

1989



Fall of the Berlin Wall enabled the unification of Germany

1991



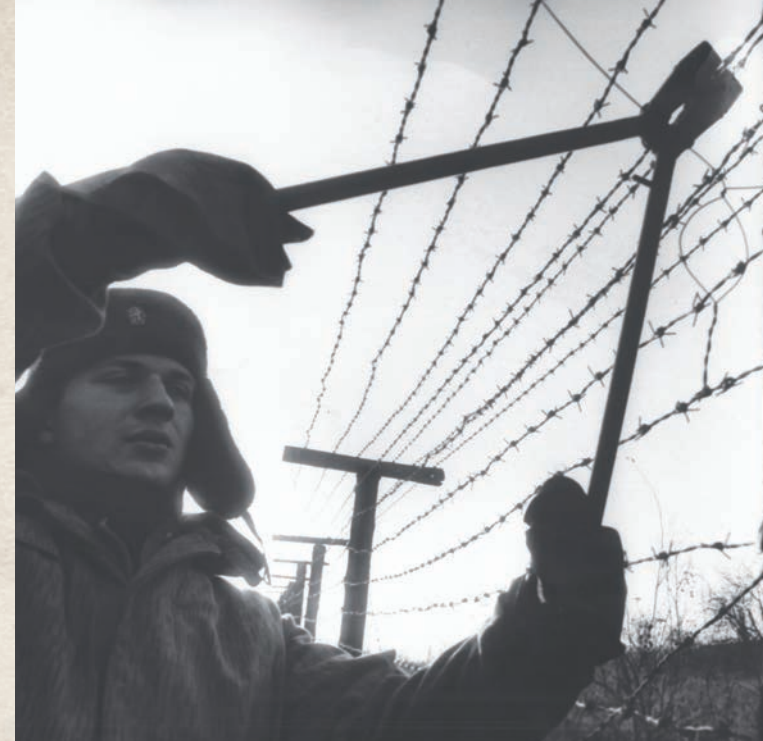
Non-communist representatives of the Czecho-Slovakia, Poland and Hungary outlined the cooperation in democratic Europe: Václav Havel, Árpád Göncz, Marián Čalfa, József Antall a Lech Wałęsa

***“In Poland it took 10 years, in Hungary 10 months, in the GDR 10 weeks and [...] in Czechoslovakia 10 days.”***

Timothy Garton Ash

***“The toppling of the Berlin Wall. The overthrow of Ceausescu by the people he had so brutally oppressed. The first free elections in Eastern Europe for a generation. The spread of the ideas of market freedom and independence to the very heart of the Soviet Leviathan. Our friends from Eastern Europe reminded us that no force of arms, no walls, no barbed wire can for ever suppress the longing of the human heart for liberty and independence.”***

Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister



to resign by dissatisfied party officials with Army backing. Yet the new BCP leadership's reluctance to shake up the political status quo caused public unrest. The previously fragmented opposition joined the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) – led by dissident Zhelyu Zhelev – on 7 December 1989 and began organizing anti-communist protests. The government ultimately collapsed, and on **14 January 1990 parliament abolished legislation governing the leading role of the Communist Party**. BCP continued to have strong influence over the country and its successor, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, won the free elections in June 1990. Following large-scale public protests, the government was replaced by a coalition led by independent Dimitar Popov, who oversaw the drafting of a democratic constitution. UDF won the second free election in October 1991.

Nicolae Ceaușescu led the communist regime in **Romania** since 1965. Ceausescu's megalomania led to a steep decline in living standards and increased general dissatisfaction. When on 15 December 1989 the secret police attempted to evict Calvinist pastor László Tőkés (a Hungarian minority leader), Timisoara people came to his defence and anti-government demonstrations broke out. The riots had spread from Timisoara to other parts of the country. Ceaușescu organized a demonstration in Bucharest on 21 December 1989. Yet rather than the anticipated

support, he was confronted by heckles – and that evening street fighting erupted. When the Army joined opposition forces on 22 December 1989, Ceausescu and his wife Elena were sentenced to death on 25 December 1989 by helicopter. But they were captured the following day, and sentenced to death by a special military tribunal on 25 December 1989. Power in Romania was then seized by the National Salvation Front led by reformist communist Ion Iliescu, who scheduled free elections for 20 May 1990.

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[www.upn.gov.sk](http://www.upn.gov.sk); [www.enrs.eu](http://www.enrs.eu)



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## ANNUS MIRABILIS

1989 AND THE FALL OF COMMUNISM IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

***The Latin term Annus Mirabilis (wonderful year) is often applied to the events of 1989, when communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe collapsed like a house of cards. While Poland and Hungary secured a transition from totalitarianism through ruling party agreement with the opposition, communist governments in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Czechoslovakia fell after mass protests by angry citizens. In Bulgaria, communism's demise resulted from complex political struggles, while communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship in Romania ended in bloody revolution.***



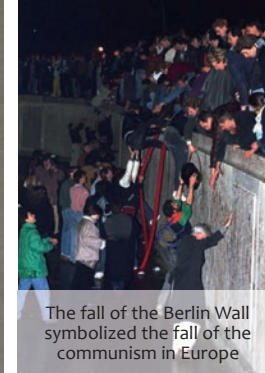


European countries of the Soviet bloc created military coalition Warsaw Pact



American President Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II played an important role in the fall of the communist regimes

The communist regimes struggled with deep economic crisis during late 1980s

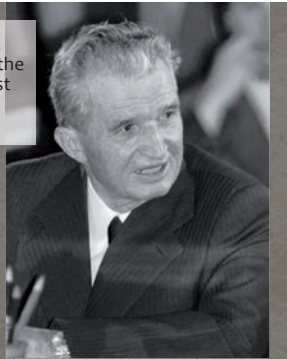


The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the fall of the communism in Europe



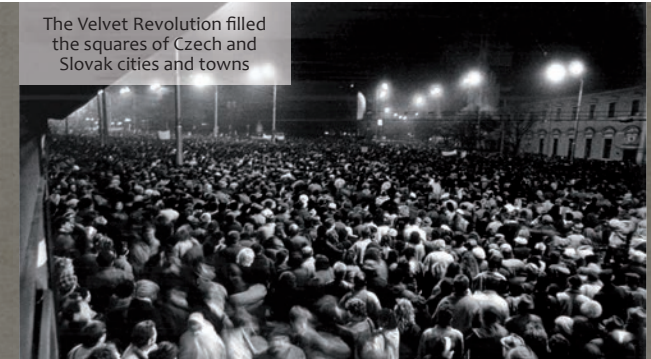
Mikhail Gorbachev (in the middle, wearing a hat) introduced the new perestroika policy in the Soviet Union

Nicolae Ceaușescu, who tried to prevent the fall of the communist regime in Romania by force



Bulgarian communist leader Todor Zhivkov

The Velvet Revolution filled the squares of Czech and Slovak cities and towns



From the mid-1980s **Poland** was hit by a severe economic crisis. The Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) had failed to improve the population's living standards. Following a wave of strikes in factories and shipyards in 1988, PUWP Secretary-General Wojciech Jaruzelski entered into negotiations with representatives of the banned *Solidarity* trade union led by worker Lech Wałęsa. In April 1989, the parties agreed to restore political and trade union pluralism in Poland. The government simultaneously adopted economic-reform legislation. ***Solidarity* emerged victorious from the parliamentary elections of 4 and 18 June 1989**, and dissident Tadeusz Mazowiecki was sworn-in as Polish prime minister.

Following the brutal suppression of the anti-communist 1956 uprising in **Hungary**, the Soviet Union set up a regime led by János Kádár – the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP). The country allowed small private businesses to operate and shops could sell quality Western goods. But Hungarian's living standards were artificially maintained by high-interest foreign loans. Kádár, who rejected any political changes, was gradually losing support and in May 1987 was withdrawn as General Secretary by the Reform Communists. Three opposition political parties also emerged: Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF), Hungarian Citizens Union, and

Liberal Democratic Union – Hungarian Liberal Party. In September 1989, the government and opposition committed themselves to creating the conditions for a transition to political pluralism. The Hungarian communist regime officially ended with constitutional change on 23 October 1989. **The HDF commanded a clear mandate in the 25 March 1990 democratic elections.**

The **German Democratic Republic (GDR)** was one of the Soviet bloc's most conservative countries. The General Secretary of the ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SUPD) was Erich Honecker, who relied on the notorious Stasi secret police to enforce rule. Disillusioned citizens expressed opposition by fleeing to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), an emigration that increased in September 1989 when thousands of East Germans took advantage of the border opening between Hungary and Austria. The New Forum (NF) as a democratic political movement also became active. The NF responded to state repression by organizing mass demonstrations. In this context, the reformed SUPD removed Honecker as General Secretary on 18 October 1989. **The protests nevertheless continued, culminating on 9 November 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall**, which had starkly symbolised Germany's division for 28 years. The new government led by Hans Modrow reached agreement with the opposition to disband the Stasi and hold free elections. The GDR was unified with Germany less than a year later on 3 October 1990.

**Czechoslovakia's** communist regime appeared very stable even towards the end of the 1980's. Yet within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS) a power struggle was underway between conservatives and reformists. On 16 November 1989, Bratislava students marched to discuss democratization. On 17 November 1989, students took to Prague's streets to demonstrate against the communist regime – yet security forces violently intervened. On the next day, Prague's university students and theatre actors started a protest strike. On the initiative of dissident Václav Havel, the Czech opposition established Civic Forum (CF) on 19 November 1989, while their Slovak counterparts set up Public Against Violence (PAV) in Bratislava. These political movements led mass public meetings that demanded an end to CPCS's monopol on power. On 27 November 1989 a two-hour general strike throughout Czechoslovakia (under the slogan "*End One Party Rule*") **successfully led two days later to parliament abolishing the leading role of the communist party**. On 10 December 1989 a new democratic-majority federal government took office. CF and PAV won the free elections of June 1990.

At the end of the 1980s, **Bulgaria** was economically stagnating. On 10 November 1989, Todor Zhivkov – the General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) – was forced