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Federal Republic of Germany

*Memo<sup>1</sup> for the Foreign Minister of the FRG, Hans-Dietrich Genscher<sup>2</sup>*

US REACTION TO THE EVENTS IN BERLIN AND THE GDR SINCE 9 NOVEMBER

*Extract*

Bonn, 16 November 1989

*For information (ahead of the forthcoming talks in Washington<sup>3</sup>)*

1. The events in Berlin and the GDR have *dominated the US media* for days. Interest in Germany and German/European-US relations has increased enormously among the public (top TV journalists have been sent to Berlin; evening news programmes have been broadcast in front of the Wall, with clips of historic scenes; there have been special features in the “Washington Post” and “New York Times” and Ambassador Ruhfus<sup>4</sup> has given several TV interviews). Moving scenes (cheering, joy, spontaneous celebrations) and highly symbolic images (the Wall, Brandenburg Gate, people embracing and shedding tears of joy) reflect Americans’ tendency to be emotional and preference for images. A *large wave of sympathy* has gripped the entire country. This is of great help to our public diplomacy work and we should certainly make use of it. The Embassy and German Information Centres are working flat out to do so. The large number of requests for interviews provides a unique opportunity for Federal Government officials to present Germany and its policies to a broad and receptive US audience.

2. The resounding echo in the media and among the US public made the *Administration’s reaction*, which largely reflects our own, look rather subdued in contrast. The focus is on realism, safeguarding stability and, most importantly, preserving unity in NATO. On the evening of 9 November, Bush<sup>5</sup> said (in Baker’s<sup>6</sup> presence and with no expression on his face) that he was “very pleased” about

1 *Memo (translated from German):* Political Archive of the German Federal Foreign Office PA/AA B 32, Bd. 179532, file reference 204-322.00 D. Written by Gebhardt von Moltke, [dodis.ch/P57380](https://dodis.ch/P57380) and Eberhard Kölsch, [dodis.ch/P57381](https://dodis.ch/P57381) and signed by Gebhardt von Moltke and Frank Lambach, [dodis.ch/P57395](https://dodis.ch/P57395). Seen on 16 November 1989 by Karl Heinz Kuhna, [dodis.ch/P57382](https://dodis.ch/P57382) and Dieter Kastrup, [dodis.ch/P57383](https://dodis.ch/P57383), on 17 November 1989 by Jürgen Sudhoff, [dodis.ch/P57384](https://dodis.ch/P57384) and on 20 November 1989 by Hans-Dietrich Genscher. Also published in: Die Einheit. Das Auswärtige Amt, das DDR-Außenministerium und der Zwei-plus-Vier-Prozess, ed. by Horst Möller et. al. on behalf of the Institute for Contemporary History Munich–Berlin, Göttingen, 2015, doc. 22.

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

3 Hans-Dietrich Genscher held talks in Washington on 20 and 21 November 1989.

4 Jürgen Rufus (1930–2018), [dodis.ch/P57385](https://dodis.ch/P57385), Ambassador of the FRG in Washington 16.11.1987–31.8.1992.

5 George Herbert Walker Bush (1924–2018), [dodis.ch/P47406](https://dodis.ch/P47406), President of the United States, 20.1.1989–20.1.1993.

6 James Baker (\*1930), [dodis.ch/P56605](https://dodis.ch/P56605), United States Secretary of State 25.1.1989–23.8.1992.

95 the opening of the GDR borders. He praised the Federal Government for having “done a magnificent job”, but was reserved about further developments and said it was “way too early” to speak about reunification. Asked why he did not seem to be “elated”, Bush said he was “just not an emotional kind of guy”.

On the following day, *Baker* said he was “extremely happy”; however, in interviews he described an implied connection between the events and reunification as “premature” (10.11.1989 MacNeil/Lehrer<sup>7</sup>). For his part, Vice-President Quayle<sup>8</sup> has said that “the reunification of Germany is inevitable”.

There are *three reasons* for Bush and Baker’s cautious statements:

– the *desire* to signal to the Soviet Union in the run-up to the summit near Malta that the US does not wish to see the *stability of developments* in Central and East Europe and Gorbachev’s<sup>9</sup> position in light of critics of his reform process *endangered* by thoughtless expressions of feelings of triumph. Bush and Baker are thus interpreting Gorbachev’s concerns correctly (cf. Gorbachev’s message to Bush on the night of 10/11 November, in which he said that he was “very concerned about the possibility of destabilisation”; similar reaction by Ambassador Kotchemasov<sup>10</sup> in a meeting with Ambassador Walters<sup>11</sup> in East Berlin on 11 November.) Referring explicitly to *your telephone call* (10 November), Baker underlined that the development in the GDR was also an *achievement resulting from the united stance shown by the US and NATO* (10.11. MacNeil/Lehrer, 12.11. Brinkley<sup>12</sup>). Secretary of Defence Cheney<sup>13</sup> reacted in a similar, but more forceful way;

– *concern* that a more emphatic reaction would inevitably lead to the question of *practical measures* to support reform in the GDR, with *financial implications* – and at a time when the Administration was being criticised for not providing enough financial support for the reform process in Poland and Hungary.

– Bush and Baker’s *characters* and governing style based on a case-by-case approach to crisis management, which deliberately refrains from using far-reaching concepts.

The *summit with Gorbachev* on 2 and 3 December has become even more relevant on account of the events in the GDR. The Administration is doing everything it can to counteract the impression that it wants to make decisions over the allies’ heads at this summit on far-reaching arrangements on a postwar order in Central Europe. On the other hand, Bush’s and Baker’s reactions, as far as we have seen so far, *merely hint* that the West already has a concept for a European peace order

7 The US journalists Robert MacNeil (\*1931), [dodis.ch/P57386](https://dodis.ch/P57386) and Jim Lehrer (\*1934), [dodis.ch/P57387](https://dodis.ch/P57387), hosted The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour on the TV channel PBS.

8 Dan Quayle (\*1947), [dodis.ch/P57388](https://dodis.ch/P57388), Vice-President of the United States, 1989–1993.

9 Mikhail Gorbachev (\*1931), [dodis.ch/P31707](https://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.

10 Vyacheslav Kotchemasov (1918–1998), [dodis.ch/P57389](https://dodis.ch/P57389), Soviet Ambassador in East Berlin 1983–1990.

11 Vernon A. Walters (1917–2002), [dodis.ch/P54605](https://dodis.ch/P54605) US Ambassador in Bonn 1989–1991.

12 The US journalist David Brinkley (1920–2003), [dodis.ch/P57390](https://dodis.ch/P57390), hosted the news broadcast This Week on the TV channel ABC.

13 Dick Cheney (\*1941), [dodis.ch/P57391](https://dodis.ch/P57391), United States Secretary of Defense 21.3.1989–28.6.1992.

96 and proven instruments for West East dialogue in the form of the *Harmel Report*<sup>14</sup> and the CSCE process.

The Administration has not commented so far on the German side's (Bahr<sup>15</sup>, Geiger<sup>16</sup>; Gaus<sup>17</sup>) proposal to hold a four-power conference on Germany.

[...] <sup>18</sup>

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**14** Report of the Council on the Future Tasks of the Alliance (Harmel Report) of 13 and 14 December 1967, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_67927.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67927.htm).

**15** Egon Bahr (1922–2015), [dodis.ch/P39530](https://dodis.ch/P39530), Member of the SPD.

**16** Michaela Geiger (1943–1988), [dodis.ch/P57392](https://dodis.ch/P57392), Member of the CSU and Bundestag 1980–1998.

**17** Günter Gaus (1929–2004), [dodis.ch/P55113](https://dodis.ch/P55113), Journalist.

**18** For the complete version of the document in German cf. [dodis.ch/52949](https://dodis.ch/52949).