

35th Anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution and the Fall of the Berlin Wall

Project Description

Thirty-five years ago, courageous people brought down the Berlin Wall and soon thereafter the SED dictatorship in East Germany. The fall of the Wall led to the end of the decades-long division of Germany and paved the way for the peaceful overthrow of communist one-party rule in the GDR. People all over the world were moved by the bravery of East Germans in standing up to the SED dictatorship as well as by the boundless joy displayed on both sides after the opening of the Wall. The city of Berlin celebrates the anniversary of that day every five years. For Berliners, it is a day of joy, reflection and coming together.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was preceded by a series of widespread protests in the GDR. In the summer and autumn of 1989, more and more East German citizens demanded democratic reforms and basic human rights, including the freedom to travel, freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. They were inspired by developments in Eastern Europe, including the Solidarność movement in Poland and the changes underway in Hungary, without which the protests in the GDR in 1989/90 would not have occurred.

At demonstrations held in Leipzig, Berlin and other GDR cities and towns, citizens took to the streets with their demands, hopes and desires. Slogans such as “Democracy – now or never”, “A free press for a free people” and “Freedom is indivisible” could be seen written on signs and banners. Some of these themes are relevant again today. Indeed, it’s not enough to simply achieve freedom, democracy and basic rights; we must also defend these values time and again. This is all the more urgent today as democratic societies around the world come under increasing pressure. Hence the motto of our anniversary celebrations: **Hold Freedom up High!**

Thousands of voices for freedom and democracy

But what do the demands expressed in 1989/90 mean for our contemporary society? What does freedom mean to each individual? What is the current condition of our democracy? Are there any walls that still need tearing down? What ideas are worth taking to the street to defend? What do we want to fight for? Starting in June, a number of partner organisations called on people to get involved and reflect on these questions at workshops, events and discussions in Berlin and elsewhere.

These people painted, sprayed and glued their thoughts and ideas onto signs and posters, thus capturing thousands of voices in support of freedom and democracy. Tens of thousands of people got involved, including children, seniors, football fans and festival guests, at memorials, cultural institutions, schools and sports clubs. Employees at public and private companies also contributed, as did national and international stars from politics, contemporary history, sport, art and culture. Workshops were held at the BVG, GASAG, the police academy, the Stiftung Berliner Mauer, at the Zionskirche and Gethsemanekirche, at Vitsche e.V. and at Hertha BSC. Among the well-known contributors are Margot Friedländer, Düzen Tekkal, Vitali Klitschko, Ben Becker and many others.

35 MAUERFALL JAHRE

The book commemorating the 35th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall

Freedom is also the theme of the book created to mark this year's anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution. This entertaining and informative publication brings together a variety of voices from politics, culture and society who join historical eyewitnesses to reflect on the history of the era from today's perspective, 35 years later, without shying away from potentially controversial debate.

Two GDR civil rights activists who worked together in the Friedenskreis (Peace Circle) in the 1980s – but who today have very different views on the war in Ukraine – meet for a conversation. We hear from two legendary GDR-born footballers, Axel Kruse and Christian Beeck, who talk about knowing when to leave and when to stay. What are the conditions for protest today? What were they in the repressive GDR and in democratic West Germany? This is the focus of a discussion between artist Gabriele Stötzer and activist Luisa Neubauer. The book also looks at Ukraine and Belarus, with Ukrainian writer Yuri Andrukhovych and Belarusian activist Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya tracing the different paths taken in those countries in 1989/1991. Journalist Hami Nguyen and filmmaker Neco Çelik also express their ambivalent relationship to 1989 from a post-migrant perspective.

The book discusses the important role of the media when it comes to facts and information – back then, when there was no freedom of the press, and today, an era in which disinformation is spread on purpose. The book also explores the importance of humour in the relationship between power and powerlessness. And it shows the extent to which memory works differently by asking a number of different voices to explain the fall of the Berlin Wall: an historical eyewitness, a tourist guide, an AI app and a translation into easy-to-read *Leichte Sprache*.

As a work containing a thousand voices, however, the key function of the Book of Freedom is to showcase the posters and signs created in the lead-up to this year's 35th anniversary. The book turns the people who made these posters into co-authors, thus creating a lasting testimony to their creative commitment and engagement with the values of 1989/90.

The book will be handed out free of charge on 8/9 November at the festival site.

Open-air installation: Discuss, reflect and celebrate along the path of the former Berlin Wall on 8/9 November 2024

Slogans and messages painted on sheets, signs and cardboard were a familiar sight during the demonstrations held in 1989/90. On 8 & 9 November, replicas of these historical banners will be on display alongside thousands of brand-new signs created at workshops this year. This unique open-air installation will run along the path of the former Berlin Wall from Invalidenstraße to Checkpoint Charlie and on to Axel-Springer-Straße. This approach allows the demands expressed 35 years ago to enter into a dialogue with the hopes and wishes of people today.

The signs and posters created by the many people who took part in workshops examining the Peaceful Revolution of 1989/90 will now, 35 years later, make it possible to symbolically overcome the dividing line that dictatorship and lack of freedom once drove through Berlin. Visitors are invited to explore historical sites, to honour the achievements of activists in the 1989/90 era, and also to

35 MAUERFALL JAHRE

commemorate the victims of the Wall and the death strip. The path of the installation will run along a 4-km section of the former Wall at the centre of Berlin and invite everyone to experience, reflect and celebrate.

The public can access the open-air installation free of charge around the clock on 8 & 9 November. In addition, on 9 November, an extensive event programme will spotlight the installation as part of the Fest für Freiheit (Festival for Freedom) that evening. On 10 November, several signs will also be on display at the Campus for Democracy located at the former Stasi headquarters on Normannenstraße.

Programme of accompanying events

The open-air installation of signs will be complemented by an extensive programme of events on 9 November examining the fall of the Wall and current freedom discourses from diverse perspectives. Talks, concerts, performances, readings and hands-on activities will create moments of surprise, impromptu gatherings and opportunities to stop, reflect and exchange thoughts with others.

Visitors are encouraged to take a stroll along the installation, stopping whenever they feel the need, entering into conversations and joining in. Video cubes, screenings and projections of historical images will round off the programme. The open-air installation combined with the individual exhibition sections will create an extraordinary walking and learning experience.

The path to freedom: the exhibition

The historical demands made by protesters during the Peaceful Revolution will be showcased in a special exhibition created in cooperation with numerous experts from memorial sites, foundations and academia. At seven 'stations' along the path of the former Berlin Wall, the exhibition will spotlight the path to freedom. Who were the key actors in the Peaceful Revolution? What role did the democracy movements in Eastern Europe play in the protests in the GDR? What was the significance of flight and emigration? How did the protests emerge and what public forums were available to citizens of a country with no freedom of the press? How did the events of 9 November 1989 play out and how did German unification actually come about? Visitors will be invited to read explanatory texts and eyewitness stories and look at poignant photos that allow them to deepen their knowledge of historical events and share this knowledge with others.

On the morning of 7 November 2024, an exhibition called "China isn't far! 35th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall – 35th anniversary of Tian'anmen" will be officially opened in front of the Abgeordnetenhaus (Berlin's state parliament). Created by the Axel Springer Freedom Foundation, the exhibition examines the violent suppression of the student protest movement for democracy on 4 June 1989 in Beijing. It also looks at the reactions of civil rights activists in the GDR to that event and sends a message of solidarity to the contemporary democracy movement in China. The exhibition will also portray worldwide dissidents from today who are fighting for freedom and democracy from within their authoritarian-ruled homelands or from a position of exile abroad.

35 MAUERFALL JAHRE

Festival for Freedom marking the 35th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall: Berlin is the stage – Berliners are the band

The night of 9 November 2024 will be a lavish Fest der Freiheit – a festival of freedom. Berlin will celebrate the unforgettable moments of joy triggered by the fall of the Wall 35 years ago. And it will do so in a loud and powerful way, inviting Berliners to make music together in the joyful spirit of those who came together spontaneously and peacefully in 1989 and brought down the Wall. Music connects people across borders: whether it's a party, a protest or a revolution – music has the power to release more positive energy than anything else. Music is something people make together and listen to together. This is why our two-day festivities celebrating the 35th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall will culminate in a rousing concert for freedom.

Eight iconic rock anthems, played by hundreds of musicians, accompanied by tens of thousands of Berliners on the street. The event will take audiences on a melodic journey through time as part of the largest participatory concert Berlin has ever seen! *Together* is the key message the city wants to send out on this occasion. *Together*, we Berliners made Berlin the city of freedom. *Together*, we are now celebrating this freedom. And *together*, we will make sure this freedom remains inviolable.

The soundtrack of freedom

Roughly 700 musicians have been preparing for this concert for weeks. They are Berliners but also people from all over Germany and Europe. On 9 November, they will come together on a 4-km strip of the former Wall – spread out over five locations along the open-air installation – and play the soundtrack of freedom completely in sync: eight modern rock classics that stand for freedom and joie de vivre, all celebrating the collective power that can be harnessed to achieve great things.

Just like in 1989, it will be the real people on the street who make 9 November 2024 a unique day in history. All Berliners are invited to become part of Berlin's biggest rock band ever – the Band for Freedom. Everyone can sing along and rock out. The Concert for Freedom will be broadcast live on huge LED screens via video stream and subtitled with the respective song lyrics. Thousands of loudspeakers, video installations and an elaborate lighting design will make the concert a unique experience that is likely to cause a few goose bumps.

For just under one hour, the entire 4-km route of the open-air installation will be transformed into one big stage – with Berliners and guests as the band!

Cinematic opening, musical finale

The concert will get underway at 8 pm with a short cinematic look back at historical events. A video collage with sound highlights will spotlight milestones between when the Wall went up in 1961 and the opening of the border at Bornholmer Straße on the evening of 9 November 1989. After that, the band will play its first song, Patti Smith's "People Have the Power", perhaps the most positive and encouraging protest song in pop-music history. All visitors will be invited to hold up their mobile-phone flashlights to create an image that symbolises the lights of freedom. At a time when democratic values are under threat worldwide, Berlin and its diverse society will stand together.

35 MAUERFALL JAHRE

The band will then play other songs, including “z.B. Susann” by the band City, “Never Let Me Down Again” by Depeche Mode, “S.O.S.” by the band Silly, “Heroes” by David Bowie, “Rockin’ In The Free World” by Neil Young and “Tage wie diese” by the band Die Toten Hosen.

The Concert for Freedom will end with a big fireworks display during the final song, the rock ballad “Freiheit” by Marius Müller-Westernhagen. People with diverging thoughts, experiences and perspectives will come together to send out a message to whole world: “Hold Freedom up High!”

City-wide programme of events marking the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Peaceful Revolution

On and around 9 November 2024 and other key dates associated with the Peaceful Revolution, there will a number of additional events taking place throughout Berlin, both on the street and at select memorials and places of remembrance. These events are being organised by clubs, churches, initiatives, companies and cultural institutions.

In addition to the key commemoration ceremony on 9 November 2024, the Stiftung Berliner Mauer is organising a special programme under the motto “Revolution erinnern – Demokratie gestalten” (Remembering revolution – Designing democracy) featuring a mobile memory lab, a youth gathering and evening events, including discussions, concerts and films. The focus will be on diverse experiences and perspectives on 1989/90 and the consequences of that era in eastern and western Germany as well as in all of Europe. One key emphasis here will be on the Polish Solidarność movement.

