

The Politburo Gets Briefed (September 15, 1987)

Abstract

This draft document informs Politburo members about Erich Honecker's visit to the Federal Republic of Germany, and, in a concluding evaluation, emphasizes the historical and international significance of the visit while acknowledging the objectivity of West German media coverage.

Source

SED Politburo Draft of September 15, 1987, on the Official Visit by Erich Honecker to the Federal Republic of Germany from September 7–11, 1987

[...]

IV. Summarizing evaluation:

1. The first official visit of Comrade Erich Honecker to the FRG was a significant political success for the GDR and an important result of its politics of reason and realism. The visit is the most significant event in GDR-FRG relations since the signing of the Basic Treaty. It is of far-reaching impact and historical significance. Together with the Basic Treaty and the Joint Declaration of March 12, 1985, the Joint Communiqué of September 8, 1987, forms the basis for the future structure of relations with the FRG. The visit itself and the political treatment of Comrade Erich Honecker, which followed the protocol for the head of a separate, sovereign state, documented to the whole world the independence and equal status of the two German states and underscored their sovereignty and the nature of their relations, which exist in accordance with international law. This delivered a powerful blow to all revanchist and “intra-German” efforts. And no comments about the “legal status” and the “unity of the nation” by Kohl and others could change that.

It is significant that a CDU/CSU-led government in particular was forced to agree to the visit and the order of events in this form. It could not avoid taking into account the postwar situation in Europe and the will of the majority of the FRG's population for peace, détente, and normal relations with the GDR.

The events and results of Comrade Erich Honecker's visit reflect the enhanced prestige of the GDR, the strength of its peace policies, and its increased international influence.

2. In view of the complicated international situation, the conversations between Comrade Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED and Chairman of the Council of State of the GDR, and Helmut Kohl, Federal Chancellor of the FRG, as well as other leading personalities of the FRG, carried considerable weight in strengthening peace and opposing the risk of a nuclear inferno.

Based on the FRG's role in securing peace in Europe, the visit was a significant step in continuing to bind the FRG to the process of peaceful coexistence. The confrontational policies of the United States were counteracted, and, in the process, the FRG continued to highlight differences between its interests and those of the United States. Thus, the GDR made an important contribution to the practical implementation of the peace policies of the socialist states, especially the momentous initiatives of M[iikhail] Gorbachev and the summit conference of the Warsaw Pact in Berlin.

The visit carried great international weight. It is a significant contribution toward improving the climate in Europe and continuing to firm up the international position of the GDR. It strengthens the GDR as an

equal partner in its relations with capitalist industrial countries.

3. Comrade Erich Honecker's assertive manner contributed decisively to the comprehensive and convincing presentation of the policies of the socialist German state and the [other] socialist states on the issues of peace, disarmament, and détente. He also strengthened the position of the realistic forces within the ruling circles of the FRG, promoting a coalition of reason and realism, and he reinforced the process of differentiation within the government coalition, extending into the CDU/CSU.

The German Communist Party, the peace movement, and all democratic, peace-loving forces in the FRG were supported. The visit positively influenced support for the policies of the SPD.

4. Comrade Erich Honecker set the focus of the visit on the shared view that war should never again be waged from German soil, instead only peace. He stressed that both German states had a responsibility to work actively toward peace, disarmament, and détente, according to the principle of equality and equal security. The GDR and the FRG had to make an important contribution in order to advance disarmament and promote peaceful cooperation in Europe, according to Comrade Honecker, for only in this way would they fulfill their joint responsibility to peace. Federal Chancellor Kohl had to agree.

Comrade Erich Honecker focused on the necessity of concluding an agreement on the global elimination of intermediate-range missiles as a starting point for nuclear disarmament. He introduced the proposals to create a nuclear-free corridor in central Europe and a chemical- weapon-free zone in Europe.

It was underscored that relations between the GDR and the FRG cannot be uncoupled from international developments and that both states must have an active and positive impact on them. For the GDR, peace is and remains the major overriding issue, also as regards bilateral relations.

Federal Chancellor Kohl could not avoid emphasizing the will of the FRG to contribute to disarmament and détente and confirming his support for the global double-zero option with respect to intermediate-range missiles. Even before the visit, he was forced to make a statement on the destruction of the Pershing I-A missiles. The agreement in support of the global double-zero option by both German states is a decisive outcome of Comrade Erich Honecker's visit to the FRG.

5. Both sides affirmed the Basic Treaty and the Joint Declaration of March 12, 1985, between Erich Honecker and Helmut Kohl as the basis for their relations.

Comrade Erich Honecker made reference to:

- the inviolability of borders and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states in Europe within their present borders as a fundamental condition for peace;
- the necessity of strict adherence to the central idea of the Basic Treaty, according to which the two German states respect their mutual independence and autonomy in domestic and foreign affairs.

The FRG had to reconfirm its commitment to the Basic Treaty and the Joint Declaration of March 12, 1985, and assure its compliance with agreements made with the GDR. On this basis, it was possible to reach an agreement on further steps toward normalizing relations. The preconditions for further progress in policies on coexistence and dialogue were improved considerably.

Concrete results of the visit:

- The CDU/CSU/FDP government coalition consented to work on establishing official contacts between the Volkskammer and the Bundestag;
- Three treaties and agreements were concluded on issues concerning environmental protection,

research and technology, and radiation protection. In the area of environmental protection, it was agreed that both sides would name and comment on feasible projects;

– It was agreed that short-term talks on creating a mixed commission for the further development of economic relations would be conducted;

– It was agreed that economic cooperation between combines [*Kombinate*] and foreign trade companies in the GDR and companies in the FRG should be further developed and that, in doing so, forms of cooperation such as collaborative efforts in the exportation of installations and equipment, particularly to third markets, and in the production of goods by West German companies in the GDR [*Gestattungsproduktion*][1], should be more strongly developed;

– It was agreed that short-term negotiations will be initiated in order to settle upon regulations and agreements on expanding and electrifying railroad lines in transit traffic between the FRG and Berlin (West);

– It was agreed that talks should be started as soon as possible with respect to the fundamental reconstruction and/or extension of sections of the Autobahn, especially in transit traffic between the FRG and Berlin (West); talks are to begin on short notice regarding a possible further extension to keep the Staaken border-crossing open beyond December 21, 1987.

– It was expected that concrete questions regarding the acquisition and supply of electrical energy between the GDR and the FRG, including Berlin (West), will be resolved at a commercial level and that corresponding negotiations will lead to long-term agreements.

– It was agreed that progress in the continued negotiations on reducing the salt content of the Werra River is possible if, having taken the economic interests of both sides into account, concurrence is achieved on the use of the procedure available in the FRG for the environmentally-friendly preparation of potash salts.

– Confidential assurance on the part of H. Kohl and E. Albrecht that they would work toward a consensual settlement of the issue of the Elbe border.

On this point, in addition to concluding the agreements on inland navigation, sport boat traffic, flood protection, and fisheries that are already well underway, E. Honecker declared his intention to start negotiations on water-protection measures for the Elbe, and to include Hanover, Hamburg, and Kiel within the border-area traffic.

– The GDR expressed its commitment to introducing some easements on travel and visitor traffic regulations, including Berlin (West) (Amending entry requirements; allowing entry to former GDR citizens who left the GDR prior to January 1, 1982, provided they are not undesirable persons; allowing bicycles to be brought in for use during visits). An intention to hold internal and informal talks on some issues regarding West Berlin was expressed.

– There was agreement to work together more closely in combating AIDS.

It is significant that the two foreign ministers met on German soil for the first time (in the office of FRG foreign minister [Hans-Dietrich] Genscher) and that additional meetings were arranged.

6. The visit ushered in a new phase in bilateral relations between the two German states. It became clear that new, positive results on the way to normalizing relations for the good of the peoples of Europe and of both countries are possible when the point of departure is the real situation, that is, the fact that as a result of the Second World War and postwar developments two sovereign German states emerged that

are independent of each other and have different social orders and alliance affiliations.

7. The visit of Comrade Erich Honecker found extraordinary resonance on an international level and in the media of the FRG. All worldwide press agencies and important newspapers emphasized the visit, the course of events, and its results as a significant occurrence in postwar history, acknowledging the developments that occurred after 1945. In the FRG, the news coverage was extensive and largely objective and correct. The visit was an expansive opportunity for the public, both internationally and within the FRG, to become familiar with the GDR's stance on basic international issues, its peace policies, and its constructive behavior in bilateral relations.

[...]

NOTES

[1] The German term “Gestattungsproduktion” literally refers to the fact that West German companies were “allowed” [*gestattet*] to produce goods in the GDR—eds.

Source: SED-Politbürovorlage vom 15. September 1987 über den offiziellen Besuch von Erich Honecker in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland vom 7. bis 11. September, SAPMO-Bundesarchiv, DY 30/1 IV 2/2A/3054; reprinted in Andreas Herbst et al., eds., *Die SED. Geschichte, Organisation, Politik. Ein Handbuch*. Berlin, 1997, pp. 788–94.

Translation: Allison Brown

Recommended Citation: The Politburo Gets Briefed (September 15, 1987), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/two-germanies-1961-1989/ghdi:document-1148>> [April 19, 2024].