

30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall: Bring back the spirit of '89 to forge a new rEUnaissance

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Thirty years ago, the world woke up to the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. Few had seen it coming, few had anticipated the implosion of the Communist bloc. The images of these days will never be forgotten. Hundreds of citizens swarming to the Wall, chipping away at it with hammers, hugging strangers from the other side. These are ever present memories for our generation.

The fall of the Wall marked what was widely heralded as a historic milestone in the spread of Western, democratic values.

As we approach the 30th anniversary, we should make no mistake. 1989 marked the end of a chapter in history - and not the eternal supremacy of Western liberal democracy, as Francis Fukuyama predicted. Today, the world is more complicated than we ever anticipated. The technological revolution is reshaping the way we live, work, and fight.

The rise in populist and nationalist voting patterns and populist voices being increasingly heard in many different countries seem to be based on the same reasoning: they accuse the elite, be this their national government or the European Union, of "not listening to the people", issuing a vague and confused call for a need to "take back control".

The divisions and exclusionist tendencies that are rising all around the world are increasingly based on the demand for dignity and recognition, accompanied by a powerful return of identity-based calls, intertwined with a widespread process of social narcissism made up of many individual experiences, in which the very concept of the common, collective good is lost.

Walls are being built against foreigners. There is a return to protectionism, isolationism and an ongoing blame-game, searching to define an enemy. Solidarity is being rejected: troops are being deployed on some of the European Union's external borders, and there is even a divorce: the dramatic case of Brexit.

After 30 years of opening borders and building a world founded on regulated but open markets, open and increased circulation of goods, capitals and people, the number of walls is growing. When the Berlin Wall crumbled, "only" 17 walls dividing countries and communities existed in the world. Today, there are more than 170 walls, some of them built to stop migrants and refugees, creating suffering for the migrants and business for smugglers.

We are living in a time of ever growing conflict between passion and reason, where reason is now more derided than listened to.

The sleeping of reason produces monsters: The great Spanish painter Francisco Goya immortalised this phrase in a famous picture. But the same painter also thought that the great wonders of human civilisation came only from a fruitful union between the logic of reason and the imagination of the passions.

This combination is part of the bedrock of European history and civilisation and has always found its foundation in culture and values, origin and sustenance for its regeneration.

This is not the time for being resigned and depressed, and even less so for spreading fear, pernicious envy or too many divisions in small countries.

On the contrary, it is a time for taking a gamble, for daring, for risking, for dreaming ... And this time is now, not tomorrow. It is the time for responsibility, for coming together and for strong alliances between the most diverse forces.

It is time for a new Pact between productive forces, between cultures and between generations. Our young people, Greta Thunberg among them, are telling us in no uncertain terms that the winning recipe is to bring together sustainable development -- as the new economic, social and environmental model--, young people and civic commitment.

The growing polarisation we are experiencing in our countries should not undermine this capacity for dialogue, compromise, civic passion and reason.

It was philosopher Elie Wiesel who said once that "We must see in every person a universe (...). Just as despair can come to one only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings."

In order for Europeans to rediscover a new sense of hope, exactly like they did in 1989, hope must turn into action. We must complete the reunification of Europe—Balkans and Cyprus included--, to build a Europe that meets the values and dreams of those who take to the streets for freedom, democracy and fair development, like in 1989.

One thing is certain: to survive in this world, Europeans must remain united. Because none of us can tackle the four major global challenges we face alone, namely globalisation, climate change, digital transformation and migration.

Together, we must formulate and implement an EU policy towards countries like Russia and China. That's why we need more effective European diplomacy and more flexibility from all European countries. Together, we must do more to defuse conflicts in our neighbourhood. Together, we must strengthen the European economy and play a leadership role in sustainable development.

Our history gives us the strength to move forward. Looking back, the Renaissance was a powerful and vast humanistic revolution that founded the modern transformation of Europe.

It gave citizens the cultural, technological and empowerment tools, the tools of civic involvement and a new form of governance so they could act as protagonists of their lives.

Inspired by our own European history, we should together build a new Renaissance, a rEUnaissance for a new EUtopia.

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