

Stalinist regime in Romania was brutal for its totalitarian leaders, ending with the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, while the other revolutions were notable for the opposition's use of passive resistance and the unwillingness of Party leadership and the secret police to use the typical terror and intimidation techniques. Unlike Chinese communists in May 1989, the Eastern European communists surrendered to popular revolt, thereby changing the system of government in the east and paving the way for integration of all Europe.

Hungary

To the amazement of the world, Hungary's movement away from communism was peaceful and served as a model for other Eastern European countries. Worsening economic conditions in the country led to general dissatisfaction, and even dedicated communists looked for alternative routes to improve the local economy. Economic advisors were especially interested in engaging in trade with western Europe. In 1988, János Kádár (who had been in power since the 1956 revolution) resigned as Secretary General; a young Politburo member, Miklós Németh, negotiated a 1 billion Deutschmark loan from West German banks. On the strength of his economic acumen he was named Prime Minister and followed economic reforms with political ones.

First, in May 1989 he oversaw the decision to remove the physical barrier between Austria and Hungary. The fence was now old and Hungary was unwilling to make expensive repairs. As the Hungarians removed the barriers, the Soviet Union did nothing and, nearly overnight, the border between Austria and Hungary was removed. This in itself was momentous, but he then announced that the citizens of other Warsaw Pact countries could travel freely through Hungary and would not be stopped as they crossed its borders. This led directly to the crisis in East Germany in November 1989.

Then, the government adopted what was termed the democracy package: basic freedoms, civil rights and electoral reforms. The communist government was ready to adopt a multiparty system. Symbolically, Imre Nagy was rehabilitated and reburied. The government also initiated round-table discussions to change the constitution that included a number of new and reconstituted pre-communism political parties. In April 1989 the Soviets agreed to withdraw

all their military forces from Hungary by 1991; in the end, this was completed in 1990 with the first free elections in Hungary since before the Second World War.

Poland

In 1983 martial law was lifted. Nonetheless, anti-government activities continued, and while the government tried to repress the liberalization movements that began in the late 1970s, opposition to the regime continued. In 1985, Polish opposition was further encouraged when Gorbachev came to power in the USSR. Encouraged by *perestroika* and

glasnost, solidarity reconstituted itself in October 1987. Despite continued harassment from the Polish government they were certain that they would not face retribution from the Soviet Union.

Due to continued economic problems, the government once again raised food prices in February 1988. This led yet again to strikes and demands for changes in the system. All but the most radical members of Solidarity advocated negotiating with the government, showing that it was not a revolutionary party in the strictest sense; they too sought to bring about changes from within the existing system. February 1989 proved to be a decisive turning point in Polish history. In Warsaw the government initiated talks with Solidarity and other opposition groups in an attempt to maintain their power over Poland. These discussions led to three major reforms: legalization of non-governmental trade unions; creation of the position of President; and the formation of a Senate (thereby giving Poland a bicameral legislature). In the lower house (Sejm) 35% of the seats would be freely elected – the rest would be reserved for the Communist Party.

In July 1989 elections were held and Solidarity won 99% of the seats in the Senate and all 35% of the seats in the Sejm. Even though he was the only candidate on the presidential ballot, Jaruzelski won by a very narrow margin. Given the results of the elections, even the 35–65 division in the Sejm was abolished and by the end of 1989, Poland was a multiparty state with a coalition government dominated by Solidarity. Poland's successful transition to democracy was soon mirrored by other satellite states in Europe, and by the end of 1989 only Albania would remain as a communist country.

East Germany's revolution and the end of the Berlin Wall

The German revolution was the most televised, well known of the revolutions of 1989, due largely to the photo opportunities it provided. This revolution inspired people far beyond its borders because it seemed so simple: the masses brought about spontaneous change through their actions. This was not a revolt of the elites or simply a student movement that spread.

East Germany was a paradox among the satellite states. On the one hand it had a reputation for being the most loyal of all the satellite states; its leaders were communist hardliners and its secret police, the Stasi, was feared above all other Eastern European political police. On the other, it received benefits from West Germany through Willy Brandt's policy of *Ostpolitik*, which was meant to build a bridge from the democratic, capitalist west and its communist counterpart. While Berlin remained a sticking point for the East Germans, they received benefits from this city's location as Moscow saw it as a place to showcase the benefits of communism to the outside world. In 1984, the two German states reached agreements for cultural exchanges and the removal of mines on their frontier, signalling an accord, or at least a commitment to the status quo for both states, rather than seeking the inclusion of the other side.



▲ East Germans entering Austria in August 1989 after the border with Hungary was opened



▲ Lech Wałęsa