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Merkel Hails Fall of Berlin Wall as Proof ‘Dreams Can Come True’

By HARRIET TORRY
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BERLIN—White balloons spanning a stretch of the former death strip floated over hundreds of thousands of revelers in the German capital on Sunday, culminating a day of celebrations to mark 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

More than 300,000 people gathered in Berlin to watch a light installation of 8,000
helium balloons tracing a nine-mile stretch be released into the night sky, police said. The illuminated balloons snaked past historic locations such as Checkpoint Charlie as part of a celebration that included music and fireworks at the city’s Brandenburg Gate—a location once circumvented by the wall.

Speaking earlier in the day, German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the fall of the Berlin Wall proof that dreams could come true during a ceremony to mark the event’s 25th anniversary. She added that its collapse offered hope to regions where “freedom and human rights are threatened or even trampled on.”

For days, celebrations throughout Germany have been commemorating the opening of the East German border on Nov. 9, 1989. The breaching of the border heralded the collapse of the Communist system and led to German reunification less than a year later.

“The Berlin Wall, this concrete-cast symbol of state despotism, brought millions of people to the edge of the endurable,” said Ms. Merkel, herself a child of the former East Germany. At the time of the wall’s fall, she was a 35-year-old scientist in East
Berlin.

The timing of the release of the balloons on Sunday roughly coincided with the historical moment, at 6:57 p.m. local time, when on Nov. 9, 1989, then-East German Politburo member Günter Schabowski replied to a journalist’s question at a news conference to the effect that the Communist state was to open its borders immediately. His response prompted hoards of Berliners to flock to and breach border crossings as East German guards stood by.

At the site of the wall on Sunday, 29-year old student Adam Schymura said the wall of lights was “a very nice idea, I don’t remember the fall of the wall 25 years ago, but look at all the people coming here to see it.”

“It’s so visible like the wall was so visible; it’s nice that it’s following its path” said Heidrun Kühn, 71, a retired public servant from the former East Berlin who was standing by the Spree river to watch the balloons with her family.

The celebrations also paid tribute to those who died trying to flee Communism for the West. An official estimate of the number of people who died trying to cross the Berlin Wall is 138. Altogether, around a thousand people died attempting to cross the 856-mile border between the former West and East Germany.

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