

The impact of 1989 on Europe, East and West

The purpose of this working group is to examine the impact of 1989 by inviting the broader research community dealing with European integration and European history to thoroughly consider in an interdisciplinary manner the centrality of the impact of 1989 for some of the current problems Europe is facing.

The members of this Working Group are collaborating initially in writing an essay, which is to be completed until January 2009. Further research, conference and publishing activities are envisaged thereafter.

The revolutions of 1989 have had a paradox impact on the process of European integration. On the one hand, the divisions of the Cold War were overcome, subsequently enabling the enlargement of the Council of Europe to 47 member states and of the European Union to 27 member states. On the other hand, one could argue that since 1989 the process of European integration has become an object of discussion, including the explicit questioning of efforts at political and cultural integration. The new member states in Eastern Europe are hesitant to give up their newly won national sovereignty. The failed referenda for a European constitution in France and the Netherlands signal that citizens in Western Europe are distrustful about this new Europe that emerged as a result of the revolutions of 1989. Fear of migration, labour competition and a weakened welfare state seemingly prevails over the desire for a Europe united in peace and liberty.

The paradox impact of 1989 is also visible in discourses on the significance and meaning of this year. It is clear that the events of 1989 are of world-historical significance like those of 1789 or 1848 and not merely a 'rectifying' revolution by which Eastern Europe returned to the general and normal path of European integration. Debates on the significance and impact of 1989, however, occur mostly in national contexts. Moreover, Europe is still split into East and West in its memory of 1989. Although the changes impacted the entire continent, it is still seen as an event that took place in Eastern Europe and really changed only this part of continent. It may be surmised that the failure to understand the true impact of 1989 for all parts of Europe and all Europeans is a major reason for the present impasse of European integration in the ideational and institutional domains.

To fully comprehend the significance of 1989, it is necessary to research the consequences of 1989 for the whole of Europe. Instead of the divided past of the Cold War, Europe now has a joint future. Indeed, we ask how the opening of Europe might inspire new research agendas and we purposely reverse the prevalent perspective by exploring the impact of the East on the West. Our main research questions are:

1. If 1989 (and 1991) signifies the breakdown of the Soviet empire, the collapse of state socialism and the end of the Cold War, how did this impact Western Europe?
2. Does the time between 1989 and 2004, with the consolidation of an enlarged European Union and newly emergent European configurations in areas as diverse as democracy and higher education constitute a distinctive period of European history and transformation?
3. While the transformation from 1989 to 2004 is relatively well researched for Eastern Europe – if within a one-sided regional framework of transition or transformation studies – what do we know about the co-transformation of the existing European Union member states and their societies?

Further contributions would be welcome. Of particular relevance might be contributions that trace the impact of the revolutions of 1989 and/or later NATO and EU enlargement

In a particular domain for Western Europe, for example, political systems and parties in Western Europe, the re-orientation of Western firms and FDI in CEE, migration, immigration and labour market policies and so on;

For wider European projects such as the European Monetary Union, the European Constitution, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Higher Education Area;

The EU and NATO itself.

If you would like to discuss your participation, please contact [chris.armbruster](mailto:chris.armbruster@eui.eu) at eui.eu

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