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Switzerland

Memo¹ for the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, René Felber²

GDR: PRESS CONFERENCE

Bern, 14 November 1989

1. Question: Has the government foreseen the events?

– The events have been accelerating in such a way that it has caught everybody unprepared. Chancellor Kohl³ himself was surprised by the events in Berlin while he was on an official visit to Poland.

2. Question: First impressions and analyses?

– Berlin has given us impressive, moving images: the inhabitants of the GDR have demonstrated that the notion of liberty is such a fundamental value for humanity that it has withstood more than 40 years of implacable dictatorship (failure of “the new man”, designed by the theorists of Marxism-Leninism). And with regard to the human rights, it is this value of free movement of people that Switzerland has defended constantly, notably since the beginnings of the CSCE.

3. Question: How do you judge the future?

– There is still a long way to go, less spectacular maybe than these historic images from Berlin, and it will require perseverance:

a) Advances on the political level: the East German people still await the revision of the first article in the constitution of the GDR, which assures a dominant role for the Communist Party (reconvening of the party congress in mid-December).

b) A long way to go to achieve economic reforms as well.

4. Question: Swiss assistance? (Our actions in favor of Hungary and Poland).

– From now on, it is necessary to think about the GDR as well. Federal Germany will undoubtedly play a crucial role at this level. But let us not forget that the GDR is, economically speaking, in a considerably less difficult situation than Hungary and especially Poland. On the other hand, the GDR still has a long way to go to catch up with these two countries when it comes to democratic liberties.

¹ *Memo (copy, translated from French):* Swiss Federal Archives CH-BAR#E2010-01A#1996/396#843* (B.58.2). Transmitted to René Felber by Guy Ducrey, dodis.ch/P15378: Having heard yesterday evening that you will hold a press conference concerning the latest developments in the GDR, I have taken the liberty of transmitting you hereafter some information and appreciations, which may be useful for you.

² René Felber (*1933), dodis.ch/P24533, Swiss Foreign Minister 1.1.1988–31.1.1993.

³ Helmut Kohl (1930–2017), dodis.ch/P31852, Chancellor of the FRG 1.10.1982–27.10.1998.

5. Question: The reunification?

– It is not up to Switzerland to give its opinion on this matter. This is a question that affects both Germanies and which is, of course, of interest to both the US and the USSR. In this regard, one can only welcome the great reticence and the comprehension of all agents involved, both demonstrators as well as leaders. Chancellor Kohl recalled the embedding of the FRG in Western Europe and Mr Genscher⁴ stressed that the FRG will respect all the agreements signed and commitments made.

6. Question: GDR–EEC

– A rapprochement is conceivable, but to speak of integration is surely premature. The economic systems are at the moment incompatible. Just look at the difficulties caused by the European Economic Area, and this is between countries that share the same market economy.

7. Question: Yalta Order called into question? Switzerland's security (abolition of the army)?

– The calling into question of the Communist Party's monopoly, the elimination of the dictatorships may – and we hope will – finally erase the ideological barriers. But the military borders, the military facilities are still there, right next to each other. What we are hoping is that the situation will, from now on, facilitate and accelerate the current negotiations concerning arms control (START, CFE). It is not the moment for Switzerland to put the cart before the horse by disarming unilaterally.

8. Question: Bulgaria?

– Zhivkov⁵, Secretary-General of the C[ommunist] P[arty] of Bulgaria has left the scene after having been in power for 37 years. For the moment, it is only the replacement of the main agent; this may be preventive action, announcing upcoming reforms.

9. Question: The Bush⁶-Gorbachev⁷ Summit?

– The two presidents will have to observe this development and what is already being called the end of the Yalta Order. Soviet propositions are possible in favor of military cutbacks.

⁴ Hans-Dietrich Genscher (1927–2016), dodis.ch/P15414, Vice-Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the FRG 1.10.1982–17.5.1992.

⁵ Todor Hristov Zhivkov (1911–1998), dodis.ch/P15343, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Bulgaria 1954–1989.

⁶ George Herbert Walker Bush (1924–2018), dodis.ch/P47406, President of the United States, 20.1.1989–20.1.1993.

⁷ Mikhail Gorbachev (*1931), dodis.ch/P31707, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 11.3.1985–24.8.1991, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union 25.5.1989–15.3.1990 and President of the Soviet Union 15.3.1990–25.12.1991.