Who Tore Down the Iron Curtain and Why?
Eye Witnesses Discuss the Dramatic Events of 1989 after 25 Years

A panel discussion with

Minister Daniel Herman (Czech Republic), Minister of Culture
Ambassador György Szapáry (Hungary)
Mr. Toralf Pilz (Germany), Head of Political, Economic, Press, and Information Section, EU Mission in Baku
Dr. Pavol Demeš (Slovakia), Former Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of Slovakia, Current Transatlantic Fellow, German Marshall Fund
Mrs. Maria Koziebrodska (Poland), Democracy Activist, Solidarity Movement
Professor Hope M. Harrison (USA), George Washington University (moderator)

1989 has been called “the year of miracles.” Twenty-five years ago, courageous citizens across Central and Eastern Europe pushed to end communist rule, taking Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms further than he ever planned. Poland’s Solidarity brought the opposition to power while a reformist government in Hungary opened its border with Austria. As peaceful citizens took to the streets in East Germany, the Berlin Wall fell, and in Czechoslovakia a transition to democracy saw the dissident Vaclav Havel elected president. Our five panelists were all part of these world-changing events in their home countries and will discuss what motivated them then and how they evaluate the revolutions of 1989 now.

Minister Daniel Herman was a Catholic priest and supporter of the opposition; he went on to serve as spokesman for the Czech Bishops’ Conference, head of the Information Office of the Ministry of Interior, director of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in Prague, and member of the Czech parliament. Ambassador György Szapáry fled Hungary in 1956 and went on to work for the IMF for almost 30 years, but returned to participate in the dramatic events of 1989 and later became the deputy head of the National Bank of Hungary and chief economic policy advisor to the prime minister. Mr. Toralf Pilz escaped from East Germany in May 1989 by traveling to Hungary and swimming across the Save River to Yugoslavia; after unification, he became a German diplomat serving in Ulan Bator, Stockholm, Kabul and Oslo before Baku. Dr. Pavol Demeš was active in the opposition in Bratislava in 1989 and after the Velvet Revolution served in a variety of government posts, including as foreign policy advisor to the Slovak president, before heading the German Marshall Fund’s office in Bratislava and hosting a television program on international relations. Mrs. Maria Koziebrodska began her pro-democracy activism in 1978, which grew to include writing for underground newspapers, establishing chapters of the Solidarity movement in her native Wroclaw, delivering messages to Solidarity activists in hiding, and moving underground activists from apartment to apartment. Professor Hope M. Harrison is an expert on post-1945 Europe and has published and spoken widely on the history of the Berlin Wall and the Cold War.

This panel is being coordinated with the Embassies of the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Germany, and Slovakia.

Monday, November 17th, 2014
4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
Lindner Commons
1957 E Street NW, Room 602
Please RSVP at http://go.gwu.edu/ironcurtain

Reception to follow
This event is on the record.