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**Press Kit for the**

**Press Conference on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012 for the “Lichtfest Leipzig 2012”  
(2012 Leipzig Festival of Lights)**

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## Press Information

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### **Overcoming Borders – Leipzig Festival of Lights Commemorates Autumn '89 and Hungary's Contribution to Opening the Iron Curtain**

The Leipzig Festival of Lights is traditionally held on October 9<sup>th</sup> at Leipzig's Augustusplatz. Under the heading of "Overcoming Borders", one focus of this year's content and artistic endeavours for the acclaimed artistic and civic initiative project will be on the historic events that took place in Hungary in 1956 and 1989, and the effects they have had on Germany and Europe. This special focus commemorates the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the German-Hungarian friendship treaty.

The Festival of Lights is held in Leipzig at the Augustusplatz because of its historic background and significance. Participants and spectators will enjoy a comprehensive artistic performance consisting of a video projection on the façade of the opera house, a choreographed dance piece by the Leipzig Ballet and a musical performance. The Artistic Director of the Festival of Lights, Jürgen Meier, Ballet Director and Chief Choreographer Mario Schröder and musician Mike Dietrich will use the presentation to illustrate historic correlations between Hungary and Germany.

Along with films and photographs of historic events from the past 60 years of Hungarian and German history, there will also be original audio and a contemporary musical arrangement featuring elements from various epochs, cultures and languages. The Leipzig Ballet will accompany the presentation with a choreographic piece interpreting the concept of freedom. The dance piece will highlight the memory of the Peaceful Revolution as well as today's continuing struggles for freedom throughout the world.



In addition and in line with the celebration's tradition, all of the visitors to the Festival of Lights are cordially invited to take part in forming a candlelight "89" at Augustusplatz.

The Festival of Lights is organised by Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing (LTM) GmbH in conjunction with the City of Leipzig and the initiative, "The Day of the Peaceful Revolution – Leipzig, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989".

[www.leipziger-freiheit.de/lichtfest/lichtfest-2012](http://www.leipziger-freiheit.de/lichtfest/lichtfest-2012)



## **Overcoming Borders – Hungary from 1956 to Today**

### **The Revolt in Hungary**

After 1945, Hungary fell within the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and interests. A Stalinist dictatorship was brutally installed. A protest movement formed, and the mass demonstrations that began on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1956 signalled the most significant popular uprising within the Soviet realm up to that time. The Hungarian people demanded free elections, freedom of opinion and independence from the Soviet Union. The Soviets responded quickly, and Soviet tanks were already rolling through Budapest only one day later. The battles that ensued resulted in the deaths of some 2,500 victims, with tens of thousands injured. Hundreds of people were summarily executed following the bloody confrontations, while tens of thousands were sent to jail. More than 200,000 Hungarians fled abroad. In the years that followed, the regime attempted to gain the loyalty of the Hungarian population by making concessions, primarily in the consumer goods sector.

### **German-German Encounter at Lake Balaton**

Starting in the mid-1960s, Hungarians were allowed to enjoy greater cultural diversity and more contact with the West. At the same time, loans from the West enabled improvements to be made in the basic supplies situation. The opposition in the 1970s focused on dialogue, steering away from revolution and instead striving for minimal consensus with Hungary's rulers. This represented Hungary taking its own path toward a peaceful transition to democracy and pluralism. The "Hungarian Way" was a new prototype and a shimmer of hope for the opposition movements in other states within the Soviet sphere of influence. After the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, Hungary gained importance as a location for East and West Germans to meet and exchange information, particularly the region around Lake Balaton. For three decades, this was a place where families and friends from East and West Germany who were separated by the inner-German border could come together.



### **Opening of the Border**

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1989, Hungary began as the first Eastern Bloc state with the formal deconstruction of its fortified border facilities. This move had been preceded on March 15<sup>th</sup> of the same year by a mass demonstration signalling the first major milestone for the Hungarian opposition movement. Hungary's Communist Party was subsequently forced to relinquish its single-party monopoly on power and negotiate at the "National Round Table" for its future government role. During the same period the events of 1956 were re-examined. The remains of Imre Nagy, the symbolic figure of the 1956 revolution, were exhumed and reinterred on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1989 in a huge ceremony attended by up to 100,000 Hungarians. This signified Hungary's final breakaway from Soviet hegemony. At the "Pan-European Picnic" peace demonstration held in Sopron on the border between Hungary and Austria on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1989, hundreds of East German citizens fled over the border into Austria. Just short of one month later the border was finally opened permanently, and on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1989 the Hungarian government granted permission to tens of thousands of East German refugees to leave for Austria.

### **New Values**

For the Eastern Bloc nations, which were already in a deep economic and legitimacy crisis, the Hungarian decision to open its borders was taken as a signal. This signal was also heard in East Germany, where the government had long resisted a new approach to foreign policy. The East German opposition took inspiration and courage from the events in Hungary, increasing its commitment to the Peaceful Revolution. After 1989, Hungary continued unabated on the road toward democracy and free Europe. It was one of the first former Eastern Bloc states to establish a liberal democratic system of government and to join NATO and the European Union. The current Hungarian government under Viktor Orbán has come under criticism at home and abroad for the new constitution Orbán has pushed for and the passage of highly controversial media legislation. The accusations allege that the laws are incompatible with the European canon of values.



### **Leipzig, the City of the Peaceful Revolution**

For years, Leipzig has nurtured a vibrant culture of remembrance regarding the Autumn of '89. Among the most important programme points on October 9<sup>th</sup>, the main day of the remembrance celebrations, are the traditional Prayer for Peace and the Speech on Democracy. The element of light has only played a role since 2007, when LTM GmbH organised a "Night of Candles" which was repeated in 2008. The first Festival of Lights honoured the Peaceful Revolution in 2009, when some 150,000 Leipzig residents and guests of the city commemorated the events of twenty years previously at Augustusplatz and on the inner city ring. Following its triumphant premiere in 2009 and a highly emotional Festival of Lights in 2010 honouring "20 Years of German Unity", reflections on the developments in Poland (2011), Hungary (2012) and Czechoslovakia (coming in 2013) have been held with an eye ultimately focused on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary coming up in Leipzig in 2014. The plans encompass a continuation of the art and civic initiative project at historic locations in a European context.

You can find more information on the internet at [www.leipzig.de](http://www.leipzig.de), [www.leipziger-freiheit.de/lichtfest/lichtfest-2012](http://www.leipziger-freiheit.de/lichtfest/lichtfest-2012) and [www.herbst89.de](http://www.herbst89.de).



## Press Information

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### Statements from the Press Conference Participants

#### **Burkhard Jung, Lord Mayor of the City of Leipzig:**

“Hungary’s contribution to the opening of the Iron Curtain is the focus in 2012 of the events commemorating the anniversary of October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989.

No other nation from the Eastern Bloc provided more favourable conditions in the 1980s for the civilian population’s break with the past. This made the democratic opposition in Hungary a role model and a beacon of hope for overcoming the dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe.

No other Eastern Bloc nation managed to achieve a peaceful transition to democracy earlier than Hungary. By opening its border with Austria on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1989 Hungary openly questioned the fundamental principle of the Iron Curtain. This was a step of historic significance for the development of Germany and for Europe as a whole in the epochal year of 1989.”

#### **Regina Schild, Press Spokesperson for the initiative, “Day of Peaceful Revolution – Leipzig, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989”:**

“Our initiative has been preparing the 9<sup>th</sup> of October commemorative events now for several years. We do this in remembrance of the decisive day, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989, when 70,000 people demonstrated peacefully and brought the Communist dictatorship to its knees.

In the wake of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution in 2009, it was our aim to focus equally on the other predominantly peaceful revolts in Central and Eastern Europe. This is why this year, Hungary’s contribution to the opening of the Iron Curtain is the central focus as a matter of great historical significance for the development of Germany and Europe.



The initiative is very pleased that György Dalos – Hungarian author, historian and the 2010 recipient of the Leipzig Book Award for European

Understanding – has agreed to hold this year's Speech on Democracy in the St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig.

This year's Prayer for Peace, the Speech on Democracy and the Festival of Lights are all once again worthy, vibrant reminders and an important message on what distinguishes the value of freedom and democracy."

**Volker Bremer, Managing Director of LTM GmbH:**

"I am very pleased that we are able to bridge the important anniversaries between 2009 and 2014 with the moving and momentous stories of our Eastern European partners. The commemoration of the Peaceful Revolution held back in 2007 with the Night of Candles was already welcomed warmly by Leipzig's residents, and its effects were felt near and far. The overriding priority here is not tourism advertising, but rather promoting the core values that distinguish the city and their contribution to Leipzig's identity: Throughout Germany, Leipzig is increasingly becoming more and more closely associated with the theme, "Peaceful Revolution". Additionally, every year we register enormous media value for the city with the press reporting on the Festival of Lights."

**Marit Schulz, LTM GmbH Marketing Manager and Project Consultant/  
Director of the Leipzig Festival of Lights:**

"In addition to the established rituals like the formation of the candle 89 by all of the event's participants, we also add new features each year. For this year's programme this means that we will be embarking on a journey through time from 1956 until the present day. For the first time, the Leipzig Ballet will join the celebration and the Festival of Lights as an artistic partner with a performance at Augustusplatz."



## Press Information

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### Schedule for the Festival of Lights on October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Augustusplatz Leipzig

#### Leipzig

#### Augustusplatz

- 8 p.m.:
- Greeting from Burkhard Jung, Lord Mayor of the City of Leipzig
  - Greeting from Zoltán Balog, Minister for National Resources for the Republic of Hungary
  - Video performance of "Wähle Deine Chronik" ('Choose Your Chronicle') on the façade of Leipzig's Opera House

Simultaneously: Leipzig Festival of Lights visitors form a large "89" with candles

#### Grimmaische Straße/Nikolaistraße

Evening: Installation on the façade of San Remo ice cream cafe by Norbert Meissner and Jörg Pfeiffer. The projection depicts scenarios including the struggle for freedom of Budapest's residents in 1956 and of Leipzig's population in 1953, meetings between East and West at Lake Balaton and the opening of the Austrian-Hungarian border in 1989/90.



## Press Information

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### Additional Events on October 9<sup>th</sup>

#### 5 p.m. to 6 p.m., St. Nicholas Church

##### Prayer for Peace

“The Courage for Alternatives”; sermon by retired Pastor Christian Führer  
Music by Renate Käbisch: “20 Years of Peaceful Revolution” for speakers,  
organ, violin and percussion.

Activist groups for peace, the environment and human rights have been holding prayers for peace in Leipzig's St. Nicholas Church since 1982. In 1989, the church was again the setting for the Prayer for Peace and the starting point for the Monday demonstrations.

#### 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., St. Nicholas Church, Speech on Democracy

##### György Dalos, Hungarian Author and Historian

Since 2001, the “Speech on Democracy” at St. Nicholas Church has continuously represented one of the highpoints of the “Autumn '89” series. Every 9<sup>th</sup> of October, a representative from one of the three constitutional branches of the government of the Federal Republic of Germany has spoken. In line with the changing focuses, the speeches in 2011, 2012 and 2013 are being delivered by individuals who have excelled in representing democracy in Europe.

#### Starting at 9 p.m.

At the conclusion of the Festival of Lights, a variety of facilities and institutions, including places that played significant roles in 1989, will open their doors for a long night of exhibitions, discussion rounds and other features revolving around the topic of the Peaceful Revolution.



## Press Information

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### Speech on Democracy, György Dalos – A Brief Résumé

Hungarian author and historian György Dalos (\*1943) spent his childhood in a variety of Jewish orphanages following the death of his father as a result of the hardships of forced labour. He attended university in Moscow, studying history from 1962 to 1967, and joined the Communist Party in 1964. Later on he was accused of involvement in activities against the state and sentenced to seven months in prison with parole. He subsequently lost his job, was ousted from the party and his literary works were banned from publication.

In the 1970s, Dalos was involved in the democratic opposition and in publications and citizen's movement in East Germany. In 1984, György Dalos received a scholarship from the Berlin-based artist programme DAAD accompanied by an invitation to West Berlin.

He worked at the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen. He served in posts in the 1990s including Board of Directors membership at the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Director of the Hungarian Cultural Institute in Berlin, Curator of the Hungary section at the Frankfurt Book Fair and a Corresponding Member of the Saxon Academy of the Arts. György Dalos remains the co-publisher of the newspaper, "Freitag".

In 2010 Dalos received the Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding during the corresponding ceremony at the Leipzig Book Fair.



## Press Information

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### “A Chronicle in Search of a European Identity”

Interview with Festival of Lights Artistic Director Jürgen Meier, Leipzig Ballet Director and Chief Choreographer Mario Schröder and musician Mike Dietrich.

*What can Leipzig's residents and guests look forward to at the upcoming Festival of Lights on October 9<sup>th</sup>?*

Jürgen Meier: “This year we are focussing on the issue of the state of the European identity. A look back at the history of Germany and Hungary reveals that borders have repeatedly been built up and torn down. The central figure in this year's installation is a young European protagonist who uses an app on his smartphone to compile a CHRONICLE of the historic events in Germany and Hungary since 1953 – practically piecing together his European identity. The video installation combined with the dance performance by the Leipzig Ballet and the crossover music from Mike Dietrich make up a gripping overall work.”

*How do you go about uniting dance, music and video projection into a complete work?*

Mike Dietrich: “It depends on the combination. My work, the music, shouldn't distract from the dance and the video performance. So for this year we made a conscious decision to go with pre-recorded music instead of live musicians.”

Mario Schröder: “The human body is our instrument. It has its own unique expressive power, a power which can be used to create a unique kind of



visual imagery. The Leipzig Ballet has dancers from 23 nations, all of whom use an instrument, namely their body, to speak a special language.

The city of Leipzig has a very special history, and subsequently something to say. We are attempting to express this, but we don't provide any answers. We're posing questions, expressing emotions, reflecting on circumstances and telling stories. Our aim is to generate emotion and sensitivity for the theme. That goes for the entire installation, for the dance, projection and the music."

*To what extent will the music on this evening "overcome borders"?*

Jürgen Meier: "Mike Dietrich draws from the full range of available resources. He doesn't permit any stylistic borders. The result is sounds from Hungarian and German folklore alongside jazz, rap and pop. All this is joined by text passages and poetry supporting the visual content. Mike Dietrich has done a great job of uniting all the acoustic elements into a harmonious complete musical concept, transcending all the different times and countries where those different elements originate from."

Mike Dietrich: "I don't speak Hungarian myself, so it wasn't so easy to get a grip on the language. I spent night after night searching the internet for interesting Hungarian music and original audio. My initial impression was always based simply on the aesthetics of the sounds. Afterwards I had the song contents and lyrics translated and then I combined them with the corresponding events in the CHRONICLE. It was a difficult balancing act to take this difficult historic context and still manage to communicate joy in the music."

*What is your impression of the collaboration?*

Jürgen Meier: "For the first time we are integrating a comprehensive dance performance into the Festival of Lights. Mario Schröder's great dedication has created a fascinating performance, depicting the historic correlations in a creative way that is certain to enrapture the participants and spectators of the Festival of Lights. The main theme of the entire presentation is also overcoming borders. And the audience at



Augustusplatz will also be included in the choreography by the dancers.”

Mario Schröder: “It’s great when a variety of artists come together to commemorate this kind of event by working on it out of their very own context. Everyone’s means or form of observing things is different, so the resulting collaboration produces a highly specialised process of creative reflection.”

Mike Dietrich: “Our different approaches and the other various projects that we are all working on at the same time make this project very demanding. We faced the challenge of creating a cohesive complete work of art in a very short period of time. Achieving this has only been possible thanks to the incredibly high level of professionalism of everyone involved. We met with each other a number of times to work together, but each of us also spent a great deal of time researching Hungarian history on our own. We all enjoy the great freedom that working on this type of project entails.”



## Press Information

July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### Introduction of the Participating Partners

Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing (LTM) GmbH works with numerous partners on the organisation of Leipzig's Festival of Lights. The permanent team for the activities in Leipzig is comprised of LTM GmbH, the City of Leipzig and the initiative "Day of Peaceful Revolution – Leipzig, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989". LTM GmbH expresses its deep gratitude in 2012 to the Leipzig Ballet and the Leipzig Opera.

### **The Initiative - "Day of Peaceful Revolution – Leipzig, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989"**

The initiative "Day of Peaceful Revolution – Leipzig, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989" is made up above all of Leipzig's citizens, organisations, institutions, museums and other entities with a direct connection to Leipzig's Autumn of 1989. The initiative receives support from the City of Leipzig and from Leipzig Tourismus und Marketing GmbH.

The initiative feels a duty to commemorate the Peaceful Revolution and Leipzig's role in particular, making it a decisive force in keeping the memory of 1989/90 alive as a crucial chapter in Germany's national history that is of indisputable international significance. Taking its cue from the "Day of Decision" in the Autumn of 1989, the initiative is dedicated to confronting the challenges of today's society and sending out encouraging signals for shaping the future.

### **Leipzig Ballet and Leipzig Opera**

The concept of freedom is a central theme for Europe and Germany – and in particular for Leipzig in its role as the incubator of the Peaceful Revolution. Ballet Director and Chief Choreographer Mario Schröder



experienced the momentous events of 1989 as a dancer at the Leipzig Opera House. His life between two systems and the political upheaval are part of his biography. Schröder sees freedom in a democracy as a privilege, and as such he regards his commission to create a Leipzig Ballet dance piece for the Festival of Lights as a very special honour. Mario Schröder will present his choreographic confrontation with the concept of freedom at Augustusplatz. The focus will not be limited only to commemorating the Peaceful Revolution, but will also illustrate today's struggles for freedom around the world, all without forgetting the joy of living in freedom that we all hold so dear.

#### **The Wiedenmann Company and Norbert Meissner**

Visitors taking a stroll through Grimmaische Straße in Leipzig's centre on October 9<sup>th</sup> will encounter two well-known participants in the Festival of Lights: The Wiedenmann company has been a welcome and hardworking partner in this civic initiative project since 2009. This year as in the past, Wiedenmann has graciously volunteered the façade of its San Remo ice cream cafe to Norbert Meissner to work his artistic wonders on. Meissner's projections illustrate the struggles for freedom the people of Budapest underwent in 1956 as well as that of Leipzig's population in 1953, and also portray the opening of the Austrian-Hungarian border in 1989/90.



We thank our sponsors and our media partners

## Lichtfest Leipzig 2012

### Wir danken den Sponsoren



### Wir danken den Medienpartnern





Very special thanks go to the project partner and the other partners as well as the technical coordinator

## Lichtfest Leipzig 2012

Besonderer Dank gilt

Initiative „Tag der Friedlichen Revolution -  
Leipzig 9. Oktober 1989“



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- ZSL Betreibergesellschaft mbH

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July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

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### The initiative thanks:

BUNDESSTIFTUNG  
AUFARBEITUNG 

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DER EHEMALIGEN DDR

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