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Netherlands

*Telegram<sup>1</sup> from the Dutch Ambassador in East Berlin, Egbert Jacobs<sup>2</sup>, to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans van den Broek<sup>3</sup>*

GDR INTERNALLY

Confidential

East Berlin, 8 November 1989

Is there a more significant symbol imaginable for the “revaluation of all values”<sup>4</sup> in this country than a high official from the Ministry of the Interior who in a forum discussion on GDR-TV calls upon his fellow countrymen on their way to the Federal Republic to be sure to travel via border post a and not border post b, because at border post a there is less traffic and things can therefore be arranged much faster?

For all observers here reporting on the state of affairs in the GDR is now at least as difficult as jumping on a speeding TGV as it passes. Now the Politburo has resigned as well! The international media provide a good overall picture of the situation, and in particular the West German media also offer enough grounds for analysis and reflection. Nonetheless, I will not exclude you from some personal notes regarding the past week.

1.

The big demonstration of last Saturday in Berlin has – apart from the exemplary peaceful and at times even somewhat playful sequence of events – brought to light a few interesting things. First, the credibility problem still hangs like a millstone around Krenz<sup>5</sup> neck. The rapid succession of concessional gestures, steps and decisions in the first weeks after his leadership acceptance has not provided a “benefit of the doubt” position for him. During the rally the functionary whom we would call the Dean of the Order of Attorneys in the Netherlands gave a speech. Among other things, he openly praised Krenz for his de-escalating intervention shortly after the heavy-handed police action on 6 and 7 October, when the tension in the country was high. A deafening protest was the speaker’s reward. The same thing happened when the speaker suggested that Krenz should be judged in the GDR on his actions and not for his words on the events in Beijing in June. A lot

<sup>1</sup> *Telegram No. 177 (incoming, translated from Dutch):* Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs BZ, 5e Blok [NA 2.05.392], inv.nr. 2128. *Delivered by:* 8 November 1989, 8.17 p.m.

<sup>2</sup> *Egbert Jacobs* (\*1945), [dodis.ch/P57545](https://dodis.ch/P57545), *Dutch Ambassador in East Berlin 1989–1990*.

<sup>3</sup> *Hans van den Broek* (\*1936), [dodis.ch/P57462](https://dodis.ch/P57462), *Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs 4.11.1982–3.1.1993*.

<sup>4</sup> *Quoted in German:* Umwertung aller Werte.

<sup>5</sup> *Egon Krenz* (\*1937), [dodis.ch/P54794](https://dodis.ch/P54794), *General Secretary of the SED 18.10.1989–3.12.1989 and Chairman of the GDR State Council 18.10.1989–6.12.1989*.

50 of water – and mercury – will need to flow under the bridge over the Elbe before Krenz will manage to get into a position where the man in the street *will* give him the benefit of the doubt. This is especially true because *the* skeleton in his closet for him is not so much his statement about Beijing, as his presidency of the “Election Committee” of 7 May last. Now that the pressure to introduce a radically new electoral law is becoming irresistible, it is inevitable that and in the margin of this – also fundamental – discussion, the electoral fraud of May will be brought to the fore, which is still fresh in the memory. Krenz will not be able to separate himself from this.

A second noteworthy aspect to last Saturday’s big rally (which, as far as I know, has not been reported internationally) was the total – repeat total – absence of references to re-unification. Most of the banners that were carried had slogans with a fierce political content in relation to this country – not a subject remains undiscussed in the streets, in public and “teach-in”-like meetings, and also on the nowadays in any case worthwhile GDR-television – but about re-unification there was not a word, not a slogan, not a chorus and not a banner. The preoccupation of both the leaders of the block parties that were awakened from their hibernation and the leaders of the “Initiative”, and of the demonstrators in the street is still the reformation of the GDR. In Dutch newspapers I also read reflections of more or less authoritative opinion makers who all assume axiomatically that the end of the present turbulent developments can only be re-unification. “The more freedom, the less GDR”, as it is crisply put. Be this as it may, the now unleashed public discussion in the GDR, which has no taboos, gives *no* evidence of this axiom. But maybe that does not apply to axioms.

2.

The Volkskammer also awakes. The concept of the “Travel Law” had hardly been published before the standing committee on justice completely rejected the draft. Personally, and admittedly based on conspiracy theories, I had assumed that the design would have some room “built in” for amendments by the Volkskammer, after which a draft as amended by the Volkskammer would receive force of law. Although I do not know the composition of this permanent committee it may be assumed that it will have a majority of SED members. On this politically white hot GDR issue with which *all* representatives would like to show themselves aligned, the budding profiling drive (*also* of the SED-representatives) has apparently overcome the usual party discipline.

Meanwhile the permanent committee for “Constitution and Law” of the Volkskammer has charged the Presidium in unambiguous terms with laxity and has demanded an emergency session with plenary debate.

3.

In close interaction with the awakening of the Volkskammer the awakening of the block parties is taking place. I have reported before on the pioneering role of the liberal LDPD and its chairman Gerlach<sup>6</sup>. He continues to fulfill this role. As the first person belonging to the political establishment he recently questioned the

<sup>6</sup> Manfred Gerlach (1928–2011), [dodis.ch/P54812](https://dodis.ch/P54812), Chairman of the Council of State of the GDR 6.12.1989–5.4.1990.

51 “claim to power and truth”<sup>7</sup> of the SED. In the past 2 months Gerlach has shown himself to be a good director of the interaction between his own statements and the street protests, and there need be no doubt in my opinion that the promised new electoral law will in fact defray with the “leading role”<sup>8</sup> of the SED. The question remains how the lawyers will shape things, taking into account that the Minister of Justice<sup>9</sup> – now obviously outgoing – is the only LDPD member in the government.

Gerlach has already been nominated for the presidency of the Volkskammer by his party and he appears to me a good contender, also given the fact that Krenz clearly wants him to (co-)play a prominent role. This would boost the activation process of the Volkskammer and would enable the LDPD, with a new chairman, to distance itself from the past, and therefore from the SED.

Meanwhile the NDPD has chosen a new chairman, the CDU is still working on this. The potential importance of a credible CDU-chairman is of course fundamental for the recovery of good relations with the churches, because these were in fact non-existent. And should it come to that, then it needs no argument that a strong, potential oppositional block could arise. The general break-up has now taken its first victim in the Evangelische Kirche: the legion of “public officials who have resigned”<sup>10</sup> has been reinforced with the Bishop of Greifswald<sup>11</sup> a few days ago, the most state-loyal Landesbischof in the Evangelische Kirche, the man who in July received Honecker<sup>12</sup> at the consecration of the restored basilica in Greifswald, to the apprehension of his colleagues.

#### 4.

Amidst all the powder vapor it remains significant that still no personality with even a glimmer of charisma has risen to report “to speak”.<sup>13</sup> The line-up of speakers at the large Berlin rally included a number of well-known artists, Prof. Reich of the Neue Forum, and also the former HVA-chief Markus Wolf<sup>14</sup>, all of whom are speakers of an almost sleep-inducing dullness. The SED secretary in Dresden, Modrow<sup>15</sup>, now internationally typified as a “reformer”, is in the lead in a demonstration that specifically demands the “renunciation of the monopoly on power and truth”<sup>16</sup> of his own SED, but in his public appearance he has the characteristics of an alderman from Ootmarsum<sup>17</sup>. The same applies in my opinion

7 Quoted in German: *Machts- und Wahrheitsanspruch*.

8 Quoted in German: *führende Rolle*.

9 Hans-Joachim Heusinger (\*1925): [dodis.ch/P57546](https://dodis.ch/P57546), Deputy Chairman Council of Ministers of the GDR 1972–1989.

10 Quoted in German: *zurückgetretene öffentliche Persönlichkeiten*.

11 Horst Gienke (\*1930): [dodis.ch/P57547](https://dodis.ch/P57547), Bishop of Greifswald 1972–1989.

12 Erich Honecker (1912–1994), [dodis.ch/P46563](https://dodis.ch/P46563), General Secretary of the SED and chairman of the GDR State Council 29.10.1976–18.10.1989.

13 Quoted in German: *zu Wort*.

14 Markus Wolf (1924–2006), [dodis.ch/P57548](https://dodis.ch/P57548), GDR spymaster and head of the STASI (*Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung*) 1952–1989.

15 Hans Modrow (\*1928), [dodis.ch/P54796](https://dodis.ch/P54796), Chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers 13.11.1989–12.4.1990.

16 Quoted in German: *Verzicht auf Machts- und Wahrheitsmonopol*.

17 *Village on the eastern border of the Netherlands*, [dodis.ch/G15397](https://dodis.ch/G15397).

52 to Günther Schabowski<sup>18</sup>, who incidentally was the only major SED-functionary (Politburo) to speak at the big Berlin rally and hardly got a word in, because he was constantly being shrieked down. A bad omen for this “reformer” who will presumably receive a heavier portfolio within the Politburo (economy?, media?).

Also noticeably absent from the stage are actors with a conservative background. If there is a GDR-Ligachev<sup>19</sup> he dares not manifest himself as such. I find this deceitful, because it is difficult to conceive that there is no conservative wing within the SED. In the euphoria of the moment it is too easily assumed that there are really no communists left in the GDR.

5.

Today the Central Committee of the SED has gathered for its 3-day meeting. It is expected that this assembly will also demand an emergency session of the Volkskammer, with plenary debate, bringing forward the date of the elections for the Volkskammer (which Krenz mentioned were tentatively planned for mid- '91 just two weeks ago), a special SED Party Congress to be held this year – the regular Congress is scheduled in May '90 – a directive statement on emigration (which will take into account the rejection of the draft submitted by the government), on a new electoral law, on the economy, and a new Politburo. At the very least.

6.

And finally: there are still no strikes. Instead people are working extra time, more and more. How is it possible.

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<sup>18</sup> Günther Schabowski (1929–2015), [dodis.ch/P56902](https://dodis.ch/P56902), member of the SED Politburo and spokesman of the GDR government 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Yegor Ligachev (\*1920), [dodis.ch/P57414](https://dodis.ch/P57414), Second Secretary of Communist Party of the Soviet Union 10.3.1985–14.7.1990.