

Document No. 17: Record of Telephone Conversation between  
Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl

November 11, 1989

The conversation took place at Helmut Kohl's request.

Kohl: I am glad to hear you, Mr. General Secretary, I would like to express my appreciation with regard to your address yesterday. It is a very good step ....

[. . . .]

We want the people of the GDR to stay home, and we do not strive to have the entire GDR population move to the FRG. And not at all because, as some are claiming, we would not be able to resolve the problems that would result from that. For example, 230,000 people have moved from the GDR to the FRG this year, and all of them were accommodated. But a mass migration to the FRG would be an absurd development; we want the Germans to be able to build their future at home.

I would also like to inform you, even though the information is still preliminary, that today by 12 noon hundreds of thousands of people have crossed the GDR border. However, there is an impression that the majority are just visitors, and have no intention of staying in the FRG. The number of people who actually want to move to the FRG for permanent residency is much lower than the level we would be concerned about.

I recently told you that we did not want a destabilization of the situation in the GDR. I am still of the same view. I do not know on what scale Egon Krenz really plans to carry out reforms. However, in a situation such as they have now, the GDR leadership should act in a more dynamic way.

I would like to repeat that I appreciate your contacting me in connection with these events. Next week, immediately after I return from Poland, I would like to give you a call again if you do not have any objections, to discuss the new developments with you.

Gorbachev: That would be good. I recall how we discussed relations between our two peoples, and general developments in Europe in the philosophical sense. As you can see, Mr. Chancellor, those discussions were not simple exercises in rhetoric. Deep changes are underway in the world. This also concerns the East European countries. One more example of that is the beginning of the reform process in Bulgaria. And changes are happening even faster than we could have imagined recently.

Of course, the changes could take different forms in different countries, and reach a deeper level. However, to preserve stability it is important for all sides to act in a responsible way.

All in all, I think that the basis for mutual understanding is improving. We are getting closer to each other. And this is very important.

[...] In particular, I recommended to Egon Krenz that the leadership of the republic should prepare reforms while carefully taking into account the mood of society, and on the basis of an open dialogue with public forces, public movements in the country.

I understand that all Europeans, and not only Europeans, are closely following developments in the GDR. This is a very important point in world politics. But it is also a fact that you and I--the FRG and the Soviet Union--have even more interest in these developments both because of the history and because of the character of our relations today.

In general, I can say that there is a certain kind of triangle forming now, in which everything has to be thought-out and balanced. I think that our relations today allow us to do everything the way they should be done.

Of course, any kind of change means a certain instability. That is why, when I speak about preserving stability, what I mean is that we, on all sides, should take steps that are carefully thought out in relation to each other.

I think, Mr. Chancellor, we are experiencing a historic turn toward new relations, toward a new world. And we should not allow ourselves to impair this turn by our awkward actions, or, moreover, to push developments toward an unpredictable course, toward chaos, by forcing events. That would be undesirable in all respects.

That is why I take the words you have spoken in our conversation today very seriously. And I hope that you will use your authority, your political weight and influence to keep others within limits that are adequate for the time being and for the requirements of our time.

Kohl: I think that it is fortunate that relations between the USSR and the FRG have reached the high level of development that they have now. And I especially appreciate the good personal contacts that have developed between us. In my opinion, our relations are beyond simply official contacts, they have a personal character. I believe that they could continue to develop like this in the future. I am ready for that. I understand that a personal relationship does not change the essence of the problems, but it can make their resolutions easier.

Coming back to the assessment of the situation in the GDR, I would like to mention that the problem now lies in the realm of psychology. Honecker's course, which rejected

any reforms up until the end, put the new leadership of the GDR in a very difficult situation. Krenz's "team" now has to operate under horrible time pressures, and this is where I see the main problem. You are right, they need time to draft and implement the reforms. But how would you explain this to the population of the GDR? [....]

[Source: Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Fond 1. Opis 1. On file at the National Security Archive. Published in *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros: sbornik dokumentov 1986-1991*. Moscow: Ves' Mir, 2006, pp. 247-250, Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.]