



POLAND

HUNGARY

GDR

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

BULGARIA

ROMANIA



THE FINAL CURTAIN

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Cover photograph: Warsaw, 17 November 1989. Demolition of
Monument to Feliks Dzerzhynski, creator of the 'Tcheka' Soviet Political
Police (future KGB). *Photo: Jarosław Stachowicz / FORUM*

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P O L A N D A L I V E F U S E

Zbigniew Gluza

In 1989, that part of Europe which lay to the west of the 'Iron Curtain' became a stage for an extraordinary experiment. Within a short period of time, several nations were standing on the threshold of a chance to change their fate – an event almost unprecedented in history.

The pace of the year 1989 was extraordinarily intensive – as though the whole breakthrough in freedom for Eastern and Central Europe had to take place within the space of that year. In January, the pending changes to the system were little more than a glimmer of hope. By December, the new, independent order was a reality in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; at the same time in the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, Romania and the Baltic Republics of the USSR, the vision of changes to the existing system were already deeply rooted. For Poland, the end of the year, which brought about the restitution of the 'free' emblem of the state and the traditional name of the country, provided a sure sign of a return to independence.

Each half of that year had its own specific dynamics which were diametrically opposite. The first half saw the waning of the Communist system but, nonetheless, with all its main characteristics – the arrogance and brutality of the authorities (as in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, or in Soviet Georgia), economic catastrophe, public apathy and a general feeling of hopelessness. The fact that changes to the system were essential was obvious but the Communists could still quash each individual attempt at rebellion. The second half of the year brought an avalanche of increasing, independence orientated attitudes in the individual communities. The actual breakthrough came midway.

The image we present is that of communities progressing through the year as in a relay race. There is no direct communication between them, they do not exhort others to act and do not agree dates – but one nation passes the baton on to the next. As an operation came to an end in one country, so it passed on naturally to the next. Each national culminating point was actually distinct from the others, like the stages in a relay race. Spring belonged to the Poles. Summer – to the Hungarians and to the 'Baltic chain'. Autumn belonged to the Germans, Czechs, Slovaks and Bulgarians. In the early days of the winter even the Romanians felt the breakthrough.

On 4 June 1989, the day when a European nation – the Polish nation – won a victory over the Communist authorities, rebellious Chinese students were massacred in Tiananmen Square (the Square of Heavenly Peace) in Peking. There, when faced with a threat, the Communists did not hesitate to resort to violence and even now continue in power. In the countries which have undergone a democratic transformation and which eventually joined the European Union, a return to Communism after 25 years seems impossible.

If everyone in Europe lived as we do – in a stable, democratic world, a return to the beginning of this quarter century would not be so very important. However, in the Ukraine, the year 2014 is a reminder that not all of Europe changed after 1989; only the border delineating it moved farther East.

T H E P R E D E V I O U S D E C A D E

Bartosz Kaliski

By the end of 1970, there were no pointers to indicate that the Soviet bloc faced no more than ten years of existence. Back in 1979, convinced of its imperial power, the Kremlin had sent its armies into Afghanistan.

In Poland, a democratic opposition became increasingly active from 1976. A secret organisation which put together the main aims of society (Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległościowe – Polish Independence Agreement), and open ones, which organised and coordinated sectors of society and social action (“KOR” – Committee for Social Defence, or the Movement for Defence of Human and Civic Rights). By the end of the 1970’s the basic principles of action for democracy and independence had been established.

When the Polish Pope, John Paul II, visited Poland on a pilgrimage in June 1979, he was greeted by crowds numbering millions, crowds which had discovered that it was possible to organise themselves despite the Communist authorities. The words uttered by the Pope in Warsaw: *“May Thy Spirit descend on us! And change the face of the world! This world!”* – were treated not as a challenge but as a prediction.

At this time, the hopes of Czech intellectualists that Czechoslovakia would recognise the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Eastern Europe lay in ruins. Gustáv Husák, leader of the Communist Party, was not interested in dialogue. The leading signatories of Charter 77, and the activists of the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Persecuted (VONS), were sentenced to prison (among them, the dramatist, Václav Havel) or forced to emigrate.

In Romania, the Communist-Nationalist regime commenced a phase of increased repression. The security apparatus expanded on a monstrous scale and the cult of the leader of the State and the Party – Nicolae Ceauşescu – blossomed. Those who rebelled were forcibly incarcerated in psychiatric hospitals or exiled. In 1979, the organisers of the Independent Trade Union of Romanian Working Peoples (SLOMR) were arrested and given long prison sentences.

In Hungary, the dissatisfaction felt by intelligentsia spheres with government policies took on an organised manifestation – gestures of sympathy with Charter 77 were openly expressed, contacts were established with “KOR”, and a free press was set up. The Foundation for Aid for the Poor (SZETA), set up in 1979, was unquestionably an opposition organisation.

In Bulgaria, the ultimate opposition stance during this period became the Bulgarian Charter 77. This, and other acts of protest, were met with ruthlessness by the security forces, which even went as far as liquidation of unwelcome elements.

In the German Democratic Republic, opposition activities were based on tight links with the Protestant Churches, which gave refuge to rebellious young people. Especially popular was the peace movement, whose aim was the introduction of an alternative (civilian) military service and pro-active environmental policies.

In the summer of 1980, helpless in the face of a growing wave of strikes, Polish Communists undertook negotiations with workers’ leaders in the Coastal Provinces and agreed to the main demand – the formation of an independent trade union movement. The multi-million strong “Solidarność” Union, which came into being in September 1980, became a widespread social movement, representing Polish aims for independence. In the many

months of its legal operations (1980–81), Poland experienced freedom on a scale hitherto unprecedented in the Soviet bloc.

From the outset, the Polish revolt was met by threats from the Soviet authorities. In December 1980, as a result of strong diplomatic pressure from the USA, military intervention was called-off. In March 1981, "Solidarność" was in a position to call a general strike which would paralyse the entire country. The Soviets again threatened military intervention. Yet, in the first days of December, when General Jaruzelski came close to dealing with "Solidarność", the Kremlin revoked military guarantees should the 'internal' operation prove unsuccessful.

The introduction of Martial Law on 13 December 1981, the internment of thousands of opposition members, the freezing of democratic reforms – served only to reveal the weakness of the Communists. "Solidarność" was de-legalised and yet tens of thousands of people joined the ranks of its underground structures. The democratic societies of the West supported this independent, underground movement. The leader of "Solidarność", Lech Wałęsa – Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1983 – was treated as an official representative of Polish goals. In answer to the threat posed to the regime, the countries of the Soviet bloc reinforced their internal policies and treated oppositionists with increasing brutality. By the middle of the 1980's, signs of a thaw began to emerge from Moscow.

After an amnesty announced in September 1986, the Polish authorities ceased to arrest people on political grounds. "Solidarność" began to re-build its open structures. The strikes in the spring and summer of 1988 made it clear to the authorities that social and economic stagnation was beginning to pose a threat to the stability of the system. The Communists showed signs of readiness for dialogue. They were encouraged in this by the changes in the USSR (*glasnost, perestrojka*) – which were rejected by those in power in the GDR, criticised by Ceaușescu, or treated with considerable reserve in Bulgaria.

The Polish opposition which had been organising itself as a Civic Committee since December 1988, under the leadership of NSZZ "Solidarność's" Lech Wałęsa, and headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Bronisław Geremek, decided to enter into concrete talks with the reformatory wing of the Polish Communist Party (PZPR) and thus to provide it with cautious support. Preparations for the Round Table talks commenced, representatives of the Catholic Church acting as intermediaries. The very people who had been responsible for the earlier attack on Polish society – Generals Wojciech Jaruzelski and Czesław Kiszczak (Minister for Internal Affairs) – were now in favour of dialogue.

Changes were taking place, too, in other countries. Towards the end of 1987, Gustáv Husák resigned as leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party; the country began to seethe with activity and independent initiatives and acts of protest multiplied but the regime continued to counter these with persecution. In Hungary there was talk of emergence from economic stagnation and when the leader of the Party, János Kádár, resigned in May 1988, market reforms were put into place opening up the country to foreign investment.

The year 1988 came to an end in this Communist dominated part of Europe with the realisation that the system was, nonetheless, losing power.

P O L A N D

In Poland it took ten years, in Hungary ten months, in East Germany ten weeks; perhaps in Czechoslovakia it will take ten days...

Timothy Garton Ash in conversation with Václav Havel
on 23 November 1989 in the Magic Lantern Theatre in Prague



Gdańsk, 3 June. 'Solidarność' rally organised before the parliamentary elections.

Photo: Jan Juchniewicz / KARTA Centre (OK)

Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, Chairman of the State Council, in a New Year address:

The year 1989 will undoubtedly be full of important and remarkable changes in Poland. What, then, can I wish you on the eve of the coming year? Let each one of us do everything possible to ensure that the New Year brings the opening of new and wide horizons for Poland. May the internal changes lead to permanent peace in the country, ensure social order and create a strong basis for national understanding.

May they become a real and permanent contribution to the rebuilding and resurrection of socialism and to the process of relaxation of tension in Europe. [20]

4 JANUARY

– On the 7th anniversary of the de-legalisation of the Independent Students' Association, an illegal student demonstration takes place in Katowice. The participants chant: "Minister Kiszczak, we want to act legally". Intervention by the militia ends in several arrests.

Student demonstrations demanding the reinstatement of the Independent Students' Association [NZS] – a parallel organisation to "Solidarność" and banned during Martial Law – continue for another two weeks in various towns.



Warsaw, January. Street traders selling clothes.

Photo: Bernard Bisson / SYGMA/CORBIS/FotoChannels

6 JANUARY

– **USSR.** Yuri Vorontzov, Foreign Minister, confirms an undertaking made during a meeting with delegates of Afghanistan partisans, that Soviet troops will be withdrawn from Afghanistan by 15 February 1989.

10 JANUARY

– **USSR.** In Vilnius, an opposition manifestation takes place, organised by the underground League for Lithuanian Independence and the anti-Communist Democratic Party. A 50-thousand strong crowd demands that Lithuania be granted independence. The authorities do not intervene.

6 JANUARY

– A meeting takes place in Warsaw with the participation of: Stanisław Ciosek – a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Communist Party, “Solidarność” adviser – Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and the director of the Press Office of the Polish Episcopacy – Father Alojzy Orszulik. The subject of the talks is the possibility of carrying out changes to the Polish regime and the re-legalisation of “Solidarność”. Further meetings with the same participants take place every few days throughout January. Father Orszulik notes: *“Mazowiecki and I came to the conclusion that a resolution of the Plenum [of the Central Committee of the Polish United Communist Party] in the matter of “Solidarność” must be formulated in such a way that it be acceptable not only to the [Party] apparatus but also to society in general, otherwise it will not offer any openings. [...] The conditions for legalisation are open to discussion”.*



Graffiti by the Federation of Fighting Youth (FMW)



An underground “postage stamp” featuring Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski: “Our bad winter”. *Ośrodek KARTA (OK) collection*

From New Year wishes of Polish intelligentsia published in the underground “Opinia Białostocka” [Białystok Opinions]:

What do we [...] wish for on the brink of this new year of 1989? A Poland free and independent of the dictatorship of Moscow and the Communist Party. A multi-party system and equal mandates in the Sejm for existing and new opposition parties. That input from the Polish intelligentsia be appreciated when putting in motion systems of reform. Medication to fight off “ideological pneumonia”. Coloured TV sets and a TV media not solely for red propaganda. Salaries for the intelligentsia to cover at least 500 portions of ‘bigos’, to give us the strength necessary to fight for an Independent Poland. We ask for so little.

Białystok, winter [33]

11 JANUARY

– **HUNGARY.** The National Council passes laws allowing freedom of expression and of association. The laws make it possible to organise rallies and to set up non-Communist political parties but they do not specify how these are to be registered. Demonstrations are not to be held in the vicinity of the Parliament building.



Kraków Independent Students' Association banner:
"An end to the red terror"



"...I'd like to but I daren't!" Drawing: Tomasz Rzesutek. From the collections of the Muzeum Karykatury

18 JANUARY

– Despite resistance on the part of some members, after two days of talks, the Plenum of the Central Committee finally decides to legalise “Solidarność” once again. Thus the condition that the opposition side take part in negotiations is fulfilled. A document entitled *Stance of the Central Committee on the question of political and trade union pluralism* contains a note as follows: “During the Round Table negotiations, organisational structures built on wider fundamentals of national understanding must be specified. At the same time, it is necessary to establish the terms, manner and time frame within which union pluralism is to be introduced and to open the way to the introduction of new trades’ unions, including “Solidarność”.

16 JANUARY

– **CZECHOSLOVAKIA.** Resorting to the use of truncheons, gas and water cannon, the militia quells a demonstration in St. Vaclav Square, the place where twenty years previously Jan Palach had set fire to himself as a protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. Security Forces arrest many participants in the rally, amongst them Václav Havel and the spokesmen of Charter 77.

18 JANUARY

– **GDR.** The General Secretary of the German Socialist Unity Party (SED), Erich Honecker, speaking of the Berlin Wall: “It will continue to stand for fifty, even one hundred years, so long as there are reasons for its existence”.

27 JANUARY

– The previously agreed meeting between representatives of the authorities and of “Solidarność” to prepare the ground for the Round Table Talks, takes place in Magdalenka, a suburb of Warsaw. As a result of the decisions taken, negotiations can commence on time and the agenda is divided between three working parties. A communiqué issued after the meeting states: “Once the formula of a social agreement has been agreed, we will apply to the State Council for a change to be made to the law on trade unions and, subsequently, at the Round Table Talks we will specify a date for the commencement of the official establishment of “Solidarność”. The road is now clear for negotiations.



Warsaw, 28 January. “Solidarność” press conference following the meeting in Magdalenka. Seated, from left: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Lech Wałęsa, Bronisław Geremek. Photo: Erazm Ciolek / FORUM

Extract from a note written by Father Alojzy Orszulik:

Mazowiecki: Not only is there an economic and political crisis but there is also considerable distrust on the part of the people. We must bear this in mind. This distrust can only be alleviated by facts, not by documents. The Round Table and its successful outcome will be one such fact but the legalisation of “Solidarność” will be a fundamental fact. The second matter is to ensure that society realises that this historical experiment is not just empty words but the beginning of a road to fundamental reforms. The third aspect concerns singularity and openness. Singularity means that the electoral agreement reached concerns the present and is not a permanent solution. Openness – that we must ensure that the public is given frank and open information about the agreement.

Magdalenka nr. Warsaw, 27 January [34]

Bronisław Geremek, advisor to “Solidarność”:

We were faced with the vision of a national drama. We knew that the economic situation was disintegrating at a rapid rate and that, unless we reached a speedy understanding, pact, or agreement, we might wake to find ourselves amid the ruins of a devastated Poland. Of course, were we to treat Poland as a small-holding, then it would have been better to wait for the farm manager to finally prove his inefficiency, to wait until everything was completely run down and then to take over the entire management. But this was not about a farm, it was about our Country.

Warsaw [14]

29 JANUARY

– **HUNGARY.** The Communists accede that the events of 1956 were a national uprising and not – as previously held – a ‘counter-revolution’. This declaration by the Party is a significant indication of the changes taking place in Hungary.

János Kis, Hungarian dissident:

Once again the demands made in 1956 are on the agenda. Some of them, like the country’s neutrality in foreign policy, are seen as part of a more distant perspective. Others, like a multi-party constitutional system, have already become part and parcel of the direct aims of the political battle. This constitutes a definitive psychological about-turn. [31]



An underground "postage stamp".
From an OK collection

5 FEBRUARY

– In Warsaw, the III Congress of the Confederation of an Independent Poland [KPN] continues. The Congress issues a statement criticising the idea of holding talks with the ruling party.

The Polish Independence Party [PPN] is also opposed to any talks with the authorities and accuses the Communists of having completely devastated Poland and of imposing persecution. The resolution issued by PPN states: *"We declare that those Polish independence organisations which sit down to negotiate with those responsible for introducing Martial Law are – to all intents and purposes – giving support to the rule of the Polish Communist Party."*



Warsaw, 5 February. III Congress of KPN. Photo: Jerzy Koźnik / FORUM

6 FEBRUARY

– **GDR.** 20-year old Chris Gueffroy is killed and his companion is seriously injured by East German border guards as they attempt to escape over the Berlin Wall. Despite the fact that both youths stopped when challenged, they were shot at close range by the guards.

Following this operation, all four guards are decorated with the 'Merit Medal' and each receives a bonus of 150 Marks.

11 FEBRUARY

– **HUNGARY.** A law is passed to reinstate a multi-party system and this results in the immediate re-establishment of the activities of some 50 political parties. This is yet another step by the ruling Communists towards a de-centralisation of the political system.

6 FEBRUARY

– Round Table plenary discussions commence in the Namiestnikowski Palace in Warsaw. A total of 57 people take part – representing both the government and the opposition. Jerzy Turowicz states: “I realise that we cannot jump from ‘social realism’ to complete democracy in the space of a single day and that sensible compromises will be necessary but – without real and meaningful changes in our political system and in the way it is run – there cannot be an understanding between the authorities and society.” After the opening speeches, a resolution is taken to set up three working parties, so-called ‘little tables’. The subject of the negotiations concerns the establishment of foundations for a pluralist social system which would be acceptable to both sides, as well as preparations for the repair of the economic system in Poland.

Lech Wałęsa in a speech during the inauguration of the Round Table Talks:

Our efforts were, and still are, wasted, rates of pay are poor, nothing is as it should be. This results from a bad system, from a lack of freedom. We can still feel Stalin breathing down our necks.

This cannot go on. It must change – Poland must be a fit place to live and Poles must feel that they are in charge.

[...] The hopes of the nation surround this Table, but there is mistrust, as well. There will be people who will not accept the results of our efforts. This is something we cannot ignore and must respect. However, we do hope for a loyal understanding of the importance of the matters with which we are dealing and of the responsibility which this moment entails.

Warsaw, 6 February [57]



Warsaw, 6 February. Commencement of Round Table Talks. On the left – the government representatives, on the right – the opposition. Photo: Erazm Ciolek / FORUM

13 FEBRUARY

– **USSR.** An independent demonstration organised by the Moldavian Democratic Movement takes place in Kiszyniov. Approximately 10 thousand demonstrators demand the reinstatement of the Latin alphabet and the recognition of Moldavian as the official language of the Republic. The rally ends with the intervention of the Soviet militia and dozens of participants are detained.

16 FEBRUARY

– **USSR.** During a 300,000 strong rally organised in Vilnius to mark the 71st anniversary of the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence, the leaders of the Communist dominated Sayudis (Lithuanian Movement for Reform), give way to social pressure and declare their intention to work towards independence. The Communist authorities turn a blind eye to Lithuanian nationalist demonstrations.





Warsaw, 6 February 1989. Inaugural session of the Round Table Talks. *Photo: Anna Pietuszko / OK*



Wrocław, 22 March. Participants in the Easter march give flowers to the militiamen. Photo: Mieczysław Michalak / OK

19 FEBRUARY

– **USSR.** The Belarus National Front organizes the first opposition rally in Mińsk to be accepted by the authorities; some 40,000 people take part. Armed with national flags, the demonstrators demand an end to the leading role of the Communist Party, the setting up of a Belarus army and the establishment of the Belarus language as the official language of the state.

5 MARCH

– **USSR.** A legal, several thousand strong rally, organised by the independent “Memorial” Association takes place in Moscow’s Gorky Park. Speakers recall Stalin’s crimes (on the anniversary of his death) and demand official condemnation of these crimes.

In Kiev on the following day, several thousand Ukrainians demand national mourning for the victims of Stalinism.



25 FEBRUARY

– Despite preventative measures by the Security Services (over 100 people are detained at railway and bus stations), the first working session of the Anti-Regime Opposition Congress takes place in Jastrząb. Around 50 activists from various parties take part, among them: the Confederation for an Independent Poland, the “Freedom and Peace” Movement, “Fighting Solidarity”, the Polish Socialist Party – the Democratic Revolution and the Polish Independence Party. In the summing up document, the participants criticise both the Communist authorities and Lech Wałęsa, and other participants in the negotiations with the government representatives. The stance of the Congress is unequivocal: *“All compromises with the Communists, notwithstanding the intentions of those who undertake them – serve only to prop up the toppling regime.”*

2 MARCH

– A meeting takes place in Magdalenka, near Warsaw, between Gen. Czesław Kiszczak and Lech Wałęsa. The aim of the meeting, which lasts 7.5 hours, is to break the stalemate situation in the Round Table Talks. These meetings in Magdalenka are repeated throughout the Round Table Talks, whenever the two sides are unable to reach a compromise.

15 MARCH

– **HUNGARY.** In Budapest, a rally takes place on the anniversary of the People’s Spring and is attended by many thousands. The actor, Györgi Cserhalmi, reads the demands listed by the opposition organisations. Delegates from “Fighting Solidarity” distribute 5,000 leaflets in Polish and Hungarian, mentioning the uprisings of 1848, the ties linking both nations and the current political situation in both countries.

26 MARCH

– **USSR.** The first partially democratic elections to the Council of Peoples’ Deputies take place. This, in turn, will lead to the Supreme Council. One-third of the seats in Parliament are reserved for members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, while the remaining two-thirds are the subject of rivalry between candidates put forward by various institutions, work-places and legal organisations.

Bronisław Geremek:

Did we agree to give the Communists 65%? Did we give them these 65%? No, because they already had 100%. What we did do was agree that they should relinquish 35% in favour of the nation. [...] We were leaving behind a system in which society had no say at all. Nobody had asked the nation who was to sit in Parliament. For 40 years, this decision had belonged to the Party. [14]

5 APRIL

– After two months of negotiations, the Round Table Talks in Warsaw come to an end and a final agreement is signed. A document entitled *Stance on Political Reform* states: Accordingly, 60% of the mandates for parliamentary deputies will be allocated to the coalition composed of the PZPR [Polish United Workers' Party], the ZSL [United Peoples' Party] and the SD [Democratic Party], and a further 5% to PAX, PZKS, UChS [catholic parties sanctioned by the Communists]. Non-party candidates, put forward by independent groups of citizens, will rival amongst themselves for 35% of the overall number of deputy mandates."



Warsaw, 5 April. The final meeting of the Round Table. Photo: Krzysztof Miller / Agencja Gazeta

7 APRIL

– **USSR.** A mass demonstration takes place in Tbilisi. Thousands of Georgians gather outside Party headquarters and demand reinstatement of independence and territorial integrity for Georgia. The demonstration lasts continuously throughout the day and night and the number of participants grows to over 200 thousand.

7 APRIL

– Changes in the Constitution are passed by the Sejm of the Polish Peoples’ Republic, establishing an upper house of Parliament – the Senate – and the office of President. A new electoral procedure to both houses of Parliament is also passed, as well as a law on freedom of association.

8 APRIL

– The Civic Committee meets in the basement of a church in Warsaw and assumes patronage of the “Solidarność” electoral campaign. The following day, it decides not to include a representative of KPN in its number.

Report issued by Department III of the Ministry of the Interior concerning the meeting of the Civic Committee:

T[adeusz] Mazowiecki [...] stressed – on the basis of discussions with representatives of some of the groups which did not take part in the Round Table Talks – that *“it was better to have lost 5 or 10 mandates, than to have won them in a manner which might have led to dire consequences.”*

J[acek] Kuron [...] stated that the “Solidarność” electoral platform should base its campaign on three elements: the sovereignty of the nation, democracy and a process of evolutionary change.

J[an] Olszewski – social apathy does not result from laziness but from total lack of confidence. [...]

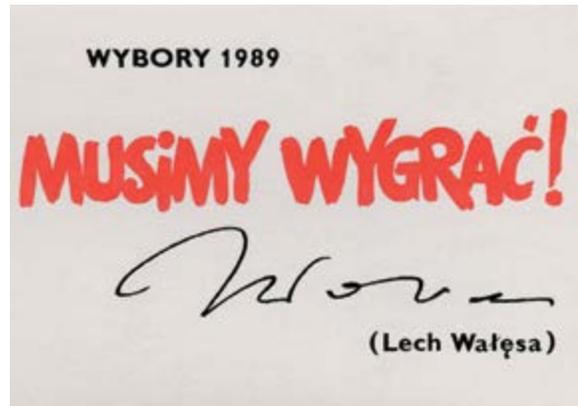
L[ech] Wałęsa [...] stressed that the election campaign must be very active and efficient, as *“...we must win. We have no alternative.”*

Warsaw, 8 April [25]



Warsaw, 8 April. Meeting of the Civic Committee.

Photo: Jerzy Koźnik / FORUM



“Solidarność” campaign leaflet: “We must win!”

From the OK collection

8 APRIL

– **HUNGARY.** Representatives of opposition organisations taking part in Round Table talks reject the government’s proposition that the talks commence without setting initial terms. The opposition makes it clear that a condition for the commencement of the talks is acceptance by the Communists of free elections.

Imre Kónya, Hungarian dissident:

The Opposition’s Round Table [...] demonstrated to the whole world that, although the opposition is composed of a political spectrum, it can speak with one voice. At the same time, it encouraged other organisations to join as this would give added credibility in the eyes of the public. [43]

Extract from the “Solidarność” Civic Committee’s electoral programme:

Why are we going to vote?

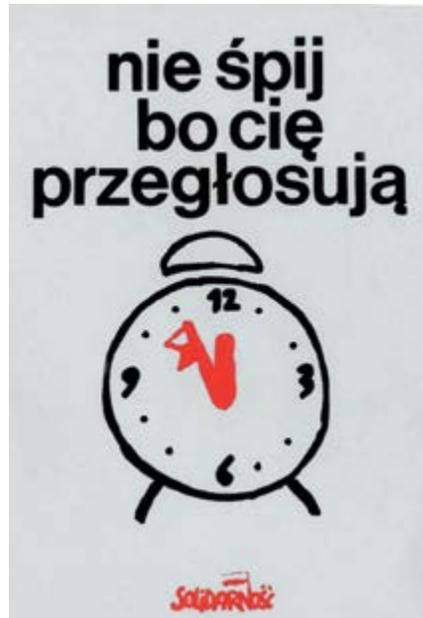
We exhort everyone to take part in the elections because we can see the benefits which Poland can achieve through the participation of independent voices in the Sejm and the Senate.

[...] In taking part in the elections, we are not closing our eyes to the as yet undemocratic way in which the country is governed, nor do we intend to pretend otherwise. We want to change the system but to do so by way of evolutionary reforms and also by taking advantage of parliamentary methods. The emergence of a chance to take a limited part in Parliament is not a favour granted to us by the authorities but a way of restoring to the nation something which belongs to it by right.

[...] Our aim is the sovereignty of the nation and the independence of the country, the restoration of the Republic. We intend to achieve our aims through legal activities and to fight our political battles in a parliamentary manner.

Our goal is to lay a foundation for human and civic rights so that a society of free people can begin to rebuild its own country.

Warsaw, April [25]



“Solidarność” electoral poster: “Fall asleep and they’ll outvote you!” From the OK collection

9 APRIL

– After mass in St. Brygida’s Church in Gdańsk, “Solidarność Walcząca” organises a protest against the Round Table agreements. Demonstrators call for a boycott of the elections, declaring them undemocratic. The following day, Lech Wałęsa comments: *“The fact that kids parade through the streets shouting slogans is neither here, nor there.”* Almost every day, right up to the elections, demonstrations organised by pro-independence groups take place in various towns throughout Poland in protest at the agreements reached between the government and the trade union.

9 APRIL

– **USSR.** At 4 a.m., Soviet security units and troops attack the participants of a demonstration in Tbilisi. Specnaz commandoes assault innocent members of the public with metal bars, trench spades and knives. Military gas is also used to disperse the crowds. Some 40 people lose their lives and hundreds are injured.

Over the next few days, dozens of people report to hospitals with symptoms of severe poisoning. Having quelled the independence demonstrations, the Soviet authorities introduce a curfew throughout Georgia and place the republic in a situation of isolation. Tanks and armoured troop carriers appear in the streets of the Georgian capital.

11 APRIL

– “Tygodnik Mazowsze” ceases to appear. Its editors join a team headed by Adam Michnik, who is setting up an official opposition newspaper.

13 APRIL

– The National Council establishes a State Electoral Commission and sets election dates: 4th and 18th June.

16 APRIL

– A ceremony to commemorate the Katyń Massacre turns into an anti-government demonstration. Some 10,000 people demand the withdrawal of Soviet troops stationed in Poland. Several hundred people march on the Provincial HQ of the Polish Communist Party. This leads to skirmishes with the militia.



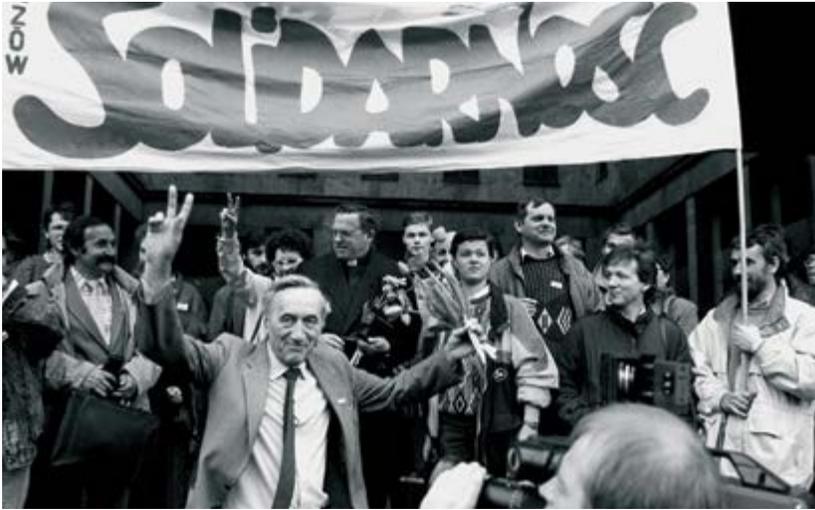
Warsaw, April. The editorial team of “Tygodnik Mazowsze” gathered in Helena Łuczywo’s apartment. Photo: Anna Pietuszek / OK



Gdańsk, 16 April. Opposition demonstration on the anniversary of the Katyń Massacre. Photo: FMW/OK

17 APRIL

– **USSR.** The Lithuanian Democratic Party organises a legal rally in Vilnius. Several thousands of demonstrators demand the withdrawal of the Soviet armies of occupation.



Warsaw, 17 April. Re-registration of NSZZ “Solidarność” in the Provincial Court.
 Photo: Krzysztof Wójcik / FORUM

Lech Wałęsa, the leader of “Solidarność”:

After one hundred weeks of hard work on our part, the Provincial Court in Warsaw has once again registered the “Solidarność” Independent Self-Governing Trade Union – a national organisation with headquarters in Gdańsk. This event was not marked by any triumphant displays and the media showed little interest. We, Poles, like our triumphs to be accompanied by fanfares and gun salutes and the flutter of flags. Peaceful, ‘official’ victories do not turn us on, even though they prove a superior political maturity. From the very beginning of this ‘second life’ of the Union, it was obvious that “Solidarność” would not now be the party of the ‘nation as a whole’ against the Communist regime but a mature, permanent structure, an association of people with a well developed social and political consciousness. [53]

17 APRIL

– The Provincial Court in Warsaw re-registers NSZZ “Solidarność”. Three days later the “Solidarność” Independent Self-Governing Trade Union of Private Farmers is also registered.

25 APRIL

– The Confederation of an Independent Poland [KPN] organises an electoral rally outside Warsaw University. It ends with the intervention of the Civil Militia and the arrest of several people. Despite its critical attitude towards the Round Table, KPN nonetheless decides to put forward its own candidates to the coming elections.

Imre Kónya, Hungarian dissident:

After a stormy Opposition Round Table discussion, we decided not to take part in the negotiations so loudly proclaimed by the press because our terms had not been met. I will appear on my own to represent all of us. I am to announce that we are not avoiding the talks but that we do not intend to take part in a posturing game. [43]

22 APRIL

– **HUNGARY.** Independent parties and political organisations taking part in the Opposition Round Table agree a common stance prior to negotiations with the ruling Communists. The main item on the agenda is the establishment of a date for free parliamentary elections. Hungarian dissidents conclude that the achievements of the Polish Round Table Talks are not sufficient for the Hungarians to emulate.

28 APRIL

– The electoral campaign commences. Polish Radio transmits the first electoral broadcast on behalf of the Civic Committee.

A photographic session featuring the Civic Committee's candidates for Parliament – and including Lech Wałęsa – takes place the following day in the Gdańsk Shipyard.

Declaration issued by the Confederation of an Independent Poland:

An openly undemocratic electoral system will evoke an understandable desire to boycott the elections. This has been planned from the outset, to ensure that a large abstention bring maximum legitimacy to the ruling party. Therefore, boycotting the election [...] plays into the hands of the Communists. A boycott will reinforce the Polish Communist Party and its allies.

These undemocratic elections can, however, be changed into a plebiscite against Communist rule and at least some of the mandates may go to deputies and senators who are, indeed, independent. We can use these elections to begin to set in motion the process of independence and democracy. [7]



Gdańsk, 29 April. Electoral campaign photographic session with Lech Wałęsa. Photographs, from top: Jacek Kuroń, Zofia Kuratowska, Andrzej Szczepkowski.

Photo: Erazm Ciolek / FORUM

28 APRIL

– **USSR.** Yet more people report to the hospital in Tbilisi with symptoms of military gas poisoning. The number of victims of the demonstrations on 9th April rises to 100. The military authorities refuse to specify the type of gas used during the riots and this makes it impossible for doctors to provide effective treatment.

8 MAY

– As a result of the agreements reached during the Round Table Talks, the first issue of “Gazeta Wyborcza” [Electoral Gazette] appears – this is a daily newspaper which is to represent the solidarity of the opposition and is edited by a team headed by Adam Michnik. This first issue – published in a print-run of 150,000 copies – introduces the Civic Committee’s Parliamentary candidates. Under the newspaper title is the slogan: “No freedom without ‘Solidarność’”.



The first issue of “Gazeta Wyborcza”

The editorial team of “Gazeta Wyborcza” in an introductory article:

Here, at last – after over forty years – for the first time in Poland and probably in the whole of the [Soviet] Bloc, is a normal, independent daily newspaper with a national print run. By ‘normal’, we mean one which endeavours, above all, to provide a wide range of information – quickly and objectively – and differentiating between information and comment. So far we have only heard of such newspapers – now we intend to produce them. [...] We feel a bond with “Solidarność” but we intend to present the views and opinions of the public as a whole, and of various opposition spectra.

Warsaw, 8 May [8]

Tomasz Jastrun, dissident writer:

Together with his classmates and neighbours, my son, who is still at primary school, took an extraordinarily active part in the election [the election campaign]. Of course, the children were most excited about pasting up posters. [...] They started out on Bernardyńska Street in the Sadyba district, which was seen as being infamous since Captain Piotrowski [murderer of Father Popieluszko] lived there. Nor can it be said that he stood out in that district. Which is why hanging up posters in Sadyba evoked such strong emotions amongst the locals. [...] Some very nice ladies began to screech: “It’s disgusting – they’re now even using children to do their work for them. You have no idea who’s behind it all – “Solidarność” is a band of Jews”. Many of our other posters carried graffiti in similar terms. It’s not just a sign of some sort of new, ugly wave [...] but an indication of the helplessness of people whose world is toppling around them.

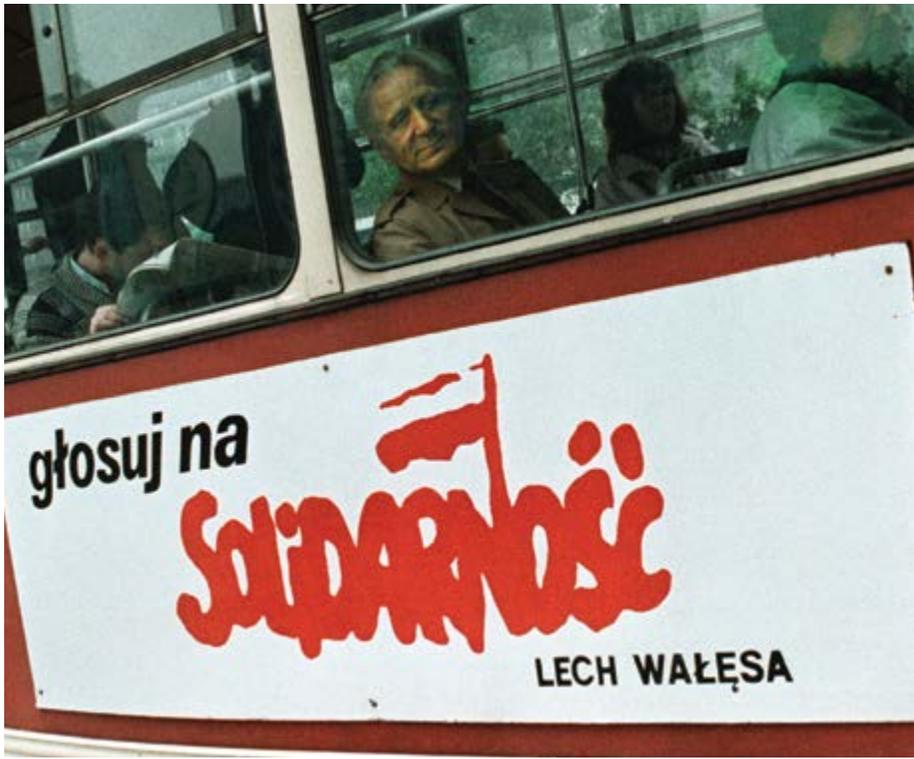
Warsaw, May [21]

7 MAY

– **GDR.** Local authority elections take place. The opposition carries out a monitoring operation and discovers mass rigging of elections. In Lipsk, the militia detains some 100 people demonstrating against the fraudulent elections. From now on, on the seventh day of each month, opposition members stage demonstrations in various towns throughout East Germany.

8 MAY

– **CHINA.** The student protest which started on 15th April in Peking, gradually widens. The main demand put forward by the strikers is that the Communist authorities recognise the recently established Autonomic Union of Chinese Universities – an organisation which coordinates efforts aimed at democratic reform.



Warsaw, spring. During the election campaign.
Photo: Wojciech Druszczyk / OK

9 MAY

– Channel II of Polish Television transmits the first election broadcast on behalf of “Solidarność”. The production is almost amateurish and primarily features Lech Wałęsa. The second part of the broadcast shows people in the public eye who speak about why they intend to vote for “Solidarność”.
– Information flows in from all parts of the country about how ‘unknown elements’ have been tearing down Civic Committee posters.

Lech Wałęsa during a press conference:

If the wave of strikes does not destroy us, if we do not give way to economic demands and do not ignore political expediency, then we may manage to lead Poland into Europe. To a Europe which will be open, like those other [Western] countries. Where you can leave or visit and come back, open to workers. But also to a Europe which will be an entity and which will not take from us our own intimacy – family intimacy, national intimacy. [2]

14 MAY

– **CHINA.** In Peking, 300 thousand demonstrators demand reinstatement of full civic rights. A student delegation meets with members of the Chinese Communist Party and puts forwards its demands.

Zhang, a Chinese student:

*They keep trying to influence us and tell us how we should behave. [...] And yet we, too, have our ‘principles’. Gorbachev, for instance, allows people in his country to speak. Why should we not have the same open discussions here, in our country? That’s why I have come here to the Square.
Peking, May [37]*



Kraków, 18 May. Skirmishes between demonstrators and militia units.

Photo: FMW/OK





Warsaw, May. "Solidarność" election posters. Photo: Jerzy Kośnik / FORUM



A Polish United Workers' Party election poster with the slogan 'Yes!' Photo: Chris Niedenthal / FORUM

22 MAY

– The election campaign enters its deciding phase. Despite some fears, the Communists are convinced that they will manage to achieve a successful outcome. In a conversation with SED Secretary General, Erich Honecker, General Wojciech Jaruzelski states: *"A hard pre-election battle is now taking place. There are major political lessons to be learnt. It is difficult to foretell what results the election will bring. [...] We hope to recoup something. Elections to the Senate are being held in a different manner but the Senate is of less importance than the Sejm. However, even here, we have to fight to win our position... [...] The situation in the army and in the security services is good. And the opposition is aware of this."*

20 MAY

– **BULGARIA.** Mass demonstrations by people of Turkish extraction demand the release of their activists and respect for the rights of minorities. Security forces take 7 days to crush the demonstration and 7 people are killed. At the beginning of June, the authorities circulate a directive ordering all citizens of Turkish extraction to leave the country immediately. This leads to a mass exodus to Turkey.

26 MAY

– **USSR.** Demonstrations take place in Moscow in protest at the elections to the Supreme Council of the USSR where not a single candidate from the reform camp was successful. Demonstrators carrying Russian national flags shout anti-Communist and anti-Party slogans. In Pushkin Square, the militia disperses "participants of an illegal gathering".

2 JUNE

– After a break of 8 years, “Tygodnik Solidarność” reappears, with Tadeusz Mazowiecki as editor-in-chief. This independent socio-political weekly – unique in the Polish People’s Republic – first appeared in April 1981 and continued publication until Martial Law.

Two days before the elections, Mieczysław F. Rakowski notes: *“This evening, Wojciech Jaruzelski appeared on television. He appealed for common-sense and distanced his broadcast from the election battle [...]. His appearance will not change much but we shall see. The atmosphere of unease in the Government-Party establishment grows.”*

Tadeusz Mazowiecki
in the introductory article:

The realisation that we are embarking on the preparation of foundations for a democratic Poland, brings with it a new insight into our tasks. [...] Up till now all that was necessary was to oppose totalitarianism. Now we must begin to construct the social structures of democracy. Up till now we have spoken of the necessity for pluralism. Now we must be able to practice that pluralism. Up till now we have addressed ourselves to our opponents, now we must tailor the values for which we fought to our own selves.

Warsaw, 2 June [51]



Warsaw, 2 June. Tadeusz Mazowiecki and a team of editors collect the first edition of the new “Tygodnik Solidarność” from the printers. Photo: Leszek Wdowiński / FORUM

3 JUNE

The largest, officially sanctioned meeting takes place at the Luzhniki stadium and is attended by 100,000 people.

The following day, Boris Yeltsin, a representative of the ‘democrats’ who received almost 90% of the Muscovite votes in the March elections to the Council of Deputies, is accepted by the Supreme Council.

– **CHINA.** The situation in Peking becomes increasingly tense. A crowd numbering many thousands of demonstrators repels the troops who are trying to take over the city centre. Stones are hurled at the Parliament building.



An underground “postage stamp”.
From the OK collection

Lech Wałęsa:

We had to do everything to penetrate the narrow fissure of democracy since only that could cause a rift in the embedded red rock of the national monolith. The elections were a chance to create an interim system which would be a meaningful bridgehead for the coming victorious battle. [...] “Solidarność” pickets were present in the vicinity of polling stations in order to help people who were unsure how to choose a candidate from the Civic Committee’s list. [...]

We were aware that what was happening was a test for several generations of Poles and that, by the following morning, Poland would be a different country. By participating and voting for our own candidates, we were opting for reforms but without a loss of blood. And yet the scenario could have been completely different.

Gdańsk, 4 June [53]

4 JUNE

– During the first round of parliamentary elections, 62% of those entitled to vote take part. The Opposition wins hands down, gaining 160 of the 161 seats in the Sejm, allocated as a result of the Round Table agreements, and 92 seats out of 100 in the Senate. For the authorities, the sore point is the failure of the national list of candidates, which included most of the leaders of the parties making up the government coalition. Two weeks later, the second round of elections sees a low turnout. Civic Committee candidates win the one missing seat in the Sejm and 7 in the Senate.



Warsaw, 4 June. “Solidarność” information point.
Photo: Erazm Ciołek / FORUM

4 JUNE

– **CHINA.** The unofficial leader, Deng Xiaoping, orders the army to occupy Tiananmen Square in Peking and to remove from it the students who are demanding political reforms. At 2 o’clock, tanks roll onto the streets of the city and infantry units fire on the helpless demonstrators using machine guns. The massacre lasts several hours. Independent press sources report several thousand dead.

5 JUNE

– Resigned to their electoral defeat, the Communists try to retain as much control as they can. Meetings take place between the government side and representatives of the opposition and the Episcopate. Faced with the threat that the election results could be invalidated, “Solidarność” advisor, Bronisław Gerecht, agrees to the introduction of changes to the electoral system which would make it possible for the ruling coalition side to make up for some of the losses it incurred.

A week later, the authorities announce that, in accordance with Round Table agreements, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski will become President. In a discussion with Archbishop Bronisław Dąbrowski, Gen. Czesław Kiszczak states that unless Gen. Jaruzelski “[...] is elected to the office of President, we will be faced with further destabilisation and the process of political reform will have to be terminated. No other President can count on the loyalty of the security forces and the army.”

Zbigniew Ferczyk, dissident:

We divided ourselves into teams and, after midnight, began to receive reports from the electoral commission. The first reports arrived and... we couldn't believe our eyes. As successive reports arrived, it became obvious – “Solidarność” had won an enormous landslide. [...] Consternation among our opponents. They made up for it with forced smiles and insincere congratulations. We still did not know what the results were in our electoral regions and throughout the country. Soon, however, everything became clear – we had won everything that was possible.

Nowa Huta, 5 June [55]

8 JUNE

– GDR. In East Berlin, 300 demonstrators take part in a protest march against the rigging of the local authority elections which took place a month earlier throughout East Germany. The militia arrest around 100 people.



Wrocław, 10 June. Following the Tiananmen Square massacre: “Look to China.”

Photo: Henryk Prykiel / NAF Dementi / Ośrodek Pamięć i Przyszłość

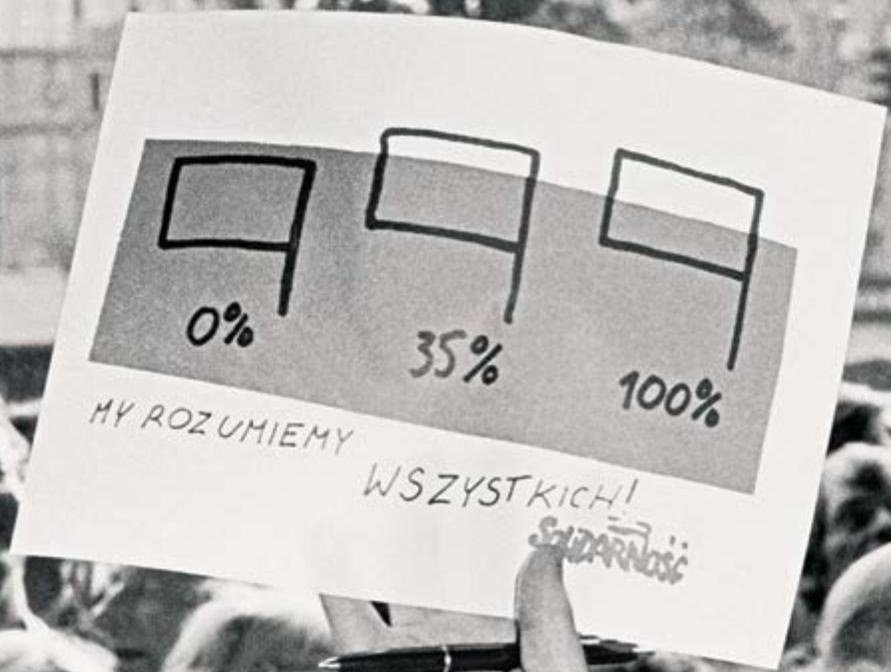
Jerzy Urban, head of the TV and the radio:

The morning after the elections, I attended a Politburo meeting. Czarzasty, our election campaign wizard who, only the previous day, had been worried that our victory might be too overwhelming, he now reported a resounding defeat. I wrote an announcement about the lost election and that the Party must accept it and I handed it to Jaruzelski. He read it aloud and then I had the biggest shock. Jaruzelski asked for comments. There were none. Power was relinquished without any discussion at all.

Warsaw, 5 June [49]



Berlin, 8 June. Demonstrators carry a banner with the slogan: “We will never come to terms with rigged elections” and a ballot box painted black, bearing the words: “Here lies democracy”. Photo: Associated Press / East News



MY ROZUMIEMY

WSZYSTKICH!

Solidarność

Warsaw, 4 June. Awaiting interim election results.
Slogan on poster: "We understand everyone!
Solidarność" Photo: Tomasz Wierzejski / FOTONOVA



Part of a "Solidarność" post-election poster. From the OK collection

9 JUNE

– During a conversation with Gen. Czesław Kiszczak, Adam Michnik rejects the proposition that a 'grand coalition' be formed and accepts a proposition that Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski be nominated for the presidency in exchange for the office of prime-minister for the opposition. Czesław Kiszczak: "They had only just declared that they were not interested in government posts and that they were in favour of a parliamentary coalition. Now they speak of the post of prime-minister."

12 JUNE

– The National Council issues a decree changing the electoral system. 33 mandates are transferred to the regions but only fresh candidates may stand for these seats. This leads to the final elimination of the key activists of the PZPR, ZSL and SD coalition.

Mieczysław F. Rakowski during a meeting of the Secretarial Office of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:

By giving away the post of prime-minister, the PZPR is giving up power and putting the Party on the defensive. [...] Our only chance lies in demonstrating that we are invincible. Defeatist positions will, I'm afraid, lead to our losing everything – not only will we, ourselves, lose but so will thousands, even millions of people, who have put their trust in us. I am against any form of concessions.

Warsaw, 16 June [48]

Bronisław Geremek:

We have demonstrated that the end of Communism is inevitable, that the king is bereft of everything, that of all the splendours left to him is a naked blade, that he has no public support. The June elections proved what was already obvious but empirically unconfirmed – that the Communists have no back-up, that they remain in authority only thanks to historical inertia, supported by the illusion of power. The election results, recorded in real-time figures, were a turning point in the perception of the future of Europe. [14]

9 JUNE

– **USSR.** In the course of the debates of the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow, the founder of the independent 'Memorial' Association, Andrei Sakharov, demands the revocation of the clause in the Soviet Constitution which speaks of the 'ruling role of the Communist Party'. His speech is applauded by only some of the deputies – mainly by the Moscow group and the representatives of the Baltic States.

H U N G A R Y

When I was in Hungary at the beginning of the 1980's and spoke about the events of 1956 and about 'Solidarność', and voiced my belief that this entire system would fall apart sooner or later, people thought I was mad. I was determined that we would live to see it fall, and when people expressed their disbelief I told them: come to Poland and see for yourselves.

Ákos Engelmayer during a discussion at a meeting entitled
Common past – common memory?, held in Wrocław in October 2002



Budapest, 23 October 1989. Rally to commemorate the declaration of the Hungarian Republic.

Photo: Bernard Bisson / SYGMA / CORBIS / FotoChannels

Imre Kónya, Hungarian dissident:

The opposition organisations decided that I should make the declaration on behalf of the Opposition Round Table. [...] This was an enormously moving experience, as I had never been inside the Parliament building.

We entered through a side door and made our way up a wide staircase. Cameras whirred and flashlights went off. In the Hunters' Hall, the two delegations introduced themselves.

György Fejti [Secretary of the Central Committee] approached me and shook my hand. I told him my name. He answered that he had seen me on television.

Budapest, 13 June [43]

13 JUNE

– After several months of preparation, the first meeting of the Triangular Table takes place in Budapest, with the participation of representatives of the Hungarian Workers' Socialist Party, the Opposition Round Table and the so-called third power, composed of state-run social institutions. Talks centre, above all, on how pluralism is to be introduced in Hungary and on democratic parliamentary elections. These negotiations continue for three months.



Budapest, June. Triangular Table Talks. Photo: Hungarian Telegraph Agency MT / Hungarian Institute in Warsaw

Extract from a letter from the Chinese Communist Party, published in the German press:

A hostile extremist minority planned to overthrow the People's Republic, the socialist order and the leadership of the Party. This political clique made up of anti-social elements was given foreign support and was based on an ideology of civic liberalism. [30]

14 JUNE

– **GDR.** The authorities express decided support for the activities of the Communists in China who are “actively engaged in the suppression of anti-socialist behaviour.” Meanwhile, the Chinese authorities publish a list of telephone numbers, which citizens can dial in order to help ‘dispense the justice of the people’.



Budapest, 16 June. Ceremonial funeral of Imre Nagy. Photo: Hungarian Telegraph Agency MT / Hungarian Institute in Warsaw

16 JUNE

– In Budapest, a crowd of 300,000 people takes part in the symbolic funeral of Imre Nagy, leader of the 1956 Hungarian Uprising, murdered by the Communists. Referring to the symbolism of the events of 33 years ago, the participants wave Hungarian flags from which the emblem of the Communist state has been removed. The ceremony is broadcast on Hungarian television. That same day János Kádár, the man who was partially responsible for the death of Nagy, dies.

Viktor Orbán, Hungarian dissident, in a speech given in Heroes' Square:

If we trust in our own strength, we can put an end to Communist dictatorship; if we are sufficiently determined, we can force the Party to organise free elections; if we do not lose the idealism of 1956, we can choose a government which will negotiate with the Russians with the aim of a swift removal of their armies. We will not be satisfied with Communist promises, we must create a situation where the governing party will not be able to use force against us – even if it wants to.

Budapest, 16 June [29]

23 JUNE

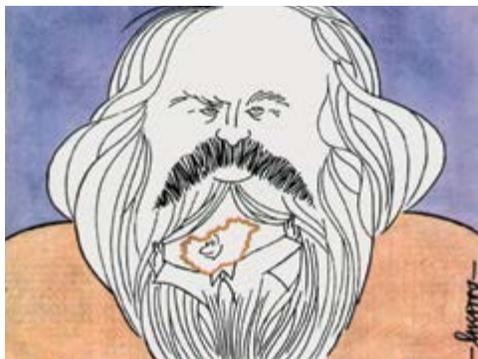
– **POLAND.** A Civic Parliamentary Party is set up in the Sejm and the Senate, headed by Bronisław Geremek. Despite limitations on numbers resulting from the Round Table agreements, the “Solidarność” faction in Parliament becomes the moving force behind the peaceful transition from a Communist system to a democratic one.

Bronisław Geremek, Chairman of the Civic Parliamentary Party [OKP]:

When we resigned from putting forward our own candidate [for President], we made it clear that we are facing a balance of power resulting from a contract and which we regard as being transitional. [...] it became obvious that the Communist majority was already disintegrating. [14]

Zoltán Bíró, Hungarian dissident and participant in the Triangular Table Talks: *Hungarians are currently living a dream of free elections. I believe that it is in the commission dealing with the elections that particularly intensive and lively discussions will take place. I stand firmly by my opinion that the elections should take place no later than this year. It is not the interests of the Party but that of the country which should count in this matter. [...] Since the country needs a Parliament which is born out of a free election, as well as a government formed on the same basis and which is legal and acceptable to the nation, then it follows that the elections should take place as soon as possible.*

Budapest, June [9]



A satirical cartoon from the June issue of the Hungarian magazine "Ludas Matyi"

21 JUNE

– The second round of talks between representatives of the ruling Hungarian Workers' Socialist Party and representatives of the opposition commences in the Parliamentary Hunters' Hall in Budapest. The factions represented in the Opposition Round Table demand that free elections be organised as soon as possible.

27 JUNE

– Gyula Horn, Hungarian Foreign Minister, and Alois Mock, Austrian Foreign Minister, cut the barbed wire border fences in a gesture symbolising the liquidation of the Iron Curtain.

Over the next few days, a systematic operation is carried out to dismantle all border fences and obstacles. The barbed wire is used to manufacture commemorative mementoes of the Iron Curtain, which are mainly sold to foreign tourists.



Sopron, 27 June. Alois Mock and Gyula Horn cut the barbed wire border fences.

Photo: Bernhard J. Holzner / Associated Press / East News

28 JUNE

– **POLAND.** Wojciech Jaruzelski issues a statement in which he states that the PZPR's monopoly on power is a thing of the past. In his opinion, the Party suffered an electoral defeat because "society did not understand that the Polish United Workers' Party was engaged in activities aimed at reform and democracy".

29 JUNE

– **CZECHOSLOVAKIA.** In Prague, the signatories of Charter 77 address a petition entitled 'A Few Sentences', in which they call for far-reaching political reforms to be carried out in the country, for the recognition of human rights and for restoration of full civic liberties. They write, among others: "We exhort the authorities in our country to finally realise that the time has come for real changes to the political system [...]."



Warsaw, 30 June. A student march in protest at the candidature of Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski to the presidency. Photo: Erazm Ciolek / FORUM

P O L A N D



Artist: Zbigniew Ziomecki.
From the collection
in the Muzeum Karykatury

The first step towards any radical changes, starting with the introduction of a new Constitution and ending with economic reforms, must be a fundamental change in the social climate in our country and a return to the spirit of freedom, trust, tolerance and pluralism. [...] A social dialogue is the only possible way out of the dead end, in which Czechoslovakia currently finds herself." The Communist press accuses the Charter 77 activists of "incitement to acts of terrorism".

30 JUNE

– **POLAND.** A demonstration organised by independence organisations, opposed to the candidature of Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski to the presidency, takes place outside the Central Committee of the PZPR in Warsaw. For the first time in several years, the militia uses water cannon to disperse about 500 demonstrators.

6 JULY

- The Hungarian Supreme Court rehabilitates Imre Nagy, leader of the 1956 Uprising and concedes that the death sentence meted out to him was illegal.
- Representatives of the government side and of the opposition meet once again in the Hungarian Parliament building. The subject of the talks is the establishment of a basis for Hungary's transition from Communism to a democratic system.

14 JULY

- Members and supporters of the October Party and the Hungarian Radical Party carry out an informal operation to eradicate Communist street names in Budapest.

Imre Mécs, a participant in the Triangular Table Talks, on behalf of the Association of Free Democrats:

Six months ago we would not even have dreamt of what today is reality. However, we must not allow ourselves to act either too quickly, or too slowly. If we proceed too slowly, people will become impatient and will cease to believe that we will ever become a parliamentary democracy. On the other hand, if we move too fast, then we could be faced with chaos and perhaps even some sort of outburst.

[...] We are an integral part of Europe but for the last 40 years we have moved away from Europe and now we must find our way back.

Budapest, July [38]



Budapest, 14 July. An operation to restore the name of Palatine Street (Nádor utca), which the Communists changed to Ferenc Münnich Street in 1960. Photo: Piroška Nagy

7 JULY

- **GDR.** 120 members of the opposition in East Berlin, who had revealed numerous instances of vote rigging during the GDR local authority elections on 7th May, are temporarily arrested. The authorities thus make it impossible for them to organise demonstrations demanding a repetition of the elections.

10 JULY

- **USSR.** A miners' strike erupts. Workers demand that the working day be shortened to 8 hours, Sundays to be work-free, an improvement in working conditions in plants and a wage rise. Over the next few days, more mines – in Siberia, Vorkhuta, Donbas, Karaganda and Kuzhbas – join the strike, which also spreads to other branches of heavy industry. It is estimated that the number of people taking part in the strike



Warsaw, 3 July. Militia intervene against the KPN demonstration. Photo: Wojciech Druszcz / OK

P O L A N D

(at its peak) is in the region of 400,000. Workers demands soon include calls for the removal of the leading role of the Communist Party and for a general election to be held to choose the head of state.

It takes the authorities two weeks to quell the main focal points of the strike by promising reforms.

19 JULY

– **POLAND.** The first sitting of the National Assembly – the combined houses of parliament – elect Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski to the office of President. In his speech, Gen. Jaruzelski stresses: *“I wish to be a President of harmony, the representative of all Poles. I also wish to win the trust of those who express hostility or dislike of me.”*

19 SIERPNIA

– An independent Pan-European Picnic takes place in Sopron to mark the removal of barbed-wire border fence posts. Border guards are withdrawn along many kilometers of the border in the vicinity of the town on the orders of the Hungarian Prime Minister, Miklós Németh. 700 citizens of East

Prime Minister Miklós Németh speaking to West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl:
Sending the refugees back to the GDR is no longer a possibility. We are opening our border. It will remain open for citizens of East Germany provided that no external military or political force makes us change our minds.

Gymnich, 25 August [24]



Sopron, August. Citizens of the GDR cross into Austria. Photo: Herbert Knosowski / Reuters/FORUM

Germany, who are holidaying in Hungary, take advantage of the several hour opening of the border and escape to Austria. Over the next few days more mass escapes across the border take place. News that it is possible to escape to the West spreads like wild-fire among East Germans. Soon, the streets of Hungarian towns are filled with cars left behind by the escapees.

Helmut Kohl:

As I listened to Németh, I felt tears come to my eyes. [...] After all, the Hungarians could have acted quite differently. It could not have been an easy decision for the Hungarian government to take and, despite current agreements, to tell the GDR authorities outright: “Any Germans who are currently in Hungary may leave for the West”.

Gymnich, 25 August [24]

29 JULY

– **POLAND.** Mieczysław F. Rakowski becomes 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. The XIII Plenum of the Party decides to designate Gen. Czesław Kiszczak for the post of Prime Minister.

16 AUGUST

– **POLAND.** Following Gen. Kiszczak’s resignation as Prime Minister, a meeting takes place between Lech Wałęsa, Roman Malinowski (ZSL) and Jerzy Józwiak (SD) to discuss a government coalition. Negotiations end with the drawing up of an agreement between the United People’s Party [ZSL], the Democratic Party [SD] (until now off-shoots of the Polish United Workers’ Party) and the Civic Parliamentary Party.



Lithuania, 23 August. Part of the Baltic chain.

Photo: Kęstutis Vanagas / FOTOBANKAS

L I T H U A N I A

23 AUGUST

– At 7 p.m., some 2 million citizens of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia form a continuous human Baltic chain in protest at the consequences of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, which took away their independence for 50 years. The chain, which stretches across Vilnius, Riga and Tallin, is almost 600 kilometres long. This is the biggest independent demonstration in the history of the USSR. Soviet authorities do not intervene.

Vytautas Landsbergis, Leader of the oppositional Sajudis:

Today's action is a symbol, above all, of the solidarity between the Baltic nations but also between all those who are oppressed. [...] We would like the next such wave to stretch to Warsaw and Budapest and perhaps even to Prague.

Vilnius, 23 August [50]

László Bruszt, participant in the Triangular Table Talks on behalf of the opposition:

The setting up of a government under Mazowiecki is a signal to Eastern Europe that it is possible to nominate the first non-Communist Prime Minister in this region. The range of possibilities this presents includes not only the liberalisation of the politics of the region, not only power sharing but also the prospect of a peaceful change of regime. Until August 1989, all we could look forward to – even in conversation – was the option to change the model – or rather, to make changes to the model. And the clearer this became,

the further Hungary advanced towards negotiations on the subject of free elections. The first real sign, however, that a peaceful way out from under the rule of the regime is possible comes with the nomination of Mazowiecki to the office of Prime Minister, and then the formation of the first non-Communist government in Eastern Europe. These were immensely important signs for opposition factions in this part of Europe, indeed, for all its citizens – the knowledge that everything is up to those in local power, that they, too, can achieve the same in their own countries. [56]

11 SEPTEMBER

– At midnight, Hungary opens its border with Austria, enabling 15,000 East German citizens to leave for Austria over the following three days.

Gyula Horn, Foreign Minister, explains: “*Budapest was forced to take this decision, since the German states were unable to resolve the problem between themselves. The GDR had a week to persuade those of their citizens who were currently in Hungary, to return home.*”

The East German press agency describes the behaviour of the Hungarian authorities as “*trading in human lives under the umbrella of humanitarian action.*”



“Solidarność” logo from a Hungarian poster

24 AUGUST

– **POLAND.** The Sejm confirms the nomination of Tadeusz Mazowiecki as Prime Minister. Mazowiecki’s speech contains the declaration: “*The government which I will head does not bear responsibility for the mortgage, it has inherited but which, nonetheless, has an influence on the way we govern. We are drawing a thick line under the past. We will be answerable only for what we do to extricate Poland from its current state of collapse.*”

Ireneusz Sekuła, the resigning Deputy Prime Minister:

The final dot over the ‘i’ was the nomination of a [...] non-Communist Prime Minister. The Soviet Union [...] turned a blind eye. This was a catalyst for the future events in other countries: [...] since no intervention had followed in Poland, there would be none elsewhere. [26]

Helmut Kohl in a telegram to Miklós Németh:

Your policies – in which Man, his dignity and his rights are paramount – should serve as an example in the creation of a peaceful order in Europe.

Prime Minister, Sir, we will never forget what Hungary has done for us during this time.

The manner in which you have kept your word and stood by a humanitarian solution to a problem, which has arisen out of the division of Germany, is most impressive.

Bonn, 12 September [24]



Budapest, September. An East European family on its way to Austria. Photo: Peter Turnley / CORBIS/FotoChannels

4 SEPTEMBER

– **GDR.** Prayers for peace, in the Church of St. Nicholas in Leipzig, lead to a spontaneous demonstration by several thousand people. From this moment, every Monday, ever increasing crowds of demonstrators gather outside the church, demanding democratic reforms.

9 SEPTEMBER

– **GDR.** An opposition movement called the New Forum is set up. Its founders' declaration states: *“At the base of all the aims which the New Forum proclaims is the desire for justice, democracy and peace, and the protection of the natural environment. This is the goal which we intend to introduce in all walks of life as part of the impending social changes.”*



Sarbogard, Spring 1989. Soviet soldiers stationed in Hungary. Photo. David Turnley / CORBIS/FotoChannels





P O L A N D

Warsaw, 12 September. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, following the Sejm's approval of the new government.

Photo: Chris Niedenthal / FORUM

12 SEPTEMBER

– **POLAND.** Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki speaking in the Sejm: *“We reject the political philosophy that economic reforms can be introduced without reference to the wishes of society, [...] putting aside democratic changes. Only a society of free citizens and the policies of a government which has the trust of a decided majority can be instrumental in Poland’s recovery.”* The Sejm unanimously approves the new government.

– **GDR.** An opposition organisation entitled Democracy Now is set up in Berlin. Its members state: *“We wish to create a united society and to achieve democracy in all walks of life. [...] Instead of a state dominated by a single party, a state which, without the mandate of the people, has taken on the role of instructor and teacher of the nation, we want to have a state which is based on the wishes of the people.”*

18 SEPTEMBER

– In Budapest, the main stage of the Triangular Table Talks concludes, with over 200 working meetings behind it. The summing up contains decisions to hold free Parliamentary elections and to make changes to the Hungarian Constitution. Some opposition factions (including Fidesz and the Union of Free Democrats) fail to countersign the final agreement, thus expressing their protest and the not entirely democratic manner of election of president prior to free parliamentary elections.

György Szabad, spokesman for the Opposition Round Table:

It is not important what the agreement meant to the opposition, what is important is what it gave to the country. We have agreed the basis for a new Constitution, making a clean break with Stalinist dictatorship; we have worked out Hungary's most democratic election system ever – the most advanced in the entire Socialist bloc. [...]

We have had to make concessions but further dialogue was only possible through compromise. There was a danger that the current leadership of the Party might make decisions which would close the door to an understanding for a long time.

Budapest, 18 September [10]



Budapest. Representatives of the opposition Round Table during the Triangular Table Talks. Front, from left: József Antall, György Szabad, Viktor Orbán. Photo: Encompass

17 SEPTEMBER

– **POLAND.** The 50th anniversary of the invasion of Poland by the Red Army, sees a demonstration staged by 'Fighting Solidarity' and KPN in Katowice. Several thousand participants make their way to the Soviet Trade Bureau and the Provincial HQ of the PZPR. Demonstrators shower both buildings with small change 'for the train home' and chant slogans: "Down with Communism!", "Soviets go home!" The militia does not intervene.

22 SEPTEMBER

– **POLAND.** The Supreme Court in Warsaw re-registers the Independent Students' Association, accepting its statute and conceding its right to strike, which the Provincial Court had rejected in May.

G D R

Those who, like us, have come here straight from Warsaw, have seen for themselves what the process of reforms has managed to achieve in Poland and in Hungary and they realise that the most important task now is to search – step by step – for a path to a common future. [...] I call on everyone in Eastern Germany: you are not alone, we stand at your side! We are and will continue to be a single nation, we are one whole...

Helmut Kohl, 10 November 1989 during a rally in front of Schöneberg Town Hall in West Berlin



East Berlin, November 1989. Rejoicing at the fall of the Berlin Wall. Photo: Chris Niedenthal / FORUM



Warsaw, 1 October. Train carrying East German refugees leaves Warsaw. Photo: Czarek Sokolowski / Associated Press / East News

Janusz Onyszkiewicz, OKP Member of Parliament:

Crowds of Germans from the GDR sought asylum in the West German Embassy [in Warsaw]. There was not enough room for all of them. Mr Johannes Bauch, who was chargé d'affaires at the time, [...] came to the Sejm to discuss the matter. I believe that Geremek and I gave him what he had come for: an undertaking that none of the asylum seekers would be sent back to the GDR. We then managed to arrange for special trains to take them through the GDR, and on into West Germany.

In a way, we had removed a sizeable brick from the Berlin Wall.

Warsaw, 1 October [32]

1 OCTOBER

– East German refugees, staying temporarily on the premises of the West German embassy in Warsaw, are given leave to enter West Germany.

Comment on East German TV: *“The behaviour of those who have left the country has excluded them from our society. And for that reason alone, no-one will miss them.”*

2 OCTOBER

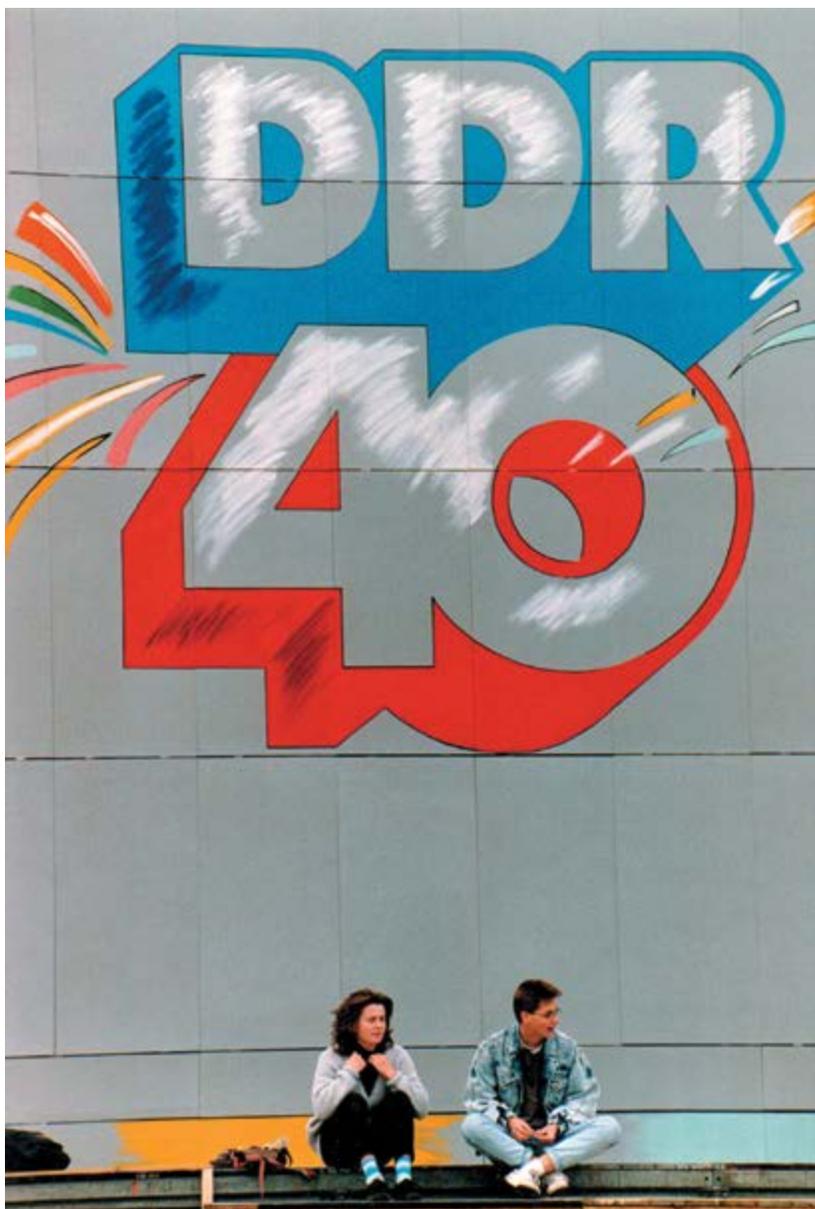
– Yet again, a procession leaves the Protestant Church of St. Nicholas in Leipzig after the service and makes its way into the town. Passers-by join the procession. 20,000 people take part in the opposition led demonstration. Astonished by the size of the protest, the militia does not intervene. The demonstrators chant: *“We want to stay here!”* Subsequent demonstrations are to take place every Monday.

2 OCTOBER

– **USSR.** Representatives of the Sajudis present a petition approved by the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic to Mikhail Gorbachev, requesting that a referendum on independence be organised in Lithuania.



Mečislovas Ščepavičius, *A map of the expansion of democracy.* “Gazeta Wyborcza” dated 10 August



GDR, October. Propaganda poster. Photo: Associated Press / East News

5 OCTOBER

– **POLAND.** A demonstration organised by the Independent Students' Association takes place outside the GDR Consulate in Wrocław. The organisers read out a declaration: "We, young Poles, [...] protest most strongly against the limitation of freedom in the GDR and, in particular, we demand an end to

the beatings and harassment meted out to members of independent organisations. Today's demonstration is intended as an expression of our solidarity with those Germans who desire freedom and democracy."

**Extract from an opposition report entitled
*An accursed helplessness:***

Individual demonstrators were dragged out of the crowd at random with unbelievable brutality; they were then subjected to beatings by as many as eight security service functionaries in civilian clothing. Detaining numerous people, the militia forced them into police vehicles, laying into them brutally despite the fact that no resistance was offered. Women were treated particularly brutally in the hope of provoking the male demonstrators to use force against the security forces. At his point, the entire event was stage-managed by Stasi officers.

Berlin, 7 October [54]

5 OCTOBER

– Beginning of the official 3-day celebrations to mark the 40th anniversary of the GDR. Mikhail Gorbachev and Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski are among the guests.

In a counter-demonstration, several thousand people march through the centre of East Berlin, demanding freedom and reforms; they chant: “*Gorbi, help us!*” The militia intervenes and many demonstrators are arrested. The following day, the government newspaper “*Neues Deutschland*” comments: “*Those who thought that the 40th anniversary celebrations would bring a change in government policy made a grave mistake. Any attempt to bring down the socialist ideal is bound to fail.*”



East Berlin, 5 October. Military parade to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the GDR. Photo: Chris Niedenthal / FORUM

Imre Pozsgay, Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister:

I kept labouring under the delusion that the Communist Party would initiate a process of reform. This proved impossible. The Communist system finally collapsed. [...] Never, in the history of Hungary, has there been a military coup [...]. The consequences of Jaruzelski's policies are an adequate deterrent. [11]

7 OCTOBER

– **HUNGARY.** The leadership of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party decides to dissolve the Party and to transform it into the Hungarian Socialist Party. This is the first instance of the dissolution of a ruling Communist Party in the whole of the Eastern bloc.

9 OCTOBER

– Yet another ‘Monday’ rally takes place in Leipzig. After prayers for peace in the Church of St. Nicholas and in three other protestant churches in the city centre, at 6 p.m. around 100,000 demonstrators begin a peaceful march through the city. The demonstrators chant: “No force!” For the first time, the militia does not take counter measures – the first sign that the Communist regime in the GDR is weakening.

Martin Jankowski, dissident writer:

Late that evening [after the rally] friends gathered at my home as previously arranged. Eyes bright, we were able to report: There were no arrests. There was no gun-fire. Nor were there any skirmishes. Everything went smoothly. The authorities did not dare to attack. [...]

Suddenly, the ‘counter-revolution’ and oppression was at an end. We felt enormously powerful. We felt brave and invincible. [...] We began to discuss the meaning of the events which had taken place in the country that day. [...] Of course, I had no champagne at home, so we raised a toast in Georgian tea.

Leipzig, 9 October [19]



Leipzig, October. Church of St. Nicholas. Photo: Martin Naumann

14 OCTOBER

– **USSR.** The Soviet authorities refuse to register the ‘Memorial’ Association, whose aim is the commemoration of the victims of Stalinist repression. The organisation’s representatives treat this refusal as a “profanation of the memory of people who lost their lives during the years of Stalinist terror.”

15 OCTOBER

– **USSR.** During a 10-thousand strong rally in Moscow, Boris Yeltsin demands democratic reform for the USSR and the removal from power of the “conservatives” in the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

16 OCTOBER

– In Leipzig a further ‘Monday’ rally takes place in support of democracy. 120,000 people take part and their slogans include: “We are the nation!”

- Some officially recognised associations and organisations also demand reforms.

18 OCTOBER

– After 18 years as leader, Erich Honecker resigns from all Party and State posts ‘for health reasons’. Egon Krenz takes over the office of Secretary General of the German Socialist Party of Unity.

Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, in a statement:

Overflowing jails, numerous injured and unending waves of refugees – these are the symbols of a fossilised dictatorial system [...]. They are also an expression of the insecurity which haunts East Berlin’s ruling circles. [...] Internal peace and stability cannot be achieved by force and by depriving people of their rights.

External peace and good neighbourly relations between our countries cannot begin to develop until the leadership of the GDR stops isolating itself and cutting off its country from the changes taking place around the world, and from the current reforms in the East and the West.

Bonn, October [24]



GDR, October. Rally organised by supporters of democratic changes.

Banner (front) reads: “We demand free elections”. Photo: Associated Press / East News

21 OCTOBER

– **BULGARIA.** For the first time since the end of the II World War, an official public meeting takes place which has been organised without the participation of the Communist authorities. In Sophia independent activists and ecologists from the Ecoglasnost organisation take part in talks to discuss the tragic state of the environment. The Bulgarian militia does not intervene.

23 OCTOBER

– **HUNGARY.** Once the Hungarian constitution has been updated to enable the introduction of a multi-party system, the Hungarian Republic is proclaimed.

Bärbel Bohley, a German dissident, speaking during the debate with SED leaders:

My dream is to find my fulfilment here. Previously we never knew what sort of GDR we dreamt of because we were constantly looking elsewhere. [...] We felt stifled and we imagined what it would be like to live somewhere else... My hope is that we will recognise that our desires are not dictated by the Politburo but by ourselves.

East Berlin, 26 October [36]

20 OCTOBER

– A wave of demonstrations sweeps the GDR. The largest rallies take place in Leipzig, Berlin, Potsdam and Karl-Marx-Stadt. An unusual demonstration occurs in Dresden, as 50,000 people take to the streets of the city in total silence. These protests last throughout the next five days.

26 OCTOBER

– Representatives of the New Forum, Jens Reich, Bärbel Bohley and Sebastian Pflugbeil, meet with the leadership of the German Socialist Party of Unity and discuss the necessity of introducing reforms. East German television transmits extracts from this debate. Demonstrations spread to further towns in East Germany – Rostock, Erfurt and Gera.



East Berlin, 21 October. A chain formed by supporters of democratic change in the GDR.

Photo: Associated Press / East News

27 OCTOBER

– Steffen Reiche, representative of the GDR Social-Democratic Party, demands that an East German Round Table be set up.

– East German authorities announce an amnesty for all those who attempted to cross the border illegally. Some of the demonstrators who were arrested during recent demonstrations in support of democratic changes, are now released.

Jan Ruml, Czech dissident:

Thousands, perhaps even millions of people took to the streets in the GDR once they realised where the road to a civic society and to freedom lay. Meanwhile, in Czechoslovakia, millions of citizens, laden with shopping bags, blunder round a country entangled in barbed wire. [27]

28 OCTOBER

– **CZECHOSLOVAKIA.** The authorities organise a swearing-in celebration for conscripts in St. Vaclav Square, hoping that this will deter an independent demonstration to mark the 71st anniversary of the country regaining its independence. In the afternoon, a crowd of several thousand demonstrators gather in the Square, chanting: “We want freedom!” The militia intervenes. More than 300 people are arrested.



Leipzig, October. Opposition rally. Photo: Associated Press / East News

3 NOVEMBER

– **POLAND.** A 3-day International Seminar opens in Wrocław; it is entitled “Central Europe. A Culture at a Crossroads – between Totalitarianism and Commercialism”. During the Seminar, a Review of Independent Czechoslovak Culture takes place, with the participation of musicians from Czechoslovakia, including émigrés, among them are Karel Kryl and Jaroslav Hutka. Several thousand Czechs and Slovaks are present.

Petruška Šustrová, a Czech dissident:

As we walked around Wrocław, [...] we would come across groups of people and almost all of them spoke Czech. [...] How many of them took part – two weeks later – in the demonstration in Prague which saw the beginning of the Velvet Revolution? Many of those who felt the taste of freedom here, no longer wanted to return to the same old set-up. [35]

4 NOVEMBER

– A rally in Alexanderplatz in East Berlin draws almost one million participants. They realise that the complete lack of reaction by the authorities to such an enormous public gathering signals the end of the old system. Members of the opposition, officials and cultural celebrities speak to the crowds from improvised platforms. The demonstrators demand a return to democracy in the GDR, freedom for the press and freedom of association.

Stefan Heym, writer, in a speech given in Alexanderplatz:

During the last few weeks we have overcome our own helplessness, we have begun to learn how to walk with our heads held high. And all this in a Germany where no revolution was ever able to change anything, where the people were always meek – in the days of the Kaiser, of the Nazis and later, too.

East Berlin, 4 November [36]

Róbert Juharos, Hungarian student, speaking in Alexanderplatz:

The nations of Eastern and Central Europe are linked not only by a common past, by a sombre 40 years of dictatorship and oppression but also by the desire for a real democracy, where our lives can take their natural course. [...]

We consider that our joint European house should be constructed only of democratic states. We are, therefore, in favour of radical reforms in all countries of the Eastern bloc. [1]



East Berlin, 4 November. Demonstration in Alexanderplatz. Slogan on banner: "Radical changes – or else". Photo: NAF Dementi / Ośrodek Pamięć i Przyszłość

7 NOVEMBER

– The Government of the German Democratic Republic resigns. Many thousands of demonstrators continue to rally in the streets of the capital.

7 NOVEMBER

– **USSR.** Numerous independent rallies take place in Moscow during the celebrations to mark the anniversary of the October Revolution. Several thousand people take part in a demonstration in support of pluralism, free elections, abolition of censorship and the release of political prisoners. The militia does not intervene.

9 NOVEMBER

– At about 7 p.m., during a press conference in East Berlin, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, Günter Schabowski, unexpectedly announces the immediate introduction of a law allowing GDR citizens freedom of travel abroad. Two hours later, spontaneous destruction of the Berlin Wall commences in several places.

Günter Schabowski during a press conference:

Today, we decided to introduce a regulation which will enable every citizen of the GDR to leave through GDR border crossings [...]. Applications for private travel abroad are allowed, without the necessity of presenting hitherto required documentation – reasons for travel and certificates proving that the applicant has family abroad. Permits will be issued within a short space of time. [...] Citizens wishing to take up permanent residence abroad will be allowed to leave via all border crossings between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany, and even through West Berlin.

East Berlin, 9 November [15]

Annemarie, active member of Democracy Now:

We didn't know what was happening. We couldn't believe it. My husband said: "Let's got to Kurfürstendamm [in West Berlin] for a beer." I said: "Have you gone mad? How? It's not allowed." That's the way we thought: it's not allowed, and that was that. [...] We made our way to the nearest crossing point, on the Bornholm Bridge. From a distance we could hear a roar, shouts of joy, there were rivers of people making their way in the same direction, some had just thrown coats over their pyjamas.

East Berlin, 9 November [52]

10 NOVEMBER

– A large-scale demonstration of solidarity with East Germany takes place in West Berlin, with the participation of high ranking representatives of the government.
– Spontaneous festivals of welcome are held in West German border towns, to greet arrivals from East Germany.

Mieczysław F. Rakowski, 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:

It appears that the "perestroika plague" has even penetrated the GDR. During a recent conversation with [SED Secretary, Egon] Krenz, I asked him whether he could envisage the following scenario: 100,000 demonstrators approach the Wall and begin to dismantle it. What will you do then? Will you fire on them? Krenz replied that this was a good question and that he can see it happening...

Warsaw, 10 November [40]

10 NOVEMBER

– **USSR.** A crowd numbering many thousands of people takes part in a demonstration in Kishinev, in support of democracy and independence for Moldavia. The demonstrators are brutally attacked by the Soviet militia, using truncheons, tear gas and water cannon. Skirmishes continue until late in the evening. According to media reports, hundreds of people are injured.

10 NOVEMBER

– **BULGARIA.** Todor Zhivkov is forced to resign from his post as 1st Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party. His successor is Petyr Mladenov, the long standing Foreign Minister. During a meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, motions are put forward demanding the introduction of political pluralism and a market economy.



East Berlin, 10 November. After the fall of the Berlin Wall. Behind the guards is no-man's land – until recently trespassers risked death. Photo: Robert Wallis / CORBIS/FotoChannels

13 NOVEMBER

– The East German authorities issue a directive to remove all blockades along the Berlin Wall.

Hans Modrow becomes the new Prime Minister of the GDR. He expresses a wish that the German states should be unified.

– Another wave of mass demonstrations sweeps through East Germany, crowds gather in the streets of Leipzig, Dresden, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Cottbus, Magdeburg and other towns. With increasing confidence, the demonstrators chant: “*We are one nation*”.

15 NOVEMBER

– **USA.** In Washington, Lech Wałęsa delivers a speech to both houses of Congress. Several times during the speech, he stresses the meaning and character of the changes taking place in Eastern Europe: “*Poland’s battle for human rights, a battle without the use of force, Poland’s determination and steadfast attitude on the road to pluralism and democracy, demonstrate to many people today, and to many nations, too,*

how to avoid the worst dangers. If there is any threat to European stability today – it does not come from Poland. The road taken by Poland, leading to very fundamental yet peaceful, evolutionary reforms, negotiated with all sides – makes it possible to avoid the worst dangers and it can be an example to many other regions.”

Commentators label Lech Wałęsa’s speech as “historical”.



Berlin, 10 November. The Wall
by the Brandenburg Gate.

Photo: Jerzy Patan / OK





It's true that our revolution was one of the last but it took less time than the others and, in one sense, it was also more radical – we did not have any perestroikas or reformatory-communist interludes. Instead, after barely a few days, we immediately began to build a normal democratic society. Czechoslovakia was the first country in the whole Soviet bloc where the new head of state was a true and life-long non-Communist, moreover, one who just a few days earlier had been the foremost dissident, the 'star of the theatre of opposition'.

Václav Havel in his book *Briefly, please* (Kraków 2007)

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Prague, November 1989. Demonstration by supporters of democratic reform.

Photo: Fausto Giaccone / Anzenberger/FORUM

Col. Jiří Bytčánek, Head of Prague's Security Services:

Twenty-one functionaries with radio transmitters were assigned to the rally, as well as seven transmission vehicles. [...] Neither the official ceremony, nor the subsequent march by student demonstrators had anything to do with the celebrations in honour of Jan Opletal. Various anti-Socialist and anti-social slogans were shouted. The first blockade was sited in the vicinity of the botanical gardens, so the demonstrators turned off towards the Fryderyk Engels boulevard and carried on in the direction of the National Theatre. At that juncture, Miroslav Štěpán [Secretary of the Prague Communist Party Town Council] rang me: "Jirko, those are not students – we have to restore order."

Prague, 17 November [41]

17 NOVEMBER

– On the 50th anniversary of the funeral of Jan Opletal, a student murdered by the Germans during an anti-Hitler demonstration, students stage a legal rally in Prague. A march by a crowd of some 15,000 people – mainly students – heading for St. Vaclav Square is blocked and the militia uses truncheons and tear gas to brutally disperse the crowd.

18 NOVEMBER

– Following the demonstration in Prague, students announce a sit-in strike in the university.

In the evening, they are joined by actors from the theatres of Prague. A rumour spreads that a student, Martin Šmíd, has been killed by the militia.



Radoj Ralin, dissident Bulgarian writer, speaking during a rally:

10 November [when Todor Zhivkov resigned] marks a second liberation of Bulgaria. And may it not remain just a heroic act or a romantic ideal... As a nation we are still being misled yet we no longer have room in our souls for empty illusions. That is why the first task must be the organisation

of free elections in the spirit of party pluralism. [...] Parties should be formed not in order to take over power but to ensure the mature development of society and of the individual. This is an inherent right.

Sophia, 18 November [17]

Petr Pospíchal, Czech dissident:

I arrived at Petr Uhl's apartment just as they were listening to a cassette recording of an interview with a woman who recounted how a close friend of hers had been killed during the demonstration. We listened to the recording several times and came to the conclusion that this posed something of a problem – to publish or not to publish.

In keeping with professional responsibility and ethics (by then we had long been active as the East European News Agency), Petr and I decided to make the information public but with the added comment: "We have received this news from a woman who has not identified herself; according to her..." This information had a radical effect on people – it acted as a catalyst for revolution, even though it turned out to be untrue. It must have been part of a ploy by security forces although it is difficult to fathom what purpose it served.

Prague, 18 November [39]



Prague, 17 November. Student march blockaded on National Street. *Photo: Radovan Boček*



The Charter 77 logo drawn on walls

18 NOVEMBER

– **BULGARIA.** The first rally to be organized by the opposition takes place in the square outside the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sophia. 100,000 demonstrators carry banners and shout slogans in support of democratic reform, they demand the release of political prisoners, free elections, freedom of speech and the prosecution of Todor Zhivkov.



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Prague, November. Demonstration in St. Vaclav Square. Photo: Ota Nephily





Prague, 19 November. Demonstration of solidarity with students, beaten up by the militia. Photo: Peter Turnley / CORBIS/FotoChannels

**Tomáš Hradílek, Dana Němcová,
Saša Vondra, Signatories of Charter 77,
in Stance on the situation in the country:**
While almost all the countries of Eastern Europe are peacefully making their way towards democratic reform, the Czech Party and State leaders are launching a war against their own citizens, who ask only that the actions of neighbouring countries be emulated. [...] We believe it is essential that those who are directly responsible for the brutal acts committed against our own citizens, should immediately resign from Party and State leadership.

Prague, 19 November [5]

19 NOVEMBER

– Throughout the day, people lay flowers and light candles in National Street in Prague, in memory of the alleged murder of a student and of the 150 people injured during the rally on 17 November. Security forces do not intervene.

Czech dissidents in the Drama Club set up a Civic Forum association, headed by Václav Havel; its aim is the democratisation of the country through reforms.

20 NOVEMBER

– **BULGARIA.** The Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party issues a statement to the effect that most of the demands put forward during the demonstration by supporters of democratic reform are unacceptable. The leadership of the Party calls on the public to “*maintain the peace which is essential to the process of introduction of state reforms*”.

21 NOVEMBER

– **GDR.** Demonstrations by supporters of an immediate introduction of free elections continue. A rally takes place outside the Czechoslovak Embassy in East Berlin in protest at the brutal treatment of students by the Czech militia on 17 November.

20 NOVEMBER

– Slovak dissidents set up an association entitled Public against Violence. Its aims are peaceful activities in support of removal of the clause concerning the leading role of the Party from the Constitution, and a speedy introduction of free elections.

21 NOVEMBER

– Some 200,000 people demonstrate in St. Vaclav Square in Prague. Václav Havel speaks to the crowd from the balcony of the Melantrich Publications building. Following his speech, Marta Kubišová sings a hymn entitled *A Prayer for Marta*, which has been banned since 1968. The rally ends as the crowd sings the Czech national anthem.

22 NOVEMBER

– Throughout Czechoslovakia, all institutions of higher education and some secondary schools go on strike. Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec declares that the armed forces will not be employed to quell opposition demonstrations.

– 80,000 people take part in an evening rally in Bratislava. Students, actors and representatives of the independent organisation Public against Violence deliver speeches during the rally in the Slovak National Uprising Square. All the speakers condemn the policies of the ruling Communists and demand democratic reforms.

Extract from a resolution passed by the actors of the Slovak National Theatre and read out by Magda Vašáryova during a rally:

One of Man's main responsibilities is the protection of life, including his own. When we speak of the dignity of life in the humanist sense: it should serve that which is good, justice and truth – let us strive for this together, of our own free will, in a spirit of honesty and tolerance... without anger, hatred, with love for our neighbour and for nature, of which we are a part. [...] Let us start as quickly as possible with a clean table and a clean slate, without immoral compromises. [...] May our thoughts have enough free rein to allow us to live in truth. Together, let us create a Republic in which we will all feel at home, as equal citizens.

Bratislava, 22 November [23]



Prague, 22 November. St. Vaclav Square.

Photo: Karel Cudlin

22 NOVEMBER

– **GDR.** The opposition and the Communist Party agree to set up a German Round Table. In Parliament, Prime Minister Hans Modrow declares that the social and political changes taking place in the German Democratic Republic are irreversible.

24 NOVEMBER

– **ROMANIA.** Nicolae Ceaușescu is once again elected 1st Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party. The decision of the members of the Central Committee is unanimous.

**J.J.K. Nebeský, high-school pupil,
in his diary:**

At 4.50 p.m. I made my way to the square and took part in the demonstration. [...] It was really marvellous, first the students' resolution was read out and then we went to the church (there must have been 400–500 of us there), where the priest read out an open letter from Cardinal Tomášek. Then we went outside and someone read a declaration signed by 300 workers from Sigma Hranice. Finally we chanted slogans: "Wake up, Hranice!" and "No work at Christmas!" It really was wonderful, the whole thing started and ended with the Czechoslovak national anthem. People lit candles, too. My first demonstration – it made a great impression on me. At least I could do something to demonstrate my views. Of course, it was very cold because it started to snow yesterday. I'm going again tomorrow.

Hranice, 23 November [45]

Jiří Dienstbier, Czech dissident:

The iceberg in the heart of Europe is melting. In effect, it has already melted but fragments are still floating around in our waters and we will not let go until they disappear completely. The second phase will be more difficult. Although, until recently, the removal of the fossilised power structures had seemed almost impossible, it now seems that it was easier than the tasks which now await us. Nonetheless, the Velvet Revolution, as it is sometimes called, has put down strong foundations on which we can build in the future.

Prague, 24 November [28]



Prague, November. Demonstrators gathered at the statue of St. Vaclav. Photo: David Turnley / CORBIS/FotoChannels

23 NOVEMBER

– For the first time, Czechoslovak TV shows short clips from demonstrations and broadcasts demonstrators' comments. Rallies take place in smaller towns, too.

24 NOVEMBER

– Meetings of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party commence in Prague. 15 out of 24 members of the Presidium and Secretariat resign. In the streets of the capital, a demonstration by many thousands of people continues. Demonstrators ring bells and jingle keys to mark their demand for the resignation of Party leaders.

24 NOVEMBER

– **GDR.** The East German opposition group 'Democratic Breakthrough' demands that free parliamentary elections be organised within a year. The Communist authorities propose to extend this period by two years.

26 NOVEMBER

– **HUNGARY.** A national referendum takes place which approves the decision to organise a presidential election after the elections to parliament.

26 NOVEMBER

– Talks between the opposition and the authorities commence; a Civic Forum delegation meets with representatives of the Central Committee of the Party. The Forum's first demand is the release of 18 people detained during the November demonstrations. In the evening, the Forum organises a 500,000 strong demonstration in Prague, where it announces its stance vis-à-vis the authorities.

– In Brno, demonstrators form a live chain to the prison in Bohunice, in the town's suburbs.

27 NOVEMBER

– A general strike is announced throughout Czechoslovakia; factories, schools, government offices are at a stand-still. Ever increasing crowds of demonstrators appear in the streets of towns and cities. The Civic Forum announces its programme.



Brno, 26 November. A chain of solidarity with political prisoners. Photo: Ota Nепily

29 NOVEMBER

– **POLAND.** In Nowa Huta several hundred demonstrators belonging to the Alternative Society Movement, the Orange Alternative and the Federation of Fighting Youth throw stones and bottles of petrol at a statue of Lenin. Fighting breaks out and the militia uses truncheons and tear gas.

Grzegorz Hajdarowicz, participant in the demonstration:

Our politics were played out in the streets. A few telephone calls and a "rent-a-mob" was ready. Propaganda called us "irresponsible louts", we were accused of terrorism but organisation of demonstrations and skirmishes with the militia were our only way to express our protest. [6]

Extract from a Civic Forum appeal entitled *What do we want?:*

Our country finds itself in a deep moral, spiritual, ecological, social, political and economic crisis. This crisis is proof of the inefficiency of the current political and economic system. [...] The Czechoslovak Republic must be a democratic country with a rule of law. Bearing this in mind, it is necessary to work out a new Constitution, and the entire legal system will have to be gradually brought in line with the principles contained in the Constitution, with guarantees that not only the citizens of the country will be subject to the law but also the governing powers.

Prague, 27 November [3]

28 NOVEMBER

– Representatives of the Civic Forum agree with Ladislav Adamec’s government that the composition of the new, Czechoslovak “wide-ranging coalition” will be presented by 3 December.

29 NOVEMBER

– The federal Parliament approves changes to the Czechoslovak Constitution – the clause concerning the leading role of the Communist Party and Marxist-Leninist ideology is deleted.



Prague, 28 November. Conclusion of talks between the government and the opposition sides. Photo: Miroslav Zajic / CORBIS/FotoChannels

Hans Modrow, GDR Prime Minister in an interview for the “Der Spiegel” weekly:

If we want to undertake talks regarding a confederation, we must first establish the realities. [...] What happens when there is a nation and two states? Are there two nations, or a single nation with two states? First, we must have foundations upon which we will then be able to build. After all,

we live in Europe and in a world which is watching us, you have neighbours and allies and we have them, too. And we – both states, that is, each with its own alliances – need to have confidence in what is happening.

Berlin, 4 December [22]



Prague, 4 December. Demonstrator carries a bust of Stalin, with a sign saying: "Nothing last for ever".

Photo: Dusan Vranic / Associated Press / East News

3 DECEMBER

– Students protest at the composition of the new cabinet and they demand more widespread reforms. The President of Czechoslovakia recalls further members of the government.

4 DECEMBER

– Many thousands gather in St. Vaclav Square in Prague in answer to an appeal by the Civic Forum. Demonstrators express their dissatisfaction with the new government and demand the dissolution of the People's Militia.

Jiří Dienstbier, Czech dissident:

When the Federal Prime Minister, Adamec, announced his 'reformed' government, people protested and demanded a radical change. I remember that evening I left "Laterna" and made my way to the boiler house – it was cold and I wanted to turn on the heating so that the workers who finished their shift at 10 p.m. would be able to have a hot shower. I returned after midnight and there were several people in "Laterna": Havel, Pithart, Jičinský and others. We discussed who might be in the new government and someone came up with the idea that I could be the Minister for Foreign Affairs. [...] We did not believe that they would want either me or Čarnogurskiego, who had been released from prison a few days earlier. [18]



Civic Forum poster: "A Return to Europe!"

From Filip Blažka's collection

3 DECEMBER

– **GDR.** The Politburo of the Central Committee of the German Socialist Party of Unity resigns. Thousands of East German citizens form a live chain to demonstrate their desire for democratic changes and for the unification of both German states.

7 DECEMBER

– **GDR.** German Round Table talks commence in Schönhausen Castle in Berlin. Decisions are taken regarding a new Constitution, the organisation of free elections and the dissolution of the Stasi Secret Police.

– **USSR.** The Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic deletes the clause in the Constitution which refers to the leading role of the Communist Party.

B U L G A R I A

As far as world events were concerned, the role of "Solidarność" did not lie simply in providing an example and creating a model of a successful political battle against Communism; it lay, too, in the fact that it formed a decisive link in a chain of events which was of world significance. It provided a template for the 'velvet revolutions' in Central and Eastern Europe.

Zhelyu Zhelev in a speech during the *From "Solidarność" to Freedom* Conference, held on 30 August 2005 in Warsaw



Sofia, 14 December 1989. Demonstration by supporters of democratic changes. *Photo: Klaus Titzer / Anzenberger/FORUM*



Sophia, 6 December. Demonstration in support of restoration of religious freedom.

Photo: Fausto Giaccone / Anzenberger/FORUM

The Union of Democratic Forces founders' declaration states:

The Union coordinates the efforts of opposition groups in the battle for democracy by creating a joint democratic platform. Its aims are, above all, to work towards the establishment of a civic society, political pluralism, a multi-party system, the rule of law and a market economy.

Sophia, 7 December [17]



Prague, December. Poster reads: "Let stars stay in the sky, sickles in the fields and hammers in factories". Photo: Dominik Książki / OK

8 DECEMBER

– **CZECHOSLOVAKIA.** The new Prime Minister is a Slovak – Marián Čalfa, a Communist representative who joined the Public against Violence association. More than a dozen representatives of the opposition are included in the new government of "national agreement".

6 DECEMBER

– Several thousand people take part in a rally in Sophia in support of restoration of religious freedom. Demonstrators present a petition to the representatives of Parliament, demanding that the Orthodox Church be freed from state control.

7 DECEMBER

– In Sophia, 13 opposition groups join to form a Union of Democratic Forces, under the leadership of Zhelyu Zhelev. The protest by the Committee for the Defence of Religious Rights escalates. Demonstrators put forward new demands, among them – free elections.



Sophia, 10 December. Demonstration by supporters of reform. Slogan on poster with Stalin reads: "65 years later, we found out who he was".

Photo: Klaus Titzler /Anzenberger/FORUM

8 DECEMBER

– The Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party excludes Todor Zhivkov and 26 other members from the Central Committee. In this way, the reform group, led by Petyr Mladenov, tries to hold on to power in the face of escalating public dissatisfaction.

10 DECEMBER

– 100,000 demonstrators in Sophia demand a Bulgarian Round Table, democratisation of the state and free elections.

From an appeal by the Union of Democratic Forces to the Bulgarian nation, entitled *Yes! to reforms*, read out during a rally by Georgi Spasov:

The deep political, economic, social and spiritual crisis in which the country finds itself requires radical changes which should escalate, widen and deepen the process of democratisation. In order to effect these reforms it is essential to carry out simultaneous changes in personnel at all levels of Party structure and in the state leadership, and to repeal those clauses of the Constitution, as well as other laws and directives, which ensure the preferential status of the Bulgarian Communist Party [...]. The democratisation of the Bulgarian Communist Party is an essential element of the democratisation of the country.

Sohia, 10 December [46]

10 DECEMBER

– **CZECHOSLOVAKIA.** The last major rally of 1989 takes place in Prague organised by the Civic Forum. The Communist President, Gustáv Husák, resigns after the swearing in of the newly formed government.

– In Bratislava, 150,000 people take part in a March for Understanding and make for Hainburg in Austria, on the other side of the Danube.

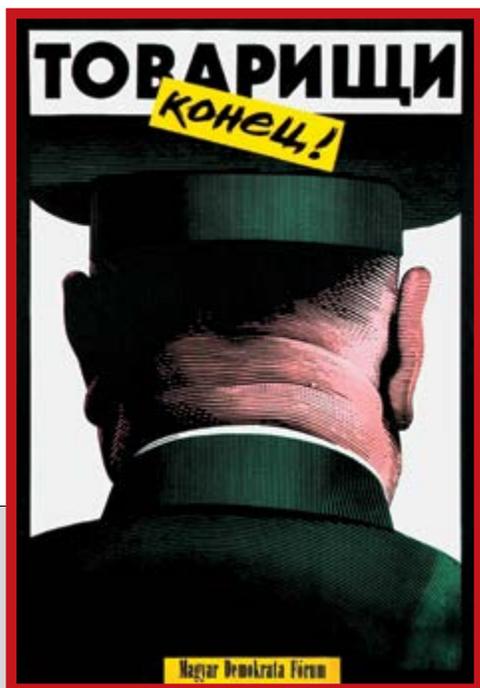




Sophia, December. Demonstration by supporters of free speech. Photo: Nadežda Czipewa



Sophia, December. Opposition demonstration outside the Parliament building. Photo: Oleg Popov / Reuters/FORUM



István Orosz, *It's over, Comrades!* Property of the author

11 DECEMBER

– The Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party proposes the exclusion from the Constitution of Article 1, which refers to the leading role of the Party. Todor Zhivkov is expelled from the Bulgarian Communist Party.

12 DECEMBER

– Another peaceful demonstration in support of democratic reform takes place in Sofia. Tens of thousands of people gathered outside the HQ of the Central Committee, light candles and stand in total silence.

12 DECEMBER

– **HUNGARY.** The new authorities begin negotiations with representatives of the USSR with regard to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country. The first contingent will consist of 10,000 out of an overall 60,000 troops stationed in Hungary.

13 DECEMBER

– The Bulgarian Communist Party organises a rally in Sophia. The 100,000 supporters declare their total backing for the new Party leaders.

14 DECEMBER

– Prime Minister Georgi Atanasov and the Secretary of the Central Committee of the party, Andrei Lukanov, meet with representatives of the Union of Democratic Forces – Zhelyu Zhelev and Georgi Spasov. In the afternoon, students (some 50,000 people) form a live chain around the Bulgarian Parliament building in Sophia, demanding autonomy for the university. The demonstrators are joined by supporters of an immediate change in the Constitution to exclude the clause relating to the leading role of the Communist Party, the resignation of the government and free elections. During the rally, the new Communist leader, Petyr Mladenov, is heard to say: *“Better to bring in the tanks”*. This later contributes to his resignation.

15 DECEMBER

– Bulgarian TV transmits a propaganda report on the events in Sophia. 20,000 demonstrators blockade TV headquarters and demand that the facts be rectified. They disperse the following day, when their demand is met. The authorities announce an amnesty for political prisoners. – Numerous demonstrations by supporters of democratic reform take place throughout the country.



Sophia, 13 December. Rally by supporters of the Communist Party. Photo: Nadežda Czipewa

Petko Simeonov, leader of the Union of Democratic Forces, speaking on television: *If a crowd numbering many thousands demands the resignation of state leaders, the dissolution of Parliament, the renouncement by the Party of its leading role and the exclusion of the Party from places of work – that is not extremism. It is quite simply proof that the public has lost confidence in the authorities, who have been instrumental in causing a profound social and economic crisis.* Sophia, 16 December [12]

13 DECEMBER

– **POLAND.** On the 8th anniversary of the introduction of Martial Law, independent demonstrations take place throughout the country. Participants demand that Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski should be removed from the office of President and should face charges. In many places, the militia intervenes and several dozen people are beaten and detained.

16 DECEMBER

– **GDR.** A Congress of the German Socialist Party of Unity takes place in Berlin. Erich Honecker, who is under house arrest, sends a letter of self-criticism. Participants in the Congress also receive a letter from Moscow, in which the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party states: *“We Soviet Communists have already learned the hard way that life cannot be encompassed by dogmas”*.

R O M A N I A

We showed the world that we were able to liberate ourselves from this horror – by paying the highest price, that of spilt blood. Despite the fact that they were bought at the cost of a sea of blood, those two events – the revolution and the death of Ceaușescu – remain the most splendid gifts for the Romanian nation. Taking into account the enormity of the crimes and losses which resulted from the rule of the Ceaușescu family, I consider that the punishment was just. I speak as a Romanian citizen. My feelings at this moment are unequivocal.

Ion Teșu, the Romanian “regime” Ambassador to Warsaw, in conversation with Urszula Bielous at the end of December 1989 (“Polityka” issue 1/1990)



Bucharest, 22 December. Street riots.

Photo: Jose Nicolas / CORBIS/FotoChannels

László Tőkés, pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Timișoara:

Five times, the Secretary and the Mayor came running. The number of demonstrators had increased ten-fold, they were demanding written confirmation that Tőkés would not be transferred – at the same time hurling invectives of an unrepeatabe nature at both officials. At 3 p.m. [Mayor] Moț invited a delegation to his office, ostensibly to give them the document. They returned with an ultimatum: unless the crowd disperses by 5 p.m., water cannon will be used. I advised the people to go home.

The crowd of Romanians grew larger and shouted slogans which had nothing to do with me or with the Church of the Reformation [...]. They sang the national anthem Hora Unirii – five thousand hearty voices! I was extremely touched. I kept repeating: “Go home” and they answered: “We love you, we won’t give you up”... They shouted: “Down with Ceaușescu’s dictatorship”, “Freedom”, “Bread”... most of them made their way to the city centre. I could feel it, I knew what would happen now – five thousand people in the city centre are capable of anything.

Timișoara, 16 December [47]



Timișoara, December. A street poster with a likeness of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Photo: Owen Franken / CORBIS/FotoChannels

16 DECEMBER

– Mass protests break out in Timișoara in defence of Pastor László Tőkés, whom the authorities want to transfer to another parish. The townspeople take down portraits of Nicolae Ceaușescu and symbols of Communist power, they remove books written by the *conducător* (leader) from bookshops and throw them into the streets and then openly destroy them.

17 DECEMBER

– The demonstration outside the headquarters of the Provincial Council and Party Committee in Timișoara continues.
 – Units of the Securitate (political police) fire on the unarmed crowd. Several dozen people, including children, are killed.
 – In the evening, army units commence operations in Timișoara and skirmishes break out throughout the city. László Tőkés is arrested.

18 DECEMBER

– **GDR.** In Berlin, the East German Round Table declares its intention of reunification of the two separate German states. The composition of an interim Government of National Responsibility is also agreed. It is to hold power until the free elections set for May 1990.

19 DECEMBER

– **GDR.** For the first time in history, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany appears at a rally in Dresden in the German state on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Helmut Kohl expresses his support for democratic reform in the GDR. During a meeting with the GDR Prime Minister, Hans Modrow, a joint declaration is agreed, setting out a programme aimed at the unification of the two German states.



Romanian flag with a hole in place of the Communist emblem.

Photo: Peter Turnley / CORBIS/FotoChannels

18 DECEMBER

– People gather outside the Cathedral in Timișoara intending to commemorate the victims of Sunday's massacre. The Security Forces and the militia cut the city off from the world. Meanwhile, Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife leave for an official visit to Iran. Some of the military, led by Colonel Viorela Oancei, cease operations against the people and join the demonstrators.

– News of the incidents reaches other towns in Romania. A rally takes place in Brasov in support of the inhabitants of Timișoara. The militia intervenes.

19 DECEMBER

– Skirmishes between the people and the Securitate functionaries in Timișoara last

throughout the day. A delegation of the city's inhabitants takes up talks with Prime Minister Constantinem Dăscălescu. In the afternoon, military troops cease operations and withdraw to barracks.

A flag with a hole instead of the Romanian Communist Party emblem becomes the symbol of the revolution.

20 DECEMBER

– Mass strikes break out in places of work in Timișoara, soldiers demonstrate alongside the civilian population and the Securitate forces eventually withdraw beyond the city. The crowd chants the slogan: "We're not afraid to die!"

The atmosphere of rebellion spreads to other regions of Romania.

20 DECEMBER

– **CZECHOSLOVAKIA.** An extraordinary Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party takes place in Prague. Participants pass a resolution, in which they apologise to the people for repression, injustice, the consequences of the invasion by Warsaw Pact armies, the stifling of freedom of speech and for making use of power for their own ends.

From an appeal to former members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, expelled during the period 1968–69:

Comrades, in this hour of reform which you, yourselves, commenced – we, [...] together with rank and file Communists ask that you forgive us for the past.

Prague, 20 December [44]

21 DECEMBER

– A rally in Bucharest, called by Nicolae Ceaușescu in order to denounce the “rabble from Timișoara” turns into a demonstration against the Communist authorities. The Romanian leader barricades himself in the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. The militia intervenes. In the afternoon, troops and armoured vehicles appear on the streets of the capital.



Bucharest, 21 December. Nicolae Ceaușescu speaks from the HQ of the Romanian Central Committee.

Photo: Associated Press / East News

22 DECEMBER

– The Romanian authorities announce a state of emergency. Fighting continues between the army, which has sided with the rebellion, and the Securitate forces. The Minister of National Defence, Gen. Vasile Milea, is killed in mysterious circumstances. Following an unsuccessful attempt to escape, President Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife are detained by Gen. Victor Stănculescu’s troops and imprisoned. The Securitate uses machine guns to fire on civilians. Fighting in the streets of the Romanian capital continues for another few days. The number of victims exceeds several thousand. The National Liberation Front now takes over power.



Bucharest, 22 December. Insurgents on a lorry.

Photo: Agencja ROMPRES

21 DECEMBER

– **HUNGARY.** The National Assembly takes a decision on the voluntary dissolution of Parliament on 16th March 1990, in order to pave the way for free elections. Hungary’s first real Parliamentary election campaign since the end of the war will start in the new year. Over 50 political parties will take part.

Dorana Cosoveanu, Curator of the National Museum, founder of the Civic Alliance:

Towards evening [22 December] all hell broke loose. Short burst of fire from machine guns shattered windows, pierced walls and forced apparently solid doors out of their frames. No telephones, no lights. It was difficult to establish where the firing was coming from, from inside or outside, was it the army or 'terrorists'... A night of terror, when it seemed as though everything would come crashing about our heads. At daybreak, we divided into three 'patrols' – made up of the curator and a few young

soldiers – and made our way swiftly through the halls of the "European Gallery". A terrible tragedy met our eyes: paintings by Rubens, Rembrandt, Jordaens, Breughel were damaged by gunfire, they hung on the remnants of frames, singed here and there. In the choking smoke, we quickly brought out the remainders of the wonders of this world.

As we tried to rescue the Flemish 16th century tapestry which yesterday had still been a glorious green, it disintegrated in our hands like ashes. Cry? Scream? Hide! Outside the light was getting stronger. The cannonade was resumed.

Bucharest, 22 December [16]



Bucharest, 22 December. Skirmishes in the streets of the city. Photo: Radu Sigheti / Reuters/FORUM

24 DECEMBER

– **USSR.** A Congress of People's Deputies declares the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact invalid and this, in turn, means legal grounds for the annexation of the Baltic Republics to the USSR cease to exist. The 1st Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, states, however, that nationalist tendencies in the Baltic States could lead to violence and to destabilisation.

Virgilijus Čepaitis, Secretary to the Sąjūdis:

At first we feared the word 'independence'. No longer. [...] Of course, there remains the question – what happens if tanks invade Lithuania? [...] Some madman could use force. Be that as it may. But we cannot go on living like this... If madness prevails then we will not resort to the use of force. We'll do as the Poles have done – we'll wait. [42]





Bucharest, 22 December. Street fighting between demonstrators and Securitate units. Photo: Fatih Saribas / Reuters/FORUM

**Extract from the sentence passed
by the Extraordinary Military Tribunal:**

Genocide has been committed and not only in Timișoara and in Bucharest. We are dealing with 25 years of crimes committed against the people through starvation, deprivation of heating and electricity and, above all, of crimes committed against the soul. [...] How long did the Romanian people have to put up with you in the fear that, at any moment, they might be apprehended, drugged, shut up in lunatic asylums!

Târgoviște, 25 December [4]

25 DECEMBER

– The Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife are shot in the town of Târgoviște, in accordance with a sentence passed as a result of a trial lasting several hours. The insurgent forces find the dictator guilty of the crime of genocide, guilty of driving the country to economic ruin and of appropriating public property of immense value.

Photographs of the execution of the dictatorial couple are released around the world.



Bucharest, 25 December. Television broadcast of the execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Photo: Krzysztof Miller / Agencja Gazeta

26 DECEMBER

– **BULGARIA.** The Independent Trade Union “Podkrepa” organises an all-day demonstration in Sophia in support of the speedy democratization of Bulgaria. Trade unionists demand the immediate resignation of the government, the dissolution of Parliament and arrangements for free elections.

27 DECEMBER

– **BULGARIA.** Round Table Talks are officially announced, with the participation of the ruling Communists and representatives of the opposition (they commenced two weeks later). The following day, new political parties are set up. The Bulgarian authorities undertake to respect the rights of the Turkish minority which had been subjected to many repressions at the end of the 1980’s.



Bucharest, 26 December. Demonstration in the city centre. Photo: Krzysztof Miller / Agencja Gazeta

26 DECEMBER

– Former high-ranking functionary of the Romanian Communist Party, Ion Iliescu, takes over the office of interim President of Romania. The National Liberation Front forms a government headed by Petre Roman (which is approved three days later). Most of the Departments are taken over by former Communists. A demonstration takes place in the capital, in protest at this composition of the Cabinet.

28 DECEMBER

– Battles with the surviving remnants of the Securitate in Bucharest slowly come to an end, most of the militia units loyal to the regime surrender.

– **POLAND.** The Sejm approves an Act introducing economic reforms. *“This package,”* says Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz, *“comprising 13 Acts and 7 Resolutions, is a major breakthrough for the Polish economy. We propose an economy based on market forces, with a private ownership structure, as in highly developed countries, an economy which is open to the world and whose rules are clear to all.”*

28 DECEMBER

– **CZECHOSLOVAKIA.** Alexander Dubček becomes Speaker of the Federal Assembly. The following day, Václav Havel becomes President. In his inauguration speech, he stresses: *“It is now no longer about a better future for Czechoslovakia. [...] May the road we are taking towards a better future lead us to a better future for the whole of Europe and of the world.”*



Kraków, 1990. Eagle without a crown, symbol of the People's Republic of Poland being demolished. *Photo: Jerzy Szot / OK*

P O L A N D

Lech Wałęsa:

The year 1989, called by some the 'People's Autumn', was coming to an end. In Poland it was officially marked by a change in the name of the country: from 'People's Republic of Poland', back to 'Republic of Poland'. The country's emblem was also transformed with the restoration of the White Eagle's gold crown. [53]

30 DECEMBER

– **POLAND.** The Senate approves amendments to the Polish Constitution. As of midnight on 31 December the new name of the country becomes valid – the Republic of Poland. The new emblem is the White Eagle with a gold crown, on a red background. The clause referring to the leading role of the Communist Party is deleted from the Constitution. Freedom to set up new political parties is guaranteed.



Bucharest, December. Victory Demonstration.
Photo: *Libertate Roumanie*, 1989

30 DECEMBER

– Pastor László Tőkés declares: *“The punishment meted out to the Ceaușescu couple was an act of justice. But showing their bodies on television was inappropriate. I do not feel hatred towards them. May God forgive them.”*

31 DECEMBER

– The National Liberation Front passes a decree on the registration of political parties. After over 40 years of Communist dictatorship, political life is revived and pre-1946 parties reinstated.

Ion Matei, head of the newly formed “Romanian Renaissance Party”:

We now have more electric power and more food in the shops. We also have freedom of speech. Despite this, the old power structures are still there, with the same old people. There are too many people who, just two weeks ago, spoke out on behalf of Ceaușescu, and now talk of democracy. Until this changes, nothing will change.

Bucharest, December [13]

31 DECEMBER

– **GERMANY.** Half a million people see in the New Year at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. The ceremony takes place in an atmosphere of German unification. According to official data, almost 350,000 citizens left East Germany in 1989.

T W O D E C L A T E S R

Bartosz Kaliski

Striving to reform the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev became its undertaker. The fact that he was awarded the title of President of the USSR and was given wide ranging powers did nothing to halt the implosion of the system, nor the galloping economic crisis. From the beginning of 1990, the Republics of the Soviet Union, headed by Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, began to announce their sovereignty and aimed for a complete break with Moscow. Beyond the Caucasus, national conflicts reared up and the incompetent actions of the Moscow leadership served only to stoke the fires of antagonism.

In January 1991, a bloody attack by Soviet special units on Lithuanian Government buildings in Vilnius could not turn the tide of events – the Baltic Republics regained their independence. Gorbachev's indecision played into the hands of Boris Yeltsin, who was determined to rid himself of the burden of his past. In June 1991, he became President of the Russian Federation, the largest republic in the USSR. In mid 1991 the final tool of Soviet hegemony was finally dismantled – the military Warsaw Pact and COMECON (the Council for Mutual Economic Aid). In December 1991, Boris Yeltsin, together with the leaders of Belarus and the Ukraine, both of which also had leanings towards independence, signed a document officially dissolving the USSR.

The break-up of the Soviet bloc changed the political and economic face of Europe. On 7 February 1992, in Maastricht, an European Community was transformed into the European Union – with a common currency, European citizenship, a joint foreign policy and joint security policies.

From January 1990 radical changes began to take place in Poland. The Polish United Workers' Party ceased to exist. The "Solidarność" camp broke up into several warring factions. Mazowiecki's government applied shock therapy to the Polish economy ("Balcerowicz's Plan"), and this caused rising unemployment and the fall of many uneconomical factories and plants. Above all, however, it triggered an explosion of entrepreneurship amongst Polish citizens and introduced an economic rationale.

In Bulgaria, the Round Table Talks finally took place at the beginning of 1990. Todor Zhivkov, state leader and Party leader, was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment for misuse of power and for fomenting national conflicts (forced 'Bulgarisation' of the Turkish population). Post-Communists won success in the free elections, however, they agreed to the election of the opposition candidate, Zhelyu Zhelev, to the office of President.

There was no lack of former supporters of Ceaușescu in a still restless Romania. Nonetheless, the country was beginning to develop towards a parliamentary democracy and market economy.

Free elections took place in the GDR in March 1990, as a result of which the Communist Party lost power. The Soviet Union had no reservations with regard to the unification of Germany, and it finally became a fact on 3 October 1990.

GDR Stasi files, which mostly escaped undamaged, became the basis of a searching assessment of East German Communism. And, while Honecker's trial never came to fruition

and the East German politician managed to escape from Europe, the swift manner with which the heritage of the SED dictatorship was tackled set an unprecedented example to other countries in the region.

In other countries, information about the crimes committed under Communism was far slower in reaching public awareness. Symbolic of the changes taking place in Hungary was the election as President in 1990 of the writer, Árpád Göncz who had been sentenced by Kadar's regime to lifetime imprisonment for his part in the 1956 revolution. It was far easier to honour the victims of Communist regimes than to bring their leaders to justice. Even today crimes committed by the Communist system remain unpunished.

In April 1990, Czechoslovakia's title was changed to the Czech and Slovak Federal Republics. 'De-Communisation' was brought into being (functionaries of the Czechoslovak Communist Party were removed from positions of authority). On 1st January 1993, the new federal state ceased to exist and the independent Czech and Slovak states appeared on the political arena. Václav Havel became President of the Czech Republic.

In the period 1991–94, Soviet army units finally withdrew from all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which had regained full independence and in which the Soviet units were seen as an occupying force.

The dominant political powers in the post-Communist countries were in agreement as to the fact that their long-term aim should be economic and political integration with the Western world. They cut themselves off from their Communist past in a more or less radical form. Ethnic tension between Hungary, Slovakia and Romania was smoothed out through negotiation and bilateral agreements. Following the economic catastrophe, this part of Europe soon found itself on the path to economic growth.

In 1994, the 'Partnership for Peace' programme was brought into being – this involved cooperation with NATO. Five years later, in March 1999, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became full members of the North Atlantic Pact and, as such, they supported NATO intervention in defence of the Kosovo Albanians. In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia also joined the Pact. .

On 1st January 2002, a common currency – the Euro – came into force in twelve (out of fifteen) of the countries of the European Union. This heralded a previously unprecedented area of economic freedom in Europe.

May 1, 2004 saw the accession to the European Union of the three Baltic Republics, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Three years later, they were joined by Romania and Bulgaria.

These countries which – just two decades previously – had been embedded in a civilisational and economic nightmare, supporting the interests of the Soviet Union – now achieved a historical success: they became full and equal partners in a united, common Europe, built on a foundation of respect for human rights and freedom, on principles of democracy and the right of nations to self-determination.

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Ośrodek KARTA [The KARTA Centre] – is an independent, non-governmental public amenity organisation (administered as a Foundation), which deals with the documentation and popularisation of the recent history of Poland and of Central & Eastern Europe. The KARTA community commenced its [underground] publishing activities in 1982, documentation – in 1987, legal activities – in 1989, international presence – in 1992, educational activities – in 1996. In 2005, KARTA set up the 'History Meeting House' in Warsaw. 

The pace of the year **1989** was extraordinarily intensive – as though the whole breakthrough in freedom for Eastern and Central Europe had to take place within the space of that year. In January, the pending changes to the system were little more than a glimmer of hope. By December, the new, independent order was a reality in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; at the same time in the GDR, Bulgaria, Romania and the Baltic Republics of the USSR, the vision of changes to the existing system were already deeply rooted.

The image we present is that of communities progressing through the year as in a relay race. There is no direct communication between them, they do not exhort others to act – but as an operation came to an end in one country, so it passed on naturally to the next. Spring belonged to the Poles. Summer – to the Hungarians and to the 'Baltic chain'. Autumn belonged to the Germans, Czechs, Slovaks and Bulgarians. In the early days of the winter even the Romanians felt the breakthrough. 