1989 revolutions in these countries. It was no coincidence that the reburial of Hungary's 1956 leader Imre Nagy was used by an opposition activist, Viktor Orbán, for voicing a public call for a Soviet withdrawal from his country.

Gorbachev seems to have been aware of the risk that historical revelations might exacerbate national tensions. Until the final day of the USSR's existence, the Soviet leadership continued to consider the Hungarian revolution of 1956 "an anti-communist fascist coup." In the case of the Soviet massacre of the Polish elite near Katyń in 1940, Gorbachev continued to deny knowledge of the whereabouts of related documents about Stalin's responsibility, although according to *Mikhail Prozumenshchikov* he had known about them since the beginning of 1989.

In Yugoslavia, the "national" question emerged in a different way. Together with Albania, it was the only Eastern country that was never occupied by the Soviet army for a longer period of time. *Florian Bieber* and *Armina Galijaš* demonstrate that, at first glance, Yugoslavia's trajectory away from communist rule does not appear particularly different from the other Eastern countries: The communist party collapsed in January 1990 and multiparty elections were held. However, in contrast to other countries the anger of the large protest movement of 1988 was quickly channeled into ethnic conflict and the main cleavages within the ruling party opened along ethnic lines. Thus elections led to different results: While non-communist governments came to power in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the successors to communists won in Montenegro and Serbia. This division of Yugoslavia⁶⁵ reflects a larger division between two groups of countries:

⁶⁵ Cf. Norman M. Naimark and Holly Case, eds., *Yugoslavia and Its Historians: Understanding the Balkan Wars of the 1990s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

In Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR multiparty elections brought the victory of non-communist forces; in Bulgaria and Romania members of the (reform) communist elite took power in palace revolts and were then confirmed in elections.⁶⁶

Transnational links and external factors

Most authors agree that the revolutions of 1989 were not disconnected national phenomena, but were reinforced by inter- and transnational links and spillover effects. As can be seen by the American, French and Polish revolutions of 1776, 1789 and 1791/94 with their transatlantic repercussions, the upheavals from Latin America to the Mediterranean region and St. Petersburg from 1820 to 1825, the Russian and Central European revolutions in the aftermath of World War I as well as the de-Stalinization crises of 1953–56, this is certainly not a new phenomenon. The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 in particular were transnational events with far-reaching spillover effects ranging from Paris to Warsaw and from Palermo to Budapest.⁶⁷

Before and during 1989, ideas of reform and democratic participation spread from Western Europe to the East, from Eastern Europe to Russia and vice versa, and from Eastern Europe to China. Among the dissident groups of the late 1980s, a widespread network of transnational links and interactions existed at the grassroots level. Later this reached up to the top: Collaboration between Polish activists and their Czechoslovak and Hungarian as well as Baltic and Ukrainian colleagues included students' contacts, the smuggling of hardware and know-how,⁶⁸ and protests against the Tiananmen massacre in front of the Chinese embassy buildings in Warsaw and Budapest. When Czech authorities arrested Hungarian activists who had supported anti-regime demonstrations in Prague on 21 August 1989, the Hungarian opposition organized a hunger strike in front of the Czechoslovak embassy in Budapest. Solidarity was active in promoting liberalization and self-determination in the USSR: Wałęsa wrote a letter to Gorbachev urging him to grant Lithuania the same right of choice as had been given Eastern Europe and later nominated the three Baltic republics for the Nobel Peace Prize.⁶⁹ In the Baltic states, students from Ukraine experienced the feeling of seeing the banned national flag waved on the streets and were taught how to layout their samizdat gazette. Polish opposition leader Adam Michnik joined the inaugural congress of Ukraine's *Rukh* move-

⁶⁶ Michael Meyer, *1989: The Year that Changed the World: The Untold Story Behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 190–91.

⁶⁷ Barbara Haider and Hans Peter Hye, eds., *1848: Ereignis und Erinnerung in den politischen Kulturen Mitteleuropas* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003). Cf. Hans Peter Hye, "Was blieb von 1848?," *ibid.*, 9–30, 12.

⁶⁸ Kenney, *A Carnival*, 109; 268.

⁶⁹ Kramer, "The Collapse (Part 1)," 211.

ment in September 1989. While Padraic Kenney has demonstrated that dissident cooperation among East Europeans was much more active than expected, he has stressed the reticence of West Europeans (in contrast to Americans) with regard to Eastern dissidents; here the dilemma of the 1970s of whether to establish and maintain contact with communist semi-official peace and human-rights organizations or of trying to collaborate with the opposition was visible.

The transnational spillover of political reforms, as analyzed by *Ella Zadorozhnyuk*, ranged from round table negotiations, free multicandidate elections to the abolishment of the “leading role” of the communist party. Competitive multicandidate elections had been made mandatory in Poland and Hungary for the National Assembly and local councils from the early 1980s;⁷⁰ the Hungarian Parliament was relieved step-by-step from party tutelage. The Hungarian communists were also first in giving up their monopoly of power in January 1989⁷¹ and announcing the transition to a multiparty system. The regulations created for the election of the Congress of People’s Deputies in the USSR in March stipulated that candidates seek approval by local assemblies; many anti-establishment communists and independent candidates won such tickets and, then, congress seats. From here they created a pro-reform caucus. Later, they were among the first deputies to leave the CPSU. In the meantime, this new kind of election in the Soviet Union had made it easier to change the regulations for elections in Poland in June, with 35 percent of the Sejm and all seats of the Senate open for free contestation. Although Gorbachev had expressed his personal disapproval, Hungary was the first to introduce genuine multiparty elections, which were held shortly after similar elections in the GDR in March and April 1990; Czechoslovakia followed in June. Further spillover effects were seen with regard to border controls: the deconstruction of the Iron Curtain on the Hungarian-Soviet border was mirrored at the Hungarian-Austrian frontier and, subsequently, the opening of the border for East German refugees. While Hungary had joined the UN Convention on Refugees in order to accept Magyars fleeing from Romania, Budapest applied the stipulations to East Germans as well.

Spillover effects triggered not only reforms, but also unrest: The Hungarian demonstrations in solidarity with the Transylvanian Hungarian minority contributed to the revolution in Budapest; in a similar fashion, the presence of East German refugees in Czechoslovakia helped inspire the “Velvet Revolution” in Prague. Added to these triggers were the demonstration effect and copying the round table

⁷⁰ Multicandidate elections (with the list controlled by the Communist Party) had been permitted in countries like Poland and Hungary on the local level since the late 1950s–60s. Alex Pravda, “Elections in Communist Party States,” in Stephen White and Daniel Nelson, eds., *Communist Politics: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 27–54. On Hungary, Hans-Georg Heinrich, *Hungary: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Pinter, 1986), 65–72.

⁷¹ Michael Gehler, “Die Umstürzbewegungen 1989 in Mittel- und Osteuropa,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 41–42 (2004): 36–46. Cf. Andreas Oplatka, *Der erste Riss in der Mauer. September 1989—Ungarn öffnet die Grenze* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 2009).

model; Hungary, the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria followed the Polish example of negotiations between the communists and non-communist forces.⁷² The emerging transnational dynamic was reflected in assessments by people on the ground: When in September 1989, after state communism had ended in Poland, a Czechoslovak citizen went to a street festival there, she was greeted by a Pole with the words: “Oh, you are from Czechoslovakia! Don’t worry, communism will fall there too!”⁷³ Mark Kramer has discovered that transnational spillovers were facilitated by the intensity of relations within the Eastern bloc.⁷⁴ While in 1986–88 reform impulses mainly came from the USSR (the Hungarian example still had not experienced any visible consequences), in 1989 the direction of spillovers started to change. From then they were mainly oriented from Central Europe toward the Soviet Union. After East European “fraternal” parties had given up their monopoly, the CPSU followed suit in 1990.

While the Soviet role before and in 1989 cannot be overestimated and Gorbachev became the “hero of retreat” (Hans Magnus Enzensberger),⁷⁵ Western behavior has been much less in the limelight. The peak of the Cold War in the early 1980s had contributed to differentiating between Western leaders who advocated continuing cooperation with communist governments and those who felt it necessary to increase support for opposition groups and demand the observation of human rights.⁷⁶ With regard to Western action and reaction, historians have not yet concurred whether this was conducive to the dismantling of communism at all and, if so, how and to what extent.

Many will agree that among Western leaders, “no person [did] more for the 1989 revolutions than the pope.”⁷⁷ The election of a Polish pontiff had certainly galvanized Catholics in his homeland. To obtain permission to visit Poland, John Paul II, who had been identified by the KGB as a “danger” to Soviet rule, had been forced to agree not to criticize communism. This dovetailed with pleas by the Curia and the Polish primate, who had advocated moderation so that the status quo of Polish Catholics would not be endangered. In the final address of his 1979 trip to Poland, Karol Wojtyła told the largest public gathering ever held in this country: “I have come to

⁷² Jerzy Holzer, “Der Runde Tisch: Internationale Geschichte eines politischen Möbels,” in Bernd Florath, ed., *Das Revolutionsjahr 1989: Die demokratische Revolution in Osteuropa als eine transnationale Zäsur* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 225–232.

⁷³ Quoted in Kenney, *A Carnival*, 286.

⁷⁴ Mark Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1),” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 178–256, in particular 180; (Part 2), 6, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 3–64, in particular 48–57; and (Part 3), 7, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 3–96, in particular 69.

⁷⁵ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Die Helden des Rückzugs. Brouillon zu einer politischen Moral der Macht,” *Sinn und Form*, no. 3 (1990): 579–84.

⁷⁶ Cf. Leopoldo Nuti, ed., *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975–1985* (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁷⁷ Pleshakov, *There is no Freedom*, 237. Some might add that this holds true for the democratization of Latin America as well.

you to talk about the dignity of man.”⁷⁸ By addressing not only human rights but also values such as honesty, solidarity and empathy, the pope inspired people who were appalled by widespread dishonesty, corruption and oppression.⁷⁹

While the pope had the advantage of being allowed to speak to the masses, even if in philosophical language, other measures in support of oppositional groups behind the Iron Curtain had to be implemented covertly. Under the Carter administration, the CIA had started secretly to support *Solidarność*. However, when the Agency discovered communist preparations for the implementation of martial law, it did nothing to warn the opposition.⁸⁰

The Western responses to perestroika were ambivalent: While many agreed with Margaret Thatcher’s assessment that “We are not in a Cold War now,” Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney was no less correct in stating that Gorbachev’s “new thinking” “may be a temporary aberration” in Soviet behavior only.⁸¹ US presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush walked a middle line in welcoming perestroika and striking disarmament deals, at the same time taking the “new thinking” at its word by calling on Gorbachev to “tear down” the Berlin Wall (1987) and to allow a “Europe whole and free” (1989).

The Cold War had emerged, for the most part, as a struggle over the fate of Eastern Europe, whose Sovietization at the hands of Stalin would be one of the foremost triggers for this global conflict. It was thus logical that it would be brought to an end over this part of the continent as well. As of today, the end of the Cold War⁸² has eclipsed the issue of Western involvement in the revolutions of 1989⁸³—with the exception of the post-November developments in

⁷⁸ Sebestyen, *Revolution*, 22–27, 46–47.

⁷⁹ Agostino Giovanogli, “Karol Wojtyla and the End of the Cold War,” in Silvio Pons and Federico Romero, eds., *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War: Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 82–89; Bernd Schäfer, “The Catholic Church and the Cold War’s End in Europe: Vatican Ostpolitik and Pope John Paul II, 1985–1989,” in Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti, eds., *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal* (London: Routledge, 2008), 64–77.

⁸⁰ Sebestyen, *Revolution*, 53, 100–2.

⁸¹ Jeffrey A. Engel, “1989: An Introduction to an International History,” in idem ed., *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–35, 2.

⁸² See, e.g., Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings Inst., 1994); Olav Njølstad, ed., *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Silvio Pons and Federico Romero, eds., *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War: Issues, Interpretations, Periodizations* (London: Frank Cass, 2005); Kiron Skinner, ed., *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008).

⁸³ See, e.g. Gregory F. Domber, “Rumblings in Eastern Europe: Western Pressure on Poland’s Moves Towards Democratic Transformation,” in Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti, eds., *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal* (London: Routledge, 2008), 51–63; Andrzej Paczkowski, “Playground of Superpowers, Poland, 1980–89: A View From Inside,” in Olav Njølstad, ed., *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 372–401.

the GDR. While many analysts have explained this with an underestimation of Eastern unrest by Western observers, noninterference may also be seen as having been a deliberate strategy to make the changes easier to swallow for the USSR. Whether “Washington got it right because it got it wrong”⁸⁴ or because it assessed the situation correctly will continue to be debated. It seems that both long-term strategic aims, as they are analyzed by *Philip Zelikow*, as well as President Bush’s short-term reaction “not to jump on the Wall” once it had been opened contributed to the peaceful yet fundamental changes. *Norman M. Naimark* supposes that the superpowers’ main achievements in 1989 are “what they did not do rather than what they did.” This may certainly be true, given the outcome a more heavy-handed Soviet or US reaction might have triggered. While Gorbachev struggled to combine liberalization in Central Europe with upholding the Warsaw Treaty Organization (at least until 1995 when his advisors expected the “elimination of the military structures of the two blocs”⁸⁵ and their merger in a security system comprising Europe, the USSR, and Northern America), he stuck to his policy of noninterference and nonviolence. The Reagan and Bush administrations, which were anxious to keep him in power, showed restraint while not forgetting long-term goals of dismantling communism and fostering Western democracy. Neither was a “superpower condominium” over Eastern Europe agreed upon, nor were the non-communist groups and new governments abandoned. In the face of the communist crisis, both sides earned respect for displaying remarkable ability to handle potentially explosive situations in a sensitive and responsible way.

Facing the upheavals of 1989, the smaller Western states shared the US goal of not destabilizing Gorbachev’s position. Since her first meeting with the Soviet leader, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher had advocated “doing business” with him and had done a lot to convince the US president of her approach. In a conversation with Gorbachev on 23 September 1989, the “Iron Lady” characterized the Soviet leader’s position as being “in favor of each country’s choosing its own road of development so long as the Warsaw Treaty is intact.”⁸⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former US security advisor, in 1989 even went as far as advocating Poland and Hungary remaining within the Warsaw Treaty Organization.⁸⁷ This was a widespread position among Western leaders, whose highest priority was not

⁸⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, “1989!” *The New York Review of Books*, 5 November 2009.

⁸⁵ William Taubman and Svetlana Savranskaya, “If a Wall Fell in Berlin and Moscow Hardly Noticed, Would it Still Make a Noise?,” in Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 69–95, 80.

⁸⁶ Conversation Gorbachev with Thatcher, Soviet protocol, 23 September 1989, in Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 530–32, 531.

⁸⁷ Conversation Yakovlev with Brzezinski, Soviet protocol, 31 October 1989, in Savranskaya, Blanton and Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces*, 563–68, 567.