

**FROM THE IRON CURTAIN TO THE SCHENGEN AREA:
BORDERING COMMUNIST AND POSTCOMMUNIST EUROPE**

A conference to mark the 50th anniversary of the construction of the Berlin Wall.

Conference organizers:

- Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for European History and Public Spheres (LBI EHP), <http://ehp.lbg.ac.at>
- Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), www.iwm.at, and
- Historical Commission, Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), www.oeaw.ac.at/histkomm.

Vienna, Austria, 28-30 September 2011

Almost 50 years ago, on August 13 1961, the Berlin Wall was erected in order to prevent the East German communist dictatorship from collapsing. It was and still is by far the best-known segment of the long fortified border separating the two opponents of the Cold War era, Soviet communism in the East and liberal democracy in the West. Departing from this symbol of the division of Europe, the conference intends to reflect on the significance of the border regimes for the ideology and practice of post-war communist regimes and their demise in general. Recent scholarship (Martin 2001, Coeuré and Dullin 2007) has demonstrated that Bolshevik dictatorship inherited and further developed from its very beginning a specific mode of governing borders and border regions.

The conference will focus on the latter half of the 20th century: from the aftermath of World War II that saw the spread of communist rule westwards, into the Soviet-dominated “people’s republics”, to the aftermath of the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc accompanied by the creation of new borders within its former territory and by its participation in European efforts toward unification. At the beginning of the Eastern Bloc formation, the Soviet-style border regime was exported together with the communist party dictatorship to each of the “brotherly” countries. Its core principles were implemented with particular violence along the Iron Curtain, but they were also applied in various degrees to the borders within the Eastern Bloc.

Many of the state borders in this part of Europe, however, were themselves contested results of earlier political developments and thus not easy to turn into “peace borders” (Friedensgrenze), as the official ideology proclaimed. In some places, longue durée conflict-ridden community experiences with the neighbouring “other” remained salient features of the borders, in others shared cultural and national belongings ran counter to the presumed centrality of the border regime under the new, Soviet-style, understanding of statehood. Border regions can therefore offer ideal sites for field research on the nature of communist rule and its interactions with its own society and with the “other”, whether the “other” resided within or without. The populations of these regions were often recruited to aid the state in sustaining the border regime (e.g. in border guarding and political surveillance). A closer examination of everyday life in such communities may contribute to our understanding of the relative stability of communist regimes.

The end of these border regimes following the demise of communist dictatorships in East Central Europe and the region’s “return to Europe” shook the socio-geographical notions predicating national identities of its individual countries and its identity within the continent and in the global order. At one extreme, the Schengen process turned some of the formerly most contested and jealously guarded borders in “New Europe” into open spaces, at the other, the previously relatively permeable intra-USSR administrative lines became state borders of “Fortress Europe”. Parallel to and cutting across the genealogy of territorial borders and border politics memories have formed of the post-war/Cold War national seclusion and exclusion, cultural frontiers and cohabitations, community separation and proximity.

The conference sets out to reflect on the historical relevance and implications of the communist border regimes for societies of the former Eastern Bloc, including the lasting imprints of those regimes in the memories and commemorations of their lived experience, which will be relevant in European societies for a long time to come. The examination of the border predicament offers a chance to identify paradigmatic features of the communist rule. This will contribute to a nuanced understanding of everyday practices of domination and of their appropriation by local actors. We encourage contributions employing approaches from history (political, economic, military, social, and everyday life history), sociology, anthropology, political science, legal studies, geography, and cultural and gender studies. Case studies and more general investigations should be based on original archival, empirical or field research. Discussions of comparative and transnational perspectives are particularly welcome. Such focus will help broaden our understanding of the unique nature of the region's shared encounter with the totalitarian project of communist transformation on the one hand, and of its highly diverse and fragmentary implementations on the other.

Keynote addresses will be delivered by:

- Sabine Dullin, Centre de recherches en histoire des slaves (CRHS), Université de Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne;
- Alf Lüdtke, Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen, Honorary Professor of Historical Anthropology at the University of Erfurt, and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Research Institute for Comparative History and Culture Hanyang University, Seoul; and
- Professor Alfred Rieber, Central European University, Budapest.

We invite conference paper proposals addressing issues, such as, but not limited to:

- Sovietization of the Eastern Bloc border space, including the ideological and legal basis of border regimes and bordering.
- The State as the perpetrator of repression and violence at the border: killings, kidnappings, forcible removals, deterrence, technology of fortification.
- The making of the border populations: purges, resettlements, homogenisation.
- "Making the borders more permeable in the interest of the people" (Willy Brandt): The détente, Helsinki Accords, and the dissolution of the Bloc.
- Collective self-surveillance: border residents "assisting" the state border regime practices.
- National agendas and discourses: nationalisms, intra-Eastern Bloc border issues, emergence of new borders after 1989.
- Heroes and villains: the border in propaganda and mass media on both sides of the Iron Curtain.
- Economic and consumerist aspects of borders: trading, smuggling, commuting for work.
- Borders in creative representations: literature, film, graffiti.
- Intellectual cross-border cooperation and penetration: technology and cultural transfers across borders, intellectual networks.
- Borders in memory cultures and everyday life: narratives, memoirs, museums.

Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words and a short c.v. by 1 February 2011 to:

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The authors of the selected abstracts will be invited to submit their written papers by 15 August 2011. The full versions of the papers for the edited conference volume will be due by 31 December 2011.

The organisers are currently applying for funding to cover travel and accommodation costs of the participants.