



Páneurópai Piknik
Sopron 2009

The speech of German's Chancellor **Angela Merkel**
August 19, 2009 at the Europa Concert in Fertőrákos

Dear Mr. President,
Prime Minister, Mayor,
Mr. Magas, colleagues, dear friends,
and ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy that I am able to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Pan-European Picnic with you.

The Pan-European Picnic was probably the picnic with the most important results in human history. It was much more than a picnic. I would say that it was more than simply a meeting of the citizens at the Iron Curtain. The picnic was really a small revolution. The picnic was a decisive juncture on the way to the official opening of the border on September 10th.

This milestone would have been unthinkable without the courage of the organizers of the Pan-European Picnic from Sopron and Debrecen, and without the courage of the reformers of the Hungarian government of that time, around Prime Minister Miklós Németh, and Minister of State, Imre Pozsgay. Chancellor Helmut Kohl movingly describes his secret meeting with Prime Minister Németh and the Foreign Ministers Horn and Genscher, on 25 August, 1989, in the Gyminch Castle. That was shortly before the official opening of the Hungarian Austrian border. In a few days that will be 20 years ago. I can cite Chancellor Kohl:

"I asked Miklós Németh many times if the Hungarians expected any trade off from us. Each time he refused with the argument that Hungary does not trade in humanity."

This readiness to help, and this courage opened the way to freedom for the citizens of East Germany, and for all Germans the way to unity. You Hungarians gave wings to the German urge toward freedom. Your courage gave the final blow to the chisel which brought down the Berlin Wall. Hungary made an outstanding contribution to the destruction of the Iron curtain and to the realization of the freedom and unity of Europe. In the name of the Republic of Germany and its citizens, and in my name as well, I thank you for this. This recognition applies to everyone who expressed solidarity with the refugees, who showed the refugees the way to the border, and gave them shelter and support.

This was not something that was automatically expected. Generous help came from the representatives of the churches, from the opposition groups, like MDF and FIDESZ, and the charities. I want to mention one individual, Father Kozma, in particular.

However, help came from the other side of the Iron Curtain. For example, one of the patrons of the Pan-European Picnic, Otto von Habsburg, was here immediately. The Order of Malta with Csilla von Boselager, the angel of Budapest, played a decisive role in the assistance to the refugees.

The free press also played an important role: Pictures were published in the former East Germany showing how the Iron Curtain was torn down. It was the call of freedom.

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We also thank the ordinary people on the other side of the border in Burgenland, and in all of Austria. Hungarians, Germans, Austrians and all freedom loving Europeans have a common reason to celebrate. Other Europeans also made their contributions to freedom. I would like to remember Pope John Paul II, the Polish Solidarity Movement, the Czechoslovakian Charter 77, and the Baltic Way Movement.

This way to freedom, democracy, and to the realization of human rights started much earlier than 1989. This path was not free of setbacks, such as the defeat of the popular revolution in East Germany in 1953, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and the Prague Spring of 1968. By 1989 the mass movements could no longer be stopped, and the man at the top of the Soviet Union, Michael Gorbachov, no longer wanted to stop these popular movements.

The citizens of East Germany were inspired by these events. The peaceful revolution was soon to come to fruition. On one side, many thousands of people from East Germany wanted to flee to freedom through Hungary. In that way they pressured the former rotten East German Regime. On the other side, many East Germans decided to stay and to bring about a regime change at home.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, we all live in a free and united Europe. This is a situation which we can never value highly enough. One sign of this is the unusual tradition of holding the Europa Concert here in the cave Theatre at Fertőrákos. On the way here to the Cave Theatre, there is a memorial plaque in memory of the forced laborers who worked here toward the end of the Second World War. Such tragic and joyous memories are so close to each other. These memories stay with us in the form of a united Europe, which we Hungarians and Germans accomplished together as friends and partners.

We will now be witnesses at the appearance of the young musicians from the Franz Liszt Music Academy of Weimar, to the historical connections and friendly partnership which our countries should symbolize.

For decades the rulers of the East Block attempted to knock the ideas of a free, united and democratic Europe out of our heads. They clearly did not succeed in this. What was for decades only a vision has now been brought to reality.

The future lies in our hands. We see that it is not always simple, but we should look at it as our mission, and we must bear in mind the events of twenty years ago. We are in a position to change things and to make improvements. We have opportunities to do this in freedom. We must use these opportunities. That is our task for the future.

