

Europe after the fall of the wall

With tears in my eyes I sat in front of the television looking at images of people climbing up the wall, people who came singing and dancing through Checkpoint Charlie from East to West and they were received with open arms. To me the fall of the wall on November 9, 1989 was an overwhelming event. Several times I had been in Berlin and each time I was impressed with the wall and the incredibly heavy security. Two worlds nearby each other which were separated severely from each other. And now a system of oppression lost to gentle powers. The churches played a large role in the changes. The opposition could assemble in the churches, prayer-for-peace-meetings stimulated to resist un-freedom and injustice.

Changed

The fall of the wall changed Europe. The cold war which had Europe in its grip belongs to the past. Freedom of speech, religion and movement has become reality for many. Unknown opportunities for encounter opened up. And in the European Union countries of East and West are nowadays represented.

However, it was not the beginning of a time of peace. Shortly afterwards the first Gulf War started and the conflict in former Yugoslavia escalated, which had a catastrophic influence on the entire region. There is also concern about the growing social differences within Europe. The boundless Europe has not yet led to an honest division of prosperity. Further, to many people in other parts of the world Europe turns out to have become a 'Fort Europe', which premises its own economical and political interests and therefore shuts out others.

Memory as obligation

Last summer the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe stated in a declaration on account of the 20th birthday of the opening of the border between Austria and Hungary: "For the church the experiences of resistance are an incentive to apply themselves for liberty and righteousness. The experience of the liberation in 1989 is also a reminder of a God who conquers boundaries and offers freedom again and again. The present economical crisis is an enormous challenge for Europe in order to search for community more than ever as condition for peace – also for social peace. The memory of 1989 obligates the protestant churches in Europe to use the liberty and strengthen the community over all boundaries. They encourage the churches *'to work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail. (Charta Oecumenica).'*' The memory is an obligation to justify freedom over and over again."

Europe

Many people in our country have grown tired of Europe. The Europe-critical parties got a lot of votes in the latest European elections. It probably has to do with conceptions on the European Union which is perceived as unnecessary, interfering or slow.

You can have a political discussion about this. But if in fact you want to let go of Europe and do not want to think about mutual challenges and responsibility for each other, than the struggle of many for freedom and peace and reconciliation in Europe has been in vain. If Europe-tiredness means that everybody has to take care for him-/herself again and that 'we' are not responsible for the 'rest', than we have learned hardly anything.

Europe is a challenge for the churches. The churches can use their unique networks to strengthen the community in Europe and take each others interests into account. Further they contribute themselves from their faith in the social discussions and remind - in a context in which often interests lead the way – of the assignment of reconciliation.

Jan-Gerd Heetderks, spokesman general synod Protestant Church, November 6, 2009.