



Speech

**by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the celebrations to mark the 30th anniversary of the
Peaceful Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall
Berlin, 9 November 2019**

What a wonderful sight! So many people have come here to the Brandenburg Gate, for so long a symbol of the division of our country. Today, it stands for something quite different: it is a symbol of unity and freedom – a symbol of a strong country and a city with a cosmopolitan flair. Good evening, Berlin!

We are all here to remember. To remember the night of all nights, after which nothing was ever the same again. Fellow Germans, distinguished guests from around the world: this night 30 years ago, the Berlin Wall fell. What an amazing gift for us Germans. What an amazing gift for Europe as a whole. Let us celebrate this momentous event this evening.

The Wall did not simply fall by itself. The peaceful revolutionaries tore it down. You, the courageous citizens of the GDR, wrote history: democratic history, world history. Even 30 years later, we cannot be grateful enough to you for that.

The Wall did not simply fall by itself. The people in Eastern Europe shook its foundations. Our thoughts today are also with our friends in Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia. Your courage was an inspiration to people in East Germany. Your courage ended the division of Europe. We thank you for that!

The Wall did not simply fall by itself. It had become porous after Mikhail Gorbachev had set a new course in Moscow, a policy of détente. He acted with courage and humanity – and to this very day we are thankful for that!

The Wall did not simply fall by itself. An inspiring figure from the West also lent a helping hand. I can still see him before me: Ronald Reagan here in front of the Brandenburg Gate. And I can still hear him saying, "Tear down this wall!" We Germans owe so much to this

America. My hope for the future is that this America will remain our partner in a spirit of mutual respect, that it will remain our partner in the fight for democracy and freedom and against national egoism.

What is more, the Wall did not simply fall by itself, nor did reunification simply happen by itself – all of this was only possible because our neighbours throughout Europe placed renewed trust in us Germans after all the horrors for which this country had been responsible.

That, too, is what 9 November stands for. It stands for a new beginning, the first democracy on German soil, for the proclamation of the republic just over a century ago. However, 9 November also reminds us of the destruction of this first German democracy, of the descent into barbarism, of burning synagogues, of the persecution and murder of European Jews.

At the latest, at the very latest since the attack in Halle, I hope that everyone in this country understands that yes, the years pass and the past becomes more distant. However, the “never again” rallying cry, the fight against racism and antisemitism, this responsibility remains!

9 November is a day of conflicting memories, an ambivalent day. Accepting ambivalences, carrying light and shadow, joy and sadness in our hearts is part and parcel of being a German. It is part and parcel of belonging to this country and its history.

During the last few weeks, we have been debating and arguing about German reunification and its consequences more intensively than we have for a long time. I think that is a good thing. For there will never be one, definitive or official history of German unity. Nor do we need it. History is made up of individual stories. And the history of our country is made up of our stories – of your stories. All of you have your very own memories of that time 30 years ago, of how East and West grew together.

I hope that we will tell each other our stories. Above all, let us listen to each other and take each other seriously.

Some of you were perhaps even there at the Wall, on the Wall, back then on that magical night here in Berlin. I have to say that I really envy you. How I would have loved to be there. How I would have loved to feel that incredible energy. How I would have loved to hear the joy of those who stormed the Wall. The pictures and footage of the time still send shivers down our spines.

However, today is not only about the old images. It is not just about the watershed moments back then. Rather, we sense that it is about us, here and now. It is about social cohesion in our country. This evening, when we think with gratitude, with tears in our eyes, of those courageous people 30 years ago, then we cannot at the same time

stand by and watch what they fought for be forgotten. We must not allow people to be marginalised or attacked. We must not allow democracy to be derided or social cohesion in our country to be destroyed. We must not allow that to happen!

This great Wall, this inhumane construction which claimed so many victims, no longer stands. The Wall is gone, once and for all.

However, new walls have emerged throughout our country: walls of frustration, walls of anger and hate. Walls of silence and alienation. Walls which are invisible and yet divide. Walls which stand in the way of social cohesion.

And you know what? The Berlin Wall was the work of Ulbricht. It was built by a regime of tyranny. But the new walls in our country are our own work. And only we can tear them down. So let us not just stand by, let us not just complain about them – let us finally tear these walls down!

Each and every one of us here today, indeed each and every one of us in this country, can play their part. For social cohesion cannot be imposed from above. Those who act together, stand together. So let us act! Let us not withdraw behind our walls and into echo chambers. Let us fight for our democracy!

I hope that we can bring some of the courage, some of the optimism, some of the self-confidence of that time when the Wall fell into our present-day. Unity, freedom, democracy – that is what those courageous people fought for 30 years ago. What a tremendous, what a proud legacy. Let us make something of it!