Contemporary European History (2025), **34**, 767–784
doi:10.1017/S0960777324000560

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Europe's Long 1989

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This article introduces the notion of Europe's 'long 1989'. It does so in order to connect the remarkable events in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 to a wider set of transformations that have reshaped Europe as a whole. The article focuses on three sets of transformation. Firstly, the dismantling of political systems forged in the earlier era of ideological polarisation. Secondly, the 'modernisation' of national economies that entailed the disappearance of the institutional expressions of class compromise after 1945 (in the Stalinist and social democratic forms). Thirdly, the unravelling of those collective identities – class, religion, gender and sexuality – that had come to shape individual experiences so forcefully across the twentieth century. The article explores the liberating effects of these transformations whilst arguing that the principle dynamic has been that of implosion. The resulting sense of loss has shaped contemporary Europe in multiple ways.

> The figure of change was implosion.
>
> (Göran Therborn, '1989 and After: Meanings, Explanations, Lessons')[1]

> [T]here can be no serious doubt that in the late 1980s and early 1990s an era in world history ended and a new one began. That is the essential information for historians of the century.
>
> (Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*)[2]

Until recently, historians of Europe's twentieth century paid most attention to the tumultuous early decades – from the outbreak of the First World War to the democratic breakdowns and economic crises of the interwar years and the horrors of the Second World War. The events around 1989, though prominently featured and extensively discussed, tended to be assimilated into a narrative that had the end of the Second World War as its centre of gravity. Viewed through the experience of three decades of violence and instability, followed by post-1945 political stabilisation and economic growth, 1989 was treated as a culmination of earlier processes. It was the icing on the cake: liberal democratic and market values were finally extended to those Central and Eastern European states trapped behind an Iron Curtain imposed upon them by Soviet annexations and Stalinisation after the Second World War.[3]

Recent historiographical debates have begun to challenge this narrative, both in terms of questioning its positive assessment of the trajectories after 1989 and by introducing new historical junctures into a period most usually assimilated under the heading 'postwar'. Building on these debates, this article argues that 1989 should be considered a historical juncture in its own right, denoting substantive

[1] Goran Therborn, '1989 and After: Meanings, Explanations, Lessons,' in *Building an Open Society and Perspectives of Sociology from East-Central Europe*, ed. P. Sztomka (Madrid: International Sociological Association, 1996).
[2] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), 5.
[3] Konrad H. Jarausch, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and epochal political, economic and social change. However, rather than tie 1989 to the fall of single party regimes across the Soviet bloc, this article develops the notion of Europe's 'long 1989' – a temporally and geographically more extended historical juncture, referring to transformations in the years before and after 1989, affecting Western and Southern Europe as well as Central and Eastern Europe. In particular, the 'long 1989' involves the implosion of a wide range of phenomena: of political systems constructed out of the ideological settlements of the Second World War; of political-economic institutions designed to either moderate or replace the basic laws of capitalist accumulation; and of collective identities based on class, religion and gender that shaped relations between individuals. Driving this implosion was a continent-wide abandonment of almost a century of efforts to impose upon society a more rational order in line with collectively defined goals. These efforts, and their political, economic and social expressions, still existed amidst the multiple crises of the 1970s. By the late 1990s, they had been consigned to the past, as part of what Varlam Shalamov called 'the great lost battle for the true reinvention of life'.[4]

This article begins by reviewing the recent historiographical debates around the meaning of 1989 and then details its own approach, defining Europe's 'long 1989' and defending its status as a distinctive historical juncture. The article develops its argument through detailed national examples that serve to draw out themes common across European countries. The 'long 1989' has had a transformative effect on how Europeans think of their identities and how they conceive of their own freedom, which this article takes up when it considers the legacy of Europe's 'long 1989' in our political, economic and socio-cultural present.

The Old and New Historiography of 1989

Paradigmatic examples of the 'icing on the cake' approach to 1989 can be found in Tony Judt's *Postwar* and in Mark Mazower's *Dark Continent*. These two excellent works of synthesis take the middle of the century as the continent's historical turning point. In Mazower's words, 'it is now clear that Europe's twentieth century divides sharply into two halves' – before and after 1950.[5] In his introduction, Judt describes how he first conceived of his book in December 1989, whilst changing trains in Vienna. In his words, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, 'the years 1945–1989 would now come to be seen not as the threshold of a new epoch but rather as an interim age: a post-war parenthesis, the unfinished business of a conflict that ended in 1945 but whose epilogue had lasted for another half century'.[6] We find the same argument in Kershaw's two-part work on Europe's twentieth century, *To Hell and Back* and *Roller Coaster*, where the later decades are given a rather cursory treatment.[7] In Garton Ash's *Homelands*, his 'personal history' of Europe, 1989's place is firmly within a narrative about the rise and (recent) fall of political liberalism in Europe.[8] In Jarausch's account of Europe's twentieth century, the events of 1989 are assimilated into the 1973–2000 era marked by the rise of economic globalisation. In Stone's *Goodbye to All That?*, the postwar consensus and anti-fascism are so closely bound together that the unravelling of the former implies a profound change in how Europeans related to the Second World War.[9]

Driving the mid-century orientation of this generation of historians was an increasing openness in discussions about the events of 1939–1945, which contrasted dramatically with the silence of the

[4] Cited in Alexievich, *Second-Hand Time*, 27. Shalamov was the author of some of the most famous short stories about the Soviet Gulag, known as *The Kolyma Tales*.

[5] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: William Heinemann, 2005). Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 399.

[6] Judt, *Postwar*, 2.

[7] Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914–1949* (London: Penguin, 2016) and Ian Kershaw, *Rollercoaster: Europe, 1950–2017* (London: Allen Lane, 2019).

[8] Timothy Garton Ash, *Homelands: A Personal History of Europe* (London: The Bodley Head, 2023).

[9] Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). In Stone's words, 'accompanying the argument about the rise and fall of the postwar consensus is the claim that this rise and fall must be understood in interplay with memories and interpretations of the Second World War' (10).

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postwar years.[10] Historians exposed the darker side of the continent's history, at a time – the late 1990s and early 2000s – when the prevailing sentiment was one of great optimism about Europe's future.[11] Aside from the specific debate amongst historians on the causes of the collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, 1989 has long been studied through narratives whose focus lies in earlier decades.[12]

This backward-looking perspective was not just an intellectual construction of Western liberals. It was firmly echoed by a 'return to Europe' narrative present in Central and Eastern Europe. In this narrative, the events of 1989 constituted a long-awaited and deserved re-establishment of the *status quo ante*, meaning before the fall of the Iron Curtain in the late 1940s. In some instances, the meaning of this 'return' was predominantly cultural: a sense of belonging to Europe betrayed by the imposition of Stalinist rule in the aftermath of the Second World War. This view was best captured in Kundera's famous description of Central Europe as 'a kidnapped West'.[13] This 'return to Europe' was also driven by a firm belief in the liberal content of the 1989 'revolutions'. As Jeffrey Isaac observed, János Kis, Adam Michnik, George Konrád and other prominent intellectuals developed this argument, laying the basis for a 'convergence between Western scholars and Eastern former dissidents on a liberal interpretation of 1989'.[14] In some places, the view of 1989 as the closure of a 'post-war parenthesis' was taken quite literally. In Estonia and Latvia, dissidents wished to reinstate the interwar constitutions so as to wipe clear – politically and juridically – the decades of belonging to the Soviet Union. This was the basis for the Congress movements, whose members were chosen only by nationals who themselves or their descendants had been citizens prior to 1940. These movements clashed with reformist figures, often leaders of the Popular Fronts working in Soviet institutions. Though the Congress movements ignored the problem of the large numbers of Russian citizens who had settled in the Baltic

[10] Henri Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990). This book was originally published in French in 1987, republished in 1990, and translated into English in 1994. The theme of holding societies and elites to account for their actions during the Second World War was prominent in the works cited above.

[11] Lazcò, Erlichman and del Hierro refer to this period as the 'glorious twenties' (*vingt glorieuses*) of European history writing which began in the second half of the 1990s. See Ferenc Lazcò, Camilo Erlichman and Pablo Del Hierro, 'Reconceptualisation and Renewal: On Writing Contemporary European History Today,' *EuropeDebate*, 2021, https://europedebate.hypotheses.org/740 (last visited 14 Mar. 2024).

[12] A number of works take up the question of why the regimes in Central and Eastern Europe fell in the way that they did. This is the case with Vladimir Tismaneanu's 'The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences', where the goal is to demonstrate the importance of civil society activism, contrasting this with Judt's argument – and Kotkin's – that collapse came from above rather than below. See Vladimir Tismaneanu, 'The Revolutions of 1989: Causes, Meanings, Consequences,' *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009): 271–88. In these historical debates about the 'causes' of 1989, we often find more general claims about the collapse of communist regimes, including the Soviet Union, though the latter event has generated its own focused set of debates. For an influential and broadly focused article, see Mark Kramer's three part article starting with 'The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1),' *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (2003): 178–256. Some explorations of the causes of 1989 focus on particular states rather than providing general explanations applied to Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. On the collapse of East Germany, see Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and The End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) and Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create a Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). On the roundtable talks in a number of Central and Eastern European countries, see Jon Elster, ed., *The Roundtable Talks and the Breakdown of Communism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For a good summary of the historical debates around the causes of 1989, see Wolfgang Mueller, 'The Revolutions of 1989: An Introduction,' in *The Revolutions of 1989: A Handbook*, eds. W. Mueller, M. Gehler, and A. Suppan (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2015), 3–30. An exception is Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes* – a book that eschews the mid-century orientation of all those works cited above and focuses instead on an abridged twentieth century whose foundations are the ideological struggles between capitalism and communism. For Hobsbawm, the period was also entirely contemporary. He recalls seeing the headlines about Hitler becoming Chancellor of Germany whilst walking home from school in Berlin with his younger sister; and yet his account of its ending was significantly more pessimistic than many of his peers. See Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 4.

[13] Milan Kundera, *A Kidnapped West: The Tragedy of Central Europe* (London: Faber & Faber, 2023 [orig. 1984]).

[14] Jeffrey C. Isaac, 'The Meanings of 1989,' in *The Revolutions of 1989: Rewriting Histories*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (London: Routledge, 1999), 130.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

states, their support for a return to the 'First Republic' became the mainstream view, particularly on the issue of refusing automatic citizenship to Russian nationals.[15]

As 1989 has lost much of its contemporaneity, and as post-1989 trajectories have departed from the triumphalist script traced out above, a more sustained historiographical debate around 1989 has emerged.[16] Challenging conventional frameworks, Conway, Lagrou and Rousso (2019) study 1989 in relation to two other 'postwar' years: 1918 and 1945, comparing them in relation to themes such as demobilisation and borders.[17] In outlining their 'histories of the present' project, Conway, Donert and Patel criticise the 'backwards-looking' aspect to contemporary European history:

> To treat the volatile and complex history of Europe during the post-1989 decades as little more than the coda of a symphony written for another age is clearly no longer viable […] To trace the threads of continuity from the ruins of 1945 to the present day risks subordinating the history of twenty-first-century Europe to the mid-twentieth-century past, while at the same time confining the history of the 1930s and 1940s to a monument or museum devoid of real historical character.[18]

In their call to 'liberate the history of the present', Conway et al. call for a greater plurality of perspectives. This would include a plurality of subject matters (more attention to gender and race) as well as greater pluralism amongst historians themselves (who tend to be predominantly male and white). There should also be fewer binary categories deployed, with those of 'men' and 'women', 'black' and 'white' replaced with more attention to fluidity in gender and sexuality.

Another reason for the much greater historiographical scrutiny of 1989 is that historians in Central and Eastern Europe have come to regard the 'return to Europe' narrative of the 1980s and 1990s, so popular in the region, as naïve and unfounded. As Laczó and Lisjak Gabrijelčič observe in a seminal collection of essays, Eastern European ideas about 'return' coincided with Western European visions of 'unification':

> [T]he power of the European narrative was more the result of *convergent aspirations*. When the Cold War suddenly ended, both halves of the continent declared in unison their intention to overcome the legacy of division.[19]

By the 2010s, however, these 'convergent aspirations' had diverged considerably. Revisionist accounts of 1989 emerged, such as Philipp Ther's *Die neue Ordnung auf dem Alten Kontinent* and

[15] Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 276.

[16] This article does not provide an exhaustive account of this historiographical debate. Already in the 1990s, voices critical of the 'return to Europe' narrative of 1989 were being aired. For a good collection of representative essays, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *The Revolutions of 1989: Rewriting Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999). More recent contributions that are not discussed in detail here include Jan Zielonka, *Counter-Revolution: Liberal Europe in Retreat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) and Padraic Kenny, *The Burdens of Freedom: Eastern Europe Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

[17] Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou and Henry Rousso, eds., *Europe's Postwar Period – 1989, 1945, 1918, Writing History Backwards* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). For another comparative approach, though in a different vein, see G. R. Horn and P. Kenny, eds., *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

[18] Martin Conway, Celia Donert and Kiran Klaus Patel, 'From Contemporary History to the History of the Present,' EuropeDebate, https://europedebate.hypotheses.org/1150, 2022, 4–5 (last visited 14 Mar. 2024).

[19] Ferenc Laczó and Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, eds., *The Legacy of Division: East and West after 1989* (New York: Central European University), 2. As Laczó and Wawrzyniak note, however, in Central and Eastern Europe in particular, the events of 1989 were contested even in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet-backed regimes. See Ferenc Laczó and Joanna Wawrzyniak, 'Memories of 1989 in Europe between Hope, Dismay, and Neglect,' *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 31, no. 3 (2017): 423.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Andreas Wirsching's *Der Preis Der Freiheit*. Ther's goal was to avoid writing an 'Occidentalist' history of Europe, developing instead 'a European history narrated from an Eastern angle, from the perspective of the peoples who ended communism, tore down the Wall, and then underwent unprecedented political, social and economic change'.[20] Writing in 2020, Laczó and Lisjak Gabrijelčič argue that 'hopes for a swift and successful merging of Europe's East and West seem unrealistic at best'.[21] Krastev and Holmes, in their book on the collapse of political liberalism, *The Light that Failed*, go even further, describing this expectation of an East-West coming together in Europe as 'utopian', fuelling unmet expectations that have driven millions in Central and Eastern Europe to move westwards.[22]

The call to 'liberate' histories of Europe's present is very welcome and there are some notable examples of this being done. We find a new and creative way of thinking about 1989 in Emile Chabal's *A Divided Republic* for instance, a book that takes 1989 out of its usual context and treats it as a significant event in the rise of neo-republicanism in France.[23] More often than not, however, there has been a focus on method rather than substance. Making histories of this time more open to new perspectives should be encouraged, but the question about 1989 as a historical juncture remains. If 1989 is not the final act in Europe's bloody twentieth century, then what exactly is it?

Defining Europe's 'Long 1989'

In order to fully grasp the 'long 1989' as a historical juncture, our analytical focus needs to move beyond the tumultuous events of the calendar year of 1989, and also to range outside Central and Eastern Europe. The concept of the 'long 1989' does this by framing this juncture as a broad process of change, beginning prior to 1989 and continuing on afterwards, involving epochal transformations in all parts of Europe, not just in the East. Above all, the 'long 1989' is a historical moment marked by an extended period of *implosion* across all dimensions of politics, society and the economy, making it an experience for Europeans that is inextricably bound up with a sense of loss. This shared experience is heavily mediated by the distinctiveness of national trajectories of change. One of the goals of this article is to balance the specificity of national and intra-European regional experiences of the 'long 1989' with the commonality that produces overlap, echoes and interdependence in people's experience of this period.

Various qualifying adjectives have been given to 1989. The 'long 1989' has some affinity with what Robert Strayer called the '1989 years', referring to the period between the beginning of Gorbachev's reforms in 1986 to the final dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991.[24] In his discussion of the relationship between 1989 and the political left, William Outhwaite also makes the case for situating 1989 within broader developments:

> [The] contextualisation of 1989 suggests a further expansion beyond the communist world. 1989 was, of course, primarily marked by the end of state socialism […]. It also, however, provided a major boost to what we were just beginning to call globalisation and to the neoliberal ideologies and regimes which were already well-established. More controversially, [1989] might be seen as making an important contribution to the end of three processes: the long social democratic century which began in the second half of the nineteenth century; the age of affluence running from

[20] Philipp Ther, *Europe Since 1989: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 8. Andreas Wirsching, *Der Preis Der Freiheit: Geschichte Europeas in unserer Zeit* (Munich: Beck, 2012). For calls to pursue much greater interconnections between historians from Western and from Central and Eastern Europe, see Laczo, Erlichman and Del Hierro, 'Reconceptualization and Renewal,' 2.

[21] Laczó and Lisjak Gabrijelčič, *Legacy of Division*, 3.

[22] Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, *The Light That Failed: A Reckoning* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), 30.

[23] Emile Chabal, *A Divided Republic: Nations, State and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 33.

[24] Robert Strayer, *Why Did the Soviet Union Collapse? Understanding Historical Change* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the late 1940s in Western Europe and North America and the 'European social model/welfare state'; Atlantic or 'Northern' hegemony in the world.[25]

The 'long 1989' contains a constructive tension within it: the conjunction of a single year with a more extended period of change. Something similar has been suggested in relation to 1968, with Richard Vinen's formulation of 'The Long '68' or the use of the term 'the '68 years' (*les années* 68).[26] As a formulation, the 'long 1989' retains an emphasis on the unquestionable drama and rapidity of the changes in 1989 but with a qualifying adjective that points to a broader historical canvas.[27]

The one sustained use of the 'long 1989' in the historical literature can be found in Kosicki and Kunakhovich's edited book of 2019, *The Long 1989: Decades of Global Revolution*. They make the case for expanding the geographic and chronological scope of 1989 but in a different way from the approach proposed here. They use the collapse of single party rule in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 as a 'frame of reference' for mass mobilisations across the world, extending as far as Egypt in 2011 and Ukraine in 2013 and 2014. For Kosicki and Kunakhovich, the 'long 1989' refers to deployments and invocations *beyond* Europe, and to events occurring long after 1989. A similar move is made in work on the 'global 1989' or in global histories of Central and Eastern Europe. In the latter case, Mark et al. explore the global influences operating on those communist elites who were central to the 'revolutions' of 1989. They also situate Central and Eastern Europe within a wider global frame, stressing its connection to the Global South.[28]

In this article, Europe's 'long 1989' interrogates more closely developments *within* Europe. It undoes the firm attachment of 1989 to regime collapse in Central and Eastern Europe, recasting it as a broader and deeper change affecting Europe *as a whole*. Historically, Europe's 'long 1989' sits between the political and social mobilisation of the late 1960s and 1970s and the later era of depoliticised individualism that characterised the 1990s and 2000s. The 'long 1989' contains within itself overlapping and complex temporalities: a combination of short-term and conjunctural events, which came as such a surprise to many observers and participants, with other developments tied to longer-term processes. As Karl Schlögel observes, 1989 as a historical juncture is made up of multiple ruptures and 'breaks'. To 'focus on one moment and one place' – such as the fall of the Berlin Wall – 'ignores the interrelationship of *temps d'évènements* and the *longue durée*, the overlapping of different layers of time'.[29]

The first key development relates to the political system. The collapse of national Communist Party apparatuses in the East was connected to the coming apart of postwar political coalitions in the West and the resulting breakthrough for radical right parties. Only in Italy did the main parties of government disappear altogether. Elsewhere, what unravelled were the tight interconnections between mainstream parties and the national state, eroding the local and regional institutions that went with it. Parties of the left and right jettisoned old ideological traditions. Communist parties, already much reformed, withered, becoming shadows of their former selves. Christian democrat and conservative parties sought new identities as their anti-communist foundations were torn asunder by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Close ties to the state, a core feature of embedded democracies after the Second World War, were increasingly viewed as evidence of corruption rather than as a distinctive mode

[25] William Outhwaite, 'What is Left after 1989?,' in *The Global 1989: Continuity and Change in World Politics*, ed. G. Lawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 78.

[26] Richard Vinen, *The Long '68: Radical Protest and Its Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

[27] For a discussion of this tension and for an account of the 'long Sixties', see Arthur Marwick, '"1968" and the Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties (c.1958–c.1974),' in *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, eds. G. R. Horn and P. Kenny (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 81–94. For a longer treatment, see Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958–1974* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

[28] James Mark, Bogdan C. Iacob, Tobias Rupprecht and Ljubica Spaskovska, *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[29] Karl Schlögel, 'This Mess of Troubled Times,' in *The Legacy of Division*, eds. Laczó and Gabrijelčič, 61.

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of political representation. These developments differ from the earlier collapse of authoritarian rule in Spain, Portugal and Greece, where regime change occurred in the midst of heightened ideological conflict and extensive social mobilisation. By contrast, later changes of the 1980s, particularly during the González years in Spain and the Papandreou years in Greece, are important components of Europe's 'long 1989'.[30]

The second development that underpinned the 'long 1989' was bound up with the economic crisis of the 1970s, which afflicted both the capitalist and communist blocks, but not reducible to it. The 'long 1989' involves the dismantling of *both* socialist command economies in the East and embedded postwar Keynesian and corporatist economies in Western Europe. Though much attention has been paid, separately, to economic transition in Eastern Europe and to Western Europe's absorption into the wider process of globalisation, it is the conjunction of – and inter-relationship between – these two processes that gives to the European experience some of its distinctiveness.[31]

The third development was the fragmentation of collective identities, even if this did not emerge *ex nihilo* from mid-1980s Europe. Already, the social transformations of the postwar boom, the so-called *trentes glorieuses*, had a major impact upon collective identities. As Henri Mendras observed in the case of France, by the 1970s bourgeois French life had lost much of its formality. The open-air barbecue replaced fussy meals in elaborately decorated dining rooms as the new model of socialising.[32] Nevertheless, the difference between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s is striking: class and religious affiliations became increasingly marginal as markers of people's identity, surviving as aspects of an individual's sense of self rather than as collective macro-social subjects. Nationalism plays a complex role in this fragmentation of collective identities. The late 1980s and early 1990s in Europe saw a 'revival of nationalism', though much of this was to do with the struggle for political independence in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. As Miroslav Hroch documented, many national movements fell away once this goal was achieved.[33] In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the violence that broke out in 1991 was heavily bound up with not only the fragmentation of anti-fascism as a collective identity for the federation but also with the processes of political reform and democratisation which challenged the power of existing elites.[34]

Beyond these three general themes, the 'long 1989' reflects the balance between nationally specific experiences and broader patterns of change.[35] We see this clearly in the political economic aspects of the 'long 1989'. The economic crisis of the 1970s revealed the internal contradictions of the postwar models in both the West *and* in the East. For the socialist economies, underlying economic contradictions made the generation of surplus an ongoing difficulty, particularly pronounced from the era of Brezhnevian stagnation onwards. Economic fortunes were directly bound up with single party rule, meaning that any attempt to fundamentally change the former also had dramatic implications for the regimes in power. For the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union, therefore, when governing elites ceded power to non-communist governments, there were no further obstacles to the processes of marketisation.

Developments in Western Europe were more gradual. As Claus Offe argued, the postwar welfare states in Western Europe were part of a wider effort at capitalist stabilisation, dependent upon the possibility of continued capitalist accumulation which from the early 1970s onwards became much more difficult.[36] The space to respond to these problems and to undertake profound changes to

[30] Thierry Maliniak, *Les Espagnols: de La Movida à l'Europe: La Décennie socialiste* (Paris: Centurion, 1990). Rodric Beaton, *Greece: Biography of a Modern Nation* (London: Penguin, 2019), chapter 11. James Petras, 'The Contradictions of Greek Socialism,' *New Left Review*, May/June 1987.

[31] Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits, 'Staring through the Mocking Glass: Three Misperceptions of the East-West Divide since 1989,' in *The Legacy of Division*, eds. Laczó and Gabrijelčič, 12.

[32] Henri Mendras, *La Seconde Révolution Française (1965–1984)* (Paris: Folios Essais, 1994).

[33] Miroslav Hroch, 'Nationalism and National Movements: Comparing the Past and the Present of Central and Eastern Europe,' *Nations and Nationalism* 2, no. 1 (1996): 35–44.

[34] V. P. Gagnon Jr., *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[35] Charles Maier, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 179.

[36] Claus Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 150.

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postwar structures was limited by the multiple actors, interests and organisations whose origins lay in the effort at stabilising Western capitalism in the interwar period and then especially after 1945. According to Charles Maier, one of the major dynamics of the twentieth century was the inclusion of the working classes into political life as part of an effort to contain the threat to capitalist accumulation posed by socialist and communist movements. In Europe, this generated a complex set of institutions – trade unions, powerful state agencies and bureaucracies, sector-specific pressure groups – that Maier labels 'corporate pluralism'.[37] The degree of institutional development as part of this stabilisation effort was both immense and highly variable. As Martin Conway has documented, Western Europe's postwar 'democratic age' was the result of a profound integration of society, state and politics: all were fused together in a new model of domestic and international equilibrium.[38] The interaction between these national varieties of 'corporate pluralism' and the push for 'modernisation' by governing and economic elites accounts for some of the variety within Europe's 'long 1989'.

Resolutions to the conflicts between labour and capital over the course of the twentieth century were generative of *life worlds*, materialised in art, architecture, design and particular models of consumer goods.[39] What unites the 'long 1989' across Eastern and Western Europe is the experience of loss (and defeat) of these worlds, what the Belarussian novelist Svetlana Alexievich describes as 'the myriad sundry details of a vanished way of life'.[40] Attachment to these life worlds had weakened since they first emerged in the 1920s, but they were nevertheless a prominent part of both the post-1945 class compromise in Western Europe and the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. This is what lends to the 'long 1989' in Europe its sense of pathos and waste. In an account of her own life, East German born writer Jenny Erpenbeck describes her experience of exploring with her son an abandoned summer camp built by a state-owned company in East Germany for their employees and their families. Her words articulate precisely this loss of a world:

> [W]e open the doors of the empty bungalows – they aren't even locked – and look quietly at the carefully folded wool blankets at the foot of each bunk bed, at the curtains that someone dutifully closed before departing long, long ago. … [A]ll of those things that have remained unchanged, as if under a spell, since the last socialist vacationers spent their annual vacation here, right before their companies were liquidated in the early nineties, and an absence that was only supposed to last two days became an absence that lasted forever.[41]

Europe's 'Long 1989' as a Distinctive Historical Juncture

Delineating distinctive historical eras or epochs is always contentious, just as there are difficulties in claiming that one period constitutes a 'juncture' or significant moment of epochal change more than another. A recent focus on the 1970s and 1980s as a 'turning point' in European history threw up a multitude of differing interpretations: one focusing on the '70s and early '80s, another preferring to absorb the two decades into a wider narrative around the collapse of the postwar consensus (extending back into the 1960s and forwards into the 1990s), whilst a third concentrated on 'hinge years' (1967–1974) that serve as a dividing line between earlier and later eras.[42] This article builds

[37] Maier, *In Search of Stability*, 183.

[38] Martin Conway, *Western Europe's Democratic Age, 1945–1968* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), chapter 1. On France, see Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 'Seconde Partie: La démocratie équilibré.'

[39] On the notion of the 'lost world,' see Karl Schlogel, *The Soviet Century: Archaeology of a Lost World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023). The book was originally published in German in 2017 as *Das sowjetische Jahrhundert*.

[40] Svetlana Alexievich, *Second-Hand Time* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, orig. 2013, trans. 2016), 29.

[41] Jenny Erpenbek, *Not a Novel: Collected Writings and Reflections* (London: Granta, 2020), 37.

[42] Andreas Wirshing, ed., 'The 1970s and 1980s as a Turning Point in European History?, with Contributions from Göran Therborn, Geoff Eley, Hartmut Kaelble, Philippe Chassaigne and Andreas Wirshing,' *Journal of Modern European History* 9, no. 1 (2011): 8–26.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on recent interest in these new 'turning points' but takes a different approach, arguing that we should think of 1989 as the central node of a much more extended period of political, social, economic and cultural transformation. This 'long 1989' extends backwards and forward in time but needs to be distinguished in particular from the multiple economic and political crises of the 1970s. This article takes 1989 as a starting point. As well as being a significant year of change in its own right, 1989 has become a symbol or a form of shorthand denoting 'a caesura, between yesterday and tomorrow, a divide between past and future'.[43] The aim here is to capture the specificity of 1989 as a year but also to situate it within the multiple and overlapping processes of change that make the 'long 1989' into a distinctive historical juncture.

Europe's 'long 1989' helps us fill in a gap between the ideological convulsions of the postwar consensus (and its many discontents) and the form of politics which prevailed from the mid-1990s onwards. The latter was increasingly technocratic, rooted in a broad consensus about the role of the market in allocating resources. It rested upon a mass withdrawal from direct forms of political involvement and the systematic demobilisation of what in France are called *les acteurs sociaux*. This contrasts with the deeply politicised era of the '60s and '70s. In his fictionalised autobiography of the twentieth century, *My Century*, Günter Grass writes of 1969: 'we fought the class struggle on a daily basis'. This description was still conceivable in the early 1980s, if we think, for instance, of the language of class conflict that suffused both sides of the British miner's strike of '84–'85, but it had become quite quixotic by the 1990s.[44] Moreover, whereas the 'long Sixties' was a source of enormous political and institutional creativity, from the rise of feminist and green movements to sit-ins, art labs and experimental theatre, the 'long 1989' bequeathed to Europe a more barren landscape of political disenchantment.[45]

Hope for a new sort of politics – as with 1968 – was not entirely absent from the 'long 1989'. As the Czechoslovak Charter 77 movement put it, its goal was 'to rehabilitate people as the true subjects of history … [which] by its very nature radically transcends the framework of mere changes of the system of power'. This vision extended itself across all domains of social life, from politics and the economy to the household and even the bedroom.[46] This may have been the wish of the dissident movement but it was swiftly brushed aside by the introduction of electoral democracy, staffed in large part by former communists and promoting an unapologetic form of capitalism. Returning to Grass's *My Century*, his entry for 1990 describes the return of a German Jew to his birthplace in East Germany, at the time of the elections of March 1990. Dropping in to watch the results with the local branch of the human rights movement, Alliance 90, which had led the protests against the regime a year earlier, Grass's narrator describes 'the mute horror' of the activists as they watched the results.[47] Alliance 90 won less than 3 per cent of the votes, whilst the Christian Democratic Union won over 40 per cent.

To make sense of the latter part of Europe's twentieth century, we should distinguish between the social and cultural ferment of the late '60s and '70s, where new forms of individualism co-existed uneasily alongside powerful collective identities, and the unrestrained but apolitical individualism of the 1990s. This is particularly evident in the realm of gender roles and sexuality. Over the course of the 1960s, new forms of individualism challenged the leaden and conventional collective identities and cultural practices that had reimposed themselves onto the relative fluidity of the war years.[48] The

[43] Schlögel, 'This Mess of Troubled Times,' 60.

[44] Gunter Grass, *My Century* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 183.

[45] Marwick notes that, in the cultural revolutions of the 1960s, 'an enormous proliferation of movements (New Left, environmental, feminist, etc.) and institutions (experimental theatres, art labs, etc.) arose that were generally critical of, or in opposition to, one or more aspects of established society.' Marwick, 'The Long Sixties,' 89.

[46] Cited in Isaac, 'The Meanings of 1989,' 125–64, 137.

[47] Grass, *My Century*, 244.

[48] For a defence of the view of the Sixties as a transformative decade in almost all respects, see Marwick, *The Sixties*. For a detailed account of this shift from the war to its aftermath in the realm of sexuality, see Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chapter 3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

interruption to Theodor Adorno's lectures in Frankfurt in April 1969 is one illustration of the conflict between the old postwar conservatism and new forms of radicalism. As Adorno began his 'Introduction to Dialectical Thought', three female students in leather jackets approached him, tossed flowers at him, exposed their breasts and tried to kiss him. Adorno, for all his radicalism, belonged to the old cultural order. Dressed in a stuffy suit and tie and quite incapable of dealing with this new generation of protesters, he promptly cancelled his lecture series.[49] A similarly uneasy standoff between old and new existed in Franco's Spain, which in this case also mapped onto a struggle between the regime and new forms of opposition brought about by the years of *desarollo* (development). In a still profoundly Catholic society, Torremolinos, a Spanish town on the Costa del Sol, became known in the 1960s for its permissive attitude towards homosexuality, as well as being a popular place for topless sunbathing by Scandinavia's liberal sun-seekers. Co-existing for a time with the cultural conservativism of Franco's regime, a large police operation in 1971 put an end to Torremolinos's reputation as a gay haven and brought it into the mainstream fold of mass tourism.[50] Some echoes of this tension remain in the *movida* movement. Pedro Almodóvar's 1983 film, *Dark Habits* (*Entre Tinieblas*) made much of the risqué coexistence of religious authority and lasciviousness. However, by the early 1980s, depictions and discussions of sex had entered the mainstream of Spanish culture. The change is evident in the contrast between filmmaker Bigas Luna's morally tortured work of the 1970s and his lighter, sensual, tragi-comic films of the early 1990s. In many respects, the *movida* movement foreshadowed what was to come in other parts of Europe a few years later: an unbridled promiscuity combined with profound disillusionment at the freedoms associated with liberal democracy and market economies.

In the economic domain, the 'modernisation' of capitalist economies should not be extended back into the international economic crisis of the 1970s. Evidence for the association of the '70s and early '80s with the arrival of neoliberalism relies on the appearance of leaders such as Pinochet in Chile (1973), Thatcher in the United Kingdom (1979) and Reagan in the United States (1981).[51] In much of Europe, this period was dominated by attempts at *preserving* statist postwar economic models. This was the era of neo-corporatism: an intensive effort at cooperation between trade unions, governments and employers. In the United Kingdom, where the corporatist tradition was at its weakest, the prefix 'neo' was most apt. Relatively short-lived, this experiment involved intense negotiations between unions, employers and government under the portentous heading of the 'Social Contract'.[52] Elsewhere, governments invested new energies into existing corporatist structures. In West Germany, Austria and Sweden, the postwar commitment to full employment remained sacrosanct.[53] The high inflation of the 1970s, as

[49] For a detailed account of the political context for this action, see Esther Leslie, 'Introduction to Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence,' *New Left Review* 1, no. 233 (1999). Gunter Grass recounts the same story in his fictionalised memoir, though the entry is for 1968.

[50] Javier Cuevas del Barrio and Angelo Nestore, eds., *Cruising Torremolinos: Cuerpos, Territorio y Memoria* (Valencia: Tirant Humanidades, 2022). Pablo Berger's 2003 film, *Torremolinos 73*, looks back at this aspect of the coastal resort.

[51] In his recent history of the 'rise and fall' of neoliberalism, Gary Gerstle puts the end of what he calls the 'New Deal Order' at 1980 and the beginning of neoliberalism at 1970. See Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[52] On the Social Contract as part of Harold Wilson's second government (1974–6), see Philip Whitehead, *The Writing on the Wall: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Michael Joseph, 1985), chapter 6. On Heath's relations to the trade unions in his government (1970–74), see Dominik Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: Britain, 1970–1974* (London: Penguin, 2010), chapter 3.

[53] For a contemporary treatment of the postwar national economic model, with a focus on Britain, France, Italy, Austria, Sweden, West Germany and the United States, see Andrew Schonfield, *Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965). On the era of neo-corporatism and a comparison of different national government responses to the economic crisis in Western Europe, see Fritz Scharpf, *Crisis and Choice in European Social Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), who looks at the attempts in Britain, Sweden, West Germany and Austria in the 1970s and early 1980s to maintain the postwar commitment to full employment. On the persistence of some aspects of corporatism in small Western European economies into the 1990s, see Uwe Becker, ed., *The Changing Political Economies of Small West European Countries* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

well as being an expression of intensified class struggle, was also the outcome of 'accommodated wage rises in excess of productivity growth' which were accepted as part of the effort to preserve the postwar model.[54] As the West German Social Democratic Party's campaign slogan in 1976 put it, 'Rather 5 per cent inflation than 5 per cent unemployment'.[55] In Sweden, the trade union movement sought to take over the country's major companies via union-controlled 'wage earner' funds, a move described as one of the most 'radical, concrete and politically realistic socialisation projects in Western history'.[56] In the East, regime survival was also the order of the day: petrodollars from the members of OPEC were recycled through Western banking institutions as loans to regimes behind the Iron Curtain.[57] Only Romania sought to avoid indebting itself. Ceausescu was determined to pay back all foreign loans, even though it meant plunging Romanians into grinding poverty and endless privations.[58]

Only *after* the failure of these neo-corporatist efforts did the project of insulating the economy from national political (i.e. electoral) control really begin.[59] François Mitterrand in France was elected as late as 1981 on a platform of 'socialism in one country', a project he maintained until 1983 when pressure on the French franc forced him to embark on a new policy of austerity (*rigeur*). Something similar occurred in Greece, where the new PASOK government in 1981 was elected with a programme called 'Change' (*Allaghi*), promising 'full-scale nationalisation' and 'an end to the exploitation of man by man'. This was Greece's first ever openly socialist government, whose leader was an outspoken critic of the European Economic Community and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.[60] Only by the middle of the 1980s did this brand of 'Euro-socialism' begin its precipitous decline, at the same time as reformist winds started to blow hard in Moscow.

The idea of Europe's 'long 1989' thus helps us differentiate the crisis of postwar capitalism from the process of modernisation, which saw a steady shift from corporatist Keynesianism to deregulated and 'disorganised' capitalism. This process of 'modernisation', undertaken by national elites, occurred after the economic crisis of the 1970s. It was because of the strength of the legacy of 'corporate pluralism' that 'modernisation' through pan-European institutions appealed to political elites. Structural reforms were introduced via the external force of the European Community. This practice became commonplace in the 1990s as countries sought to implement reforms as part of their bid to join the single currency.[61] National projects of 'modernisation' were therefore bound up in multiple ways with the re-launch of European integration in the early to mid-1980s.[62]

Europe's Long 1989 in Practice

The following section applies the general framework traced out above to a set of concrete examples. We find that, to begin with, any temporal claims about the rapid and successive fall of communist

[54] Cited in Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2014), 32.
[55] Cited in Streeck, *Buying Time*, 32.
[56] Göran Therborn, 'The Tide and Turn of the Marxian Dialectic of European Capitalism,' *Journal of Modern European History* 9, no. 1 (2011): 11.
[57] Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 28.
[58] Judt, *Postwar*, 622–26.
[59] For a history of neoliberalism that frames it as a project of insulating markets from democratic control (whilst at the same time embedding them in new rules and orders), see Quinn Slobodian, *The Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).
[60] Beaton, *Greece*, 347; Petras, 'The Contradictions of Greek Socialism,' 8.
[61] For more details in the cases of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, see Kenneth Dyson and Kevin Featherstone, *The Road to Maastricht: Negotiating Economic and Monetary Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
[62] For an excellent account of the crucial Fontainebleau summit of 1984 and its role in the re-launch of European economic integration, see Stephen Wall, *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Wall was a diplomat in the Foreign Office during the time he covers in his book, which builds on his first-hand experience as well as his broader understanding of the United Kingdom's role in the EC/EU.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

regimes in Central and Eastern Europe are out of line with the extended process of change that characterised political developments in the Soviet bloc. Even if we restrict our understanding of 1989 to the introduction of multi-party elections in Central and Eastern Europe, we need to think in terms of the 'long 1989'.

Romania is a useful illustration because, at first glance, regime collapse in Romania was quicker and more dramatic than anywhere else. Ceausescu's regime had been the most brutal, combining a personality cult with heterodox economic policies that imposed enormous hardships on the population. Though Ceausescu's downfall was remarkably quick – taking less than a week in December 1989 – change in Romania extends both backwards and forward in time. An earlier challenge to Ceausescu's rule had come on 15 November 1987, in Brasov, an industrial centre in south-eastern Transylvania.[63] Workers in a large truck factory, angry about wage cuts, food rationing and power cuts, converged onto the town centre. Between 5,000 and 20,000 workers protested in Brasov's main square and ransacked the party building. The uprising was brutally crushed, but the protests of December 1989 clearly had a history extending back into an earlier part of the decade.

At the same time, Ceausescu's departure at the end of 1989 was closer to a coup at the top of the state than it was a democratic revolution. Created ostensibly to oversee – in a non-partisan way – Romania's transition to multi-party democracy, the National Salvation Front (FSN) was registered as a political party in its own right in February 1990, in order to compete in the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled in May that year. As the direct successor to the Romanian Communist Party, the FSN controlled the state and the economy. In the May elections, the FSN's presidential candidate, Ion Iliescu, a former high-ranking Communist Party official until he was sent to the provinces by Ceausescu in 1971, won 85 per cent of the vote. In the parliamentary elections, the FSN took over 66 per cent of the votes, giving them a large majority in parliament. The FSN's political offer, mixing scepticism about the West with open hostility to the market, was popular for a time, particularly outside of Romania's larger cities. By the mid-1990s, however, Romania had broken with its past. In 1994, the Romanian government signed the Partnership for Peace agreement, 'a preliminary step to formal adherence to the [NATO] alliance'.[64] And in 1995, the government formally requested admission to the European Union. In short, though Ceausescu's fall seemed to occur within the space of a single week in December 1989, Romania's experience of political change was far more drawn out.

Elsewhere, the 'long 1989' is best-suited to capturing political, economic and social changes that spanned at least a decade. In Poland, societal mobilisations driven by economic shortages were a regular occurrence, going back as far as 1956. Change was also particularly uneven in Poland: a decade of labour unrest in the 1970s culminated in the dramatic events of 1980 and 1981 that led to the imposition of martial law. Then, at the end of the decade, came a swift and surprising collapse of the communist establishment. As Kotkin remarks, writing about Poland, 'throughout most of 1989, neither the establishment nor the opposition had a clue that the end was nigh'.[65] The 'long 1989' is also useful for thinking about the demise of the Soviet Union. Though the Soviet Union faced a number of long-term structural difficulties, Mikhail Gorbachev's coming to power in March 1985 marked a turning point. His initially cautious Andropovian reforms were soon replaced by something much bolder: *perestroika* and *glasnost*. Perestroika, in particular, led to a collapse in the Soviet Union's centralised economy without ushering in anything that resembled a functioning market economy. As Alexievich writes, 'the more they shouted and wrote "Freedom! Freedom!" the faster not only the cheese and salami but also the salt and sugar disappeared from the shelves. The shops stood empty. … You could only buy things with ration cards, as though we were at war'.[66] Economic hardships turned opinion against Gorbachev, boosting support for his rival Yeltsin, just as the latter mobilised the republics of

[63] Kotkin, *Uncivil Society*, 88–89. Judt, chapters 18 and 19. Mazower, chapter 11.
[64] K. Hitchens, *A Concise History of Romania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 300.
[65] Kotkin, *Uncivil Society*, 102.
[66] Alexievich, *Second-Hand Time*, 47.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Soviet Union against the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Though Gorbachev resigned on Christmas Day of 1991, and the Soviet flag was lowered at the end of year to be replaced with the tricolour of the Russian Federation, this did not bring about any sort of final political and social settlement in Russia. In 1991, during the August coup, Yeltsin had defended the Russian parliament – the Duma, also known as the White House – by famously standing upon a tank to deliver a speech. In October 1993, in the midst of a constitutional crisis and now president, Yeltsin ordered troops to shell the same building, using force to impose upon recalcitrant parliamentarians his radical plans of privatisation and marketisation.[67] Some sort of closure of this long period of internal political and social turmoil in Russia came only with Yeltsin's retreat from frontline politics in the late 1990s and the handover of power to a then unknown figure, Vladimir Putin.[68]

It is central to the notion of Europe's 'long 1989' that these dramatic trajectories of political collapse in the East are also bound up with the implosion of an entire political-economic model in the West. We see this illustrated in a paradigmatic fashion in the case of Italy and in a more nuanced way in Austria. Some have compared the political crisis of the early 1990s in Italy with regime collapse in Central and Eastern Europe.[69] By the time of the 1994 Italian election, all the old elite of the 'First Republic' had gone – some to prison, others, such as the socialist leader and former prime minister, Bettino Craxi, to their sumptuous villas abroad where they managed to escape arrest. However, as with Central and Eastern European states in 1989, the crisis of Italy's First Republic did not start on 17 February 1992, when a mid-ranking Socialist Party functionary, Mario Chiesa, was arrested in Milan for taking bribes.

A more plausible beginning of this era of political and economic change in Italy was the referendum on the reform of the Italian wage indexation system, the *scala mobile*, in June 1985. The *scala mobile*, dating from after the Second World War and significantly expanded in 1975 in the wake of protracted industrial strife, provided the most extensive protection of workers' wages in all of Western Europe. The 1975 changes introduced an automatic wage increase in line with a union-controlled price index, to the tune of 100 per cent, and an agreement to guarantee 80 per cent of wages for workers that were laid off.[70] The effort to reform the *scala mobile* by uncoupling wage-setting from inflation was a flagship policy for the Socialist-led Craxi government in its drive to revive the Italian economy in the early 1980s. Moreover, it signalled a major departure from Italy's post-war political and economic model. After a heated campaign, Craxi won the referendum that had been demanded by the Communist Party. The result was 54.3 per cent against repealing the reform of the *scala mobile* and 46.7 per cent in favour, on a turnout of 78 per cent. This outcome loosened the grip of society and social actors on the Italian state and the political parties. It facilitated economic 'modernisation' in Italy and paved the way to a final abolition of the *scala mobile* in 1993. The expanded *scala mobile* of 1975 had been a central part of the settlement aimed at stabilising Italian society after the violence and labour unrest of the 'hot Autumn' of 1969 and the early 1970s. The wage indexation system thus served as a measure of the wider balance of social forces in Italian society and the role of parties and unions in maintaining this balance. The referendum of 1985 set in train a steady uncoupling of the parties from their social base, culminating in the dramatic collapse of the party system in 1992–4.

[67] For a detailed and balanced account, see Roy Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia: A Journey Through the Yeltsin Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), chapter 3, 'Privatization, Government Crisis and Elections.'

[68] On the latter years of Yeltsin's presidency, see Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia*, part 3.

[69] Some of this account of the crisis of Italy's First Republic is based on interviews conducted in Catanzaro, Calabria, in Dec. 2022. See also chapters 7 and 8 from Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents, 1980–2001* (London: Penguin, 2001) and Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (London: Penguin, 1990). On the 1985 referendum, see Peter Lange, 'The End of an Era: The Wage Index Referendum of 1985,' *Italian Politics* 1 (1986): 29–46. See also Vitorio Bufacchi and Simon Burgess, *Italy Since 1989: Events and Interpretations*, revised edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998) and Mark Gilbert, *The Italian Revolution: The End of Politics, Italian Style?* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995).

[70] Richard Locke, 'Eppure Si Tocca: The Abolition of the "Scala Mobile",' *Italian Politics* 9 (1995): 185–95, 186.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Austria, after its postwar resurrection as an 'island of the blessed' (*isola felice*), to use Pope Paul VI's phrase of 1971, experienced a protracted crisis of its political, economic and social model from the mid-1980s onwards, affecting almost all dimensions of life in the country.[71] Austria's postwar Second Republic was built on the successful integration of Catholicism with mass politics and state-directed economic planning. The economy was based on a form of social partnership rooted in Catholic doctrine. The country's two main parties, the Socialist Party (SPÖ) and the centre-right People's Party (ÖVP), divided up political appointments, all the way from the national level down to the municipalities. These two parties jointly ran the economy, the SPÖ coordinating with the trade unions and the ÖVP with agriculture, industry and the employer associations. There was an international dimension to this 'Austrian way'. Achieved against the odds by the mid-1950s, Austrian neutrality formed the basis for extensive diplomatic activism. Vienna became a crucial pillar of the liberal international order (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, arrived in 1965 and the United Nations in 1979) and a hub for Cold War spies, both real and fictional.

Alive and well in the early 1980s, this model had been comprehensively dismantled by the time Austria joined the European Union in 1995. Long-time socialist chancellor Bruno Kreisky, who maintained Austria's distinctive political-economic model through his piecemeal reforms, stepped down in 1983 as corruption and other scandals begin to corrode the Austrian two-party system. In 1986, when former UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim stood as candidate for the Austrian presidency, his war record was found to involve a very close association with the German war effort. The 'Waldheim affair' was part of a wider crisis of the 'Austrian way', extending from the political to the economic and social realms. Waldheim's clear victory was one of the first breaches of the anti-fascist consensus that had been so strong in Europe since the end of the Second World War. It served as the backdrop for the controversial play by Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz* (Hero's Square), performed in November 1988. Bernhard was not only intent on exploring what he saw as Austria's perennial antisemitism. He also attacked the 'Austrian way' as a whole, which he dismissed as 'a nation of 6.5 million idiots living in a country that is rotting away, falling apart, run by the political parties in an unholy alliance with the Catholic Church'.[72]

Talks between Austria and the European Community began in 1987. Privatisations followed along with an austerity budget in 1988. The decision to join the EU catalysed these changes, with further privatisations and profound reforms of the country's social security system introduced under the banner of 'preparing Austria for Europe'. The far right Freedom Party (FPÖ) and its leader, Jörg Haider, became a lightning rod for opposition to EU accession. In the elections of October 1990, the FPÖ increased its vote share to 17 per cent (up from 10 per cent in 1986 and just under 5 per cent in 1983). As well as mobilising an older bourgeois resentment against the Second Republic rooted in a deep cultural pan-Germanism, the FPÖ emerged over the course of the 'long 1989' as the voice for disaffection with the winding down of the postwar model amongst the Austrian working class. The SPÖ took 57 per cent of the working class vote in 1986, the FPÖ just 10 per cent; by 1995, the share was 42 per cent and 34 per cent respectively.

As regards the unravelling of collective identities, the transformation in national political and economic systems during the 'long 1989' had an effect rather like the magician who pulls away the white cloth to reveal an empty space where a rabbit once sat. The collapse of the political and economic national orders revealed in dramatic fashion the fragmentation of Europe's religious and class-based identities, as well as significant changes in sexuality and gender roles. These changes had been occurring over a longer period, obscured by the continued presence of the political parties, the unions and the Church. Under the pressures of secularisation and rising incomes, change had occurred incrementally within the interstices of an existing institutional order, manifested in inter-generational tensions

[71] On the 'modernisation' of the Austrian model, see Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Anton Pelinka, *Austria: Out of the Shadow of the Past* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[72] Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz*, 1988. Cited in Brigitte Salino, '"Place des Héros," la déchirante mise en scène de l'antisémitisme,' *Le Monde*, 2 Sept. 2024.

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and clashes, particularly in the Sixties. In Austria, the Catholic and socialist sub-cultures had started to erode some time before the Red-Black political edifice came unraveled in the 1990s, in the same way that communist and socialist political cultures in the East were eroded before the onset of the 'long 1989'. Nevertheless, precisely because the institutions of the old order persisted, these collective identities retained a strong hold over individuals. When news spread of the death of the Italian Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer on 11 June 1984, there was a dramatic outpouring of grief. In France, Mitterrand's election in 1981 was met with heartfelt joy by those who filled the Place de la Bastille, the Champs Elysée and many other sites of celebration across France. The tears and excitement reflected a genuine attachment to socialist ideals, perhaps the last time that a presidential election result in France had been met with so much hope and expectation.

The erosion of collective religious identities, and their close connection to evolutions in sexual identities and practices, occurred unevenly across Europe, reflecting the slow pace of change in matters relating to both faith and sex. In Poland and in Lithuania, the 'long 1989' was an era of religious revival as the Catholic Church aligned itself with the nationalist cause; elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, political change confirmed the strongly secular orientation of these societies, whilst also ushering in a period of relative openness in matters of sexuality. Western European experiences were equally uneven. Ireland stands out as a case of dramatic change. In his memoires, *We Don't Know Ourselves*, the Irish journalist Fintan O'Toole recounts a trip he made from Maynooth to Dublin in 1985.[73] O'Toole hitched a ride in a Lancia sports car, driven by 'a stocky, moon-faced, bald man in a black clerical garb with a gold pectoral cross hanging from his neck'. This was Eamonn Casey, a prominent and well-regarded Irish bishop. O'Toole recounts how the bishop drove like a maniac, at over 120 miles per hour on the Dublin road, joking that should there be a crash, he could easily administer the last rites to his unfortunate victims.

In the years after this incident, the authority of the Church unravelled fast. In May 1992, the story broke that Casey had fathered a child with a divorced American woman and had used Church funds to maintain the child. A year later, the country's most well-known and popular priest, Michael Cleary, was found to have had a family of his own with his housekeeper. Even more damaging were the many accounts of sexual abuse of children by priests. In her 1999 book on the politics of sexual morality in Ireland, Chrystel Hug writes that

> Irish society has changed more over the last two decades [the 1980s and 1990s] than in the previous century, and the cathartic process reached all-pervasive proportions in the first half of the 1990s, notably at a time when the Catholic Church became embroiled in a number of controversial issues which markedly eroded its authority.[74]

In the 1960s, every year around 1,400 people took up religious vocations in Ireland. In 2009, nine priests were ordained; 160 died. In the same year, two nuns took their vows and 228 died.[75]

In some respects, the Irish experience was late in comparison to other Western European countries. In the United Kingdom, censorship was phased out in the 1960s, abortion and homosexuality legalised in 1967 and more liberal divorce laws introduced in 1969. However, attitudinal and legal changes are rarely in perfect harmony with one another. In Marie Darrieussecq's novel *Fabriquer une femme*, she recounts a school trip by French adolescents to Spain in the early 1980s. As the coach makes its

[73] Fintan O'Toole, *We Don't Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland since 1958* (London: Head of Zeus, 2021), chapter 30.

[74] Chrystel Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 1. Cited also in Dagmar Herzog, 'Sexuality in the Postwar West,' *The Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 1 (2006): 144–77, 154. Hug describes a number of other important contributors to a sea change in sexual morality in Ireland in the 1990s, including the 1992 case of X, a 14-year-old girl who had been abused and raped by a family acquaintance and became suicidal after being prevented from travelling to England for an abortion. In Hug's view, the case of X was decisive in shifting public opinion but this interacted with the impact of the scandals on the Church's authority. See Herzog, 'Sexuality in the Postwar West,' 157.

[75] Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 533–37.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press

way through the long boulevards of Madrid, the young visitors are captivated by graffiti so explicit that the teachers rush to close the curtains in the coach, the implication being that France was far more prudish than Spain at this time.[76] By contrast, survey data suggests that in the United Kingdom, it was only in the 2000s that Britons became markedly more open to, and tolerant of, divorce, homosexuality, abortion and casual sex.[77]

Legacies of Europe's 'Long 1989'

How should we evaluate the legacy of the 'long 1989'? We might start by considering when – if at all – this period ends. The onset of near permanent crisis that has come to shape Europe since the economic and financial crash of 2008 perhaps marks the beginning of the end of the 'long 1989' – an end to economic deregulation and the return of political mobilisation and polarisation. And yet, the stamp of the 'long 1989' is clearly still with us: from the continued scars of economic 'modernisation' across so many abandoned parts of Europe's national economies to the contemporary relevance of German reunification and the Soviet Union's dismemberment.[78]

If the 'long 1989' was dominated by implosion of the old order, then it came with a tangible sense of liberation. This generated a mood of optimism and possibility – from the early experiences of the first 'Erasmus generation' (the scheme launched in 1987) to the multiple scenes of family reunification along the divide of the Iron Curtain. At the time, only a small minority lamented the haste with which states such as East Germany were disassembled. Liberation was not only about political parties and elections. It was also a liberation from the past. For the year 1995, in *My Century*, Grass imagines the *récit* of a radio presenter who finds himself in Berlin in July, on the sun-baked Kurfürstendamm.[79] The radio host describes the Love Parade of that year – 300,000 revellers, dancing to electronic music, some aboard little buses that moved slowly through the crowd. Grass's narrator describes the prevailing sentiment: 'We want to have fun. Fun, fun and only fun'. In contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, the Love Parade of 1995 was without Maoists or skinheads or indeed ideology of any kind. It was nothing like the peace marches of 1989 either, with their candles, priests and 'Goody Two-Shoes' whiff of ponderous moral superiority, as Grass's narrator puts it. If there was any political content to an event such as the Love Parade, it was the right to free oneself completely from politics, from History with a capital 'H'. All of the macro-social subjects of Europe's twentieth century – *Homo sovieticus*, the worker, the bourgeois, the Christian – were gone, opening the door to a seemingly unlimited set of possibilities.

Writing of the same period in her autobiographical *The Years* (*Les Années*), the French novelist Annie Ernaux is cautious about the changes wrought by the 'long 1989'.[80] Initially envious of the East's political revolutions, Ernaux loses her patience. Of the citizens of the defunct East German regime, she writes that '[w]e liked them more when they were queuing up for salami and books, deprived of everything. … [T]his allowed us to savour what it meant to belong to the "free world"'. Why was Ernaux so disappointed to see the citizens of the former Soviet bloc flock to the fruit stores and to Beate Uhse's sex shops?[81] It was not because of the tawdriness of their desires but because in

[76] Marie Darrieussecq, *Fabriquer Une Femme* (Paris: P.O.L, 2024).

[77] UK in the World Values Survey, 'UK now amongst most socially liberal of countries,' https://www.uk-values.org/news-comment/uk-now-among-most-socially-liberal-of-countries-1018742/pub01-116, 2024 (last visited 18 Mar. 2024). This same survey suggests that whilst greater permissiveness was an inescapable feature of the 1990s, significant changes have occurred since then as well, particularly in the 2010s.

[78] On the connection between contemporary German politics and reunification, see Guy Chazan, 'The Political Scars of Reunification,' *Financial Times*, 7/8 Sept. 2024.

[79] Grass, *My Century*, 260.

[80] Annie Ernaux, *Les Annees* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

[81] In her history of German reunification, Mary Elise Sarotte writes that after the Berlin Wall came down, 'shops overflowed and West Germany's normally strict closing hours were impossible to maintain. Candy and fruit proved to be especially popular – as did erotica, particularly that sold by sex shop entrepreneur Beate Uhse.' Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, 69.

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doing so they revealed to her the real content and limits *of her own* freedom. The frenetic consumerism of those who had lived behind the Iron Curtain exposed the materialism of her own life. The French documentarist Ovidie describes those who came of age in this time as the 'generation without a name', sitting awkwardly between the baby boomers and those later generations shaped by economic crises and culture wars.[82]

Integration into Western European institutions offered a great deal both to Central and Eastern European citizens and those in Western Europe. The 'long 1989' was followed by a time when mobility across Europe would be almost taken for granted, as would the right to vote as one wished. The hedonism on the Kurfürstendamm was more than just frenetic disillusionment. Out of the festivals and raves of the 1990s grew a counter-cultural movement where music provided some escape from the ascendant materialism of the 1990s.

The 'long 1989' also brought about a transformation in people's understanding and experience of democracy. Gone was an understanding of freedom as a form of *collective* emancipation, one asserted over nature and over the constraints imposed by society upon itself. In the Soviet Union, the failure of this attempt at collective emancipation gave to the last years of the Soviet Union its tragic dimension – the sense of waste and dashed hopes which lived on in post-communist Russia. In Western and Central and Eastern Europe, it was easier to embrace a private existence. Many did so and there was much to be enjoyed. But this individualised form of freedom inaugurated an era of emptiness, 'a world with objects without subjects', as Ernaux put it. Erpenbeck has articulated a similar sense of doubt around the precise status of the freedom that came in this time, seen from her vantage point as an East German woman of twenty-two when the wall came down. In her words:

> I couldn't make much of this word *freedom*, which floated freely in all sorts of sentences. *Freedom* to travel? (But will we be able to afford it?) Or *freedom* of opinion? (But what if no one cares about my opinion?) *Freedom* to shop? (But what happens when we're finished shopping?) *Freedom* wasn't given freely, it came at a price, and that price was my entire life up to that point.[52]

'What happens when we're finished shopping?' Erpenbeck's question encapsulates the problem of framing democracy as a defence and recognition of individual rights. Doing so puts the broader questions about collective existence out of reach of democratic systems. As Wirsching puts it, playing on the double meaning of *preis* in German, freedom in Europe's 'long 1989' was both a *prize* and something that came at a *price*.

The dismantling of the postwar political structures did not mean the end of political parties nor of mass politics, but it restructured the relationship between voters and politicians. Instead of a vertical division between rival political camps, such as the Austria of the Blacks (Catholics) and the Reds (Socialists), a divide opened up between society at large and the political elite. This horizontal division between the public and the political class was the political legacy of the 'long 1989'. For the following decade, it structured European politics in a relatively stable way. In post-communist societies, it fitted the requirements of European Union accession, where the national political class was tasked with recasting national societies along the lines required by the EU's legislative framework (the *acquis communautaire*) with little scope for internal deliberation or debate. Across the former societies of the Soviet bloc, governments came and went but the policies – aimed at delivering the promise of EU membership in 2004 – stayed the same. Something similar occurred in Western Europe, most notably for those national economies wishing to adopt the Euro in 1999. The Maastricht convergence criteria became the cornerstone of a set of political and economic goals that governments were committed to even in the face of mass protests, as occurred in France in 1995.

[82] A generation without a name is the phrase used by Ovidie for an interview for *Le Monde* Campus, 'J'avais 20 ans,' https://www.lemonde.fr/campus/article/2022/01/27/ovidie-realisatrice-le-viol-m-a-fait-prendre-conscience-des-dangers-auxquels-une-fille-etait-confrontee_6111142_4401467.html (last visited 18 Mar. 2024).

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One problem with restructuring of democracy around the defence of individual rights is that individual agency depends upon collective – not individual – action. As a result, the 1990s were increasingly characterised by a feeling of distance from decision-making and a sense of powerlessness on the part of voters. This produced a strong anti-establishment sentiment that laid the basis for a later wave of populist mobilisation. Rather than the collapse of the postwar consensus in the 1960s and 1970s, the roots of Pim Fortuyn and Silvio Berlusconi lie in this transformation of freedom during Europe's 'long 1989'.

The disappearance of the economic institutions of the postwar order also left a very uneven economic legacy. Many of Europe's former industrial heartlands have not been revived. Renault's famous Billancourt factory on the île Séguin west of Paris is a telling symbol. Covering 100 hectares and employing 40,000 workers at its peak, the factory closed in 1992. Empty for years, it was razed to the ground in 2005. Today, one part of the site is a cultural centre whilst the rest has been the object of multiple efforts at urban renewal. From the towns on England's Lincolnshire coastline to the abandoned factories that litter the territory of the former Soviet Union, it often feels as if time has stood still. Elsewhere in Europe, change has been more pronounced: from the explosion of financial services in the Baltic states to the integration of post-communist industrial apparatuses into a German-centred manufacturing hub that consolidated Germany's place as one of the world's leading exporters over the last two decades.

Whilst the weakening of collective identities has opened up new spaces for individual self-realisation, individualism and social fragmentation have left European societies divided along ethnic, generational and socio-economic lines. The great promise of liberation that came with the extension of individual liberty to the terrain of sexuality has remained only partially met, much as the sexual revolution of the Sixties did little for women's sexual pleasure. As one Italian female activist put it, recalling the explosion in non-monogamy in the '60s and '70s, 'there was lots of promiscuity … we were *all* unhappy'.[83] The consequences of Europe's 'long 1989' are equally mixed. Legislation on same sex marriages was a significant step, even if attitudes towards homosexuality still vary enormously across Europe. After the decline in the authority of the Church, capitalism quickly filled the void, controlling women's bodies and their sexual behaviour. In Central and Eastern Europe, the acquisition of political rights coincided with the spread of the market into people's intimate lives. One East German journalist commented in 1995: 'Eroticism feels with its fingertips; elbows destroy that. The pressure to achieve makes human beings sick and has a negative impact on sexuality'.[55] In her twentieth-century history of sexuality in Europe, Herzog concurs. She notes that, over the course of the 1990s, 'eastern Germans (gay and straight alike) articulated the conviction that sex in the East had been more genuine and more loving, more sensual and more gratifying, less grounded in self-involvement than West German sex'.[56] A sense of unfulfilled expectations, of an unrealised freedom, also contributed to the 'Me Too' movement of the 2010s as well as to the wider malaise surrounding matters of sexual behaviour and identity that structures our present.[84] More generally, the legacy of the 'long 1989' has been an acute sense of loss, not least for those materially affected by the transformations of the time and those for whom it has produced a continued and as yet unfulfilled search for meaning in new forms of political and social mobilisation.

[83] Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 163.

[84] For a powerful articulation of this malaise, see Ovidie, *La chair est triste hélas* (Paris: Julliard, 2023).

Cite this article: Bickerton C (2025). Europe's Long 1989. *Contemporary European History* **34**, 767–784. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000560 Published online by Cambridge University Press