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## ‘Peaceful Revolution’ as a Way of Conceptualizing the Events of 1989 in East Germany

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(Gniezno)

**'PEACEFUL REVOLUTION' AS A WAY OF CONCEPTUALIZING  
THE EVENTS OF 1989 IN EAST GERMANY**

**Abstract**

The author's aim was to analyze the expression 'die friedliche Revolution' (peaceful revolution) in the context of changes that took place in 1989 and 1990 in East Germany. On the one hand, the expression is a continuation of the rhetoric which came into being as the German Democratic Republic declined, and on the other constitutes a useful tool in the present-day attempts to create "positive" collective memory, which unites German society around the events of the year 1989.

**Keywords**

German Democratic Republic, Germany, 'peaceful revolution', the fall of the Berlin wall, 1989, language policy, 'die Wende', communism

According to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, it was the wars and revolutions that were to shape the face of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>, marking different stages of two totalitarian regimes, which in that century began and ended their impetuous march through Europe. The communist regime in Central and Eastern Europe collapsed around the year 1989. In the contemporary German official discourse this year is referred to as ‘Das Jahr der friedlichen Revolution’ (‘the year of peaceful revolution’). This expression is advocated, among others, by die Bundesstiftung für Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur (the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED-Dictatorship), which was established by the German parliament in 1998 and whose mandate is to examine the history of German Democratic Republic and the consequences of the regime imposed by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED). In this institution, the rhetoric associated with 1989, seen as the year of historic changes and marked by the struggle for freedom, designates a specific framework for the interpretation of changes that took place in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in East Germany<sup>2</sup>. The phrase ‘die friedliche Revolution’ is also the key word of political and governmental commemoration of the year 1989 in Germany.

In less official contexts, other expressions can be encountered; German Historical Museum in Berlin (Deutsches Historisches Museum) in its publications and exhibitions relates to a somewhat broader range of conceptual expressions to describe the year 1989: using both ‘die friedliche Revolution’ and e.g. ‘Zerfall der DDR’ (‘the fall of GDR’), or ‘Mauerfall’ (‘the fall of the wall’).<sup>3</sup> Here, greater emphasis is put on the collapse of the dictatorship itself than on the whole process<sup>4</sup>. There are also institutions that seem to distance themselves from the

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<sup>1</sup>H. Arendt, *Über die Revolution*, Monachium 1965, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>In Poland, according to some scholars, using the term ‘revolution’ with reference to the year 1989 is not a very popular idea. The members of the “Solidarność” did not like this expression as it evoked the communist rhetoric and they also did not like the connotations associated with revolution as a violent change. E. Cizewska, *Filozofia publiczna Solidarności. Solidarność 1980–1981 z perspektywy republikańskiej tradycji politycznej*, Warszawa 2010, p. 29. However, this term is applied in some public institutions, e.g. Europejskie Centrum Solidarności (European Solidarity Center).

<sup>3</sup>The word ‘die Mauer’ in the GDR was forbidden. The official name was: “antifaschistische Schutzwall” build in order to provide peace and protection from the NATO; <http://www.ddr-museum.de/de/blog/sammlungsblog/spannend-spannend.html> (from: 29.12.2012).

<sup>4</sup>The exhibition in the German Historical Museum in Berlin: *Das Jahr 1989. Bilder einer Zeitwende*. The exhibition was held from 30 May till 30 August 2009. The authors: Dieter Vorsther and Carola Jüllig.

official commemoration, such as Das DDR Museum (the Museum of the German Democratic Republic), which focuses mainly on the everyday life of the citizens of the bygone state, while in their publications and exhibitions we can encounter the word 'die Wende' ('the turn/change')<sup>5</sup>, which is rather avoided in the official commemoration discourse as 'die Wende' is a part of the unofficial East German memory.

In the present article I intend to analyze (mainly linguistically) the expression 'die friedliche Revolution', and try to justify an intuitive belief concerning the relationship between the connotation of this phrase and other forms of expression that were common among the opposition, protesters and religious communities in the autumn of 1989. I will make an attempt to examine, in what ways the changes that the German language underwent at the end of the GDR era are associated with the present-day choice of the expression 'die friedliche Revolution' in the official commemorative discourse.

Let us start with the history of the word 'revolution', which can be traced back to such words as: 'to twist', 'to roll', 'to wrap' (the Sanskrit: *varutram*, Greek *elutron*, *eíluma*. All of them allude to artisanal act of 'enveloping' 'covering', 'twisting'. Indo-European forms \**wel*— or \**welu*— are connected with circular movement, as well as the later Latin *volumen* (scroll) and the verb *volvere* — 'to revolve around, 'roll'<sup>6</sup>. The observation of nature and celestial bodies in particular, led to the employment of the word 'revolution' (from lat. *volvere*) in the domain of astronomy and astrology to describe the movements of the stars and planets ("De revolutionibus orbium coelestium" by Copernicus)<sup>7</sup>. Later, 'revolution' was transferred to the realm of sociopolitical experience giving way to describing various changes and breakthroughs in the history<sup>8</sup>. In 13<sup>th</sup>-century Italy, 'rivoluzione' gained po-

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<sup>5</sup>Online-Ausstellung "Wendejahre", <http://www.ddr-museum.de/de/blog/thema-ddr/bdquo1990-aufbruch-zur-einheitldquo.html> (from: 27.12.2012).

<sup>6</sup>A. Rey, *Révolution. Histoire d'un mot*, Paris 1989, p. 24–25; J. Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, [http://books.google.pl/books?id=7EqXVooC3EAC&pg=PA2&lpg=PA2&dq=varutram+revolution&source=bl&ots=69y4IKSYBX&sig=E6DynZ8zr7m2wQeZEOjEyOn7pRg&hl=en&sa=X&ei=V\\_8SUybSK\\_CV0QW5vICACA&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=varutram%20revolution&f=false](http://books.google.pl/books?id=7EqXVooC3EAC&pg=PA2&lpg=PA2&dq=varutram+revolution&source=bl&ots=69y4IKSYBX&sig=E6DynZ8zr7m2wQeZEOjEyOn7pRg&hl=en&sa=X&ei=V_8SUybSK_CV0QW5vICACA&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=varutram%20revolution&f=false) (from 02.02.2012).

<sup>7</sup>H. Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup>R. Koselleck, *Dzieje pojęć. Studia z semantyki i pragmatyki języka społeczno-politycznego*, translated by J. Merecki, W. Kunicki, Warszawa 2009, p. 260.

litical meaning and was later transferred to English and French<sup>9</sup>. Etymological dictionary of the German language informs that 'die Revolution' appeared in German language as an astronomy related term in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and came into use in the political sphere only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Throughout the centuries, other attributes were added to 'revolution', e.g. in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century we may find the expression: 'la révolution d'État', which allows one to think that it was the first step on the way to combining 'revolution' with: 'social', 'political', 'industrial', 'cultural' attributes, which are widely used today<sup>10</sup>. The present-day understanding of 'revolution' and its connotations come from the time of French Revolution<sup>11</sup>.

'Revolution' in its contemporary, sociopolitical meaning, is a radical change in the political and social relations, which might be marked by violence<sup>12</sup>. In addition, there is a notion concerning the overthrow of the existing order. This does not mean, however, that the term 'revolution' applies only to a rapid change. In addition to sudden breakthroughs, it also functions in the semantic field of 'renewal', which assumed extreme form in the case of some revolutions, which gave rise e.g. to a new dating system.

The fact that 'revolution' can be perceived both as a violent change and radical renewal, which does not have to be associated with violence, is in line with the perception of contemporary humanities, in which 'revolution' is perceived to a greater extent as a process than a single event<sup>13</sup>. European languages give

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<sup>9</sup>F. Kluge, E. Seebold (eds.), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, Berlin–New York 1989, p. 598.

<sup>10</sup>W. Wrzosek, *Historia. Kultura. Metafora. Narodziny nieklasycznej historiografii*, Poznań 1995, p. 13–45.

The first documented use of 'revolution' comes from 1355 and was found in a Florentine historiography. *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie* 3, Jürgen Mittelstrass (ed.), Stuttgart, Weimar, 1995, p. 607.

<sup>11</sup>R. Koselleck, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

<sup>12</sup>"[...] mit Zerstörung, Gewalttat und Willkür einhergehender auf radikale Veränderung der bestehenden politischen und gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse ausgerichteter, gewaltsamer Umsturz[versuch] Ggs. Evolution". G. Drosdowski (ed.), *Das grosse Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache in sechs Bänden* 5, Mannheim–Wien–Zürich 1980, p. 2156. H. Paul (ed.), *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Tübingen 1992, p. 694.

<sup>13</sup>B. Starnawski, *Próby języka przełomu*, [in:] K. Chmielewska, G. Wołowicz (eds.), *Opowiedzieć PRL*, Warszawa 2011, p. 111. According to R. Koselleck, no other notion contains to such an extent diachronic and synchronic aspects in one lexem. R. Koselleck, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

testimony to the fact that even a process which lasted one thousand years can be called 'revolution'. I refer here to a great breakthrough in human history, which consisted in the transition from nomadic to sedentary agriculture — the Neolithic revolution.

In the Marxist philosophy, a rapid transformation ('revolution') did not oppose the evolutionary implementation of the ideals of communism. On the contrary, it was the evolutionary process of social reconstruction that laid the foundation for the legitimacy of the real, existing socialism in Europe after the Second World War. It is worth looking at the term 'revolution' in a German dictionary from 1974, from the time when Marxist ideology was dominant in the East Germany. The main reference which we can find there is the 'social revolution' ('soziale Revolution') combined with the transition to a higher stage of social consciousness. Its ultimate goal was to transform the world by the replacement of one class by another<sup>14</sup>.

The definition of 'die friedliche Revolution' in the German dictionary implies that it was a process, which lasted two months: "die politische Umwälzungen in der DDR im Oktober/November 1989"<sup>15</sup>. Whereas in the texts of both the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED-Dictatorship and German Historical Museum 'peaceful revolution' is shown as a process, which starts in the autumn of 1989<sup>16</sup>, along with the peaceful marches and demonstrations (according to the account of the secret police their number reached 130<sup>17</sup>) and ended with the reunification of Germany — on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1990 (Tag der deutschen Einheit)<sup>18</sup>. Thus we see a greater significance attached to the 'peaceful revolution' in the official discourse than in the dictionary from 1992, where we find a narrowed definition: of 'peaceful revolution' (October and November 1989). In contrast to the official commemoration discourse, the emphasis here is put solely on the demonstrations taking place in the autumn of 1989, which

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<sup>14</sup>G. Klaus, M. Buhr (ed.), *Philosophisches Wörterbuch 2*, Leipzig 1974, p. 1061.

<sup>15</sup>"Political breakthrough in the GDR in October/November 1989", H. Paul (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 694.

<sup>16</sup>With the central date: November 9<sup>th</sup> — the fall of the Berlin Wall.

<sup>17</sup>A. Wolff-Powęska, Berlin 1989: rewolucja misiów Haribo, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8.11.2009; [http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7230642,Berlin\\_1989\\_\\_rewolucja\\_misiow\\_Haribo.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7230642,Berlin_1989__rewolucja_misiow_Haribo.html) (from 29.12.2012).

<sup>18</sup>One could also ask why this date was chosen for the official commemoration and not the day the Berlin Wall fell — November 9<sup>th</sup>.

resulted in the fall of the wall, and not in a series of events that eventually led to the reunification of Germany.

To what extent can one associate the events related to the year 1989/1990 and the term ‘peaceful revolution’? Let us answer by referring to the characteristics of the contemporary term ‘revolution’ in the German language, given by O.W. Lembcke<sup>19</sup>. The author mentions among other: emotionality, symbolism and rituals. ‘Peaceful revolution’ seems to be an event that actually made the previously accumulated emotions of the subjected society “burst”. There was a strong feeling of resentment against the oppressors and the euphoria concerning victories over the despotism. The strong symbolism was also contained in the Berlin Wall, parallel to the Bastille in the French Revolution, which for the French symbolized the oppression. Another symbol was embedded in the slogan: “Wir sind das Volk” with similar influence as “liberty, equality, fraternity” in the French Revolution. Analyzing the texts and museum exhibitions, one can feel that there was a widespread awareness among the participants that this was a historic moment. This awareness sought its external expression in the sense of belonging to a community — for example in marches and demonstrations. The power and identification potential of those rituals was immense and their message was: we, the People and not those who are in power represent the will of the nation.

Considering the term ‘revolution’ as applicable to the events of 1989, one has to take into account the fact that usually in response to a word that we hear, our mind conjures up images and a network of associations. In the case of the word ‘revolution,’ among many associations which may inadvertently come to mind, there are: ‘fear,’ ‘violence,’ ‘fight,’ etc., and it might not necessarily be a spontaneous and enthusiastic fight for freedom that ends in a complete collapse of a discredited system that comes to one’s mind. In order to mark the word ‘revolution’ in a clearly positive way, the word was complemented by the attribute ‘peaceful’. However, the attribute ‘peaceful’ was probably chosen not only to neutralize the term ‘revolution’ and to deprive it of any negative connotations. The concept of ‘revolution’ can be supplemented with additional attributes that differentiate it, in this case, the peacefulness of the revolution was to be its main characteristic. ‘Friedlich’ (peaceful) stresses the peaceful course of events (die friedliche Entwicklung), which first: took place without

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<sup>19</sup>O.W. Lembcke, 14, Juli 1789 — Erfindung der Revolution, [in:] R. Gröschner, W. Reinhard (eds.), Tage der Revolution — Feste der Nation, Tübingen 2010, p. 94–95.

violence, and second, whose aim was peace<sup>20</sup>. In accordance with the rules of the German grammar 'friedliche Revolution' can be understood as a *genetivus subiectivus* and *genetivus obiectivus*. Thus, in the first case, we are dealing with a reference to the subject — a revolution together with an attribute pointing to its peaceful course, and in the second case: revolution, whose aim is peace (revolution aimed at peace)<sup>21</sup>.

There are those who are opposed to the attribute 'peaceful' for the revolution of 1989, even though they admit that the connotations are justified as they reflect the intention of non-resorting to violence undertaken by protesters (even if in some clashes with the police took place in Berlin and Dresden, among other places). Rolf Gröschner, remaining in the conceptual tradition of Thomas Hobbes, notes a contradiction between the word 'peaceful' as the denomination of a successful revolution and the properties of the adjective 'peaceful' — one that does not question the authority of the state<sup>22</sup>. Although the demonstrators were determined not to use violence against the order which in their eyes was lawless, but did not, however, behave peacefully in the philosophical and legal sense (they acted against the government of the state). This was a mass movement, which in the given circumstances led to the bloodless transition, but, according to opponents of that attribute, it mitigates the danger associated with the pacification of the state, which then had large defense forces. Thus a negative consequence of the application of the word 'peaceful' negates the fact that the demonstrators have shown courage walking out on the streets. Moreover, the term 'peaceful revolution' may seem like a *contradiction in adjecto* the same as communist slogan 'struggle for peace' (excluding the metaphorical use).

One may also ask why the word 'the Turn/the Change' ('die Wende') was not considered more appropriate to describe the transformation of the political system. Firstly, it is a word negatively "marked" as this term was used by the Secretary General of German Unity Party Egon Krenz upon taking office, and two days later — 20 October 1989 — the central authority of the party "Neues Deutschland" devoted four pages to this subject<sup>23</sup>. (Some explain that it might

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<sup>20</sup>K. Sommerfeldt, H. Schreiber (eds.), Wörterbuch zur Valenz und Distribution deutscher Adjektive, Leipzig 1974, p. 199–200.

<sup>21</sup>R. Gröschner, Der 9. November als Feiertag einer Freiheitsrevolution, [in:] R. Gröschner, W. Reinhard (eds.), op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>22</sup>Ibidem, p. 262.

<sup>23</sup><http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Artikel/20Jahre/2009-10-20-wende-oder-wie.html> (from 29.12.2012).



have been their way of overcoming the weakness of communist language by resorting to the concepts from the semantic field of ‘change’ and ‘renewal’<sup>24</sup>). Secondly ‘die Wende’ does not seem to reflect the meaning of strongly emotionally marked ‘revolution’, because it does not assume that the changes were made by the society (‘die Wende’ contained the idea that it was to be carried out by the ruling elites, which was exactly the intention of Egon Krenz while using the word ‘die Wende’). Meanwhile, the ‘peaceful revolution’ was carried out from the bottom up, and this is particularly emphasized in the commemorating texts: “Von nun an bestimmten nicht mehr die alten Machthaber des Regimes der Menschen das Schicksal, sondern die Menschen wiesen selbst den Weg”<sup>25</sup>.

In addition, ‘revolution’ can be associated with momentous facts, even apart from axiological layer of the word. Irrefutably, the French and Russian revolutions were events of great significance in history, and so the use of this term may be a form of lending “glamour” and “historical significance” to the interpretation of historical events of 1989.

Moving on to reflections concerning the linguistic choice of the expression ‘peaceful revolution’ one should note that after 1989, some languages underwent one of the biggest transformations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century history<sup>26</sup>. Although this statement was uttered by K. Ożóg with reference to the Polish language after 1989, it might be generalized to other languages freed from the bondage of the “communist newspaper”. The below-mentioned conclusions coming from the analysis carried out by Ehrhart Neubert<sup>27</sup> on the changes in the language which took place around 1989 in East Germany, allow for treating the term ‘peaceful revolution’ as a continuation of other linguistic choices, which were then made:

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<sup>24</sup>J. Bralczyk, *O języku polskiej polityki lat osiemdziesiątych i dziewięćdziesiątych*, Warszawa 2003, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup>“From now on it was not the authorities of the old regime that decided about the ways the society should go, it was the very people who traced the way for politics”. P. Gunnar, *Wir sind das Volk. Verfassungsdiskussionen im Einigungsprozess 1989/90*, [in:] D. Blume, U. Brey Mayer, B. Ulrich (eds.), *Im Namen der Freiheit! Verfassung und Verfassungswirklichkeit in Deutschland 1848–1919–1949–1989*, Dresden 2008, p. 101

<sup>26</sup>K. Ożóg, *Język w służbie polityki*, Rzeszów 2004, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup>E. Neubert, *Die Sprache in der Revolution 1989* [in:] R. Gröschner, W. Reinhard (eds.), *op. cit.*

In the fall of 1989 there was a general feeling that the words have become a way of confronting the regime. This breakthrough in the speech began in September 1989 with quite defensive slogans (eg 'keine Gewalt')<sup>28</sup>. The commonly used political key words of the GDR disappeared or became a taboo, for example, words such as: 'tasks' ('Aufgaben'), 'achievements' ('Errungenschaften'), 'progress' ('Fortschritt'), 'comrade' ('Genosse'), party ('die Partei'), 'plan' ('der Plan'). Even the ruling party, in order to keep the power as long as possible, tried to use the old words in a new sense, partly by marking them with additional attributes: 'socialism with a human face' ('Sozialismus mit menschlichen Antlitz'), 'real reforms' ('wirkliche Reformen'), 'real dialogue' ('echter Dialog'), 'real/full democracy' ('wahre/volle Demokratie').

A very unique context for some linguistic expressions was provided by the prayers for peace ('Friedensgebete') — events held in Leipzig, which were the source of the words of encouragement penetrating the official language. Witnesses describe that people discovered their own ways of expressing themselves, not fearing to confront the existing language through various language games, verbal slogans and citations from the regime: "How we demonstrate (in the original version: work) today, is how we live tomorrow" ("Wie wir heute demonstrieren (früher arbeiten!) werden wir morgen leben")<sup>29</sup>. Mocking the party jargon was also not uncommon, mostly by using the dogmas and pompous or overused formulations. Slogans and banners allow for the assessment of the evolution of the consciousness of the society. In the early demonstrations in September 1989, the texts were different from those in November or spring of 1990. In November, there were demands associated with the fall of the wall and unity: "Deutschland Einig Vaterland", in December overtly against the party "SED — das tut weh" (a word play using rhyme between the party abbreviation and the verb 'to hurt'). The January slogans in 1990 already reflected the need for institutionalization: "Es wird langsam zur Dual, wir brauchen diese Wahl" (we badly need elections, enough of dual governing).

People were looking for podiums on which to speak, to tell about what they could not express in 40 years. They voiced their complaints, accusations, wishes, hopes, expressions of despair. Although the meetings were organized in the church environment, the non-Christian opposition members were also invited to speak out against the existing order. They referred to concepts and

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<sup>28</sup>Ibidem, p. 212.

<sup>29</sup>Ibidem.

notions that would form the content of the new, future social order. Many people have written letters to the clergy, writers, poets, dissidents, proposing solutions to social problems, sharing thoughts. In Leipzig, there was a pole, where everyone could post their demands. Passion and joy caused by the access to free speech in the society increased with the increasing autonomy and the belief that with the rise of free speech a new quality of society was being created<sup>30</sup>.

Having looked at some book titles published or supported by the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED-Dictatorship, one can notice a clear reference to the values and emotions that characterized the period of transition in Eastern Germany: “Vom Gebet zur Demo. 1989 — Die friedliche Revolution begann in den Kirchen”<sup>31</sup>, “Die Erfahrung der Freiheit”<sup>32</sup>, “Unsere Revolution. Die Geschichte der Jahre 1989/1990”<sup>33</sup>, “Der der Einzelnen Mut. Die Revolution in Arnstadt 1989”<sup>34</sup>, “Keine Gewalt! Revolution in Dresden 1989”<sup>35</sup>.

These titles refer to the former sense of community, which was also constructed at the level of language, among other things, by the formula “we”<sup>36</sup> (“Wir sind das Volk”)<sup>37</sup>. This ‘we’ stood in opposition to the ‘them’ — the ruling party. It was the ‘people’, who abandoned the role of subjects, challenged the legality of the power of the party and elevated themselves to the role of actual, not just declarative sovereign (The GDR constitution stipulated that the power was held by the people). And so the word ‘Volk’, which had intimidated people so far, e.g. (judges — ‘Volksrichter’ — in the name of the people pronounced sentences, the police ‘Volkspolizei’ chased the enemies of the people, the Party that led the people ‘Volkspartei’). But in the in autumn of 1989 ‘das Volk’ gained another meaning — it became the unifying theme for the whole society.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibidem, p. 210.

<sup>31</sup>A. Brummer (ed.), *From Prayer to Demonstration. Peaceful Revolution Started in Churches*, Frankfurt a. M. 2009.

<sup>32</sup>F. Hoffmann (ed.), *The Experiment of Freedom*, Berlin 2012.

<sup>33</sup>E. Neubert, *Our Revolution. The History of the Year 1989/1990*, München 2008.

<sup>34</sup>J. Schonfelder, *The Courage of the Individuals. Revolution in Arnstadt 1989*, Jena 2009.

<sup>35</sup>H. Starke (ed.), *Non Violence! Revolution in w Dresden in 1989*, Dresden 2009.

<sup>36</sup>In the then Poland there was also this common ‘we’ that underlined the significance of the political and social changes. J. Bralczyk, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>37</sup>This phrase later changed into “Wir sind ein Volk”, appearing for the first time in Leipzig on 4.09.1989. M. Kilian, *Staatsrecht und Staatssymbolik zwischen 9. November 1989 und 3. Oktober 1990*, [in:] R. Gröschner, W. Reinhard (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 235.

At the time, the language was also used to activate those who were politically undecided “Fernseh’n aus, kommt heraus!” (turn off the TV, come to us!). The words were like dynamite, things were said out loud, for which only several weeks ago one could legally be punished<sup>38</sup>.

At that time the party was desperate to remain in power, but lost the influence over the society. Erich Honecker, shortly before his resignation, came up with a proposal of a public ‘dialogue’: “Dialog ist unsere Politik”. But the long-awaited dialogue came too late and was seen as a design to put an end to the demonstrations. Soon, in the streets one could see banners in response to Honecker’s suggestion: “Ulbricht log, Honecker log, Krenz log, Dialog” (a play on words based on the rhyme between the past tense form of the verb ‘to lie’ and the word ‘dialogue’). The party failed to get out of the maze of propaganda speech, up to the point that they were still using words such ‘comrades’ (“Liebe Genossen und Genossinnen”) referring to a society that was just trying to fight the communist regime. Their vocabulary could no more lend itself to describe the new social and political reality.

The present-day term ‘peaceful revolution’ makes a clear reference to the rhetoric of the period of the collapse of the GDR. Its connotations and the potential to unify the society can be combined with the potential of other forms of expression created then. At that time the idea was to build a community of common values and purpose in society, and the term ‘die friedliche Revolution’ today is meant to build positive memories around the events of the year 1989. Hence, one can argue that the attribute ‘peaceful revolution’ is a continuation of that language from ‘die Wende’, as it is filled with the rhetoric of revolutionary struggle for freedom. The whole positive image of the events in East Germany in 1989 is formed on this concept.

One should remember, however, that the events recognized by posterity as groundbreaking and revolutionary tend to be romanticized. For example, the search for gunpowder in the Bastille, originally motivated by strategic and military needs, has been replaced by the release of the prisoners from the Bastille as the sole purpose. This also applies to demonizing the conditions in which the prisoners lived in Bastille and their idealization as innocent victims of despotism. In the case of ‘peaceful revolution’, it is hard to deny that the collapse of East Germany was inevitable, since it no longer had political support from the outside and was on the verge of economic bankruptcy, but on the other hand,

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<sup>38</sup>E. Neubert, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

one should not question the courage of the society, who confronted the regime in the squares and streets of East Germany.

In Germany, the pride stemming from the events described as ‘peaceful revolution’ is to some extent a compensation for a sense of shame originating from the years 1933–1945. ‘The peaceful revolution’ is a ground for a new memory, suggested in place of the previous one, as the events of 1989 were clearly successful, compared to the whole German history and therefore fully suitable for the state commemoration.

A confirmation for this can be found in the following words of Anna Wolff-Powęska: “The Germans have the right to warm up by the fire of revolution memory, which enabled them to overcome their historical fatalism of the date of 9<sup>th</sup> November. After the Nazi coup in 1923 and Kristallnacht in 1938, the November revolution of 1989 allowed them to find a positive material to build a new identity on”<sup>39</sup>.

**Magdalena Dobkiewicz**

**‘POKOJOWA REWOLUCJA’ JAKO SPOSÓB KONCEPTUALIZACJI  
WYDARZEŃ ROKU 1989 W NIEMCZECH WSCHODNICH**

**Streszczenie**

W artykule postawiono tezę, że wyrażenie ‘die friedliche Revolution’ jest konsekwencją przełomu w języku, do którego doszło w Niemczech Wschodnich jesienią 1989 roku. Ten obecny we współczesnym oficjalnym piśmiennictwie w Niemczech zwrot pokazuje metodę konceptualizacji ówczesnych wydarzeń w NRD. Jego konotacje zestawiać można z powstałymi wtedy formami wyrażania („językiem przełomu”), które miały budować w społeczeństwie wspólnotę wartości. Określenie ‘pokojowa rewolucja’ może być traktowane zatem jako kontynuacja „języka przełomu” wypełnionego retoryką rewolucyjnej walki o wolność. Stało się pojęciem, na podstawie którego tworzy się konkretny obraz wydarzeń roku 1989/1990 w Niemczech Wschodnich. W pracy podaje się także możliwe powody takiego wyboru językowego, między innymi w zestawieniu z terminem ‘przełom’ (‘die Wende’). Wnioski wynikające z artykułu pozwalają twierdzić, że wyrażenie ‘pokojowa rewolucja’, na mocy swoich pozytywnych konotacji, jest podstawą budowania wspólnej pamięci oficjalnej dotyczącej najnowszej historii Niemiec.

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<sup>39</sup>A. Wolff-Powęska, op. cit.