



**Petra Pau**

Vice-President of the German Bundestag

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## Conference of Eastern European Parliaments in Prague on 17 November 2009

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. There was a time when ‘actually existing socialism’, as it was known, spanned a third of the globe. It was also the era of the Cold War. Twenty years ago, the Soviet-dominated system collapsed. Deservedly.

2. A huge celebration to mark this took place in Berlin last week, on 9 November. It was a European celebration. It was attended by representatives of every EU country, but also by representatives of the United States and Russia. That was important.

3. Berlin in 1989 saw the final end of the border that had previously divided the world into East and West. Yet Berlin was only the factual and symbolic culmination of a process which had been begun to build long before.

4. Furthermore, it was not the elected statesmen of the time who swept away the old system. It was, above all, courageous citizens in the Eastern countries who, with determination and bravery, engaged in a successful revolution.

5. At all of the German celebrations, Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Horst Köhler have acknowledged this historic truth and international experience. I expressly wish to do so here also.

6. This leads me in turn to the conclusion that citizens will continue to deserve a greater voice in future. The famous German Social Democrat Willy Brandt once encapsulated this in the slogan “Dare more democracy!”



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7. “More democracy” was an important driving force for many who opposed the Stalinist system: first in Yugoslavia, then in Hungary, also in the GDR, in the CSSR, in Poland, spreading to further countries and gaining in strength.

8. Today, most eastern European countries have been united with western European states in the EU. This is historic progress, in part because it prevents devastating wars against one another.

9. But the rallying cry to “dare more democracy” nonetheless remains a joint challenge. The EU has a great deal of potential for more democracy. Eastern Europeans with a firm commitment to democracy are in a particularly strong position to highlight this.

10. There is one more thought I would like to contribute. The current global financial and economic crisis is not yet over, while the next has not yet been averted. This has a significant impact on every country.

11. One priority for the eastern European states might be to work collaboratively to ensure the European Union continues to evolve and become better able to weather crises – in the interests of our countries, but above all on behalf of our citizens.

12. History has shown us what the wrong approach is. This is all the more reason for us to turn our experiences into something positive. To be viable, the EU must be socially just and outward-looking, and become a Union of all its citizens.