

Call for the Establishment of a Cold War Museum – The Division of Europe and Its Overcoming

For almost half a century, the Cold War dominated international politics and daily life in East and West. It divided Germany, tore Europe apart and split countries elsewhere in the world. The confrontation came to a head in repeated crises which put peace at risk. The conventional and nuclear arms race threatened the survival of humanity. The conflict between the systems of Communist dictatorship and Liberal democracy increased international tensions and poisoned the domestic political climate. Although the 'hot' wars took place in Asia and Africa, the East-West conflict created a climate of fear in Europe which still has implications even now.

Nonetheless, the two hostile blocs succeeded in avoiding nuclear destruction and in escaping, after a number of failed attempts, from the trap of mutual demonisation. Responsible statesmen on both sides tried again and again to turn coexistence into a lasting détente through gestures designed to reduce tensions. The peace movement, which spanned both blocs, sought to limit the arms race and achieve a resolution to the conflict. Finally, Communism collapsed, and the population prevailed in their struggle for freedom and democracy and freed themselves from Soviet dominance. The countries of East Central Europe thus regained their independence, and the European continent is now able to grow back together again.

Two decades after the end of the Cold War, the world has changed so dramatically that it is difficult to recall what a threat this war posed and how it was resolved. The remains of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall have largely vanished; the countries of East Central Europe, now free and flourishing again, have become members of NATO and the EU. These rapid changes are resulting in the experiences of the Cold War being forgotten. The generation born after 1989 has no personal memory of the suppression and division of the continent. Even visitors to Berlin from around the world have immense difficulty in finding traces of the once all-pervasive conflict.

We call for the establishment of a **Cold War Museum**, to safeguard for the long term the memory of the division of Europe as well as of the developments that led to the overcoming of this division. The ideal location is Berlin: a city that was on the front lines of the East-West conflict, divided in two by an inhumane wall, and which became a symbol in its own right in the course of repeated crises. The existing museums, such as the Allied Museum in Berlin-Zehlendorf, the German-Russian Museum in Berlin-Karlshorst and Caecilienhof Palace in Potsdam, need to be linked by a depiction of the international context.

We call on the Federal Government and the Berlin Senate to secure premises, which are suitable for a comprehensive museum, at the Checkpoint Charlie former border crossing. We ask for support in the form of signatures and donations.

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(as of April 13th, 2010)

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Hans-Jochen Vogel, former Federal Minister, former Governing Mayor of Berlin

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