The fall of the Berlin Wall twenty years ago created a beacon of hope that big changes were in store for Albania and its totalitarian regime. Now, two decades after the fall, people can still vividly recall details of that particular day. Albanians will always remember the peaceful rallies of students, intellectuals and citizens of Tirana one year after the fall of the Wall, as the symbol of freedom and democratic changes. The student rallies of 1990 were the first manifestations of courage and freedom against the totalitarian regime, and of Democracy and legal representation over communism. The leader of this movement, speaking recently at a conference entitled “1989-1990: The era of change in Albania” declared that “At that time, Albania was one of the most isolated of countries. The country lived under the worst totalitarian communist regime of all Eastern states. For 45 years, Albania was ruled by the most extreme and most totalitarian of regimes. The Iron Fist of this dictatorship had banned the freedoms and the basic human rights of its citizens, as well as property rights, by taking everything from its citizens -- land, wealth, and their homes, and creating another system in which everything belonged to the state and where citizens became slaves of the socialist state.” The memory of these people recalls the cultural barbarity of that system, including the destruction or closing down of all churches, mosques and other places of worship, and forcing citizens to adhere to an atheistic belief. Institutional memory will recall a regime that executed many Albanians without fair trial – twice as many executions as compared to all other communist regimes in Eastern Europe. It was only in the early 1990s that the communist regime decided to remove an article from the Penal Code under which anyone who had left the country was charged of high-treason. Many people who had attempted to leave the country were murdered and, in some cases, had their dead bodies included in a macabre travelling government show that toured Albanian cities such as Shkodra, Saranda, etc. It was only after the student rallies that the regime realised its time in power was over, and they would not be able to escape the tidal wave of freedom started by the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is the moment when Albanians started running through every town square and tearing down the statues of their dictator.
This autumn, Europe and the rest of the world will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the resulting change in the landscape of Europe and the reordered world powers. On 28 April 2009, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, delivered a speech in Berlin.

"To be honest, I find it hard to believe already 20 years have gone since we saw the Berlin Wall come down. I can still see the images of citizens of the East and the West hammering down the artificial division of this city – but also of the country and of the continent. The transformation which this place has undergone – and at what pace – is a model of what happened across the whole of the united Europe. Like this city, countries and regions were previously isolated behind the Iron curtain. Today many of them are thriving in the heart of an enlarged European Union.

First of all, EU enlargement has served as an anchor of stability and democracy and as a driver of personal freedom and economic dynamism in Europe. It has advanced the rule of law and protection of human rights. It brought about peaceful democratic change and extended the area of freedom and prosperity to almost 500 million people. Enlargement increased our weight in the world – be it in international trade or when addressing issues of global nature, such as climate change or development. It has substantially increased our crisis management capability, notably for peace-keeping missions. Let us thus recall that the EU’s enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe was certainly not just a moral obligation. It was as much a matter of our enlightened self-interest in terms of stability and security. Secondly, there was always a solid economic case for EU enlargement. Above all, the enlargement and free labour flows coincided with the creation of new jobs. Investments in the new member states increased opportunities, lowered the unemployment and improved living conditions, thus making it less likely for people to seek jobs abroad. Indeed, some people left, creating wage pressures in some sectors (dentists, plumbers). However, many are returning, bringing home new skills and entrepreneurial spirit. Remittances they send benefit families and increase quality of life in the new member states.

Beyond economic figures, the citizens in the new and not-so-new member states benefit directly in terms of personal quality of life: Here I am thinking, for instance, of much improved environmental standards and increased consumer protection. Joining the European Union also presented citizens throughout the enlarged Union with further opportunities for networking within the knowledge economy, starting from the Erasmus student exchange and stretching to pan-European research cooperation. At this point, I must stress the importance of the careful management of the EU accession process. As all recent and potential entrants to the EU are painfully aware, the preparations for enlargement require hard work and difficult decisions, in order to meet the Union’s demanding standards in virtually all areas of public policy.

As to the track record, the new member states have mostly been rapid and effective in implementing reforms. Some have in fact achieved a better record of position of EU legislation than their EU15 counterparts. No one says that the accession of 12 states comprising 100 million new EU citizens was picture-perfect from the first second. It is true that there have been isolated cases of weakness in the rule of law and also certain inappropriate administrative capacities. The experience of the 2004/07 accession is indeed essential for our current agenda that covers of the Western Balkans and Turkey. The region is part of Europe and it is strategically important for the European Union. If the positive experience of the 12 Central and Eastern new member states is anything to go by, then clearly the future potentially holds equally beneficial developments for the Western Balkans and Turkey. Even the fastest scenario for the next accession of a new member state, likely to be Croatia, is clearly slower than the slowest envisaged scenario for the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Time is on our side: we can pursue deepening and widening in parallel. This has been and still remains the best recipe to build a strong and united Europe.

Today Europe is truly whole and free. Let us keep it that way."

**Five years of an enlarged EU**

The year 2009 marks a historic double-anniversary. 20 years ago, we saw the Berlin Wall come down and the Iron Curtain crumble. In May this year, we celebrate the 5th anniversary of the EU enlargement that successfully reunited Eastern and Western Europe.

The recent enlargements of the European Union were a milestone in the process of unifying Europe and have brought benefits to citizens throughout the Union. Economically, enlargement has led to increased living standards in the new Member States, while creating export and investment opportunities for the old ones. It has also helped consolidate democracy, stability and security on our continent. An enlarged EU carries more weight when addressing issues of global importance be it climate change or the world economy and its governance. Five years on the EU is not only bigger, it is also stronger, more dynamic and culturally richer. In the current difficult global context, the big challenge is to resist any temptation of protectionist tendencies that would destroy the huge benefits for citizens brought about by the creation of a border free single market of 500 million people.

"The 2004 and 2007 enlargements were a huge historic step. They put an end to the division of Europe, helped consolidate democracy and brought economic benefits for all EU countries in terms of higher competitiveness, higher economic growth and higher job creation. We should not let the crisis overshadow this uncontested success. United, we can shape the solution to global issues such as climate change or a new international financial governance. Divided we will achieve nothing," said Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Joaquín Almunia.

Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, added: "Enlargement has served as an anchor of stability, and driver of democracy and the rule of law in Europe. Economically it has benefitted both new and old member states, as well as the EU as a whole. It has extended the area of peace and prosperity to almost 500 million people and increased our weight in the world."

It has been five years since the EU took in 10 new Members from Central and Eastern Europe, putting an end to several decades of division brought about by the Cold War. Two others, Bulgaria and Romania, joined in 2007. A Communication on "Five Years of an Enlarged EU" shows that the enlargement brought about huge economic benefits for both sides.
The Berlin Wall was a physical barrier separating West Germany from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (East Germany). The wall became the symbol of the Iron Curtain dividing Western Europe and Eastern Bloc.

The wall separated East Germany from West Germany for more than a quarter of a century, from the day its construction began on 13 August 1961 until it was brought down on 9 November 1989. The construction of the Berlin Wall, started in November 20, 1961. Two months before, on 15 June 1961, the First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party and GDR State Council chairman, Walter Ulbricht, stated during an international press conference, "Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten!" (No one has the intention of erecting a wall the first)

The record of a telephone call between Nikita Khrushchev and Ulbricht on August 1, 1961, suggests that it was Khrushchev that took the initiative for the construction. On Saturday, 12 August 1961, the leaders of the GDR gathered and Ulbricht signed the order to close the border and erect a wall. The day after the border with West Berlin was closed. During the construction of the Wall, soldiers received orders to shoot anyone who attempted to defect. Additionally, chain fences, walls, minefields and other obstacles were installed along the length of the inner-German border.

The east German government claimed that the Wall was an "anti-Fascist protective rampart" ("antifaschistischer Schutzwand") intended to dissuade aggression from the West. Another official justification was the activities of western agents in Eastern Europe. According to the official figures, during this period, at least 98 people were killed while trying to cross the Wall into West Berlin. However, other sources claim that there were at least 200. The economic collapse of the communist system and the changes in the international balance of power during the 80's, led to civil unrest and pro-

The fall of the Berlin Wall paved the way for German reunification, which was formally concluded on 3 October 1990.
Iron Curtain symbolism

“Iron Curtain” is a term used to describe the boundary that separated the Warsaw Pact countries from the NATO countries from about 1945 until the end of the Cold War in 1991. The Iron Curtain was both a physical and an ideological division that represented the way Europe was viewed after World War II. To the east of the Iron Curtain were the countries that were connected to or influenced by the former Soviet Union. This included part of Germany (East Germany), Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania (until 1960 when it aligned with China). While Yugoslavia was Communist politically it was not considered to be a part of the Eastern Bloc or behind the Iron Curtain. Josip Broz Tito, the president of Yugoslavia at the time, was able to maintain access with the west while leading a communist country. The other countries to the west of the Iron Curtain had democratic governments. The term “Iron Curtain” was coined by German politician Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk, and made popular by Winston Churchill, who first used it in a public speech in March of 1946. The term was first used to refer to the actual metal barrier that cut the continent in two, but it soon became a reference to the ideological barrier also. When Churchill first referred to the barrier he wasn’t trying to emulate the words of von Krosigk. In a telegram directed to US President Harry S. Truman, Churchill spoke about the European situation and said “An iron curtain is drawn down upon their front. We do not know what is going on behind.” This became the first official mention of the term Iron Curtain.

The Iron Curtain fence stretched for thousands of kilometers to separate Eastern and Western countries, and it was especially strong in Germany, where the Berlin Wall became an unmistakable symbol of the Iron Curtain division. In certain regions, the Iron Curtain was nothing more than a plain chain link fence, when in other places it was a highly guarded area which only people carrying special government permissions could approach. Demolition of the Iron Curtain started in Hungary during the summer of 1989 when thousands of Eastern Germans began to emigrate to West Germany via Hungary on September 11, foreshadowing the fall of the Berlin Wall.