

DOCUMENT No. 6
Material for the Session/For Circulation
in the Council of Ministers,
Draft: Temporary Transition Rules for Travel
and Permanent Exit from the
GDR, Berlin,
9 November 1989

Material for the meeting
 For Circulation in the Council of Ministers
 Berlin, 9 November 1989
Members of the Council of Ministers

It is requested that the attached draft resolution Temporary Transition Rules for Travel and Permanent Exit VVS b2-937/89 by the GDR Chairman of the Council of Ministers be approved through circulation today, Thursday, 9 November 1989, by 6:00 p.m.

[Harry] Moebis¹⁰⁵

Material for the meeting
 Secret
 Council of Ministers Circular b2-937/89
 [11/9/89]
 [40th] copy 4 pages
 V 1204/89

Title of the draft:
 Temporary—Transition
 Rules for Travel and
 Permanent Exit from the GDR

Draft presented by:
 Chairman of the Council of Ministers

signed: Willi Stoph

Berlin, 9 November 1989

Draft Resolution

The attached resolution on the temporary transition rules for travel and permanent exit from the GDR is approved.

Draft Resolution

To change the situation with regard to the permanent exit of GDR citizens to the FRG via the ČSSR, it has been determined that:

1. The decree from 30 November 1988 about travel abroad of GDR citizens will no longer be applied until the new travel law comes into force.
2. Starting immediately, the following temporary transition regulations for travel abroad and permanent exits from the GDR are in effect:
 - a) Applications by private individuals for travel abroad

- b) can now be made without the previously existing requirements (of demonstrating a need to travel or proving familial relationships). The travel authorizations will be issued within a short period of time. Grounds for denial will only be applied in particularly exceptional cases.
 - b) The responsible departments of passport and registration control in the People's Police district offices in the GDR are instructed to issue visas for permanent exit without delays and without presentation of the existing requirements for permanent exit. It is still possible to apply for permanent exit in the departments for internal affairs [of the local district or city councils].
 - c) Permanent exits are possible via all GDR border crossings to the FRG and (West) Berlin.
 - d) The temporary practice of issuing (travel) authorizations through GDR consulates and permanent exit with only a GDR personal identity card via third countries ceases.
3. The attached press release explaining the temporary transition regulation will be issued on 10 November.

Responsible: Government spokesman of the GDR
Council of Ministers

Press release

Berlin (ADN)¹⁰⁶

As the Press Office of the Ministry of the Interior has announced, the GDR Council of Ministers has decided that the following *temporary transition regulation* for travel abroad and permanent exit from the GDR will be effective until a corresponding law is put into effect by the *Volkssammer*:

- 1) Applications by private individuals for travel abroad can now be made without the previously existing requirements (of demonstrating a need to travel or proving familial relationships). The travel authorizations will be issued within a short period of time. Grounds for denial will only be applied in particularly exceptional cases.
- 2) The responsible departments of passport and registration control in the People's Police district offices in the GDR are instructed to issue visas for permanent exit without delays and without presentation of the existing requirements for permanent exit. It is still possible to apply for permanent exit in the departments for internal affairs [of the local district or city councils].
- 3) Permanent exits are possible via all GDR border crossings to the FRG and (West) Berlin.
- 4) This decision revokes the temporary practice of issuing (travel) authorizations through GDR consulates and permanent exit with only a GDR personal identity card via third countries ceases.

[Source: *Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen der Staatssicherheit (BstU), Central Archive, MJS Working Group Nieber 553, sheets 15-19. Translated for CWHIP by Howard Sargeant.*]

DOCUMENT No. 7
Transcript of the Tenth Session of the
SED Central Committee,
9 November 1989,
from 3:47 p.m. - 3:55 p.m.

[EXCERPTS]

Krenz: Comrades! Before Günther¹⁰⁷ speaks, I have to digress from the agenda once more. You are aware that there is a problem that wears on us all: the question of exit [from the GDR]. The Czechoslovak comrades are increasingly finding it a burden, as our Hungarian comrades did earlier. And, whatever we do in this situation, it will be a move in the wrong direction. If we close the border to the ČSSR, then we are basically punishing the upstanding citizens of the GDR, who would not be able to travel, and in this way put pressure on us. Even that would not have led to our gaining control of the situation, since the Permanent Mission of the FRG has already informed us that they have finished with renovations. That means that when they open the building, we will face the same problem again.

And, Comrade Willi Stoph, as acting Chairman of the Council of Ministers, drafted a decree which I would like to read to you here and now. Although the draft has been approved by the Politburo, it has such an impact that I wanted to consult the Central Committee.

Decision to change the situation for permanent exit of GDR citizens to the FRG via the ČSSR.

It is decreed:

1. The decree of 30 November 1988 about travel abroad for GDR citizens will no longer be applied until the new travel law comes into force.
2. Starting immediately, the following temporary transition regulation for travel abroad and permanent exits from the GDR are in effect:
 - a) Applications for travel abroad by private individuals can now be made without the previously existing requirements (of demonstrating a need to travel or proving familial relationships). The travel authorizations will be issued on short notice. Grounds for denial will only be applied in particularly exceptional cases.
 - b) The responsible departments of passport and registration control in the police county offices [VPKÄ] in the GDR are instructed to issue visas for permanent exit without delays and without presentation of the existing requirements for permanent exit. It is still possible to apply for permanent exit in the departments for internal affairs.
 - c) Permanent exits are possible via all GDR border crossings to the FRG and (West) Berlin.
 - d) The temporary practice of issuing (travel)

authorizations through GDR consulates and permanent exit with only a GDR personal identity card via third countries ceases.

3. The attached press release explaining the temporary transition regulation will be issued on 10 November.

The press release reads as follows: "As the Press Office of the Ministry of the Interior has announced, the GDR Council of Ministers has decided that the following temporary transition regulation for travel abroad and permanent exit from the GDR will be effective until a corresponding law is put into force by the *Volkskammer*."

Then follow the four points that I do not need to read to you again.

I said that however way we do this, it will turn out bad. But it is the only solution that saves us from the problems of having to do everything through third countries, which does not further the international prestige of the GDR. Comrade Hoffmann?¹³

Hoffmann: Comrade Krenz, could we avoid this word "temporary"? It creates a constant pressure, as if people didn't have any time left and had to get away as soon as possible. Wouldn't it be possible—I don't know the entire text—to avoid that or work around it?

Krenz: Yes, we could write: "According to the *Volkskammer*'s decision, the following transition regulation" and simply take out "temporary." Transition regulation, after all, means temporary.

Dickel:¹⁰⁹ Until the travel law comes into effect.

Krenz: So, until the travel law comes into effect, the following things are valid, OK?

(noise)

Krenz: Agreed? (noise) Comrade Dickel, do you foresee any difficulties? It's correct as it is, isn't it? [noise, Chair rings bell]

Dickel: As far as the announcement is concerned—(shout: louder!) it perhaps would make sense for the Press Office of the Council of Ministers to make the announcement rather than the Ministry of the Interior, although we will actually carry out the decree, since it is a decree from the Chairman of the Council of Ministers.

Krenz: I would suggest that the government spokesman make the announcement right away. (shouting) What? (noise)

Banaschak:¹¹⁰ Isn't it dangerous to adopt such a passage, "temporary"? ... (shouts: louder!) If we adopt such a passage, one that contains "temporary" or "transition solution," couldn't that have the effect that people aren't sure what will come next... (noise, shouts: They just said that! Further noise, shouts)

Krenz: Therefore, we will say that we will avoid "temporary" as well as "transition rule" and say: until the travel law, which is to be passed by the *Volkskammer*, comes into effect, this and that is decreed. Agreed, Comrades? (shouts: yes!) Good, thank you very much. Günther Jahn, you have the floor.

(Quietly, to his neighbor at the presidium table, with the microphone turned off): It is always good to do something like that. (Loudly, with microphone turned on): After Günther Jahn, Günter Sieber will take the floor.

[Source: SAPMO-BA, tape Y 1/TD 738, transcribed in Hans-Hermann Hertle and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan (eds.), *Das Ende der SED: Die letzten Tage des Zentralkomitees*, 4th edition, (Berlin: Dietz, 1999), pp. 303-306. Translated for CWHIP by Howard Sargeant.]



DOCUMENT No. 8
Günter Schabowski's Press Conference in the
GDR International Press Center,
9 November 1989,
6:53-7:01 p.m.¹¹

Question: My name is Ricardo Ehrman, representing the Italian press agency ANSA. Mr. Schabowski, you spoke about mistakes. Don't you believe that it was a big mistake to introduce this travel law several days ago?

Schabowski: No, I don't believe so. (Um) We know about this tendency in the population, this need of the population, to travel or to leave the GDR. And (um) we have ideas about what we have to bring about, (such as) all the things I mentioned before, or sought to mention in my response to the question from the TASS correspondent, namely a complex renewal of the society (um) and thereby achieve that many of these elements... (um) that people do not feel compelled to solve their personal problems in this way.

Those are quite a number of steps, as I said, and (um) we can't start them all at once. There are series of steps, and the chance, through expanding travel possibilities ... the chance, through legalizing exit and making it easier to leave, to free the people from a (um) let us say psychological pressure... Many of these steps took place without adequate consideration. We know that through conversations, through the need to return to the GDR, (um) through conversations with people who find themselves in an unbelievably complicated situation in the FRG because the FRG is having a great deal of trouble providing shelter for these refugees.

So, the absorptive capacity of the FRG is essentially exhausted. There are already more than, or less than provisional (um), that these people have to count on, if they are put up there. (um) Shelter is the minimum for constructing an existence. Finding work is decisive, essential...

Beit: (softly) ... integration...

Schabowski: ...yes, and the necessary integration into the society, which cannot happen when one is living in a tent or an emergency shelter, or is hanging around unemployed.

So, we want... through a number of changes, including the travel law, to [create] the chance, the sovereign decision of the citizens to travel wherever they want. (um) We are naturally (um) concerned that the possibilities of this travel regulation—it is still not in effect, it's only a draft.

A decision was made today, as far as I know (looking toward Labs and Banaschak in hope of confirmation). A recommendation from the Politburo was taken up that we take a passage from the [draft of] travel regulation and put it into effect, that, (um)—as it is called, for better or worse—that regulates permanent exit, leaving the Republic. Since we find it (um) unacceptable that this movement is taking place (um) across the territory of an allied state, (um) which is not an easy burden for that country to bear. Therefore (um), we have decided today (um) to implement a regulation that allows every citizen of the German Democratic Republic (um) to (um) leave the GDR through any of the border crossings.

Question: (many voices) When does that go into effect?... Without a passport? Without a passport? (no, no)—When is that in effect?... (confusion, voices...) At what point does the regulation take effect?

Schabowski: What?

Question: At once? When...

Schabowski: (... scratches his head) You see, comrades, I was informed today (puts on his glasses as he speaks further), that such an announcement had been (um) distributed earlier today. You should actually have it already. So, (reading very quickly from the paper):

- 1) "Applications for travel abroad by private individuals can now be made without the previously existing requirements (of demonstrating a need to travel or proving familial relationships). The travel authorizations will be issued within a short time. Grounds for denial will only be applied in particular exceptional cases. The responsible departments of passport and registration control in the People's Police district offices in the GDR are instructed to issue visas for permanent exit without delays and without presentation of the existing requirements for permanent exit."

Question: With a passport?

Schabowski: (um...)(reads:) "Permanent exit is possible via all GDR border crossings to the FRG.¹¹² These changes replace the temporary practice of issuing [travel] authorizations through GDR consulates and permanent exit with a GDR personal identity card via third countries."

(Looks up) (um) I cannot answer the question about passports at this point. (Looks questioningly at Labs and Banaschak.) That is also a technical question. I don't know, the passports have to ... so that everyone has a passport, they first have to be distributed. But we want to...

Banaschak: The substance of the announcement is decisive...

Schabowski: ... is the ...

Question: When does it come into effect?

Schabowski: (Looks through his papers...) That comes into effect, according to my information, immediately, without delay (looking through his papers further).

Labs: (quietly) ...without delay.

Beil: (quietly) That has to be decided by the Council of Ministers.

Question: (...Many voices...) You only said the FRG, is the regulation also valid for West Berlin?

Schabowski: (reading aloud quickly) "As the Press Office of the Ministry ... the Council of Ministers decided that until the *Volkskammer* implements a corresponding law, this transition regulation will be in effect."

Question: Does this also apply for West Berlin? You only mentioned the FRG.

Schabowski: (shrugs his shoulders, frowns, looks at his papers) So ... (pause), um hmmm (reads aloud): "Permanent exit can take place via all border crossings from the GDR to the FRG and West Berlin, respectively."

Question: Another question also: does that mean that effective immediately, GDR citizens—Christoph Janowski, Voice of America—does that mean that effective immediately, all GDR citizens cannot emigrate via Czechoslovakia or Poland?

Schabowski: No, that is not addressed at all. We hope instead that the movement will (um) regulate itself in this manner, as we are trying to.

Question: (many voices, incomprehensible question)

Schabowski: I haven't heard anything to the contrary.

Question: (many voices, incomprehensible)

Schabowski: I haven't heard anything to the contrary.

Question: (many voices, incomprehensible)

Schabowski: I haven't heard anything to the contrary. I'm expressing myself so carefully because I'm not up to date on this question, but just before I came over here I was given this information. (Several journalists hurry from the room.)

Frage: Mr. Schabowski, what is going to happen to the Berlin Wall now?

Schabowski: It has been brought to my attention that it is 7:00 p.m.. That has to be the last question. Thank you for your understanding.

(um...) What will happen to the Berlin Wall? Information has already been provided in connection with travel activities. (um) The issue of travel, (um) the ability to cross the Wall from our side, ... hasn't been answered yet and exclusively the question in the sense..., so this, I'll put it this way, fortified state border of the GDR.... (um) We have always said that there have to be several other factors (um) taken into consideration. And they deal with the complex of questions that Comrade Krenz, in his talk in the—addressed in view of the relations between the GDR and the FRG, in ditto light of the (um) necessity of continuing the process of assuring peace with new initiatives.

And (um) surely the debate about these questions (um) will be positively influenced if the FRG and NATO also agree to and implement disarmament measures in a similar manner

to that of the GDR and other socialist countries. Thank you very much.

[Source: Author's transcript of television broadcast. Translated for CWIHP by Howard Sargeant.]



DOCUMENT No. 9
Verbal Message from Mikhail Gorbachev
to Helmut Kohl,
10 November 1989¹³

As you, of course, know, the GDR leadership made the decision to allow the citizens of East Germany unrestricted travel to West Berlin and the FRG. It is understandable, that this decision was not an easy one for the new leadership of the GDR. At the same time, the decision underlines the fact that deep and fundamental changes are taking place in East Germany. The leadership is acting in a concerted and dynamic manner in the interests of its people, and they are opening a dialog with various groups and levels of society.

Statements from the FRG made against this political and psychological background, designed to stimulate a denial of the existence of two German states and encourage emotional reactions, can have no other goal than destabilizing the situation in the GDR and subverting the ongoing processes of democratization and the renewal of all areas of society.

We have received notice that a meeting will take place today in West Berlin, in which official representatives of the FRG and West Berlin will participate. A meeting is planned in the capital of the GDR at the same time.

With the current situation of *de facto* open borders and huge numbers of people moving in both directions, a chaotic situation could easily develop that might have unforeseen consequences.

In light of the time pressure and the seriousness of the situation, I thought it necessary to ask you, in the spirit of openness and realism, to take the extremely pressing steps necessary to prevent a complication and destabilization of the situation.

[Source: SAPMO-BA, DY 30/IV 2/2.039/319. Translated for CWIHP by Howard Sargeant.]