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Major figures who contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain

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Summary

Keywords: anti-communist resistance, political context, spiritual message, political figures, high-level negotiations, significant changes.

Our research approach is based on the presentation of the most powerful leaders of the period, who contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain, both within the communist system and in the West. In the West, we chose to present the two leaders of Europe from 1989: Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand, who reacted against the communism, managing to determine through their successful policy, to some extent, its fall. On the other hand, we chose to analyze the figures situated at opposite poles: George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, who had a leading role in the fall of communism, through their concepts, policies, actions and reforms.

Because not only politicians contributed to the collapse of the communist empire, we also analyzed briefly the great figure of Pope John Paul II, who played an important role in the cultural and spiritual message transmitted in missionary activities all over the world. His role was visible, however, particularly in the resistance movement from Poland; this is the reason why we found it necessary to analyze the figure of Lech Walesa, who, in 1979, following the visit of the Pope in Poland, courageously adopted the papal message, in his actions of organizing the workers union called *Solidarity*.

Certainly, the declining economic doctrine contributed to the fall of communism, but referring only to economic factors would be a simplification unworthy of all the events that occurred at that time. On the other hand, it would be absurd to believe that only the Pope or only Gorbachev had an important role in the demolition of the communist system.

The nations also contributed to overcoming the limitations imposed by the communist dictatorships, and, to this purpose, we kept track of how the Hungarians, the Poles and the East Germans contributed to the fall of the domestic political system.

Structure

This paper is structured in four parts. In the first part we designed the international political context from Yalta to Malta, because we could not explain how the crisis of the communist political system was reached in 1989 without reviewing the circumstances and events that led to the establishment of these authoritarian dictatorships. The lack of power generated in Europe after World War II led to the division of the territory between the three European powers that have emerged victorious from the war, at the conference of Yalta. The violation of the agreement signed at that time and the different subsequent interpretation of the strategies of the two world superpowers, in the years to come, led to the biggest political crisis, which was the Cold War.

Under these circumstances, the Soviet influence, ideology and political and economic organization model has been extended to Eastern Europe and the American model has been extended to the West, which led to the division of the European continent for a period of almost 45 years and to an unprecedented nuclear arming.

We presented the events of this period and the negotiations between the two world superpowers based on the available literature in the field.

In the second part of the work we wanted to point out what was the contribution of Pope John Paul II to the fall of communist systems in Eastern Europe, through the spiritual message transmitted, mainly to the Polish believers, shortly after the pontification.

In Poland, the Catholic Church represented a support to the resistance movement which broke out almost a decade before the fall of the communist Polish regime. We analyzed the sermons, the speeches and the encyclicals delivered by the Pope on several occasions, ever since he was pontified, to the visits he made and to delegations received in Vatican, through the reactions of communist leaders and of ordinary people to the topics discussed.

The new sense of self value, the new experience of human dignity and the bravery given to people of not being intimidated by the communist authorities, were the results of the spiritual message transmitted at the first visit to his native country, Poland. As a consequence, a large non-violent self-defense social movement took place.

The mass phenomenon in Poland had as a great actor, of international resonance, in the person of Lech Walesa, and the events of the years 1980-1981, which culminated with the imposition of the martial law by the Polish authorities, represented the object of our study, because they were only a preview of the fall of the political system in Poland in 1989.

In our scientific approach, we structured afterwards the effective participation of the political leaders of 1989 to the way actions in Eastern Europe ended. In this respect, we compared the four political actors who interconnected and their decisions were taken after long high level negotiations, culminating with the Malta summit in December 1989.

In this chapter, we started from the presentation of the personalities of the political actors and we continued with the events of 1989. The weakening of the control in Kremlin, the reforms initiated by Gorbachev and the change in the international perception of the actions of the communist systems, led to political changes, first in Hungary and Poland, and later in other communist countries.

In the light of the events, it was necessary to make also a brief presentation of the role played by Kohl and Mitterrand in the negotiations regarding the future of Europe and the political and friendship relations between the two European countries.

The exodus of the East German refugees in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and the decisions taken by the Hungarian Government have contributed to the fall of communism in the GDR, to the reappearance of the German problem in the agenda and of the international and high-level negotiations to resolve the dilemmas that had occurred.

The personal relationships, of friendship, among political leaders, have also contributed to the preparation of the Malta summit and to the extraordinary results of the negotiations.

At the end of the study we did a retrospective of the events of 1989 through the 1989 Archives of Radio Free Europe, made available by the courtesy of Professor Michael Shafir, and the archives of newspapers *La Stampa* and *La Stampa Sera*, available to the public in electronic version.

Why did we choose to draw conclusions based on documents from both archives? In order to be able to get an overall, much clearer, picture of the role played by different actors to the recent history of Europe.

Events transmitted by Radio Free Europe were clearly analyzed and sketched by extraordinary political analysts and correspondents from all over the world, who prepared materials for the editors of *Radio Free Europe* and *Radio Freedom*, to inform the listeners of the states under communist political oppression. In conclusion, we can say that the media has also contributed, to some extent, to the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Bibliographical sources

In the historical chapter of our research, we primarily used the extremely rich specialty literature existing in libraries. Given the historical, political and international relations representing the theme of our research, the selection of bibliographical sources was extremely difficult, especially because of the broad spectrum of events that took place in the selected period.

In order to focus on certain papers, it took a long and careful analysis and selection of what we consider to be the representative ones. Thus, the guide mark was a comparative picture of the events that took place in the analyzed political systems.

We analyzed the world powers that, in 1945, decided the fate of the European continent and, thus, its division, starting from the general literature and specialty literature, from the period when the events took place and also the literature that represented a subject of study for specialists, policy analysts, historians and leading intellectuals thereafter.

We followed the contrasting features of the post-Yalta period, outlining the negotiations between the two world powers during the Cold War, in the work of Tony Judt, Serge Bernstein, André Fontaine, Robert English, Paul Dukes, Lewis Gaddis and many others.

Of course, there are many other authors who dealt with these issues, but we had access to the above mentioned works and those to mentioned in the bibliography, available both in the libraries of our country and in Germany. In this chapter, focusing on historical aspects, we began an incursion based on these studies and scientific papers, because we felt that they could give us an outline of the overall reality of an era characterized by conflicts.

We have followed chronologically the establishment of the communist dictatorial systems, focusing also on the reformist attempts and their suppression in the Central and Eastern Europe countries, during the nearly 45 years of communism. In this case too, we selected, from the vast literature, those works that have drawn particular attention.

After that, we analyzed in a more profound way the historical events of the eight decade, in the chapter on the Polish resistance movement, and the role of the spiritual message of Pope John Paul II. To this end, we consulted mainly the speeches, sermons and papal encyclicals, available in Vatican's online archive, under aegis of *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. Also, we followed closely the message sent by the Pope during his visits to the communist states, when receiving various delegations at the Vatican, in the letters sent to political leaders or reformist dissidents, not just from the Vatican Archives, but also through Pope's memoirs and his extraordinary biographies. We found the work of George Wiegel, *The Witness to Hope. The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, to be a

very valuable one to this respect and an extremely well documented work, substantiated with primary research sources. In addition to this work, we should also mention the biographies written by Luigi Accattoli, Alison Behnke, Charles Curran, Joseph Derupos, Deborah Parks or Edward Renehan Jr. The works of the Pope created a clearer picture on the thinking and the motivation of choosing certain themes in public debates and attack on the political systems, by using an insinuating, metaphoric, comparative language, enriched by biblical parables, from which it was impossible not to understand whom they were really addressed to. Among these works we can mention: *Memory and Identity*, *Go in Peace. A Gift of Enduring Love*, *Dono e Mistero. Nel 50 ° del mio sacerdozio*. All documents available at *Libreria Editrice Vaticana* have been really useful and have enriched the results of our research.

In addition, the archives of the newspapers *La Stampa* and *La Stampa Sera* gave us the opportunity to feel the pulse of events and the tensions between the Kremlin communist authorities from Poland and the Poles, from the moment when the events took place. Therefore, we selected articles that highlighted the criticism of the communist systems from the Iron Curtain, the interviews published or the reactions of the parties involved in the tumult of the events and of the world leaders regarding human rights violations in Poland in the years 1980-1981, before and after the imposition of the martial law by an authoritarian government.

In the chapter dealing with the events of 1989, for more accuracy of the facts, our analysis was based on documents provided by the American National Archives in accordance with the *FOIA (Freedom of Information Act)* law that allows the revealing of information and documents controlled by the U.S. government. The documents belonging to the National Archive Fund, can be consulted in Europe only at request, after 30 years of their creation, according to the national archives law, although those related to the speeches of the German chancellor Helmut Kohl have been published by the *Konrad Adenauer Foundation for Helmut Kohl* on the website or, some other telephone calls have been made public by various archival funds.

Telephone conversations between some political leaders of 1989, messages, letters, statements on the agendas of various international summits, excerpts from the diaries of foreign policy advisers, who were part of teams present at international negotiations, helped us understand why and how some compromise has been reached, on the one hand, and the success of negotiations in various sensitive issues, on the other.

We completed our research with a work published by the actors who contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989: Helmut Kohl with the work *I wanted the unity of Germany*, Mitterrand's adviser, Jacques Attali in *François Mitterrand as he was*, George Bush in *A World Transformed*, Mikhail Gorbachev with the works *Memoirs* and *Perestroika and Soviet-American Relations*, extracts from the *Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev*. The analyses and the political critical articles, published and made available to researchers by the Institute *François Mitterrand*, *Konrad Adenauer Foundation for Helmut Kohl*, *Gorbachev Foundation* and *Bush Library* have also been of great support.

This chapter occupied most of our research, but, to complete the study, we also analyzed in this thesis documents from the *Archive 1989*. The events, reactions and actions of political leaders and peoples of Eastern Europe, published by news agencies of the time, were used by extraordinary political analysts, correspondents of *Radio Free Europe*, whose studies have been radio broadcasted and presented by the editors of *Radio*

Free Europe and *Radio Liberty*, which broadcasted illegally for the listeners of the Eastern European countries under communist dictatorships. We also completed all these sources, with articles published in *Archivio Stampa*, which can be consulted in the appendix of the thesis.

Research Methodology

Our research is focused on the analysis of political speeches of those who contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain. We tried to make this analysis not only in terms of the language used in politics, but also in terms of relations between it and the political ideology, between thought and political power, between representatives of the power and the social environment which it is addressed to. We noticed what are the specific discourse features and relations between them.

Initially, we identified the themes and mechanisms for analysis of the functionality of political and liturgical speeches, the performance of these speeches and the procedures used in order to have the expected impact on people, social groups that it is addressed to.

Politicians use political discourse to convince, as we observed in our research, to present their memberships, political ideology and political thought. Language is the interface of the political scene, that not only describes events, but that is part of the events taking place at a time, giving them a special meaning and a definition of the political role of the authorities. The way the masses that the speech is addressed to react depends very much on how it is described by language.

Political language includes the political beliefs of those involved, and their relationship with the linguistic meaning. We have to consider all the characteristics of the political discourse, that is to say we should see it not only from the perspective of the place where it is staged, but also in terms of the debate, of the symbolic actions, of the interdiscourse. By interdiscourse we understand the role of the public opinion, of the media, of the political struggle in the game of convincing. The debates are related to direct confrontations between politicians and the staging of political discourse involves understanding the topic of the text delivered by the politicians. The symbolic actions of the speech represent the political power that can be exercised by using the means of communication.

The text of a speech must be linked to socio-historical conditions which have generated the context in which events occurred and the anticipation of the effect. The relationship between ideology, discourse and political power can be investigated in three stages of analysis: *social analysis* – because the analysis of a speech cannot be separated from the social and historical factors; we can follow the context that is established through the act of speech, the spatial and time delimitation, the role of the institutions in determining social conduct with its limits, how can they be coordinated as capital-labor-wages in order not to interact with the institutions; *discourse analysis* - reveals the context of the discourse by studying the discourse forms: *the narration* (the story that fills the social space and justifies the legitimation of power), *the argumentation* (the strategies of concealment are highlighted by contradictions, inconsistencies or lack of reaction), *the syntactics* (the combining of words in speech by the use of pronouns, of tenses and the effect it can produce to support the relations of domination); the last type

of analysis is *interpretation itself*- the speech can be viewed as text, but, in the absence of the author, it can acquire a different meaning.

Critically speaking, speech answers the questions *what?*, *why?*, *how?*, *which?*, as it is a process of understanding the language and not just a product. First, we describe the text, then we analyze it by highlighting all the relations stipulated above, and at the end we explain the relationship between social context and power. The analysis reveals who is talking, what does he/she communicate, to whom he/she is addressing, what are the reasons and if the speech itself succeeds to produce the desired effects and to support its interests.

At the end of the paper, we made a review of how the moment 1989 was captured by Radio Free Europe, from the perspective of the analysis made by the press, which referred not only to the political events ongoing at that time, but interpreted them, attributed them a political perspective, and captured the reaction of the politicians of that time *on spot*.

We used the method of comparative analysis to highlight the difference between the speeches of politicians with diametrically opposed ideologies.

The research questions, *why?* or *how?*, the causal questions, allowed the empirical observation of certain trends, their evolution over time and the identification of some authorized opinions; they allowed us to refine the analytical and comparative approach in terms of the researches carried out so far, but we also expressed our own opinion regarding them.

Currently, the historical studies on these events play an important role in the world literature, contributing considerably to a complete understanding of the facts, through studies of nationalization and internationalization tendencies, of interdependence.