

'A moral knockout victory' from Le Figaro (10 November 1989)

Caption: On 10 December 1989, following the opening of the borders of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the French daily newspaper Le Figaro welcomes the fall of the Berlin Wall and outlines the role played by Egon Krenz, General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), in the process that led to that country opening its borders.

Source: Le Figaro. 10.11.1989, n° 14 061. Paris: Le Figaro. "K.O. moral", auteur:Giesbert, Franz-Olivier , p. 1.

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A moral knockout victory

Who would have believed that they would live to see the end of the Berlin Wall? As the refugees cross the border, many experts are boasting at length that they predicted it all.

But, by and large, they did not predict anything. It was not their fault. There are times when History races ahead. That is, when its pace is not completely frantic.

When Egon Krenz, the heir apparent, succeeded Erich Honecker at the head of the GDR, it was more or less taken for granted that he would continue to pursue his predecessor's policy with an iron hand. He was even portrayed as a transitional leader.

Wrong. We must be careful of transitional leaders. The temporary often becomes permanent. Egon Krenz is now even forcing the hand of fate.

With Communism no longer being what it was, the leader of the GDR opened the floodgates to reform over the course of a few days. He has invented high-speed perestroika.

Egon Krenz did, in three weeks, what Poland and Hungary have taken years to do. Apparently more Gorbachevian than Gorbachev himself, he took the policy on which he had just embarked on through to its conclusion in a trice.

By deciding to open up the GDR's borders to the FRG and West Berlin, Egon Krenz brought down the 160-km Wall which, along with the 1 393 kilometres of 'Iron Curtain', separates the two Germanies. It is the end of an era, the end of a world, even.

In 1963, US President John Fitzgerald Kennedy exclaimed in front of the Wall: '*Ich bin ein Berliner!*' ('I am a Berliner!'). Until yesterday, faced with this hideous invention of Communism, with its watchtowers and fugitives shot like rabbits, we were all Berliners.

That is the reason for the wave of joy that has been unleashed across the world with the fall of the Wall. It was the final major symbol of the Cold War. Since the West had won an economic, moral and ideological victory by a knockout, it had to come down.

General de Gaulle probably said it all when he suggested, 'Russia will soak up Communism as blotting paper soaks up ink.'

A stunned Europe is now realising that Communism will not last forever. But Russia, it seems, will. And Germany, too.

With the end of the 'Iron Curtain', the German reunification process is, perhaps, now in motion. When the FRG and the GDR are reunited, wrote François Mauriac not long ago, 'we shall have reason to tremble.' But are we, in fact, trembling?

Franz-Olivier Giesbert