

# The Truth Shall Get You Jailed

by Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff



In the past week, two eerily similar polls – [one in Germany](#) (available in German only) and [one in the United States](#) – made it into the public sphere. Both concerned the pillar of freedom, free speech, and both sadly portend the end of what countless brave souls on both sides of the Atlantic who died on so many battlefields valiantly fought for.

November 2019 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which ostensibly ushered in the end of the Communist iron grip on Eastern Europe. Following the end of World War II, Communism had brutally separated the free West from the subjugated East, and nowhere was this partition more glaringly obvious than in individual liberty or lack thereof. Thirty years have now passed since that glorious November day. I watched the tearing down of the wall by East Berliners desperately seeking freedom – the freedom to speak, think, move, exist – live on television, having visited East Berlin only a year before. I was ecstatic for the people of East Germany, hoping they would be able to savor their hard-fought freedom as I have done over and over.

The widespread disillusionment that has set in over the past

decades pains me. Just a few days ago, the Post-Communists won the parliamentary elections of the state of Thuringia in what was once East Germany, and I am quite certain post-election analyses will show that the block of Post-Communist voters consists of mostly young people who have no recollection or experience of the evil of Communism.

And so it comes as no surprise when a well-known German opinion research institute publishes a poll indicating that “nearly two-thirds of [those polled] are convinced that nowadays one must be very careful regarding the topics about which one can speak freely because there many unwritten laws indicating which opinions are permissible and which opinions are not permissible.” In addition, 58% of those polled no longer feel safe speaking freely in public, with only 17% agreeing that they can voice their opinion freely on the Internet. More than 40% sense that political correctness is overemphasized, while 35% have decided for themselves to voice their opinions only in a private setting.

The German poll is complemented by a – frankly, frightening in its ramifications – US poll: a whopping 51% of Millennials call for fines and even jail time for “hate speech.” In a survey conducted by the Campaign for Free Speech, more than 60% call for restrictions on speech in some way. While the Campaign’s director finds the results “frankly extraordinary,” they are hardly surprising. Speech restrictions coupled with hefty fines and, in some instances, even jail time have become the norm in Europe, with my case being one of countless others. Moreover, the results of both polls are what free speech activists on both sides of the Atlantic have been warning about for at least the past decade: at international forums such as the United Nations and the (perhaps lesser-known) [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#), these very speech restrictions have been not only concocted, but also weaponized and successfully applied. In one case in point, at an official OSCE forum in Vienna in 2015, which I

attended, we were told that speaking the truth may constitute “hate speech”, because “sometimes truth is difficult.” Secretary General Antonio Guterres of the United Nations calls for stepping up international efforts to suppress “hate speech.”

Calling for jail time for speaking “unauthorized truth” sends a chilling effect without the need (yet) for concentration camps to be re-opened. If we do not stop these dangerous attempts at silencing free speech in Europe as well as the United States, we will find ourselves in a dungeon sooner than we ever thought possible. For those asking why and how we have come so far, why these staggering numbers are calling for the First Amendment to reflect today’s cultural norms (Which norms? Whose norms?), the Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn made the following observation in a 1978 commencement speech:

*A decline in courage may be the most striking feature that an outside observer notices in the West today. The Western world has lost its civic courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, in each government, in each political party, and, of course, in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling and intellectual elites, causing an impression of a loss of courage by the entire society. There are many courageous individuals, but they have no determining influence on public life.*

This was true in 1978, and it true today. Go out and fight hard for your rights and your freedom. My friend Eric Metaxas rightly believes that America still has enough freedom left to fight for freedom. But we must take heed of Ronald Reagan’s warning that freedom is not passed down from generation to generation. It must be fought for anew every single day.

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