

European Memory of "1989" – The Challenge for Civic Education

Bodo von Borries (University of Hamburg)

The German version of this report is published in: "Außerschulische Bildung 2/2009",
<http://www.adb.de/publikationen/zeitschrift-ab.php>

English translation by Julia Brooks

First things first: This is not about what I prefer or love, but rather about what is and what may be. Many (luckily) engaged and mission-driven individuals romp about in the field, but there must also be distanced analysts and sober empiricists who can clearly separate the normative ("should") and objective ("it is") and analyze the deep structural settings of identity-related learning. It is not enough to bring up a long series of vaguely operationalized and self-absolutist items. Empirics must at least occasionally present higher claims and reflect on their methods.

For those in didactics, self-limitations on the permissible also come into play. What is – particularly in compulsory and graded school learning processes – legitimate? It is imperative to take the Beutelsbach Consensus seriously, i.e. to follow (see Schiele/Schneider 1977, 178ff.):

- "The prohibition against overwhelming the pupil" (no indoctrination)
- "Treating controversial subjects as controversial" (no mere passing on of the dominant narrative)
- "Giving weight to the personal interests of pupils"(empowerment to participation and self-judgment)
- "Learning methods and skills orientation"

One must not hide his/her own enthusiasm for Europe as the chance for freedom and human rights, though sometimes it must be reined in.

The Form and Function of "Places of Memory" and the Suitability of "1989" as a "Common Place of European Memory"

Previous cultural studies have made it rather clear that history is not recorded as a chronological sequence and narrative (e.g. Nora 1990, Assmann 1997, Flacke 1998, Carcenac-Lecomte 2000, François/Schulze 2001), but rather grouped around "places of memory", even when these symbols

often preserve a particular narrative. These “places of memory” are by no means to be understood as always topographical or even local, but many have instead symbolical or metaphorical character, such as “Christmas”, “Volkswagen” or the “D-Mark”(German Mark) (see François/Schulze 2002). The focus here is then to examine whether “1989” is a suitable “common place of European memory.”

Places of memory arise not in the moment of the relevant events/occurrences, but rather in retrospective in the course of societal discourse on the meanings of history. They are themselves coagulated constructions and by no means scientifically based or free of individual or national interests. In fact, places of memory more nearly reflect power relationships and negotiations under conditions of force. Yet we should not be deceived: states – even dictators – cannot simply decree “places of memory” (certainly not by the issuance of mere guidelines for history education).

When the manifest or latent needs of large population groups are not met, the supply of state force (its power to impose to obedience) simply dries up. The majority of Poles – even the farmers, who before 1772 certainly did not belong to the “Polish nation” as a pure “aristocratic nation” – did not ignore the history lesson of the three conquerors of Poland before 1914. In other words, the official historical myths of the “Three Empires”, Russia, Prussia and Austria have failed; the “Polish National Myth” was until today an incredible success.

Places of memory are carefully cultivated around relatively simple symbolic sites, dates, persons and events. This process of selection does not occur haphazardly, but is rather determined more aesthetically and psychologically than through historical science. For example, the French Revolution did not take place in “1789” and was not decided by or identical to the “Storming of the Bastille”. The national holiday (“July 14”) nonetheless became a success, even if only after some time and with considerable help. The “French Revolution” (even the term is an interpretation!) was much longer and more complex, much more contradictory, much bloodier and much more futile than the symbol indicates (and that can be proven), but such a representation would be poorly suited to a holiday for the entire “nation”.

A second example: “January 27 (1945)” as the worldwide “Holocaust Memorial Day” was downright unfortunately chosen. The liberation of a few thousand deathly ill prisoners in the evacuated Auschwitz concentration camp, which this date represents, is a poorly suited representative of the entire anti-Jewish Genocide. The mass executions in Babi Yar near Kiev as prototype (29-30 September 1941), the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as a resistance action (19 April 1943), or even the Wannsee Conference in Berlin as a persecution scheme (20 January 1942) would be without a doubt better symbolic days. Nevertheless, January 27 will presumably establish itself in the process of “universalization” of the Holocaust.

The 9th of November, 1989, marking the “Fall of the Berlin Wall”, would be a weaker proposal for a “common European place of memory” and “common European commemoration day” of 1989. The fact that this day has not yet managed to establish itself, even in Germany, as a “national holiday” is not to be easily forgotten. The specific German character of the date is unmistakable - even apart from the ambivalence of 1848 (execution of the 1848 revolutionary Robert Blum), 1918 (November Revolution), 1923 (failed Hitler putsch), 1938 (“Night of the Broken Glass”), or 1939 (on the eve of Georg Elser's Hitler assassination attempt). As with the French Revolution or the Holocaust, a wide intellectual movement towards universalization of the symbol must first take place and be successful. This is not impossible, but it appears from today's perspective to be neither probable nor desirable.

What is true of these dates is also naturally true for the year as a whole. As with 1848, 1945 or 1968, the symbolic year “1989” witnessed countless historically relevant events and movements in different places and at different times. That for itself does not speak against the year's symbolic value as a “place of memory”, but very different pictures emerge from the perspectives of various groups and countries.

Even if we were to agree on a canonical list (which is surely not possible), the events combine themselves as if in a kaleidoscope whose image transforms greatly with each shaking (i.e. country). The priorities and causalities of 1989, in order words, present themselves rather differently according to the specific nation or region.

"1989"

Symbolic Date	Land/Region	Event
03.02.	Paraguay	Fall of dictator Stroessner
28.03.	Serbia	Abolition of the autonomy of Kosovo and Voivodina (and beginning of the end of Yugoslavia)
05./04.	Poland	Lifting of the ban on Solidarność and Round Table Talks (first free election 04.06.)
09.04.	Georgia	Massacre in Tiflis
03./04.06.	China	Tienanmen Square massacre

04.06.	Iran	Death of Ayatollah Khomeini
23.09.	The Caucasus/ Transcaucasia	Declaration of sovereignty by Azerbaijan
23.10.	Hungary	New Constitution (after the opening of the border with Austria on 11.09.)
09.11.	Germany	Fall of the Berlin Wall
14.12.	Chile	Election of President Alwyn as end of Pinochet dictatorship
25.12.	Romania	Execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu und Elena Ceaușescu (following uprising and putsch)
29.12.	Czech Republic and Slovakia	Velvet Revolution: President Havel

Many, though in no case all of these twelve symbolic dates - which lend themselves well to universalization - are related to Gorbachev's policies of "glasnost and perestroika". Any generally acceptable history from a common European perspective – and there are also other continents with relevance to Europe! - must be relatively complicated and integrate together many moments which, for simpler minds, would be hardly understood and would probably weaken the desired affirmative and identity-building force of the "common places of memory". Furthermore, we generally prefer to hear stories of successes and victories over crashes, defeats or remaining "ambivalences".

A sensible and pan-European history of "1989" must, above all, not begin and end with 1989. It would need to start more around 1985 ("glasnost und perestroika"), if not 1968 ("Prague Spring") or 1980 ("Solidarność"); the zenith would be reached in more like 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union (sovereignty of the other 14 member states alongside Russia). Yet it is also impossible to exclude 1992 (the peaceful division of Czechoslovakia), 1990-95 (the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia), 1995 (the expansion of the EU, European decisionmaking) and 1999-2004 (NATO accessions) from the picture. The exact symbolic dates are once again to be taken cum grano salis here. Neoliberalism skeptics would want to or have to include the dates 2008 (world financial crisis) and 2009 (world economic crisis) as well.

How might a pan-European narrative then look? It would have to intertwine a whole series of systemic strands (completely aside from regional differences).

Elements of a pan-European "1989" narrative

Basic Phenomenon	Main Trend	Counter-trend	Affected
Civil Liberties and Democratization	Fall of Eastern European dictators; emergence of parliamentary democracies	Maintenance of semi-socialist and emergence of semi-fascist dictators; later democracy fatigue in Eastern and Western Europe	Central Eastern, Southeastern and Eastern Europe
Market Economy and Privatization	Collapse of the "real existing (state) socialism" in Europe; victory of "globalized (turbo)capitalism" (admittedly only until 2008)	Exceptions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova; deviant developments in China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba, as well as in Central Asia and Transcaucasia.	Predominantly in Central Eastern, Southeastern and Eastern Europe.
Nationality Conflicts and Civil Wars	Breakup of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Moldova, Georgia, etc., and military and peace-keeping "occupations" in Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo, respectively.	German (re)unification	All Europeans to very different extents
European Integration instead of East-West Separation	End of the "Iron Curtain" and "Cold War"; expansion of the EU and NATO	Triggering of EU-Crises through "Expansion and Consolidation" (not vice versa); growing Euro-skepticism and EU hostility.	Almost all Europeans

The various parts of Europa were affected very differently by the basic phenomena and counter-trends of "1989". One sees very clearly at first that the German (re)unification presented an outspoken

exception (which also speaks against the 9th of November as a “common place of memory”) to the general trend of nationality conflicts and state disintegration around 1989. Many unpolitical citizens of Western Europe will not have, even after 20 years, noticed or felt existentially involved in much of the emerging civil liberties or market economy in the eastern part of the continent. Even many West Germans have never stepped foot in the former GDR or the new federal states, whereas almost all East Germans have been in West Germany repeatedly. More empathy or self-sacrifice on behalf of the “new states” in the East is hardly to be expected any differently from the Irish or Portuguese. This structural asymmetry is naturally decisive for the historical-cultural handling of “1989”.

One could add an additional negative factor to the list, namely the urgent structural issues such as the environmental catastrophe which were dangerously relegated to the background by the “implosion of the Soviet bloc” and have been dealt with only passively over the last fifteen years. Similar is true in many respects of the North-South conflict – the asymmetrical world economic order. The abolition of the “socialist camp” (as the “Second World”) has presumably delayed reorganization of global economics. To synthesize a common European narrative would naturally not only be interesting for the eastern part of Europe, but it would be an intellectual, moral and communicative challenge and thus no theme for celebratory commemoration speeches. Maybe this would also be true for twelve year old students in history and civics class.

Verifiable differences in European cultures of history

You are presumably expecting from me the empirical assessment of currently existing “places of memory” and “cultures of history” in different parts of Europe. To provide some more or less reliable information on the subject, however, is not so simple. I personally undertook a comparative study in 1995 with colleagues and friends from numerous countries (“Youth and History 1995”), and almost 32,000 ninth graders (around age 15) in 27 mostly European countries took part, along with their 1,250 teachers. The study is informative, yet there remain numerous methodological problems, and the material is in the meantime highly outdated. The circumstances could have changed massively in last 14 years, but the structures remain interesting.

The question of 1989 appeared then to be too Germany-centered; we therefore produced the question, “What do the changes in Eastern Europe since 1985 make you think of?”

Whether this was wise or not is after the fact no longer such an interesting question. Seven statements (“interpretations”) were presented for classification along a five-point Likert scale – from (1) “strongly disagree” to (3) “neither agree nor disagree” to (5) “strongly agree” (see Borries et al. 1999, 221 and 242). The responses were neutrally assessed, that is to say that the related and positively correlated

interpretations of “Victory of the USA in the Cold War” (MEuropa = 3.09¹) and “Betrayal of socialist ideals” (MEuropa = 2.99) were not both answered negatively or affirmatively.² In Germany, the reserve was particularly clear.

Three statements drew – in international application – considerably more agreement, even if only moderately: “Collapse of the USSR” (MEuropa = 3.64), “Nationality Conflicts and Civil Wars” (MEuropa = 3.53) und “Introduction of the Market Economy in Eastern Europe” (MEuropa = 3.49). Above all, if one considers that agreement generally comes easier than disagreement, the remaining statements came out practically neutral: “Democratization of the Soviet Society” (MEuropa = 3.29) and “Freedom for the Member States of the Warsaw Pact” (MEuropa = 3.27). What does this all mean?

The responses did not vary greatly on average from “neither agree nor disagree”, in other words, from abstention or “no comment”. Even that which lay blatantly before the eyes, such as the wars in the Western Balkans and the Caucasus, the disappearance of the Soviet Union or the expansion of the market economy, did not differ greatly from the mean. Occasionally, terms or concepts which necessitated more detailed knowledge clearly appeared to overwhelm the fifteen year olds. What is the “Warsaw Pact” exactly? What do “market economy” and “socialist ideals” mean? Such questions are better to answer neutrally, thus putting outspokenness or decisiveness out of the question.

One would have thought that families – even if not in all countries – would have spoken extensively with their children about the advantages (and disadvantages) of democracy and market economics, about the new chances of freedom or about the loss of jobs or the threat of civil wars. Although 1,000 Slovenian and 1,000 Croatian (as well as 700 East German) youths participated in the study, this appeared to be hardly the case. Even the most important contemporary historical occurrences which lay only five or ten years in the past, or even persisted, had apparently disappeared behind a gray smoke screen which even “communicative memory” or “cultural tradition” (e.g. directives of the new state powers) could strangely not manage to break through. It evidently takes national directives and textbook productions much longer to take effect in spreading new historical ideologies in everyday school life. Even the reading of current newspapers was not to be counted on from the students. They presumably only commonly recognized that which lay far back in the past as history.

The results also showed only weak differences between the responses of students in participating countries. One could have concluded that the “Collapse of the USSR” would be particularly accentuated in Russia, the Ukraine and Poland, partially with disappointment and partially with

¹ “M_{Europa}” stands for the mean (average) response of all respondents in the 27 mostly European countries.

excitement. In actuality, however, the five Scandinavian countries, Estonia and Lithuania, as well as Israel, Turkey, Italy and Belgium, placed higher values on this statement. Germany falls, above Slovenia, in the next to last place. The results look similarly erratic for “Betrayal of socialist ideals”: the only respondents who could more or less agree with this statement lived along the Mediterranean in Israel and Palestine, Portugal, Spain and Greece. Only Estonia and Lithuania constitute the exception, where socialism never became very popular. The lowest values, and thus a rejection of “betrayal” in the scaling, came from the German, Croatian and Hungarian respondents.

So why present these more or less disappointing findings? We simply have nothing better (or at least I know of nothing). “1985 et seq.” - which we surveyed as a substitute for “1989” - was in 1995, when I am not mistaken, no passably fixed “place of memory” in the participating countries. The youth simply reflected the vague, blurry positions of their parents and grandparents. Unequivocal decisions by the respective families also shine through in other, by all means related questions. The questions seeking a comparison of the (former) GDR with the (old) FRG were, for example, asked only in Germany; they brought, however, completely different results in the new German states versus in the old. Respondents overwhelmingly preferred their own respective sides; even the children of the “peaceful revolutionaries” of 1989 already completely grasped GDR nostalgia, or “Ostalgie” (see Borries et al. 1999, 348f.).

The fact that fixed “places of memory” exist in Europe with considerable national differences can also be seen from other questions in “Youth and History 1995”, including, for example, on “Adolf Hitler”. Colleagues from other countries decided to overrule my own objections and the German misgivings about asking such “personalized” questions. The structural questions on “National Socialism” appeared much too difficult however, and respondents in all countries knew and were able to judge Hitler. The question therefore appeared as “What do you think of ‘Adolf Hitler’?” (see Borries et al. 1999, 162ff., 186)

In this case, the youth proved themselves to be considerably more outspoken, decisive and prepared to provide information. Two interpretations were clearly rebuffed: “A founder of national unity, order and security” (MEuropa = 2.13) and “A puppet of German industrialists and imperialists” (MEuropa = 2.60). A pro-Nazi trivialization thus appears to no longer be en vogue, but instead (even if less extreme) – and this one could not have previously known – the official Communist Party version.

In contrast, two responses to the “Hitler” question received exceptionally high agreement, namely “A cynical dictator and aggressor who is guilty of genocide” (MEuropa = 4.19) and “The best known representative of totalitarian power and violence” (MEuropa = 4,09). The response “A mentally ill, asocial criminal” (MEuropa = 3.76) was valued with somewhat more muted agreement. It is no surprise than Hitler received outspokenly negative responses. More important is the fact that the theoretical

totalitarian variants (presumably not often exactly understood) and the psychological version (“mental illness”) were somewhat less enthusiastically accepted than the clear description of “dictator and genocidaire”.

Three further – consistently positive – interpretations are to be classified as more neutral (“undecided”) when one considers the general tendency towards affirmation: "A die-hard opponent of cultural mixing and foreign infiltration" (MEuropa = 3.34), "The leading opponent of communism" (MEuropa = 3.40) and "A gifted speaker, organiser and leader" (MEuropa = 3.19). Both of the previously rejected concepts of trivialization, namely ("order") and anticommunism ("puppet") appear here again in a different form and are no longer categorically rejected.

The national differences here are much greater and can be illustrated by the combination of only two items. The situation is in reality much more complicated, as we cannot count on the fact that the questions are understood in the same way in all 27 countries – and 25 different languages. Even if the responses are more or less calculable (and the questions were scrutinized by independent translation and reverse translation), their connotations are never to be completely grasped. Likewise for the multi-faceted combinations of “mentally ill criminal” or “gifted leader”.

In some countries, “mentally ill criminality” is recognized while “gifted leadership” is rejected : as in Iceland, Poland, Greece, Turkey, Spain, Italy, Germany (interestingly only in the West) and Scotland. We should expect this combination (recognition of the negative and rejection of the positive characterization) to arise from a certain naivety of adolescence and to be regular and valid everywhere, yet this is in no sense the case.

In other countries, for example Norway, Sweden, Croatia, Israel(!), Portugal, the Netherlands and France, much more is acknowledged alongside the “self-evident fact” of the “mentally ill criminal” and, to a lesser degree, the “gifted leader” (then without such a capability he would not have been so successful at the time). It is clear that “gifted leader” is here meant more as a descriptor and less – as in the first group of countries – as a moral assessment.

There remains a third group where the – still considerable – assessment of “gifted leader” clearly surpasses the designation as “mentally ill criminal”. Two groups are to be carefully differentiated here; included are Hitler and Nazi sympathizers as well as Palestinians, Arab Israelis and (unfortunately) also Bulgarians – according to the motto that “the enemy of our enemy is our friend.” Among others – and this is even more disturbing – the members of victimized nations, such as Russians, Ukrainians and Lithuanians (or are the later also sympathizers?) express themselves as particularly dramatically Hitler-friendly. These results may be vexing, but one cannot deprive the respondents of their perspective: the fascination with the “strong and irresistible man” appears to outweigh the horror of the

“absolutely evil perpetrator” (a high degree of antisemitism was simultaneously to be noted in the affected countries, even in serious public opinion surveys!).

The whole risk, the possibility of a rash transition from state socialism to fascist national systems (e.g. in Belarus and Serbia) can unfortunately not be further discussed here. Another connection is more decisive here: there are certainly common “places of memory” in the countries of Europe which emerge from the (expanded) “contemporary history”, yet their respective interpretations diverge from each other quite substantially. In such cases, it is presumably more fitting to speak of “separated memories” than “shared memories”. To wish for the possibility of an officially approved – through the EU or the Council of Europe – standard version of history appears unpromising and undesirable democrats.

Further examples could be added. Even such an elementary phenomenon as “industrialization” is interpreted with great variation in different countries (see Borries et al. 1999, 151ff., 180). The reductive interpretation of “the invention of better machines” largely predominates, yet “the improvement of living conditions” is placed well above the “struggle of workers against owners” in many countries (Lithuania, Russia, Bulgaria, but also Turkey, Israel and Palestine). It is exactly the opposite in many other regions (such as in Scandinavia, Great Britain, South Tyrol, and Greece, but also in Poland, Hungary and Slovenia). Is there more “Marxist class struggle” remaining in the West than the East in 1995?

A fourth example is “colonial history”, which is presumably too complicated for a unitary “place of memory” even within individual countries. One could easily think that different concepts (such as “assistance for progress and development”, “profitable exploitation and environmental depredation”, “bold discoverers and adventurers”, “sacrificial Christian missions”) coexist and conflict. It is exactly these variants which we attempted to operationalize, with partial success (see Borries et al. 1999, 113ff., 129).

Respondents across Europe strongly agreed with “negative” categorizations such as “Exploitation” (MEuropa = 3.68) and “Racism” (MEuropa = 3.65), while more descriptive (and open to projection) variants such as “Adventurer” (MEuropa = 3.60) and “World Empires” (MEuropa = 3.49) received less sympathy. The “positive” interpretations came out – considering the general tendency toward agreement - more neutrally: “assistance for the progress of others” (MEuropa = 3.18) and “Christian Mission” (MEuropa = 3.17). Opinions of colonialism were therefore unpropitious, though not to such an extreme extent as in the case of Hitler.

However, certain individual countries diverged greatly from these mean European responses. In the non-colonial powers of Italy, Norway, Hungary and the Czech Republic, “exploitative system” received particularly high agreement, while “assistance for progress” was rated negatively (with a difference of

one to one and a half points on the scale). Deflections from the mean remained rather marginal in the five “classic colonial powers” Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, England and France – and “assistance for progress” reached nearly the same values as “exploitation” (only a fourth of a scale point lower). In two uninvolved states (Ukraine and Turkey), the expression “development assistance” overly predominated. Those are considerably large and interpretable differences.

The situation could have thoroughly changed by 2009. It is however highly unlikely that the differences across Europe have disappeared. The present outlook has likely not arisen from a carefully processed and considered history, but rather the (alleged) perceptions and beliefs of the present strongly color how history is told and authenticated. The current World Financial Crisis could possibly serve, for example, as an impetus to newly negotiate and reinterpret the history of the last 30 years – whether consciously or unconsciously. This will occur differently in the respective countries, however, and admittedly lead to struggles between divergent versions of history.

Divergent historical orientations, i.e. contemporary consequences of “1989”

What can we then do with “1989” in civic education, when – as shown – it is not possible to merely create identity by establishing simple and universally shared symbols? If I see things correctly, we cannot get around cognitive analyses and working through the situation emotionally. It is therefore necessary to critically compare the major interpretative models of the world which arose from “1989”. This can be done here only rather theoretically and with particular caution, we cannot avoid covering certain theories, since they determine the orientation of others.

Why are the – as we shall see, rather antithetical – present analyses and future prognoses since 1989 even mentioned here? When we consider “1989” are we not dealing with history, or rather, the past? We must finally get around that we essentially consider history through the lens of our understanding of the present and expectations of the future. However much we may imagine it to be possible, we cannot therefore ignore the predictive models of researchers, teachers and students.

History is not the past, but rather the relationship between interpretations of the past and our perceptions of the present and expectations of the future. It is likewise not merely a “reconstruction of the past”, but above all a “construction of meaning through the experience of time”; it is not a regular cognitive act, but rather even more a complex mental, political, moral, affective and aesthetic effort. This fact is theoretically hardly any longer controversial, but is taken seriously far too seldom in schools and colleges.

For our case of “1989”, this means that the great financial and world economic crisis since 2008, for

example, must soon lead to a major rethinking and rewriting of the history of “1989” – particularly among the former absolute market enthusiasts – (and without negating the aspect of freedom!). So how do the previous models since 1989 look?

Expectations of the Future following “1989”

Catchword	Concept	Hitherto Confirmation/Refutation
"The End of History"	Final victory of democracy/parliamentarianism and free market economy/growth, capitalistic “withering away of the state”	Popular, yet implausible, already refuted
"The Clash of Civilizations"	Conflict West v. Islam, and West v. China (enthusiastically taken up in “fundamentalist” Islam, mutual image of the enemy)	Operative, thus apparently plausible and reputedly confirmed
"Monopolar World"	USA as enduring world hegemon	Realized and failed in the short term
"Imperial Overextension"	Predictable end of US hegemony	Already largely confirmed
"New Power Balance“	Multipolar global system of non-European world powers (China, India, Brazil, etc.), recreation of a traditional pattern of tensions between attempts at hegemony and balancing coalitions	Rather plausible, rudimentarily confirmed
"Europe's Hour"	Renaissance of European prestige and opportunity to effect change (not only as a beneficiary, partner or rival of the USA, but as a teammate on a global level), EU-Attractiveness, Expansion and Consolidation	Normatively desired, only partially empirically confirmed
"The Renaissance of the 'Third Ways'"	New regulation instead of deregulation, return of the social welfare state.	Highly controversial
"Necessary Deferral of Priorities"	"Spacehip Earth" instead of "Resource Wars"	Highly plausible

The two final theories may be most in need of further explanation. Almost no one disputed after 1989 that the “right” side had morally earned its defeat. People could only not agree on whether the victorious side was indeed the morally “right” side or whether it had “earned” its victory. A minority contended that this was by no means the case. One could in fact read much of the subsequent development as “class struggle from above” instead of “irrevocable globalization”; in this case the continually growing gap between the rich and poor (intra-nationally as well as inter-nationally) would simply be a result of the fact that the economically powerful must no longer – for legitimacy purposes – be considerate of the fact that capitalism could have once again boldly show its true colors (the opposite of an “End of History” is clear). How should things go further? Is the idea of a “Third Way” - even a “Renaissance of Socialism” really dead? “New regulation instead of deregulation” and a “modest recurrence instead of radical decomposition of the social welfare state” may soon appear clearly – and controversially – on the order of business.

The earthquake of “1989” temporarily, though seriously, displaced governments' and citizens top priorities for public action. Thus, for example, the problem of the environment lost much of the political importance that had been previously ascribed to it. It took until 2007 to once again reach the level of consciousness reached in 1985 or 1987 about the pressing risks of climate change and energy shortage, only to be immediately crushed once again by the world economic crisis. More polemically stated, we slept though almost twenty years which could have been used for the ecological redirection on which our survival depends. The fact remains, however, that we possess no alternative to our rather small “Spaceship Earth” for the eight – or soon to be ten – billion people populating the planet. To wage further “resource wars” and continue conventional colonial and hegemonic politics would be self-destructive, since they will more or less cause our common boat to capsize. Our priorities must therefore change fiercely and rapidly again.

These are not predominantly nationally specific interpretations which result from different “cultures of history”, but rather different logically structured “Grand Theses” with different orienting powers and political operating procedures. Difference, contrasts and controversies must be dealt with here on a second level. It is not obvious that a “European” handling of “1989” could overcome these difficulties.

Errors and the processing of “burdensome” history

The fact that there are no shared memories in Europe, but rather – if at all – at best separated memories, should be sufficiently clear. That the political beneficence and medial implementation of a “shared interpretation” is neither easily possible nor even desirable must be more clearly elucidated. Instead, it naturally depends on mutually and patiently listening to each other, practicing understanding

the foreign and finally, achieving not just a minimum level of tolerance, but acceptance; “mutual recognition” is more than just “begrudged tolerance”.

Why is this trivial requirement so important and simultaneously so difficult? Even when many do not see it (or want to see it) this way, there were – even in time for the rapidly changing review of 2007/09 – with the complex and contradictory processes 1989/91 not only “winners”, but also “losers”, not only “beneficiaries”, but also those who were “held back”. One would think that this would not be true for the whole of Central Eastern Europe, but only for individual countries such as Belarus, Moldova, Armenia or Uzbekistan. It surely not to be taken seriously enough, for example, that according to a survey at the end of 2008, Joseph Stalin was once again regarded as the most important and most popular politician in Russia, or that in Austria more than 30% of voters cast their ballots for the “right-wing” (or “neo-fascist”) party. Those are only two – if striking – examples among dozens relating to the recent handling of totalitarianism.

The symbolic year 1989/91 is, whether we like it or not, not only a triumphant success story, but also – if more secondarily – a story of burdensome catastrophe. One must only travel once to Bosnia, or ex-Serbian Kosovo, or even to Moldavian Transnistria or Armenian settled and occupied Nagorno-Karabakh (with their respective histories of refugee movement and displacement). A pan-European pride in freedom and a celebration of victory is out of the question there; it is rather a matter of skeptics and those harboring resentment expressing themselves less loudly than the naïve victors and those who see the situation differently.

Real winners are not always perceived as such, and perceived losers are not always the real losers. Considering that even clever historians (and human rights activists) are not “God Almighty”, it is often difficult to settle on an objective assessment of actual improvements and deteriorations in society. Subjective assessments of others (“perceived” improvements and deteriorations) may be incomprehensible for us – as well as annoyingly forgetful and one sided – yet they are themselves actual mental, social and political realities. We can see this in election results and poor voter participation, for example.

In light of the extraordinary liberating experience of 1989, it may sound provocative when I say that 1989 has, for other people, also – in actuality or as perceived – put a burden on living standards, self-esteem, social prestige and biographies (of “the losers”). In third locations, the experienced relevancy of “1989” has never really arrived. We have to become better at “changes of perspective” and the “understanding the foreign” in the field of history, even when it alienates or aggravates us. I would therefore like to present, in closing, my own rough model of how we can mentally and communicatively deal with “burdensome” or “conflictual” histories (see Borries 2008, 121-137). We must however first

consider the common errors which do not lead to “commonality”, but rather to the perpetuation of burdens.

Types of errors in dealing with “burdensome history” and the failure of “historical reconciliation”

Integration of Histories Direction and Perspective	Attempt at common memories; secured peace without historical reconciliation	↔ Preservation of separate memories; threat of wars due to lack of historical reconciliation
Main view through the authorities (“top down” politics of history) ↓	Victors' history and condemnation/forgetting of the losers (“cynicism of power”) ↓	↔ Hostile histories in a system of revenge and quid pro quo ("ancestral enmity") ↓
Main view through the population ("bottom up" politics of history)	↔ Forgotten hostile histories; disappearance because of irrelevancy (“the priority of survival”)	X ↔ Underground history of the losers and hope for reversal (“the heroism of remembrance”)

Examples for the strategies above are so easy to find that a more detailed explanation will be omitted here. More important is that none of these strategies contribute to actual reconciliation, since each ultimately persists in maintaining the “own” perspective and promoting mere self-recognition. The four common errors here can be categorized into two sets of opposites: with the very unequal strengths of some former or current opponents, there are chances for the “obliteration of history” or “ghetto history”, while with comparable strengths there is the possibility for “becoming indifferent” or the “fostering of ancestral enmity” – which could possibly end with the common downfall of both sides. Given these common failures, what does a successful handling of history look like?

When two cultures, societies or populations of victors and vanquished or descendant generations of victims and perpetrators grow together over time, their view of the mutual victories and defeats (including their own grief or sense of wrong-doing and that of the other) must be drudgingly tucked within each other, or rather harmonized with each other – as with their languages (“English” grew out of “Norman” and “Anglo-Saxon” and “the cultural identity of Mexicans contains both the history and accent of the Spanish.”). That is certainly also true of – previously antagonistic – European neighbors who have entered into a major union (e.g. the E.U., Euro, Schengen Agreement).

Reciprocity and multi-perspectivity are also important to acknowledge that, for instance, “the other side also has a – relative – right” and “the own side also carries a – partial – responsibility”. This presupposes the admission that, “it is not possible to go head-first through the wall”. So arise evasion and resignation, but also chances for new solutions. One could name this model “Critic as Denial”, but also “Allowing for New Beginning.” “Past grief only has a purpose when it is succeeded by wisdom. Let us turn to each other – and go further together!”

Phrased somewhat solemnly, this is also a model for “reconciliation over the graves”, “mourning in order to overcome and grow” or the “search for alternatives”. In successful cases, the individual handling of losses (e.g. deaths) and failures (e.g. divorces) proceeds in exactly the same way. Not only “mourning” should be allowed, but also – after a period of conflict – that a new perspective on another and further life can be found. Such a handling would include a rather fixed cycle of “intolerable, but also undecidable conflicts” over a “begrudged and distanced tolerance” for “limited mutual acceptance.” This means more communication with the other side, but also more readiness to admit one's own mistakes (without a guilt-complex or self-resignation) in order that we can also along better with ourselves and others.

In fact, this model advances a moral decision to reject hate and accept cooperation, but it also contains a proper portion of “pragmatism” and “self interest” (“I suspect that I have more important things to do than to engage in these scuffles and sacrifice myself to them.”). There may not yet be many really good examples of this, but the fact that one can neither unequivocally persuade and assimilate nor kill or displace “the others” in a conflict has not been true for that long. It is essential that the process of working through the past includes a learning process, genesis, “liberation” and overcoming, especially when it comes to the tolerance of ambiguity and ambivalence.

Mental Strategies for Historical Reconciliation

	Understanding Histories	Changing Behavior	Handling “the Others”
First Steps (Self-distance)	Avoidance of simplistic “traditional” and “exemplary” figures for the construction of meaning	Abolishment of historical falsifications and tendentious myths of superiority and inferiority	Maintain distance from the (own or foreign) past or forgetting of the past
Middle Steps (Movement)	Change and contrast of perspectives on history and the criteria for selection	Turning to each other and going forward together (in life and historiography)	Search for conditions and chances for a shared future (despite hostile past)

Further Steps (Reciprocity)	Systematic comparison and exchange of historical narratives and orientations	Construction of new, more plausible histories, at least compatible or held partially in common	Development of tolerance, even mutual sympathy and acceptance of "the others" (including their history)
--------------------------------	---	---	--

Once again: this model was developed for cases of conflict with clearer victor-vanquished asymmetries and perpetrator-victim relationships. The case of "1989" or "1989/91" appears to me to be pertinent, however. The current motto in Europe of "Turning to each other and going forward together!" is therefore fitting. That means not a unitary history, but instead arduous work toward inquisitive exchange and partial acceptance.

Cited Literature

Assmann, Jan: Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen; München (Beck) 2. ed. 1997.

Angvik, Magne, and Borries, Bodo v. (Eds.): YOUTH and HISTORY. A Comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes among Adolescents. Volume A: Description, Volume B: Documentation (containing the Database on CD-ROM); Hamburg (edition Körber-Stiftung) 1997.

Borries, Bodo v. (in cooperation with Körber, Andreas, Baeck, Oliver and Kindervater, Angela): Jugend und Geschichte. Ein europäischer Kulturvergleich aus deutscher Sicht; Opladen (Leske & Budrich) 1999 (= Schule und Gesellschaft 21).

Borries, Bodo v.: Historisch Denken Lernen - Welterschließung statt Epochenüberblick. Geschichte als Unterrichtsfach und Bildungsaufgabe; Opladen und Farmington Hills (Barbara Budrich) 2008 (= Studien zur Bildungsgangforschung 21).

Carcenac-Lecomte, Constanze et al.: Steinbruch Deutsche Erinnerungsorte. Annäherung an eine deutsche Gedächtnisgeschichte; Frankfurt/M et al. (Peter Lang) 2000.

Flacke, Monika (Ed.): Mythen der Nationen. Ein europäisches Panorama; München/Berlin (Koehler & Amelang) 1998. (Exhibit Catalogue from German Historical Museum, Berlin).

François, Etienne and Schulze, Hagen (Ed.): Deutsche Erinnerungsorte, 3 Bde.; München (Beck)

2001.

Nora, Pierre: Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis; Berlin (Klaus Wagenbach) 1990.

Schiele, Siegfried and Schneider, Herbert (Ed.): Das Konsensproblem in der politischen Bildung;
Stuttgart (Klett) 1977.