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In 2014 were held, in many European Countries, loud commemorations of the Century lapsed since the beginning of the Great War, the 1st World War. And only very few concerning the quarter Century lived since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Why are there so few academic events to commemorate the “collapse” of the Berlin Wall, which took place a quarter of a century ago?

Naturally, societies like to focus their celebrations on a defined, specific date. The 9th of November 1989, the breach into the Berlin Wall was chosen as the symbolic focal point to commemorate the events of 1989. It is nevertheless the whole year of 1989 that was pivotal, for the XXth century, for our continent, actually for the world. It was already in February 1989 that were signed, in Warsaw, the “round-table agreements”, between the Communist government and Solidarnosc, leading to “partially free” elections in Poland a few months later. Mobilizing against and overcoming the communist authorities in a deep-rooted long-lasting series of protests, across Eastern Germany every Monday after the Summer, or in Czechoslovakia from mid-November onwards, was as important and relevant in this year 1989, than the symbolic events of early November in Berlin.

However, this potential debate between relevant dates for commemoration of the event of 1989 was totally overshadowed by the 1914 celebration. This issue on competing dates of commemoration in Europe illustrates the complexity and richness of the European historical build-up, which conglomerates layers of events, on which we stand to try understanding our present. Is therefore 1989 less relevant in 2014 than 1914? Is Europe still based on the situation that led to the first World War (or maybe the architecture that emerged afterwards, between 1918 and 1920) more than of the post 1989 situation? Is 1989 too close for historians, too far for political scientists, economists and lawyers?
It could also be that the perceptions of the Chain of events, their importance and causality in the build-up and history of Europe is substantially different, when you look at them from Praha or Paris, Budapest or Brussels, Berlin or Warsaw, Strasbourg or Geneva. That is certainly one of the underlying issue that needs to be addressed through the different contributions to this volume.

1989 still remains fundamentally relevant and influential today, because it is the starting point, not just of a single, but of a triple “revolution”.

As hinted above, a quarter century may also be an odd period for academics to consider. Still very recent; too close maybe for historians to properly analyze; many documents are not yet openly accessible. On the other hand, 1989 is still close enough to us, so that we can ask witnesses, or even better, major actors, to share their memories, understanding and visions of these events; we thus are very pleased to have the contributions of two major actors, as promoters and actors of 1989 changes, and then Presidents in their respective countries, Mr. Václav Klaus and Mr. Lech Wałęsa.

But at the same time, 1989 is probably too far past for political scientists; too many successive events since have changed both their framework of analysis and their analytical tools. Also likely to be already buried for lawyers, under new Constitutions, thousands of pages of legislations (representing for a large part “l’acquis communautaire”), reforms upon reforms that have blurred the perspective. And also a difficult focus for economists, as so many of the fundamentals of economic science have been dramatically altered in 1989, ... and since.

Theses methodological difficulties explain why an interdisciplinary approach proves specifically relevant for such a hard-case for academics to analyze. Maybe the different and complementary approaches of various specialists will help us, to get a better description and understanding of what did really happen, why, and how much it still affects us today.
That being said, 1989 still remains fundamentally relevant and influential today, because it is the starting point, not just of a single, but of a triple “revolution”.

First, for Central and Eastern Europe, and soon for the rest of the world – let us remember that 1989 also was the year, in May and June, where we witnessed large pro-democracy students’ manifestations on Tien-an-men square, much further East that is... – 1989 materializes the fall of the Communist (single-party) political system, for the benefit of the liberal-democratic political values and system, to the point that a US-based scholar figured out he was witnessing the end of history! For better or for worse, history certainly did not end in 1989, and the vitality of Nations – as Hegel used to phrase it – had numerous occasions since to show its relevance and potential nuisances. Notwithstanding, the 25 years of liberal-democratic practice in Central and Eastern Europe have produced diversified results in different national political systems, and the relevance, successes or shortcomings of these developments definitely deserve scrutiny and evaluation after a quarter-century.

Second and simultaneously, 1989 materializes the change of paradigm for the economic governance of Central and Eastern Europe. System change appears even more rapid and radical that in the political realm, and planned economies suddenly and immediately gave way to market economies. With solid economic growth for most of these countries – which did not exclude some periods of downturns, sometimes violent – and a whole series of economic transitional mechanisms, that had to be invented. How to fairly privatize a government-run economy? How to guarantee social welfare in both a transitional economic period and in a new liberal market economy? Twenty-five years of this succession of transitions first, and then market economy in Central and Eastern Europe seems a long-enough period for examining the merits – or flaws – of economic experiments and practices that have been implemented in these Countries. And as we shall see below, leads to diverging appreciations on the validity of the process.

Third, with slightly less simultaneity since it will take until 1991 to fully materialize, 1989-1991 initiates a geo-political shake-up whose aftershocks are still being strongly felt, in Eastern Europe... and everywhere else. The bipolar world that had structured, since the Second World War, both the World and the European stages was suddenly gone. With incommensurate repercussions on the world governance; for example, for the first
time since the UN creation in 1945, the Security Council was able, in 1990, to adopt a Resolution authorizing sanctions against a State (Iraq) which had invaded a neighboring State (Kuwait), up to authorizing – for better or for worse – a military intervention. It led to amazing and unthinkable developments of international law (responsibility to protect) and potentialities for global governance. As another international consequence of 1989, the World Trade Organization – which had failed to materialize following World War II – could finally be created in 1994, as a by-product of 1989 events, constituting such a breakthrough in International relations that a non-irrelevant number of scholars consider that WTO could be the appropriate place for the emergence of global governance mechanisms.

However important the impact of 1989 on the world geo-politics, it was even more dramatic on the European scale. The division of Europe, and not only Berlin, by a wall, or an iron-curtain, was no-more. European Geo-politics was to be fully rethought. But where to start from? Scratch? 1920’s? 1945? Also an apparently obvious question, but still difficult to answer today is open by the fall of the Berlin wall: what do we mean by Europe? Are there geographical or new geo-political borders to Europe? Could European horizon be the European Union? If yes, what to do of Ukraine (as we know it is a currently very hot issue), but also of Norway or Switzerland? If EU is not to be the horizon, then how should Europe be organized? Or not organized at all?

As regard intra-EU geo-politics, the equilibriums between large West-European States (France, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom which all had more or less the same population) has been shattered by German reunification. Also, the relatively rapid enlargement of the EU to Eastern Europe imposes to find new equilibriums inside EU, and maybe even a “raison-d’être” to a renewed European project. Especially since 1989 also opened the way for a change of the balance of power on the global level; whereas Western Europe was strongly and safely seated in the driver-seat of the World (not alone, naturally, but think that the G-7 included 4 European States out of 7) until 2008; despite its reunification or enlargement (the choice of wording is matter of perspective) and the ensuing increase in population and capacities, enlarged Europe is sliding to a less dominant position (to say the least) on the world stage. To follow-up on the G-governance mechanisms example, the G-7 was transformed to a G-20 in 2008; the new G-20 still only comprises 4 European States, no more... Comparing four out of seven States to four out of twenty hurts
hard. So Europe, Central, Eastern, Western, Southern, Northern, or maybe together, has to think its future under a new global pressure, which may alter the conditions for analyzing, both the current situation and the future prospects.

But in the real world, these three dimensions of the 1989 revolution may not be disentangled.

Naturally, we academics, tend to divide and categorize issues, to have them fitting within the boundaries of our disciplinary approaches. Thus, these three dimensions of the post-1989 revolution might, in classical academic governance, have led to three different research efforts and books. But in the real world, these three dimensions of the 1989 revolution may not be disentangled. They not only happened and developed simultaneously, but they have been feeding each other, and one is also the result, or the pre-condition, of the other. This is why we try here to grasp them together.

This is why we have chosen to gather very heterogeneous expertise to discuss this 25 year landmark of the 1989 revolutions: actors of 1989 and post-1989 and academics from various disciplines and perspective. Were invited to contribute to this evaluation assessment: Václav Klaus, former President of the Czech Republic; Lech Wałęsa, former President of Poland; Andreas Gross, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; Dusan Sidjanski, Former Special adviser to the President of the European Commission, and Professor emeritus from the University of Geneva; Richard Sulik, former President of the Parliament of Slovakia and currently MEP; Prof. Thilo Bodensteine, Central European University; Mr Rudolf Hermann, Journalist at NZZ; Prof. Miroslav Jovanovic, University of Geneva; Prof Zdzislaw Kedzia, University of Poznan; Mr. Tomáš Munzi, Head of the Czech Entreprise Institute; Prof Gerald Schneider, University of Konstanz; Prof. René Schwok, University of Geneva; Prof. Dusan Triska, University of Economics, Prague. So what does such gathering produce as an evaluation of the current relevance and significance of these past events?

First, there seems to be an agreement that democracy, as resulted from the 1989 events, is and remain a central and fundamental value in Europe, as was notably underlined by
Gross and Wałęsa. However, twenty-five years after the 1989 events, Sidjanski points out that democratic values may be at risk, due to the current wild economic crisis that hits Europe since 2008. Actually, according to him, both democracy and European integration may be in danger in 2014. Less pessimistic, Klaus and Sulik consider that a liberal economy, with as little constraints as possible by social norms but sufficiently democratic support a stable and secure legal and political environment authorizing economic growth is a sufficient achievement; according to them, the 1989 events did allow to reach such stage.

Actually, Klaus underlines that the main element of the 1989 events is the fall of the planned economy model, or in his words the end of subordination of the economy to a political ideology. In that respects, he expresses worries that only twenty-five years after this achievement of 1989, the current wish of the EU members States to develop and strengthen the European single currency (€), may constitute a renewed example of trying to subordinate the economy to a political project. A strategy that, according to him, the 1989 legacy should prevent. Further, he considers the European social model as an attempt from Western Europeans to preserve the political acquis and priorities of the pre-1989 Western Europe, which as a side effect prevents the Eastern Europeans to continue and complete their economic transformation towards a fully liberal economy. Klaus discourse was strongly opposed by Sidjanski, as outgoing special adviser to the President of the European Commission for the past ten years.

So is this opposition real, or only a matter of diverging perceptions. As Kedzia underlined, perception of facts is as important as facts themselves. However, is the strong criticism of the EU by the former Czech President, 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 10 years after Czech integration into the EU, justified and relevant or is it grossly exaggerated?

Klaus, supported by Sulik, considers that EU is now largely overstretching its interventionist practices into national economic and political dynamics, and has become rather harmful than helpful for the economic growth of its member States. On the other hand, Gross, Jovanovic, Sidjanski, Schneider and Schwok believe that the 1989 events and their follow-up made the EU, and eventually other European institutions (such as the Council of Europe), more relevant and useful than they were before. So who is right, who is wrong? As Liebich underlined in his intervention, it is widely agreed that the West
influenced the East after 1989, but it is largely underestimated how much the integration of Eastern European States into the EU also transformed the West, and naturally the EU.

Actually, a key for providing an understanding of the cause for this difference in perception was quite relevantly proposed by Bodenstein and Triska. They each in their own words, showed that in the transition process, for practical reasons, liberalization and privatization come first, institution building and acquisition by public authorities of a redistributive capacity only being realized later. On that precise issue, and basing their argument on the current situation in Russia, both Gross and Kedzia warn us of the risk of a loss of political trust by citizens in political leaders, if the process is not pursued to its end (in clear, if the process is stopped after the liberalization and privatization phase without building the social framework allowing for a reasonable degree of redistribution). Thus, according to them, an unfinished process may weaken democracy, and consequently endanger peace and macro-economic stability, which are pre-condition for liberal economic reforms.

Both sides reasoning seem largely tautological, making it hard to decide on their respective validity on a purely discursive analysis. However, as was clearly underlined by Triska and Munzi, as long as the rule of law principle remain in application, the organized transition towards a stronger social system of redistribution, or the economic consolidation in a genuinely neo-liberal perspective, may both be led, according to expressed democratic preferences and for the benefit of citizens.

So it seems to me that it is where the diverging understanding of the current impact of 1989 events, twenty-five years later, finds its roots. For some contributors to this book, the transition is not yet over (Bodenstein, Jovanovic and Schneider). For other it is over and was worth it, Kedzia and Wałęsa basing their appreciation on political/moral consideration, Herman and Schwok on economic arguments. However, two contributors, Klaus and Sulik, not only consider the transition over, but also that the process of transformations overstepped the momentum initiated by the 1989 events. So clearly, 1989 may for all be considered as a critical juncture, but the debate about its transformative potential is still open. It leads some authors not only to consider it over, but for that same reason that future change will be more or less impossible (Bodenstein and Triska). To these, Wałęsa replied that a critical juncture is not really needed; based on his own experience and in his own words, he stated that “the battle against communism was so easy to win that
nobody noticed there was a battle for years.” Thus 1989 was not in his view so much of a critical juncture than one specific stage in a long voluntary process of change, initiated by civil society and social movements active within the system. He thus believe that further change is still very possible, and see in some recent protest movements against the excess of capitalism, some similarities with the social mobilization against communism of the 1970’s and 1980’s.

A middle of the road approach was towards potential additional changes was proposed by Jovanovic and Gross, both underlying that the relationship between economic liberalization and a social political project has to be kept within a reasonable balance, to the risk of failing to respect the genuine nature of liberal democracy. Failing to maintain that balance would constitute a serious threat, not only to values and principles of democracy and European integration, but also as regard peace and stability, as was pointed out by Schwok. However, as was rightly pointed out by Schneider, external (security) threat to democracy may help strengthen cohesion. In that respect, one has to note that cohesion and stability are antonymic to transition. So whether authors privilege stability or change may strongly influence on the current evaluation of the original 1989 momentum for change. Thus at this stage, 25 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, it seems that we are still unable to agree on to whether the transition process is over. I would actually be tempted, to conclude this introduction, by coming back to Liebich’s argument, stressing that the transition did not only concerned central and Eastern Europe, but the whole of Europe and especially EU; in that respect, it appears obvious that the transition of EU as an aftershock of the fall of the Berlin Wall is far from being over. That remark would certainly constitute a perfect starting point for a research leading to the assessment of the same question for the 50th anniversary of the fall of the wall, in 2039. In between, competing narratives of the 1989 events and their importance will most likely continue to co-exist. May the present book be considered as a contribution to this ongoing debate.