

TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL OVERCOMING EAST AND WEST

**Legislative Chamber, Parliament
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Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for opportunity to speak to you today on a topic that remains as important and relevant today as it was 20 years ago.

Few events during the lifetime of most people here today can have had so much resonance as the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of a momentous year in Europe.

Many of us grew up looking at the world through the prism of 1945, and of 1949, the year that new global divisions were cemented.

Younger generations, however, have come of age since those post-war divisions collapsed, and it is worth pondering what they, and we, see through the prism of 1989.

Certainly causes can be harder to understand than results, and there is still little agreement on what led to the breakthroughs that brought down the Wall.

Historian Timothy Garton Ash noted that, when people ascribe responsibility for the events of 1989, they tend to give credit to their own.

Poles and Catholics highlight the role of Pope John Paul II, and of the Solidarity movement.

Germans and Hungarians single out the contribution of Hungarian reform communists who opened the Iron Curtain and let East Germans escape through it.

Russians usually give the largest credit (or blame) to Mikhail Gorbachev.

Germans on the left give credit to their version of détente, known as *Ostpolitik*.

Americans, especially on the right, give credit to Ronald Reagan.

As Garton Ash says, each of these different perspectives illuminates a part of the elephant. But nobody has yet explained what the entire animal looks like.

I'm sure this conference will produce some fascinating, and more nuanced, additions to the debate.

It is unfortunate that Mr Lech Wałęsa was not able to be here. His Solidarity movement was a vital path-breaker in showing that a wide cross-section of citizens was prepared to take the risk of protesting against their oppressors.

There is little doubt that the vast majority of people on both sides of the Iron Curtain welcomed the end of the division of Europe.

It was a change that virtually whole nations wanted – not just frustrated youth, or those of one political leaning.

As people gained confidence that the old order in Eastern Europe was losing its grip, even the servants of that old order began to hope for something different.

It's true that Europeans, especially those in the East, felt trepidation about a future that had suddenly become less predictable. That was only too natural when such a huge shift was taking place.

And there were attempts by some leaders on both sides of the old divide to prevent, or to hold back, the reunification of Germany.

We smile at this now, because we're so keenly aware of how today's Germany, the most powerful economy in the EU, personifies responsible and cooperative leadership as a European and global citizen.

But the fact was that, in 1989 and 1990, there were thoughtful people who wanted to keep Germany divided.

There can be no better demonstration of the strength of fears rooted in the past.

Much of Europe's recent history is about overcoming those fears – often with exemplary success.

One of the frameworks that can help us understand the recent changes is to look at what some call "the shorter twentieth century" – the 75 years from 1914 to 1989.

In 1914, the world was dominated by European powers, European empires, and European colonies and ex-colonies.

Only Japan was giving notice that other civilisations might aspire to European-style economic and strategic power.

By 1989, Europe's claim to being at the centre of global power was in the past.

For forty years Europe had been a battlefield for cold war and potentially hot war.

By the time that was over – by the time scenarios of tanks pouring through the Fulda Gap were replaced by the reality of Berliners pouring through the Wall – Europe was just another continent.

Now, people even speak of 1989 as Europe's "last moment in history". Since then, they say, history is being defined elsewhere.

History, if we see it in terms of disruption and disaster, certainly scaled down its presence on a continent that had seen so much of it.

But the break-up of Yugoslavia showed there was still some of that malign history to be played out in Europe.

One of the questions this conference may consider is why those long-suppressed communal differences had such a violent outcome in some places, but were managed with reasonable success elsewhere.

This is of particular concern to New Zealand. We felt it our duty to assist Europe in peacekeeping deployments to Bosnia, including under EU command.

And we have a tradition of peacekeeping engagement in a number of theatres closer to home, sometimes working with European partners.

It's important to get peacekeeping and peace-building right.

New Zealand welcomed the UN Secretary-General's report, issued in July, on peace-building in the immediate aftermath of conflict.

The report rightly focussed on the need to set "virtuous cycles" in motion to lay foundations for lasting peace.

It's even more important to get war prevention right – to forestall the kind of "vicious cycles" that led to the wars of the Western Balkans after 1989.

We need to understand why some countries and societies manage to defuse their tensions, and the roles that history, leadership, and outsiders play in these often unremarked success stories.

For the last twenty years, Europe has been working to resolve the detritus of its old tensions and conflicts.

Happily, these are now confined to relatively local levels. A conflict between major powers in Europe looks to be inconceivable.

The span of "the shorter twentieth century" points to what is arguably the key reason why Europe's development remains so important to us – why history has not left Europe behind, but is still being created there.

During that time, much of Europe shifted from a desire for contest and exclusion, to a desire for peaceful inclusion.

In 1914, the major powers were locked into a mentality of defensive strategic confrontation.

Military build-ups were putting in place new technologies with implications only dimly appreciated by planners and their political masters.

Governments wove webs of alliances in the hope of deterring outright warfare.

In 1989, it looked as though those very same conditions still dominated Europe: strategic confrontation, build-ups of new military technology, complex alliances intended to contain the adversary.

In 1914, a spark in the tinderbox ignited a war with casualties on an unprecedented and scarcely imaginable scale.

In 1989 there was a handful of casualties, and then for the most part a velvet revolution.

What was so different?

Other speakers will have their views on this, but let me provide one perspective.

By 1989, Eastern Europeans had been aware for a generation that, on the other side of the divide across Europe, there was a model that worked.

Historian Tony Judt points out that one aspect of the Cold War was the four-decade war waged by the regimes in Eastern Europe against their own people.

In 1989, a combination of economic and ideological exhaustion brought that war to an end.

Part of this exhaustion came about through a growing awareness that, put simply, the model for Western Europe was working, and the one for Eastern Europe was not.

Western Europe in 1989 was protected not only by NATO, but also by the economic and political example of the EU – or at that time the European Community, as the EU's immediate ancestor was known.

The European Community's example had a huge power of attraction, then as now.

The European Community in 1989 represented a level of economic success which newly liberated Eastern Europe could begin to aspire to.

But equally, it represented political success: success at neutralising the fears and rivalries of the past.

It offered a non-confrontational model, and an alternative to four decades of repression and confrontation.

Unlike nations in 1914, nations in 1989 didn't want to fight. They wanted to join.

This is the history that is still being created in Europe: the process of the EU's enlargement and development.

Directly after 1989, most Eastern Europeans went through a decade and a half of sometimes painful transition.

But the potential of 1989 bore fruit in 2005 and 2007 with the embrace by the EU of ten new members formerly behind the Iron Curtain.

As the EU continues the gradual process of further enlargement, a related issue is the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours, and the question of how Europe is to be defined.

This conference has the subtitle "Overcoming East and West", and the great presence at the eastern frontier of Europe is, of course, Russia.

Russia is simultaneously within the frontier, on the frontier, and beyond the frontier. It is a European state, and a Eurasian state.

The relationship between Russia and the rest of Europe has been a complex one for centuries. On both sides, fears rooted in the past remain strong.

The trajectory of Russia after 1990 has in some ways been different from that of the Eastern Europeans who are now members of the EU.

The same applies to the two states closely tied to Russia by history, namely Ukraine and Belarus.

In these countries, there is a real debate over inclusion in Europe – less so in Belarus, where debate is stifled – and that debate may play out over decades.

It's important that, during this process, a new division isn't solidified.

This needn't be another Iron Curtain, with walls and watch-towers. It would be a psychological divide entrenched through ingrained habits of mistrust.

Countering this is the openness of citizens on all sides to new opportunities, to information, markets, travel.

Although these opportunities are not always universally available, over the long term they offer the best hope for the old fears and habits to be eroded.

New Zealand follows these developments with great interest. We hope that the EU-Russia Summit later this month will result in further substantive cooperation.

In December, I will be visiting Europe to talk with EU leaders in Stockholm, and then with the Russian government in Moscow.

In both capitals I hope to discuss perspectives on the future of Europe.

As early as next year, the EU may reach another milestone if it concludes accession negotiations with Croatia, the first of the main combatants in the Yugoslav wars to be in sight of qualifying for membership.

New Zealand would warmly welcome Croatia's entry into the EU.

Our Croatian community is one of our oldest and most distinguished communities deriving from continental Europe.

EU membership would reinforce the personal and economic ties we have with Croatia.

We do not underestimate the challenges Europe faces in consolidating a Union that now comprises 27 countries, and in absorbing future members. We wish them every success in this vital task.

But already the EU's achievements have been remarkable in terms of extending to its new members the peace, stability, democracy, and prosperity delivered to Western Europe since the signing of the Treaty of Rome 52 years ago.

This is what I see through the prism of 1989: the post-war achievement in the West is now being delivered to the East.

Inevitably, the process is taking place at different speeds in different locations. But it is one of the great achievements of modern history.

The prism of 1989 is a guardedly optimistic one.

If it does not have the triumphalism of 1945, it lacks the pessimism of 1949. We need to nurture it.

I am confident this conference will be an exciting and challenging one. I wish participants well for the next two days.

Thank you.