

1989 & European Playwriting – Michael Black

1989 was an amazing year for Europe and an amazing year for me. At the start of the year, I'd just finished my doctorate, and the weight off my shoulders was freedom itself. Also at the start of the year, [Václav Havel](#) was detained by the Communist Czechoslovakian authorities, and I founded **Hostage Productions** as a response. **Hostage Productions** was soon raising money for a production of Havel's play *The Increased Difficulty Of Concentration*, which was produced in London in September 1989, as was my own play *Propaganda Fide* a month later. By that time it was obvious that European events were gaining an uncontrollable momentum. There was more and more anti-Communist agitation in east European countries throughout the year, but Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* held firm, and the Soviet Union didn't send the tanks in. November 10th soon came, and I remember to this day watching live TV footage of the Berlin Wall being pulled down by the citizens of Berlin in the theatre bar after a performance of *Propaganda Fide*. Before the year end, [Václav Havel](#) was out of prison, and leading the Czech Velvet revolution itself.

These are the events that made me the European I aspire to be today. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, it simply wasn't possible to believe in a united Europe when all the evidence of two opposing political systems was against you. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, everything changed, and new European possibilities opened up in my life. For instance, I travelled to Romania for their National Theatre production of *Propaganda Fide*. And the Romanian director knew his Gorbachev as well as I did, talking to me about "our common European home". Also, in 1992 **Hostage Productions** organised a post-revolutionary national playwriting competition with the National Theatre Of Romania to encourage new voices of civic society and social democracy. The winning play, *Urma Scapa Turma*, by Alin Fumurescu, opened in Tirgu-Mures before transferring to Bucharest.

In all the European plays I've written since 1989, now a period of some twenty two years, I've been trying to write plays that are capable of uniting Europe through theatre. That might sound ambitious, but then, I am. And I write historical plays because I use European history as a dramatic tool and play fast and loose with it for unifying cultural purposes. The EU has always been a primarily economic organisation, but profound European union is deeply cultural as well. It is for this reason that I lobby for the establishment of an EU Arts Council after the 2013 culture funding agreement. "Without culture, Europe cannot be" said the German theatre banner in 2009, and I hope my plays have a part to play in that process themselves.