

ANNUS MIRABILIS

THREE DECADES AFTER:
DESIRES, ACHIEVEMENTS, FUTURE

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the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity

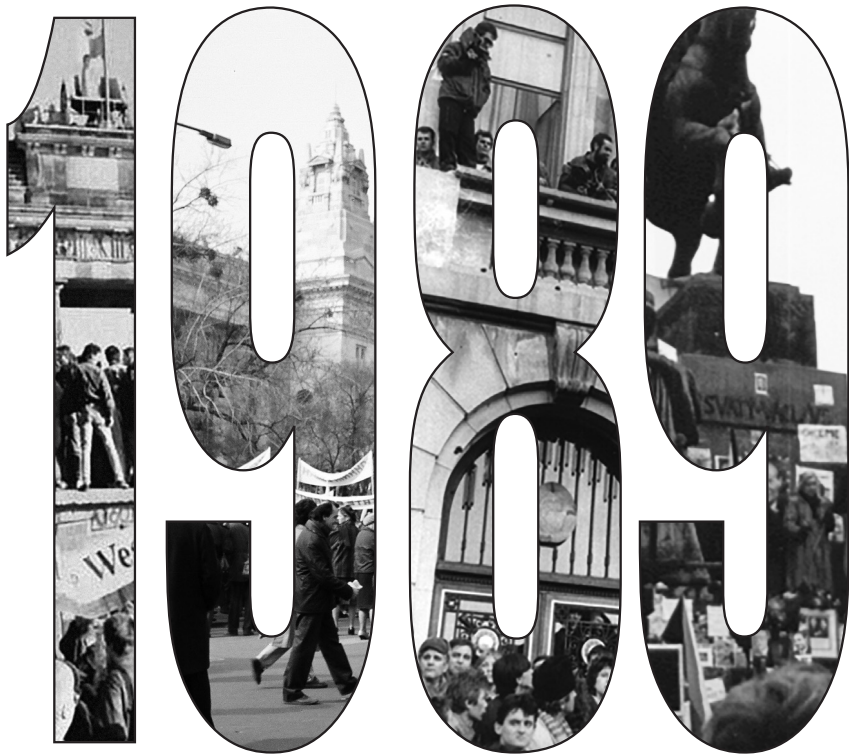


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Foreword

This editorial project includes, most of all, the consolidated version of papers presented during the international conference entitled “1989 – Annus Mirabilis. Three decades after: desires, achievements, future” organized by the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS), in partnership with the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (NUPSPA) and the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism (NIST) of the Romanian academy, an event taking place on 19-20 November 2019 in Bucharest. This event is part of a broader ENRS project called “About 1989. Changes and challenges”, including international conferences in Berlin, Bratislava, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw. The objective of this series of international conferences was the following – “The discussed topics will include, but will not be limited to: successes and failures as well as losers and beneficiaries of the various transformation models; reconciliatory processes within and between societies; coping with legal, political, social, cultural and economic legacies of communism; roles of empires and international organizations in overcoming the burden of communism and ways in which these changes are present in the memory cultures of the regions.” (<https://enrs.eu/project/1989-changes-and-challenges>).

The collective volume includes fifteen studies which can be structured around three categories: research exploring general elements making possible the end of the Cold War and the fall of communist regimes in Europe; case studies concerning some countries, as regards the fall of communism and the transition period; general evaluations of the transition towards liberal democracy and capitalism, from the perspective of the European Union.

In the first study included in the book, Adrian Pop accomplishes an excellent inventory of the role of geopolitical factors at the end of the Cold War, emphasizing the importance of personalities in history, especially the “Gorbachev factor”. In the next study, the reputed military historian General Mihail E. Ionescu proposes a different methodological approach, attempting

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to bring to public attention the decision-making process within the Soviet Union, by offering relevant excerpts from Soviet archive documents circulated by historian Vladislav Zubok, or by using documents of the Trilateral Committee. Mihai E. Ionescu's thesis is that at the top of the Great Powers there was always an opinion exchange and the end of the Cold War was mutually accepted. However, there was no common long-term projection concerning the future of Europe.

Another study related to the main factors determining the fall of communism in Europe is the research of Ana-Maria Cătănuș. She offers a very interesting and detailed evaluation on the role of dissidents in eroding the foundations of communist regimes from Central and Eastern Europe, emphasizing the differences among countries of the former Soviet bloc.

The first case study concerns Poland. Historian Anthony Kemp-Welch speaks about a "Polish paradigm" in achieving a non-violent transition from the totalitarian to the democratic system, emphasizing the plurality of factors involved in this historical event. The essential features of the Polish double transition – towards representative democracy and market economy – are offered also from the position of "insider" within the Polish institutional system by the historian and political scientist Łukasz Kamiński.

The second case study concerns Slovakia. The young and esteemed historian Peter Jašek offers a brief perspective on the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia, with special emphasis upon events in Bratislava. In his study, Juraj Marušiak presents in detail the process of Czechoslovakia's demise, offering a balanced Slovakian perspective on this major event for the history of Central Europe.

The history of the fall of Berlin Wall is masterfully synthesized by Michael Gehler, whose study offers some essential elements of moments charged with huge symbolic meaning for the history of 20th century Europe.

Bulgaria is another case study, illustrated in research by historian Jordan Baev. He presents with accuracy the dynamics of events marking the end of communism in Bulgaria, bringing credible factual arguments in support of the historiographical thesis concerning the coup d'état in Sofia. The double transition to democracy and capitalism is critically evaluated by Bulgarian researchers Bogdana Todorova, Ivka Tzakovska and Vassil Prodanov. The theory of Bulgaria's political oligarchization, supported by factual elements, is chal-

lenging, as it departs from canonical approaches about the depth of the phenomenon of democratization in Bulgaria.

The fall of communism in Romania is the object of two studies, by Florin Abraham and Constantin Hlihor. Abraham's research, which is broader, attempts to offer a synthesis of the main elements defining the "Romanian revolution", while historian Constantin Hlihor includes a series of non-determinist considerations upon individual (psychological) factors which play a decisive role during systemic changes.

The last case study, by Daunis Auers, concerns economic and political transformations in the Baltic States. The synthesis dedicated to these countries is both interesting and useful, as it offers important reflections upon the manner in which the post-communist systemic transition process can be successful or can fail.

The politological, not historiographical, approach is predominant in the study by Alina Bârgăoanu and Flavia Durach; the two authors are offering carefully researched answers to the essential question: "What is the status of Central and Eastern Europe three decades after the fall of communism?" The implicit conclusion is that former Soviet bloc countries, which meanwhile became members of NATO and the European Union, did not overcome the traditional historical position of "the West's periphery".

The last chapter of the book belongs to Ferenc Mészlivetz, whose approach to the results of the last three decades in Central and Eastern Europe starts from his own hopes thirty years ago. Mészlivetz's approach is fundamentally interpretative and inherently polemic, some of his opinions being easy to integrate within the eurosceptic discourse. His assumed objective is to find answers to the question concerning the future of Europe, which this Hungarian political scientist suggests in an implicit manner. Of course, his opinions, as well as those of all the authors in this book can and must be submitted to critical evaluation, but we consider it is legitimate to host them as long as they aim to create a better and safer future.

* * *

For the organization of the Bucharest conference and its tangible result, that is to say, this book, we must warmly thank: the Romanian Ministry of Culture, which keeps the interest of ENRS alive for, by offering the financial resources

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necessary for its activities; Rafał Rogulski and his hardworking team at the ENRS Secretariat in Warsaw; Remus Pricopie, Rector of NUPSPA, and Alina Bârgăoanu, Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations; Radu Ciuceanu, Director of NIST and, last, but not least, Octavian Roske, scientific secretary of the Institute. I would like to also thank the team of the Comunicare.ro publishing house, led by Livia Szasz, for their involvement and professionalism.

This book is undoubtedly not without faults, and the most important is that not all the countries from the former Soviet bloc were covered in these case studies. For objective reasons, not all conference participants were able to submit their papers in good time for publication, and so, in order to finalize the project, the decision was taken to publish the results of the symposium in the current form.

What is crucial is that the volume includes a plurality of historiographical evaluations, methodological approaches and political opinions, expressed in a diverse manner, sometimes even polemically. Presuming the good faith of all authors, my editorial intervention was limited to technical aspects, with each researcher bearing responsibility for the analyses and opinions expressed within the studies included in the current volume.

FLORIN ABRAHAM,
Bucharest, 24 May 2020