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Dear Andra Mattei,

The Berlin Wall is an essential element of Germany's cultural memory. It is known internationally as a symbol of division, and ultimately the peaceful revolution that ended the Cold War — and small pieces of it, chipped away by thousands of visitors, can still be found across the globe as a reminder and warning to us all.

The physical violence that happened along this border wall took on a destructive symbolism, and people's dogged resistance on both sides of the border became a powerful symbol of the struggle for freedom and human rights, inspiring both sadness and hope. The citizens of the former German Democratic Republic in particular often went to prison or even paid with their lives for engaging in this struggle—according to the Berlin Wall Foundation, more than 140 people died trying to cross the Wall between 1961 and 1989. On the Western side of the Wall, some people used art to express their discontent, painting graffiti and murals. Although this form of resistance

was illegal, it seems to have been condoned by the authorities. Both then and now, we need to distinguish between graffiti/murals as pointless vandalism and graffiti as a public art form that also reflects the artist's social responsibility. In the 1970s, artists and activists started to protest against the political division of Germany by painting slogans and murals on the Wall. The most prominent among them was the pop artist Keith Haring, who painted his vision of a unified Germany on the Wall in 1986. Today, the most acclaimed and widely known artist/activist representing this political art form is Banksy.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that the Senate Department for Culture and Europe does not condone criminal acts, but that it regards and promotes art and artistic freedom as assets worth protecting and as defining elements of any free and democratic society.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Klaus Lederer

Senator for Culture and Europe