

# Recovering the Promise of 1989

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# 5 BIG IDEAS





# WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE LEGACY OF 1989



Democracy is constant struggle, democracy must be conquered, democracy must be defended and democracy must be built day by day. This is the key lesson of 1989 for us.

The year 1989 represents a distinctive symbol of the desire for freedom. In various parts of the world, from Tiananmen Square in Beijing, through East-Central Europe, to Chile or Nicaragua, people actively stood up for the values of freedom and human rights. The subsequent global rise of liberal democracy was overwhelming and even led to thoughts about the end of history.

According to John Keane, the Velvet Revolution of 1989 transformed the very meaning of the term "revolution." The events of 1989 showed a non-violent refusal of arbitrary power and were crucial for cultivating public space. Šimon Pánek highlighted that despite the current challenges, Central Europe is an example of a successful transformation and serves as a model for others. Thanks to this, Europe sees the best time in its history and it has never enjoyed such freedom and democracy as it does today, added Iveta Radičová. Tawakkol Karman agreed that revolutions in 1989 represent important symbol and inspiration even for Arab countries and affirmed that "these revolutions created fears in the dictators around the world." The gradual collapse of the Soviet Union represented a crucial step towards liberty and democracy. The importance of the defeat of the Soviet forces in

Afghanistan in 1989 for the success of democratic revolutions in East-Central Europe was mentioned by Gilles Kepel. Maia Sandu clearly declared that “to me and my fellow countrymen the dissolution of Soviet Union was not the geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. It was exactly the opposite, the beginning of brighter, better, free future for our country.”

Since then, the spirit of liberty and trust in democratic values has faced many difficult tests and we are today at perhaps one of liberal democracy’s most challenging moments. According to Ralf Fücks, modern democracies have moved away from providing public goods that improve quality of life: social security, education, healthcare and infrastructure. Liberal openness towards globalization, immigration, diversity and innovation needs to be reconciled with conservative demands for security, togetherness and stability. Failure of liberal democratic institutions to provide sufficient results for citizens, said Jan Zielonka, is a key motive for the rise of support for populist movements. Moreover, Amichai Magen argued that issues related to technology, geopolitics, migration and climate change were roots for social anxiety evident in liberal democracies. In this state of anxiety, society has opted for order over freedom. Karolina Wigura emphasized that politics is fundamentally linked with emotions. She argued that populists have been skilful at harnessing fear to advance their position. According to Alina Afleailor, the promises of 1989 were not completely fulfilled in Europe, and Antonio Argenziano regrets the existing “cultural wall that divides Western and Eastern Europe.” In the current crisis of democracy “China, Russia, Iran and others see themselves an alternative to liberal democracy,” mentioned Ralf Fücks. Yevgeniy Zhovtis defines many today’s authoritarian regimes as a hybrid of authoritarianism and democracy, i.e. with seemingly democratic regime, but authoritarian at its core.

Despite these challenges, we are committed to renew democracy. The phenomenon of populism which is, according to Gadi Taub, “the most important social movement nowadays” must be taken seriously and the concerns of the people must be addressed. “We need to answer the fear of loss with empathy” advised Karolina Wigura and renew thus the spirit of trust in the principles of open society and democratic values. Grigor Yeritsyan stressed

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the necessity of engaging the younger generation and to bring the people in public discussion. Using modern technology and promoting democratic values through education are the tools to achieve this goal. Richard Youngs urged promoters of democracy to be open to different forms of democracy because it has evolved over time and will continue to evolve in the future. Democracy’s abilities to act in a rapidly changing international, economic, and political environment must be improved.

There are important signs of hope in the world today. From democratic transitions in a wide variety of countries, including Ukraine and Tunisia, to the rise of civic protest movements in Venezuela, Russia, Nigeria, Turkey, and, the most dramatic one, in Hong Kong. Maia Sandu shared the complicated journey of Moldova to democracy. She stated that “despite the historical legacy of 1989, Europe is not immune to democratic backslidings. Yet, I am proud to say that just like in 1989, Eastern Europe is at the forefront of the battle for democracy.” She concluded with an encouragement: “Democracy is constant struggle, democracy must be conquered, democracy must be defended and democracy must be built day by day. This is the key lesson of 1989 for us.”





# THE WORLD ORDER IS CHANGING AND THE DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES MUST COPE WITH IT



In Africa, we have this problem: China knows what it wants from Africa; Africa doesn't know what it wants from China.

Tectonic shifts are taking place in the international order. America has been a guarantor of a global order for much of the 20th century and into the new millennium. Today, US dominance seems diminished and its interests appear to be turning inwards. Moreover, current internal uncertainties of democracy are taking place during a global economic upturn, allowing the advance of authoritarian regimes in China and Russia, which have preyed on the openness of democratic economies. This has served as a source of inspiration for autocrats in many other countries. Anna Lührmann explained the current “third wave of autocratization”, defining it as the loss of democratic traits that occurs gradually and to varying degrees. The gradual process makes it hard to diagnose when a country stops being a democracy. The most challenging seems to be the rise of global influence of China. Since Tiananmen Square massacre of pro-democratic movement, the Chinese regime gradually created a modern, technology-based system of total control and became, according to Ondřej Klimeš, the major anti-liberal actor worldwide. According to Yang Jianli, “Tiananmen Square massacre crushed many young lives, but, more importantly, it crushed the hope of a whole generation.

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*Current transformation of the Global Order represents a huge challenge which democratic countries must cope with.*

*At the same time, however, it is a new opportunity for creative democratic and liberal spirit.*

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Even worse, it killed China's idealists." Jan Švejnar confirmed that even in the economic field, the dominant liberal model has been challenged in the last ten years. Due to unexpected rise of centralized China as a major power, there is a systemic competition between Western and Chinese systems. Szu-chien Hsu argued that Chinese economic growth comes with costs, both for the Chinese people and the rest of the world. More specifically, he explained that the competition with Chinese companies is unfair as they are subsidized by the state. In the Chinese "state capitalism", there is an omnipresent element of state control. According to Olusegun Adeniyi from Nigeria, China represents the new challenge also to the countries receiving its capital. The economic relationship between China and African countries is growing. However, the wellbeing of the citizens is not a focal point of China and the connection is at a crucial point where loans have to be paid back. "In Africa, we have this problem: China knows what it wants from Africa; Africa doesn't know what it wants from China," stated Olusegun Adeniyi.





# THERE IS A NEED FOR A GLOBAL ALLIANCE OF DEMOCRACIES

In this changing world order, democracy faces challenges that need a coordinated response of democrats all over the world. They need to join in an effort to strengthen democratic values and to build democracy for the future. "Authoritarian countries, like China and Russia, are playing hard in the world geopolitics now and they are playing as a team with countries like Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia", said Hasler Iglesias. "Democratic countries should play as a team as well", he added. Rosa María Payá Acevedo urged democratic countries to take a stronger stance against human rights violations. European Union as a community of democracies should undertake the role of a global advocate for democracy and human rights. Moreover, the experience of European countries that successfully overthrew their communist regimes in 1989 can be instrumental. Baltic states, in particular, can be critical in supporting the pro-democratic processes in Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

Democratic movements around the world need our solidarity and support. The success of the 1989 revolutions would not have been possible without the support of international actors and foreign powers. Such an enabling environment is one of the critical factors in the process of transition to democracy. Natan Sharansky testified how in the Soviet period "solidarity was the overarching spirit that gave people hope that they won't live forever under the authoritarian regime." Lech Wałęsa made a crucial point that global solidarity is needed today to be able to defeat the authoritarian regimes.



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Many Latin American countries are still experiencing a lack of international support and involvement in their democratization processes. The need of combined pro-democratic effort from the EU, the US and other foreign actors in Cuba and Venezuela was mentioned by Michael Gonzalez. Similar solidarity is also needed in other parts of the world. Glanis Changachirere shared her experience during the 2017 Zimbabwean coup where the new government released the army on protestors. "If we do not have support from the international community, we will perish," she said. "The authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet countries like Azerbaijan, Russia and Kazakhstan are kept in power through corruption, nepotism, and a weak judicial system", said Leyla Yunusova. She stated that Western organizations should stop financing these authoritarian regimes and start paying attention to the crimes that they commit. Tawakkol Karman talked about the current "second wave of Arab Spring" and put it clearly: "the will of people to have democracy and freedom will not stop, no matter how much it will cost. The West should decide to be with the will of people or to be with the dictators."

The threat of totalitarian China demands collective approach. Rushan Abbas described the oppression of Uyghurs under the Chinese regime. Officially, "vocational training centers" of the Chinese government serve as concentration camps where Uyghurs are enslaved, tortured, and raped. Abbas urged the international community to speak out against the Chinese oppression of the Uyghurs. Han Dongfang advises that governments of democratic countries should get together to have a common approach towards China. Democracies in Asia, such as India, South Korea, and Japan must face the threat of totalitarian China together. They should work together to promote Pan-Asiatic democratic norms such as human rights declarations and human rights courts. According to Lee Sook-Jong, they can be active democratic promoters and "issue critical statements when there is a serious aggressor in the region." Niranjan Sahoo suggests that despite internal challenges, "India

is the only country capable of facing Chinese ambitions in Asia. India's role in promoting democracy has been massive in the region even though it does not follow the Western way."

Among the initiatives advocating democracy and human rights belongs to the Coalition for Democratic Renewal which started in Prague, on the platform of Forum 2000. Carl Gershman made reference to it and stressed the relevance of Václav Havel's legacy, declaring Prague "a global center for the fight for freedom and democracy in the world today."



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# NEW TECHNOLOGIES REPRESENT OPPORTUNITIES BUT ALSO SERIOUS THREATS TO DEMOCRACY



We need to be on the same page about what we want; not what is possible.

Rapidly evolving technologies represent one of the most serious challenges to democracy and the global future. Despite their many positive aspects, information technology and artificial intelligence have recently become widely used tools for distorting truth, political manipulation, and the restriction of personal freedoms. Political aspect of technologies was described by Jonathan Ledgard. In his view, technology can be a tool that works for potential liberation, but it can also “become an oppressive tool for commercial needs and autocratic governments.” Benedetta Berti warned that “in future, whoever will have access to informational technological dominance, will have battlefield superiority.”

Social media allows today’s populists to better express and spread their opinions. This powerful tool raises concern, as public opinion could follow influential speakers, thus being a danger to democracy. Moreover, digital technologies serve as a powerful instrument of modern propaganda. According to Tom Daly, current fake news and propaganda are nothing new, but the speed and volume with which they are passed on using



information technologies is completely new. Many authoritarian regimes, such as the one of Russia, utilize the internet and cyber space for disinformation campaigns and information warfare. They aim to attack societal balance in democratic countries in order to erode the Western concept of democracy. Destructive power of digital political manipulation, for instance, has caught global public attention with the twin shocks of Brexit and the 2016 US Presidential election and with the related facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Benedetta Berti anticipated “the emergence of a techno-authoritarian model where, with emerging technologies, a stable authoritarian system can be created, that can promise prosperity and stability, but without freedom.” For instance, digital totalitarianism and technology-based system of total control in China show how technology can threaten freedom, human rights and undermine democratic principles. According to Xiao Qiang, “China, as one of the biggest technology powers, is getting more politically repressive.” Lobsang Sangay warned about surveillance and social credit system in China that control the entire population. „China oppresses people because it is insecure,” he said and continued “today we are talking about human rights in China, but it is a challenge for the whole world.”

The technological progress opens new opportunities for the promotion of democracy and human rights as well. Radka

Bystřická stressed that technology can help drive social change, assuring that non-profit organizations deliver social good at a fraction of the cost and time. Contemporary social movements, from the Arab Spring to Fridays for Future, have been possible because of internet technologies and social media, reminded Giuseppe Mastruzzo.

There is a need for a discussion on the future of technology and both the potential threat and benefit it poses to democracy and human rights. Gerd Leonhard warned that “we have survived nuclear weapons; we may not survive artificial technological intelligence.” Nevertheless, he believes in the power of these technologies to do well if we are careful about the way we use it. “It’s not the tools that we’re missing,” he says, “but it’s the discussion about what the tools should do.” Peter Pomerantsev confirmed and added that “we need to be on the same page about what we want; not what is possible.”

There must be certain regulatory solutions on an international level, as well as conversation with tech giants. Yet, developing structures to regulate artificial intelligence proves difficult, pointed out Xiao Qiang. As the field moves quickly, policies often don’t account for everything when they come into force.

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*The true challenge, thus, is managing regulation alongside with the development of artificial intelligence.*

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# CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES CALL FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION

Another serious threat that our world is facing is climate change and the environmental crisis. We are living in the Anthropocene – an era when humankind has become a significant force in the geological history of the planet. Effects of human activity have manifested in global warming and related climatic processes, loss of biodiversity and in the pollution. These anthropogenic processes represent a significant global disorder and constitute a major challenge for the long-term sustainable survival of human civilization. These processes need to get, at least partly, under control and appropriate policies need to be invented and implemented. It seems, however, that there has been an inability of political leaders to face this challenge effectively so far.

There is constant growth of population, production, and consumption within planetary boundaries. “We are in a historic moment, when the future of mankind is at stake,” proclaimed Ralf Fücks and explained “we need a new green industrial revolution, shift from fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas to renewable energies and to totally different kind of mobility. We need a different kind of agriculture and we have to rebuild the industrial system in all its parts. At the same time it’s a challenge to our lifestyles, because individual responsibility matters. But we also need different policies, making natural consumption more expensive, creating incentives for innovations and setting free the creativity of open societies to find solutions for the challenges we are facing.”

On the level of environmental activism, we are probably seeing the beginning of a new global movement and cultural transformations comparable to the societal upheavals of the 1960s. According to Lucie Smolková, “Students for climate” are in



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the streets because they fight for the most basic human right – the livable environment. She pointed out that responsibility is an inherent part of freedom. The issue of climate change, however, should not be framed in a language of threat, but in a language of open and rational discussion. Moreover, since the environmental crisis is a global phenomenon, it needs a global cooperation. Many global challenges have been debated locally, mainly in national contexts so far. Transnational discussion, however, is needed. In connection to transnational issues, Lech Wałęsa implied that the spirit of solidarity is needed. In a simple but strong manner, he reminded that “if something is too heavy to lift, you invite someone to help.”

Patriarch Bartholomew provided ethical context for our response to these global challenges. In his special address, he suggested that “it is the way in which globalization is perceived that requires change. The goal is to create a globalization with a ‘human face.’” We need an alternative to a culture that declares economic indicators as the sole or absolute criteria of economy, thus surrendering to the tyranny of consumerism. We are obliged to imagine an economy that promotes a sustainable world. He also declared: “Justice and peace cannot be established only through economic development or technological progress. The appropriate response to our present multifaceted crisis is the priority of a culture of solidarity. On the one hand, solidarity points to the struggle for social justice and human dignity. On the other hand, it promotes the idea of freedom as cooperation for the common good and co-responsibility for the environment as our common oikos.”



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