



THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW STORY (1989-2009)

The twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall was, not surprisingly, marked by a great number of celebrations, debates, films, documentaries, exhibitions, articles, books and conferences. Anniversaries are always a good excuse for “experts” to draw up balance-sheets and carry out mid- to long-term analyses, but above all they constitute a prime opportunity to perpetuate, organise and transmit the memory of past events. The night between the 9th and 10th of November 1989 was unquestionably one of the key events of the century that ended recently, arguably the most important event for the European continent since the end of the World War and the defeat of Nazi-Fascism. Some experts are known to hold the view that the three years between 1989 and 1991 were the final act of the 20th century, the “short century” which began in Russia in 1917.

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought to a close the long and dramatic narrative of the Soviet regime and its satellites, Germany was once more united and strong at the heart of Europe, the Cold War ended and, at the very moment when the processes and categories of international geopolitics were being redefined, the construction of unified Europe received a new and extraordinary lease of life. It is therefore clear – especially if we consider that that was also the year of the Chinese student demonstrations and the tragic events of Tienanmen Square – that 1989 marked an epochal turn in the destinies of Germany, Europe and the world that went down in collective memory as the “year of liberty”.

Although events in Berlin had been long in the making (which is almost always the case, since great changes do not happen in a day) with the reforms ushered in by Gorbachev in the Soviet Union from 1986 onwards, this does not detract from the profound historical and symbolic significance of the fall of the wall in the city that was the emblem of the Cold War and the division of Germany. Especially since many then believed that nothing would ever change in Eastern Europe and that *perestroika* was little more than a bluff.

Today, twenty years on, not only have many of those events been explained and processed by historiographic research, but it is also possible to

attempt to address some of the great unresolved issues raised at the time by the collapse of so-called “real socialism”. What did the end of forty years of division mean for Germany? How did the international order change? In which direction would the former Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe go? How did the “Europe entity” influence the modernisation and democratisation of the former Communist countries? Conversely, how did their subsequent “entry into Europe” condition the development and configuration of the EU? And again: what remains of Marxism-Leninism? Did 1989-91 actually lead to the “universalisation of Western liberal democracy”, according to the time-honoured theory of Francis Fukuyama?

What seems to have emerged from public debate in recent weeks, alongside the clear awareness of the period-setting nature Berlin's '89, is, on the one hand, the failure of communism both in the form of Soviet-born “real socialism” and as the political agenda of Western European communist parties, on the other the difficulty of redefining the international order and governance in the aftermath of the Cold War. The latter aspect especially appears to be the most complex and problematic, and probably represents the greatest challenge – as yet unresolved – left by the events of 1989-91. With the collapse of the assets and stability guaranteed by the division of the world into spheres of influence, international geopolitics has been divided by rifts old and new (think, for instance, of the Balkans), which the previous order had effectively placated and frozen.

Whereas, therefore, the fall of the Berlin Wall represented “the triumph of liberty” – as the title ran in *La Repubblica* on the following day – the unresolved question of how to equip the international system with a democratic and efficient governance, clear and predictable rules and the right balance between national sovereignty and supranational powers persists to this day. From this standpoint, the “other story” which began on 9 November 1989 has yet to take on a clearly defined shape and, while new divisions and conflicts emerge, Europe cannot avoid taking the lead role in world affairs that many, on the threshold of the 'Nineties, envisaged and predicted.

To mark the twentieth anniversary celebrations of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the “Centro Studi per il Progetto Europeo” organised an event in which to reflect on the effects and implications of that extraordinary moment, especially in

view of the fact that the city of Bologna and Emilia Romagna were for many years the ambassadors of Italian communism, amongst other things. With the title, *Quando iniziò un'altra storia. Riflessioni a Bologna a vent'anni dalla caduta del Muro* (When another story began: reflections in Bologna twenty years after the fall of the Wall), the event was held on 8 November and was attended by the president of the "Progetto Europa" association, Fabio Roversi Monaco, with the participation of two university lecturers and researchers, Angelo Panebianco and Paolo Pombeni, and two high-profile Italian politicians, Piero Fassino (leader of the Democratic Party) and Francesco D'Onofrio (senate group leader for the UDC – the Union of Christian and Centre Democrats).

All speakers highlighted the period-setting significance of '89 also for Italian politics, not only because of the change of name and identity of one of the two main post-War political parties (a change – said Fassino – which was in fact the result of a long process of internal development dating back to 1968), but above all because of the "earthquake" which shook the country's entire political structure to its core with the collapse of the "First Republic". Similarly, all speakers touched upon the new problems which arose from this "new story": Europe's role in the international system, for instance, which D'Onofrio considers to be in serious decline, against the growing strength of the United States under Obama and the increasing weight of Asia's emerging economies; the current tendency towards "re-nationalisation" which, according to Panebianco, risks delaying the advent of a new international global and democratic order; the problem, highlighted above all by Pombeni, of how to create consensus and participation among the citizens in respect of the new supranational entities and bodies, starting with the European Union.

The event drew a large audience, and closed with a short speech by the former European Commission president, Romano Prodi, who stressed the need to push ahead with the political integration of Europe well beyond the scope of the Lisbon Treaty. Without a "communitary" Europe, resulting from the gradual (but vital) ceding of sovereignty by the nation states, said Prodi, the EU risks not having a role in the future of the world; in other words, not being there as a key player in the "new story" which, with a display of great courage and hope, the citizens of Berlin inaugurated twenty years ago.

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