

EDITORIAL: Twenty Years of Overcoming 'East' and 'West'...

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The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 symbolises the end of an era in which Europe, and the world, suffered ideological, political, social and cultural divisions. Twenty years later many of the previous political, economic, social and cultural divisions that separated the European West and East have been eliminated. Some, however, remain, despite the transformation of the Central and Eastern European countries since the 1990s. The long accession process and recent integration of ten post-communist countries into the enlarged European Union (EU) have only partially eliminated the socio-economic and cultural differences between them and their Western counterparts. Moreover, new divisions have emerged among the post-communist countries of the former Eastern Bloc. This is especially apparent in the differences between those which succeeded in becoming EU members in 2004 or 2007, and those which hope (or have lost any hope) of following in their path.

This special issue of *ANZJES* reflects on challenges that have arisen as Europeans have attempted to overcome the divisions between the 'two Europes' in the past two decades. Contributors presented earlier drafts of the articles in this volume at the international conference "Europe Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall: Overcoming 'East and West'" (Wellington, New Zealand, 3-4 November 2009).¹ At this conference, academics at institutions from around the world presented more than two dozen papers,

¹ The conference was organised by the National Centre for Research on Europe at Canterbury University, Victoria University of Wellington and several others co-organisers and sponsors, including the NZ Ministry of Foreign affairs.

approaching Europe's post-1989 divisions from a range of disciplines and with a variety of analytical tools.

The authors of the articles presented here use different disciplinary techniques to demonstrate that while liberal democracies and market economies have replaced fortified borders, communist political monopolies and command economies in the East, some socio-economic and cultural divisions continue to separate Easterners and Westerners. While these divisions continue to overlap political geography, contributors show that the end of the Cold War has brought an increased mobility of individuals across borders as well as a mobility of borders themselves. One consequence of this increased mobility is the movement of 'East-West' divisions from the political boundaries between states into the middle of societies on both sides of the former Iron Curtain.

The title of **David William's** article, "Europeans without Euros": Alternative Narratives of Europe's "New Happiness" suggests that new social and economic conditions separate 'Eastern' and 'Western' Europeans. This is more than simply a story of economic cleavage. Clearly, a socio-economic fault-line distinguishes the affluence and relative — but eroding — security of Western societies and a harder reality in the East. In his analysis of Dubravka Ugrešić's 2004 novel *Ministarstvo boli* (The Ministry of Pain) and Milan Kundera's *L'ignorance* (Ignorance, 2000), however, Williams reminds us that the new mobility has mixed together Europeans with different experiences of the Cold War and its aftermath. Untangling themes in Ugrešić's novel, Williams shows how this new mobility has generated an underclass of often articulate and educated Easterners in West European societies. He recounts how some Eastern intellectuals regard this development with a tragic sense of irony. Many Easterners find themselves — voluntarily or involuntarily — refugees in a West that twenty years before they had pined for. Now many who struggled in movements that brought down the Iron Curtain find themselves excluded and alienated in that same West — not because of ideology, but because of their citizenship. Williams juxtaposes the ironic fate of Ugrešić's newcomers to the West to the renewed sense of absurdity experienced by Eastern dissidents in Kundera's *Ignorance*. Williams points out how Kundera's dissident writers mistakenly believe that the end of the Cold War divide will liberate them to take up the universal themes that their Western counterparts could engage in without fear of censorship. Instead, they find themselves imprisoned by expectations that bind them — forever? — to the Cold War's struggle for freedom of conscience. Williams's review of these literary accounts of Europe's recent past demonstrate that post-Cold War mobility has not eliminated divisions between East and West, but rather mixed them up, bringing Easterners and Westerners into closer proximity and forcing them, for better or worse, into contact with each other.

Jeannette Prochnow's article, 'West Germans Don't Even Know About It', also addresses the effects of mobility and difference on identity. It does so with a very different perspective and set of analytical tools, however. While Williams's article focuses on the challenges and perceptions of Eastern European intellectuals in the New Europe, Prochnow uses ethnographic analysis to investigate how the former East

German workers who built pipelines that now deliver Russian gas to the West have experienced Europe's reunification. While, no doubt, a few of these workers participated in the mass exodus that brought down the Berlin Wall, most experienced unification as a different form of mobility: the movement of the Federal Republic of Germany's borders eastward. Prochnow's pipeline workers did not shift location. Rather, history dramatically shifted the context of their lives. Prochnow demonstrates how German unification transformed these pipeline workers from select and celebrated 'heroes of socialism' into a historical footnote in contemporary Europe's energy politics. In a careful analysis of documents and interviews produced by pipeline workers and their associations, Prochnow illustrates how the imposition of Western institutions and values prompted a reaction within this group. Individuals, who found their identity under threat, coalesced as a group to preserve the stories and values that gave meaning and dignity to their lives. Prochnow demonstrates how pipeline workers found and articulated common threads in experiences during the Cold War and in preserving memories of that period after unification. She shows how the struggle to shape historical memory in the new Germany became a foundation for a new identity, consolidating a growing division within German society. She demonstrates in microcosm how unification transformed Germany from a country with 'two states and one nation' into a country with 'one state and two nations.'

Andreas Siegert approaches the relationship between mobility and Europe's post-1989 divisions from another angle. In the article 'Does the Socialisation of Young Russian Academics Foster Immigration?', Siegert demonstrates that belonging to different social strata within the hierarchy of the former East European communist societies has influenced the capacity and willingness of young Russian academics to take advantage of post-Cold War opportunities to emigrate to the West. Siegert's article provides a timely reminder that East European societies also had history and structure during the Cold War. He shows how the legacies of Soviet-era social structure in East Europe have continued to influence the behaviours of individuals in the present. Siegert illustrates how academics who were socialised into language training and the building of networks by their parents are far more likely to take advantage of contemporary opportunities to (e)migrate. Before the end of the Cold War, however, such training and networking were largely the preserve of members of the old nomenklatura, rather than activities open to all members of society. Siegert's recognition of the importance of divisions within the former communist social structures and their impact on some Easterners' mobility in the new Europe is noteworthy on its own and as an observation that parallels similar observations about the relationship between class and mobility inside the European Union.²

In his 'A Tale of Two "Europes": European Regions from Berlin to Lisbon' **John Hopkins** updates the evolving story of Europe's 'third level'— local and regional — governments and attempts to decentralise governance in member states and the European Union. He notes there are differences in the importance of regionalism within and between the Western (old) and Eastern (new) members of the European Union. He also explains how and why the enthusiasm for a 'Europe of the Regions', triggered by the

² N. Fligstein, *Euroclash: the EU, European identity, and the future of Europe*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2008.

Maastricht Treaty in 1992, evaporated by the end of the 1990s, only to be awakened again by the Lisbon Treaty's institutional innovations. He further notes that the renewed interest in regional governance within the EU and indeed the very existence of effective regional governments is a phenomenon found, in varied form, only in Western Member States. New Member States in Central and Eastern Europe have not expressed strong interest in regionalisation. In these countries, memories remain fresh of how regional autonomy and federalisation led to political instability and the dissolution of 'regionalised' states like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. They must also deal with the consequences of the fact that the rush to meet EU membership conditions 'was most easily achieved through central legislative Diktat' (Hopkins, p.66).

This selection of articles and their account of the more recent divisions between Europe's West and East are far from complete. Many differences have emerged between the former communist countries of Eastern Europe over the last 20 years. These are not addressed in the papers presented here. These are mostly, but not exclusively, outcomes of the uneven national and regional successes in the closely linked processes of post-communist transition and EU accession. Relative failure in these processes draws an even deeper distinction between the experiences of daily life for those in the less successful, post-communist European states and those in the 'old' and 'new' EU Members States.

However, though these new and old 'East-West' divisions continue to shape the landscape of Europe, their importance and size should not be overestimated. Even more so, they should not be used as an argument that *nothing has changed* or that the 'Europe of 2009' is more divided than the 'Europe of 1989'. As stated above, the removal of the concrete and barbed wire between Europe's West and East 20 years ago has significantly contributed to greater mobility of Europeans and European borders, but it has also enormously increased political and individual freedoms all around ex-communist Eastern Europe. The salient features of the communist political and economic model based on one party ideological and political monopoly and centrally planned economy no longer exist in any European country. Even those countries on the far East of the continent, which are today considered authoritarian rather than democratic have succeeded in significantly marketising their economies.³ They also accept, at least formally, political multi-partism and therefore the freedom of the opposition to openly criticise and challenge their rule. The post-communist Central European and the Baltic states, on the other hand, have not only succeeded in joining the '(elite) club' of the EU, they have also provided their citizens steadily improving living standards and social infrastructures, which are moving toward the average of their Western neighbours.⁴ Similar trends, though still at a significantly lower level can

³ The private sector share in GDP of e.g. 'Putin's Russia' was 65% in mid 2009 and the average economic transition (i.e. marketisation) indicators score given by the experts of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to this country was 3 (on the scale from 1= rigid centrally planned economy to 4+ = the standards of an industrialised market economy; see *Transition Report 2009*, EBRD, London, 2009.)

⁴ While being around half of the EU/EC average and far below the level of the real GDP per capita level in any of the EU/EC member states in 1989, two most advanced post-communist European states – Slovenia and the Czech Republic – have increased their GDP p.c. by 2008 to 90.9% (Slovenia) and 80.4 (Czech Republic) of the EU average. In this way, they have also succeeded to overcome or come close to the GDP p.c. levels of the two least developed 'old'

also be seen among the post-communist 'late reformers' in the Balkans; firstly, in the most recent EU members of 2007 – Bulgaria and Romania, then also among the current official and potential candidates for EU membership from the Western Balkans.

While reading the following contributions and their account of Europe's post-1989 divisions and unfulfilled expectations, the reader should bear in mind that Europe today is not more, but less divided. For the majority of its nations and people, Europe has become a better place to live in than it was twenty years ago.

Milenko Petrovic and John Leslie, May 2010