



FENCE WALLS

From the Iron Curtain to the US and Hungarian Border Barriers and the Emergence of Global Walls

INTRODUCTION

Good fences may make good neighbors, as the proverbial saying goes, but the building of a concrete wall along the entire length of the US–Mexican border proposed by Donald Trump upon officially announcing his candidacy for the presidency on June 16, 2015 led to widespread indignation in the US, Mexico, and Latin America at large, auguring badly for inter-American relations. The border barrier issue, however, has been poisoning US–Mexican and inter-American relations since 1993 when Democratic President Clinton ordered the construction of a 13-mile/21-km border wall between San Diego and Tijuana. Since then some 700 miles/1,100 km of border fence and wall sections have been built mostly during Democratic President Obama’s administrations (2009–2017) in line with the 2006 Secure Fence Act as signed by Republican President George W. Bush and enjoying bipartisan support.¹ That still leaves two-thirds of the border unfenced. Republican President Trump’s border wall would be the culmination of a process that has been going on for twenty-five years and has, in fact, shown more continuity than difference over the various administrations in the White House. Due to the increasing militarization of the Border Patrol and the growth in the number of unauthorized border crossing-related deaths,² domestic and international

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1. “Latin American Reaction.”

2. Reece Jones’s *Violent Borders* offers a remarkable overview of developments on the US–Mexican border. The Border Patrol has found more than

opposition to the US border barrier have often made references to the 'Iron Curtain' in North America and its cutting a continent in half. But President Trump's border wall plans—to some a promise, to others a threat—have invited the most vociferous criticism and backlash so far,³ and the Iron Curtain analogy got settled in the media without much questioning of the appropriateness of the comparison. The gross mistake of comparing the protective border fences against unauthorized entry with the prison wall-like border fences against unauthorized exit went unnoticed in the American and Western media.⁴ Simultaneously, however, the Iron Curtain metaphor made an even bigger comeback in the region of its original location: the heart of Europe.

A METAPHOR AT WORK

While most of the world, and Europe in particular, was reading the news about the proposition of candidate Trump in disbelief, the very next day, on June 17, 2015, the Hungarian right-of-center government of Viktor Orbán announced the building of a border fence along Hungary's southern Schengen border with Serbia—where the Iron Curtain used to run—in response to the European migrant crisis going strong since 2014. The idea of a fence wall originated with László Toroczkai, then vice-president of the right-wing populist Jobbik Party and mayor of Ásotthalom, a village of 4,000 people

6,000 bodies since the 1990s, but estimates are two additional deaths for every recovered body. The continuous rise in border deaths is largely the result of the construction of the border wall and the massive border patrol presence that also involves the use of deadly force by agents. The latter caused the death of 33 migrants between 2010–2015. The first National Border Patrol Strategy document, released in 1994, predicted that “with traditional entry and smuggling routes disrupted, illegal traffic will be deterred, or forced over more hostile terrain, less suited for crossing and more suited for enforcement.” Each year since the 1990s, the Tucson, Arizona coroner's office has reported a twentyfold increase in the number of migrant bodies recovered (*Violent Borders*, Ch. 2).

3. Silko 4; Schmidt; “Bush Signs”; “Fox dice”; Felbab-Brown; Andreas xi; Regal; “Trump Mexico Wall”; Jacobo and Marshall; Quinn; Huetlin.

4. Except for political science professor Paul G. Kengor's article, “America's 'Berlin Wall'?” on the incorrect use of the Iron Curtain/Berlin Wall metaphor in relation to the US–Mexican border fence, I could not trace writings addressing the issue either in English or in Spanish.

just 6 mi/10 km from the border that was hard-hit by the chaotic and threatening influx of thousands of unauthorized migrants transiting through the village daily. Despite his aversion to fence walls, Toroczkai started lobbying for them in the fall of 2014 since he saw no other solution to restore law and order and to normalize the increasingly tense situation in the region. As examples of effective fence walls, he drew on the US–Mexico and Bulgarian–Turkish border barriers in place since the 1990s and 2013 respectively.⁵ Domestic opposition and international critics immediately turned to the Iron Curtain metaphor in this case too.⁶ From the moment Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán announced the border fence onwards, US President Donald Trump and Orbán have often been compared with regards to their views on border security and migration.⁷ The parallels drawn between the two heads of state, one leading a global superpower and the other a regional small power, have marked a truly unprecedented moment of US–Hungarian relations. The protection of borders and national interests with walls and fences prompted many, nationally and internationally alike, to draw analogies with the Iron Curtain, which both powers—no matter how disparate they may be—had a historically intimate relation with.

The US faced the Iron Curtain on the inner-German border and in West Berlin. It assisted escapees from behind the Iron Curtain with generous refugee admissions, and its staunch anti-Communism contributed to tearing down the fences cutting through Europe. Hungary lived the life of captive nations behind the Iron Curtain

5. Serdült; Lengyel; Lyman; “The Indisputable Success.”

6. “Vasfüggöny a szerb–magyar határon”; “Botka ismét”; Bershidsky; Karasz; “A New Iron Curtain in Europe”; “Successful Hungarian Border Fence”; Rodgers and Kallius; “Border Fence with Serbia and Croatia.” Similarly to the case above, the distorted application of the Iron Curtain metaphor to the Eastern EU and its border fences was the topic of only two articles, both by Yuliya Komska (Dartmouth College), “What Red Deer Tell Us about” and “Iron Curtains.” Regarding the Hungarian border barrier, historian Áron Máthé, vice president of the Committee of National Remembrance, has given various interviews refuting the application of the Iron Curtain metaphor to the current fence. See Máthé “Border Fence Equals Iron Curtain?” and Zoltán Veczán’s article on the same in Hungarian.

7. Porter; Faiola, “How Do You Stop Migrants?” and “Hungary’s Prime Minister”; Shattuck; Rachman.

and was the first country in the Eastern Bloc to open it in August 1989 thus contributing to the end of the Cold War. Yet by the mid-2010s both nations' governments had come to see walls and fences as necessary to handle unauthorized entry and national security issues. Recent opinion polls, however, attest to the fact that whereas about one third of Americans (35%) support the construction of the border wall and well over half of them oppose it (62%), in the case of Hungary more than three fourths of those polled (78%) approve of the border fence and less than a quarter oppose it (20%).⁸ Interestingly, when the aggregate data for the 28 EU member states (39% approve–51% disapprove) are broken down to individual countries, we find a very strong East-West dichotomy in the support for tight border controls and migrant quota allocations (“Project 28”). When it comes to fortified borders, Eastern Europeans⁹ have a special relationship to fences and walls with various generations living behind them for decades. Since 2015, Central and Eastern European countries have come to form a solid bloc in support of border controls just as they used to form a bloc behind the Iron Curtain. The legacy of the Iron Curtain may serve to explain the marked stance of the Eastern part of the EU against migration.

Critics on both sides of the Atlantic often emphasize that border barriers have never been effective (Porter; Tomlinson; Regal; Jones “Borders and Walls”). These critics employ the Iron Curtain metaphor in the same populist manner that they accuse the governments on the political Right of when its adherents refer to migration as a threat to national security, values, and identity. True, the issue of migration lends itself to easy politicization and political gains. The resurrection of the metaphor serves the purpose of discrediting the proponents of border barriers neces-

8. See Pew Research polls in Sul, and Project 28 poll results (Q9) by Századvég Foundation.

9. Consider that ‘Eastern Europe’ here is not a geographical, but a political and historical term. On the concept of Eastern and Central Europe see McElroy and Applebaum. Also note that Communist Albania and Yugoslavia were not considered as parts of the Eastern Bloc. The former aligned with China from 1960, while the latter—under the leadership of President Tito—was the initiator of the Non-Aligned Movement established in 1961 and was thus independent and neutral.

sitated by the tidal waves of current migration. But apparently, the Iron Curtain left behind a very different imprint in the West and the East and on the two ends of the political spectrum. At the end of the Cold War few envisioned the rapid unfolding of the global migration crisis.¹⁰ In fact, the tightly closed borders of the Cold War era—marked by the prison wall-like Iron Curtain in Europe and its ‘affiliates’ around the globe such as the Bamboo Curtain in East Asia, the Korean Demilitarized Zone, the Cactus Curtain in Cuba, and the Ice Curtain in the Bering Straits—kept one third of the global population off the global market and strictly limited in its international movement (Massey 5).

Even though in the post-Cold War world the age of globalization was expected to break down barriers of all kinds and to make borders largely symbolic, the global emergence of the national security state in our post-9/11 world, coupled with the intensifying global migration crisis, led to quite the contrary. We seem to have entered the era of global walls. Nearly three decades after the dismantling of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, one third of the countries of the world have some type of walls on their borders or border sections.¹¹ Yet in this world of walls, the erection of a border fence on the Schengen border section of Hungary with Serbia in 2015—deemed necessary to stop the massive and irregular influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa heading mostly towards Germany, Sweden, and the UK—led to a major controversy and debate in Europe. But while the Hungarian government was heavily criticized internationally, especially in Western Europe, for constructing ‘a new Iron Curtain’, the very nations of Europe once living behind the Iron Curtain came to view the Hungarian border fence as a necessary evil to protect the European Union from the destabilizing effects of mass migration. For many, the fence wall on the southern Schengen border of the EU became the guarantor of the rule of law and social peace, and it was in no way comparable to the hated and feared Iron Curtain that locked

10. Except for international migration experts, such as Myron Weiner in his seminal book, *The Global Migration Crisis*.

11. After World War II four countries, at the end of the Cold War 12 countries, in 2014 65 countries, while by 2018 some 70 countries had border barriers (Vallet, “Introduction”; Jones “Borders and Walls”).

up entire nations between 1948 and 1989 while protecting their oppressors' regimes. The Visegrád Group (V4) of Central Europe¹² especially turned into a united block in support of increased border controls and restrictions on migration. The fence walls of the spatially identical border sections reflect not only the changing concepts of walls, but also the distinct historical experiences with migration.

FENCES AND WALLS OF THE IRON CURTAIN

The Iron Curtain was a Soviet-style border barrier.¹³ On the one hand, it was a geopolitical wall with the aim of protecting the Soviet buffer zone militarily against potential Western European threats after 1945. On the other hand, it was a migrant wall against emigration or rather flight from Communism. Prohibitive exit rules and closed borders were deemed necessary in order to prevent mass escape from the Soviet-occupied and puppet government-run Eastern European countries and to forestall the brain-drain phenomenon and labor shortages in times of heightened labor mobilization following the Second World War. Between 1945 and 1950, some 15 million emigrants—mainly ethnic Germans—fled from the Soviet-occupied Eastern European countries creating a major refugee crisis in Western Europe that in fact ended only with the erection of the Iron Curtain (Fassmann 207, 209).

Konrad Jarausch points out that the border barrier definitely had a stabilizing effect on Western Europe (9). Yuliya Komska expresses the same view by saying that “citizens of the adjacent Western-bloc countries, eager to keep out communism and atheism, were often just as interested in maintaining the physical borders as were the authorities in the Eastern bloc” (“Iron Curtains”). As a matter of fact, the construction of the Berlin section of the Iron Curtain, for example, was partly received with a degree of relief in the Western world as a means to avoid war (Taylor; Smyser Ch. 7). Upon receiving the news about the construction of walls in Berlin, US President Kennedy expressed the following to top

12. The V4 includes Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary.

13. In the Soviet Union the possibility of legal emigration was terminated in 1922 and unauthorized exit was severely controlled following the 1928 establishment of heavily guarded borders. On Iron Curtain crossings to the West see Wright 1–8.

aide Kenneth O'Donnell: "It's not a very nice solution, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war. [...] This is the end of the Berlin crisis. The other side panicked—not we. We're going to do nothing now because there is no alternative except war" (qtd. in Smyser 106). The Wall was also expected to stop the flow of escapees not only by the East Germans and the Soviets. In the US State Department, Foy David Kohler, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs commented on the constructions as follows: "[T]he East Germans have done us a favor. That refugee flow was becoming embarrassing" (qtd. in Beschloss).

It is important to emphasize that the Iron Curtain was imposed upon Eastern Europe by an invading power. The Soviet Union had the most vested interests in the fortified borders, and the Soviet know-how and military advisers were instrumental in the construction, maintenance, and upgrading of the Iron Curtain border throughout its entire existence of more than 40 years. Its costs, however, burdened predominantly the satellite countries' budgets, constituting a major drain on their economies (Kramer; Léka).

The entire length of the Iron Curtain stretched over 4,220 mi (6,800 km) through Europe from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea and divided the continent into East and West. In comparison, it was twice as long as the US–Mexican border of 1,933mi/3,110km, and it was even longer than the 3,987 mi / 6,416 km US–Canadian border (discounting the Alaskan–Canadian border 1,538 mi / 2,475 km).¹⁴ Until its fall in 1989, it was a physical and ideological border between two hostile blocs. Physically, it emerged gradually. Next to the Soviet–Norwegian and Soviet–Finnish sections in place since 1928, the new Finnish and Baltic sections were established by 1945. Following their annexation, Eastern Finland (Karelia) and the Baltic States lost their sovereignty and were integrated into the Soviet Union. In the satellite states the Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian sections started to be erected and organized in 1948–1949. By 1952, with the construction of the inner-German border (IGB), the Iron Curtain was ready in its entire length except for the Berlin section where the Wall,

14. Source of data: US Census Bureau. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011*. Geography and Environment, Table 359, US–Canada and US–Mexico Border Lengths, p. 223.

the most famous part of the Iron Curtain¹⁵, was erected around West Berlin in various stages between 1961–1975.¹⁶



*Walls,
Material and Rhetorical:
Past, Present,
and Future*

Today, the European Green Belt or the Iron Curtain Trail natural conservation areas, running from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, follow the corridor of the former Iron Curtain. Map source: Public Domain, <upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/be/EuGB_solid_labels_web.png>.

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15. For the seminal photographic documentation of the Iron Curtain corridor see Rose. The Baltic coastal region, including that of Poland, was dotted by large, inaccessible military areas.

16. The Berlin Wall divided into two sections: a 69.5mi/111.9km portion between East Germany (GDR) and West Berlin and a 26.8mi/43.1km portion between East Berlin and West Berlin. It was not one solid line of concrete but a combination of different types of double physical border barriers that consisted of various types of fortified fences (expanded metal, metal mesh, limit signal, and barrier fences) and of walls (wall-shaped front walls and concrete walls). The most well-known, 26.8mi/43.1km long section consisted of double concrete walls (with the 160yd/146m ‘death strip’ in between) stretching across the city center between East and West Berlin. With sections also reaching into residential East Berlin, the complete length of the Berlin Wall was 96mi/156km encircling entire West Berlin (See “Die Berliner Mauer. Stand 31. Juli 1989”; Rottmann 4).

The border defense works along the Iron Curtain were highly complex and heavily militarized areas. Next to the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), its sections of the IGB and the Berlin Wall were the most guarded of the world (Rottman 4–5; 14–22). Each section had its own development and history, but in general terms they included the following:

a) a border zone, 2–15 km wide, in which the local population was issued special documentation and strictly controlled in their movement in and out. Unreliable elements were not allowed to work or reside in the zone and were forcefully relocated;

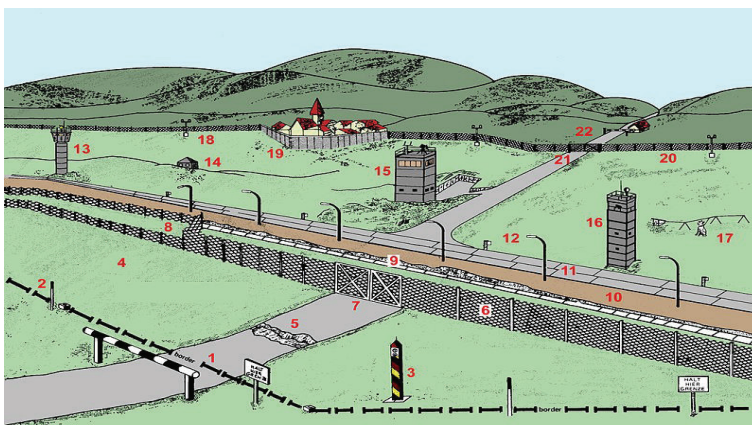
b) regular patrols to prevent escape attempts. They included cars and mounted units. Guards and dog patrol units watched the border 24/7 and were authorized to use their weapons to stop escapees;

c) watchtowers and flood lights at regular distances;

d) anti-vehicle ditches and roadblocks;

e) raked sand strips to track border violations;

f) two lines of barbed wire fences (on the outer and inner borders) with landmines and booby traps in between. Typically in rural areas the border was marked by double fences made of steel mesh (expanded metal) with sharp edges, while near urban areas a high concrete barrier similar to the Berlin Wall was built. A later development of the mid-1960s was the electric signal fence as designed in the SU (Rottman 14–28; Léka; Berki).



The third-generation inner German border fortification system, c. 1984. Source: Public Domain, <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortifications_of_the_inner_German_border#/media/File:System_of_gdr_border_fortification.jpg>.

In addition to the East German sections, the other highly effective section was the 560mi/900km long Czechoslovak border with West Germany and Austria where, apart from the minefields, high voltage electric fences of 4,000–6,000 V were installed between 1951–65.¹⁷ Martin Pulec from the Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism commented as follows: “The fact [that] there were electric fences was a secret in Czechoslovakia, but some people knew about it from foreign radio stations like Radio Free Europe and Voice of America” (Willoughby). Between 1948–1989, there were 282 certified cases of death out of which 91 escapees got electrocuted; most of them, however, were shot (145 escapees), while the rest were killed by mines, drowned, or were savaged by guard dogs (Willoughby). In general, minefields proved very effective deterrents. For instance, on the 221 mi/357 km long Hungarian–Austrian border alone, there were more than 1.1 million landmines deployed in 4–5 lines, first between 1948–1956 and then between 1957–1970, when the mines were finally replaced by an electric signaling system alarming the guards directly. In fact, in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1956 the exodus of some 200,000 Hungarian refugees between October 1956 and January 1957 was made possible by the May 1956 joint decision of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Workers’ Party (MDP) and the Defense Council to clear the minefields on the complete 632mi/1,081km long Hungarian–Austrian and Hungarian–Yugoslav border.¹⁸ Clearance of the border sections was completed by September 1956, and after the Revolution the redeployment of mines was effected on the Austrian border only (Berki; Zsiga 43, 45, 54; “A nyugati és a déli határövezet”). When asked about the effectiveness of the physical barriers and the contemporary high-tech solutions, however, Axel Klausmeier, director of the Berlin Wall Foundation,

17. The high voltage electric fences did not stretch over the entire length of the 560mi/900km long border as it did not follow each and every turn in the border (Willoughby).

18. The relaxation of the western and southern borders of Hungary in mid-1956 was due to the improvement of bilateral relations with both neighboring countries after Stalin’s death in 1953 and the declaration of Austria’s neutrality following the termination of its four-power occupation in 1955 (“A nyugati és a déli határövezet”).

emphasized that the single most effective aspect of the Iron Curtain was that guards were given the order to shoot trespassers. “It was the biggest possible deterrent. Everyone knew: if you tried to cross over to the West, you had to count on dying in a hail of bullets” (qtd. in Huetlin).

Many underline that the Iron Curtain was not impregnable. Some sections of it were porous, and despite all the effort and money invested in it, thousands managed to cross over, under, or above it.¹⁹ Still, successful crossings were the exception rather than the rule. For example, in the 1970s, only 1 in 20 escapees (5%) managed to cross the IGB; in the 1980s, only 1% of escapees reached the other side (Jarausch 17). The cruel “death strip” represented by the Iron Curtain proved a highly successful deterrent. It made unauthorized crossing extremely dangerous since the attempt rarely went undetected. The fences and walls stood as powerful symbols of control and their message was unmistakably clear: emigration by illegal means was practically impossible or way too risky at best. The fence wall reinforced by a human wall of guards patrolling 24/7 was almost impenetrable and very effective. The numbers of those who died while crossing, who were caught in the act and were imprisoned or were even executed are still not known. The most researched sections of the Iron Curtain from this aspect are the IGB and Berlin, where the total current estimates are at 75,000 failed attempts and about 1,300 dead.²⁰ The overwhelming majority of the 13.3 million emigrants from Eastern Europe between 1950–1990 left legally, having been granted official exit permits. Seventy-five percent left under bilateral agreements for “ethnic migration,” ransomed by the receiving government, under lengthy family reunification procedures (for children and the elderly), or fled via third countries (Jarausch 17–19).

With this background in mind it is clear to see that the application of the Iron Curtain metaphor to the current border fences,

19. Silko 4; Komska “Iron Curtains.”

20. Hooper; Connolly; “More Than 1,100 Berlin Wall Victims.” Numbers, however, can vary considerably depending on what is meant by “border-related deaths” by different researchers. In Berlin alone, the official number was 138 in 2015, while researchers at Checkpoint Charlie Museum found 483 dead related to border crossing (Bensch).

and the Hungarian border fence in particular, is a serious mistake despite the fact that both constitute fence walls running along the spatially identical southern border sections of Hungary with Serbia and Croatia. The border sections may be the same, but the two fences are definitely not when we consider the purpose, message, and popular support behind them, and not only because today in Hungary—unlike in the United States²¹—the use of deadly force is not authorized against border crossers, nor are the landmines and high voltage fences of the Cold War years. As Áron Máthé analyzes it in “Border Fence Equals Iron Curtain?”, the Cold War analogy is wrong for various reasons. First, the Iron Curtain stood as a wall of separation between totalitarian dictatorships and the free world. It protected the Communist regimes and forced the captive nations into submission, whereas today, free nations aim to keep up law and order through their elected governments. Therefore, Máthé argues, “modern-day border fences protect Western-style rule of law.” Second, while both border fences are meant to prevent unauthorized crossings, the direction of the population movements they are expected to control is distinct. The Iron Curtain aimed to prevent unlawful exit, that is, “flight from the enslaved nations,” while today’s border fences are meant to control unauthorized entry. In addition, I find it crucial to highlight that in the Iron Curtain era, authorized exit opportunities were very limited. Legal emigration was discouraged through endless legal hurdles, humiliation, intimidation, loss of jobs, and confiscation of property. Finally, as Máthé specifies it, whereas today’s border fences emerged as a result of open political debates with a clear objective, the Iron Curtain was erected

21. The use of deadly force resulted in the death of 33 migrants on the US–Mexican border between 2010–2015 (Jones *Violent Borders*, Ch. 2). In the meantime assaults on Border Patrol agents have more than doubled since the early 2000s with 384 attacks in 2004 and 786 attacks in 2017. The record year was 2007 with 987 assaults. Most attacks have been registered in the Arizona Tucson Sector, known as the nation’s busiest smuggling area. Although most attacks have involved rock throwing, more dangerous ones have been continuously on the rise (Conze; also see Nelsen). For the policy on the use of deadly force see US Customs and Border Protection (2014). For deaths on the border consult Reece Jones’s *Border Walls*, 26–52, 102–125 and *Violent Borders*, Ch. 2.

undercover and mendaciously, exemplified by the Berlin Wall being called the “Anti-Fascist Protective Wall” or by the high voltage electric fences of the Czechoslovak–German section.

The use of the Iron Curtain metaphor predominantly by the Western media and political elite in this new setting holds the danger of driving a wedge between the East and West of the EU amidst the global migration crisis that is not expected to subside in the near future. As Komska puts it in “Iron Curtains,” many Western “[media] outlets have dusted off the term to charge Eastern European countries with sealing their borders, Cold War-style. We should retire the metaphor before it plays a part in fracturing Europe once again.” The challenges facing the EU call for converging instead of diverging policies of border controls and migration. The finding of a common voice, however, could be effectively impeded by the invocation of Cold War terminology when EU politicians and the media lash out against the ‘Iron Curtain mentality’ of Central and Eastern Europeans and their governments in relation to migration. Walls have two sides, however, and it seems the ‘mental wall’ that the Germans used to call “the wall in the head” to describe the psychological impact of the four decades long separation between the East and the West continues to limit Western European thinking as well. This is especially worrisome since the legacy of the Iron Curtain is still strong and can be clearly documented in statistics from life expectancy to economy and prosperity, from the gross average wage to the perceived corruption index or the percentage of the foreign-born (“Twenty Maps”). The line of the Iron Curtain looms even in the 2017 EU scandal regarding the different quality of foodstuffs produced by multinational companies for consumers in the eastern and western parts of the EU (Boffey).

THE HUNGARIAN BORDER FENCE

The East–West dichotomy within the EU has become very marked in relation to the European migration crisis of 2014–2015 and its aftermath. In my view the distinct migration-related experiences on the two sides of the Iron Curtain do contribute to the current marked differences in pro- and anti-immigration policies and attitudes in Western and Eastern European countries amidst the migration crisis. Hungary is a case in point. It was

the first Eastern bloc country to dismantle the hated and feared Iron Curtain in August 1989 when it opened the border fences to East German migrants on their way to West Germany. In November that year the Berlin Wall was torn down. Today Hungary is located on the outlying Schengen borders of the EU. At the height of the migration crisis, in the summer of 2015, Hungary became the first EU country within the Schengen zone to erect a border fence. This phenomenon has been looked at especially critically in the case of a nation that tore down the Iron Curtain and has now 'replaced' it ("France"; Bershidsky; Rodgers and Kallius). Strangely enough, the same border fence building on the Bulgarian–Turkish border starting in 2013 by EU member, but non-Schengen zone member, Bulgaria did not create such tidal waves of criticism, even though—ironically—both countries' barriers run along identical lines of the Iron Curtain (Lyman "Bulgaria"; Sergueva; Charlton).

The decision to build what was conceived as a temporary border barrier or border fence was made for compelling reasons. The number of asylum applications skyrocketed to 46,720 in August of 2015—a world record at the time—overburdening the country's immigration system and infrastructure.²² The number of asylum applications per year grew by 97% in Hungary from 2012 to 2015 (4,676 persons–177,135 persons).²³ In most cases, migrants were not willing to cooperate with the Hungarian authorities but aimed to pour through the country illegally either by not waiting for the adjudication of their asylum applications—as it happened in 90% of the cases (Janik 19)—or through bypassing the screening process altogether on their way to Germany, Sweden, and the UK. Unknown numbers failed to register and apply for asylum in Hungary before entering the borderless Schengen zone despite the efforts of the authorities; most did not comply with or wait for the results of their medical examinations either. The massive irregular entry thus defied the rule of law and order,

22. Upon examining statistical data on asylum applications per month between 2013 and 2017, we find that the Hungarian world record at the time was soon outdone by Germany, itself reaching an all-time high of 92,105 in August of 2016. In comparison, the highest number of asylum applications per month in the US as of June 2016 was 11,050 ("Hungary Asylum Applications and Asylum Applications by Country").

23. Immigration and Asylum Office; "Hungary Asylum Applications."

and created utter chaos along the route between Hungary's southern and western borders (Janik 15–19). It led to traffic safety violations with masses walking along the motorways. It constituted a major health hazard with several migrants diagnosed with infectious diseases,²⁴ and it posed a national and international security threat as it would turn out later. In October 2016, Hungary's Counter-Terrorism Center revealed that seven ISIS terrorists had entered the EU via Hungary over the summer of 2015 by taking advantage of migrant crowds and they set up a “logistics hub” in the country where they planned and prepared the November 2015 Paris attacks, which claimed 130 lives, and the March 2016 Brussels attacks, killing 32 people (Gordon).

To normalize the chaotic situation and restore the rule of law, first an emergency razor wire coil fence, then a concertina wire fence was built on the most critical 109mi/175 km Hungarian–Serbian border by September 2015, and by October, it was extended to the 213mi/345km Hungarian–Croatian border too, thus sealing off the country's entire 322mi/520km long southern Schengen border. By April 2017, the Hungarian–Serbian section was further reinforced and upgraded with high-tech border defenses (intelligent fence) in addition to the 24/7 human wall of guards. The guarded border fence has proved highly effective from the beginning, with monthly apprehensions dropping by 99% between September and November 2015 (from 138,369 to 315). Asylum applications reached a record low of 175 persons in December of 2015, with annual statistics showing an 83% decrease between 2015 and 2016 (from 177,135 to 29,432).²⁵

Having experienced the chaos and the national security risks involved in irregular mass migration first hand, there has been overwhelming support for the border fence in Hungary (78%) and in the V4 countries that also participate in the operation and control of the border barrier (“Project 28”; “V4”). As *The New York Times* notes, “Mr. Orban's tougher new policy has taken the migra-

24. Several registered migrants were diagnosed with syphilis, hepatitis B and C, HIV, typhoid, paratyphoid fever, and tuberculosis (“Hungary: Migrants Diagnosed”).

25. Marton; Montgomery; for the statistical data see “Elfogott migránsok”; “Hungary Asylum Applications.”

tory pressure off his European Union partners, while allowing them to condemn him anyway” (Lyman “Already Unwelcoming”). Indeed, international criticism of the Orbán government’s border practices has continued strong in Western Europe (Sandford). Hungarian Minister of the Interior, Sándor Pintér, emphasized “that a number of EU politicians have mixed up illegal migration and asylum policy,” and pointed out that in 2015–2016 “migrants have arrived in Hungary from some 104 countries crossing the green border illegally. There is no war or catastrophic situation in so many countries, therefore the arrival of so many people without any valid visas and bypassing legal routes has been unjustified” (“V4”).

But even though critics have kept reminding us that “given its history behind the Iron Curtain, Hungary should know better than to erect a fence” (Rodgers and Kallius), they have also come to acknowledge the effectiveness of the Hungarian border fence (Janik 16; Montgomery; Perez; Jones “Borders and Walls”). And strangely enough, the Hungarian border fence—which was partly inspired by the border fences between the US and Mexico and not by the Iron Curtain—is now sometimes used by the media as an example of a successful border barrier for the US. As *The Washington Post* noted, “Donald Trump may want a wall, but Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán—a vocal fan of Trump’s immigration plan—has built one [and put up a] formidable migrant blockade, turning Hungary into a global model of how to prevent even the most determined asylum seeker from slipping through. One thing is relatively clear: Hungary’s migrant blockade seems to be working. From a peak of more than 13,000 migrants a day, Hungary has more or less snuffed out illegal migration” (Faiola “How Do You Stop Migrants?”). In October 2017, the prototypes for the American border wall were unveiled in San Diego, California, but the final version, or combination of versions, and technologies applicable in the different types of terrain remain to be seen, as does the funding of the construction and the handling of privately owned land along the border, for example, in Texas (Nixon).

FROM LOCAL WALLS TO GLOBAL WALLS

Once construction of the US–Mexican border wall begins in earnest, however, it will definitely contribute to the emergence

of the era of global walls in our post 9/11 world, and it will speed up the construction of many more. But the Iron Curtain metaphor serves as a poor reference for this new era of global migration controls that the world has entered. The legacy of the Cold War may still be strong but our multipolar world of unprecedented degrees of globalization moves to different drummers. Even though the setting up of border barriers may seem to contradict globalization, they might as well be seen instead as the very products of the globalization of securitization, a multibillion dollar business with great potentials for job creation and the channeling and managing of human labor as that of products and services. The emergence of global walls will require new ways of tackling old problems while giving rise to new problems at the same time. But while for some border barriers are unacceptable as limitations of liberty and as threats to social peace and the rule of law, for others they are part of a new reality and are seen as necessary evils in order to preserve social peace and the rule of law. Border barriers—whether they are fence walls or concrete walls—have two sides and two interpretations, and differing interpretations of the same walls will depend on our own traditions and experiences with migration.

In line with the above, I suggest that the root of the so very different assessment of border fences and the current European migrant crisis in the Eastern and Western parts of the EU can be partially found in their Iron Curtain-related experiences with migration and border controls. Western Europe saw continuous, but sporadic arrivals from behind the Iron Curtain. Escapees and refugees entered in very limited numbers since migration was kept under check by the very Iron Curtain itself. Their reception was a success story since the border-crossers were most often highly educated (academics, artists, professionals, university students) or skilled workers willing to cooperate and integrate. Another contingent consisted of fellow ethnic groups (e.g. ethnic Germans) who arrived in an organized, controlled manner, ransomed by the mother country as part of bilateral agreements. The migration of both groups enjoyed the sympathy of the receiving society. Their positive reception and willingness to cooperate guaranteed that their integration would be successful, which led

to the Western European tendency to view migration positively. The conclusion from this migration experience was that people did manage to defy the Iron Curtain and crossed the death strip despite the heavily guarded fence walls, so border fences and migration restrictions did not work!

Eastern Europe was largely closed to both immigration and emigration throughout the Cold War; even intraregional movement was limited. Instead of migration, Eastern Europeans experienced invasion and long-term occupation by the Soviets. Escapees were considered traitors by the ruling regimes and were severely punished if caught. The Iron Curtain was imposed upon them and was perceived as a prison wall. Those few emigrants that left and foreign visitors that entered were looked upon as potential spies. In fact, international visitors were only allowed to move about under strictly controlled circumstances by reporting to the local police. All in all, the result was a negative view of migration. Since few managed to defy the Iron Curtain and leave, the Eastern Europeans concluded that border fences and migration restrictions did work! The West may have prevailed finally, showing that people and ideas cannot be locked up behind fence walls, but in the Eastern European experience the Iron Curtain effectively did so along 4,220 mi / 6,800 km for over 40 years.

CONCLUSION

Yet perhaps the most significant experience and lesson from the Iron Curtain for Eastern Europeans was that it was taken down out of their own initiative, and that the spirit of freedom not only survived, but evolved further even behind 'prison walls.' As a result, unlike in the West, Eastern Europeans do not feel threatened and limited by the border fences they set up themselves, out of their own volition, since they know walls are temporary, necessary evils until another era of better alternatives sets in. And until then maybe the best way to look at the emerging global walls of migration is to make sure their gates open in both directions—of course, national security advisors might prefer the gates to be security revolving doors, security turnstiles or interlocks.

In my capacity as the organizer of the American Studies Guest Speaker Series at Eötvös Loránd University, I hosted Gregory Shaf-

fer, Supervisory Special Agent and FBI Legal Attaché in Central and Eastern Europe, in December 2012. To students' and colleagues' great surprise, the Attaché drew parallels between the national security significance of the southern US and Hungarian borders. As his audience was listening in disbelief, he pointed out the need for stepped-up immigration and border controls and border security on the Schengen borders of Hungary in order to safeguard the EU from the challenges posed by organized crime groups and terrorists that could take advantage of migrant routes and loosely checked, irregular flows. The 2015–2016 experiences proved him right. His audience today would not consider the comparison between Hungarian and US borders exaggerated. In fact the majority in that audience would agree that the 24/7 guarded border fence has proved effective in stopping unauthorized entry and safeguarding the country behind it without tampering with legal cross-border movement in either direction. This is no Iron Curtain.

The question regarding the US border wall should not be framed as whether the Trump administration is going to build it²⁶ but rather which sections are going to be scheduled for when, and which technologies fit best the different terrains. Since it has been an ongoing project spanning over all the different administrations of the past twenty-five years, it can only be expected to continue during and beyond the Trump administration. As architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne aptly expresses, the current wall prototypes,

[the] eight slabs and seven spaces-between-slabs [...] enact, with surprising precision, the southern border wall that we already have and probably always will, the one we're eternally displeased with and yet condemned to keep building. That what we're producing is a strange hybrid of wall and tunnel, [...] something that both frustrates and enables connection, that makes plain that a border is at once the place where we're

26. "Excerpts from Trump's Interview"; Ballesteros. Consider that just as the 1965 Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act doing away with the anachronistic national origins quota system came at the price of the introduction of Western Hemisphere immigration quotas, Congressional support and funding for the construction of the border wall may come at the price of continuing DACA, the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program that has protected some 700,000 'Dreamers' from deportation and is set to expire in March 2018.

separated from another country and where we're joined to it. A barrier made of alternating bands of substance and absence, aspiration and impossibility. Here wall, here no wall. Here something, here nothing. And on and on across the desert.

The US–Mexican border wall has inspired many similar protective migrant walls—such as the Hungarian border fence—and will continue to serve as an example for similar rising walls around the globe. However, these fences and walls with their gates or revolving doors open to all types of legal cross-border movement at all times are not those of the Iron Curtain, and in our Global Era this Cold War metaphor should definitely be withdrawn from circulation on both sides of the Atlantic.

*Walls,
Material and Rhetorical:
Past, Present,
and Future*

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