

Document 3: Letter from Gerd Vehres to Oskar Fischer
September 10, 1989ⁱ

Dear Comrade Minister:

In addition to my CT 385 from September 10, I would like to inform you of some further aspects of my conversation with Comrade Nyers.

After I had given our initial position on the decision by the Hungarian government and the following recognition by the Party Presidium, Comrade Nyers replied:

1. Comrade Nyers does not wish the events mentioned to be viewed in the GDR as an anti-GDR campaign.
2. Comrade Nyers believes that a great part of the original problem was caused by the sudden opening of the border with Austria. This fact strengthened existing intentions among a number of GDR tourists to leave the country illegally. The quickly increasing numbers willing to leave under existing circumstances make it impossible to convince such a huge number of people by words or declarations. Had Hungarian organs been placed deep in the affair, that is, in the situation themselves, many substantial conflicts would have been started that would have been undesired by both Hungary and the GDR.

The only political victor in this case is the FRG. Comrade Nyers expressed his conviction that in the future the Hungarian side must deal with us on a more mutual level. He believes that the present wave of emigration is unique and that later this will start to abate, and consequently the problem will become manageable. Related to this, he emphasized once again that the Hungarian decision is only a temporary measure, valid for just a short time.

Afterwards the Hungarians will again apply our existing bilateral agreement.

Comrade Nyers stated that until last month the Hungarian leadership had examined whether the Berlin Formula would make a solution possible. "We wanted very much to proceed, but unfortunately had to find out that with such a number of people willing to leave the country under these particular conditions in Hungary, success was unfortunately not a possibility." [...]

In judging Hungarian actions one must observe that "Hungary is in a dilemma, we have fallen into a political trap." Hungary could not choose between good and bad, but rather between only bad and worse. (I refrained from remarking that in that statement the GDR is the lesser evil.) Comrade Nyers lastly referred to the exceptional nature of the present situation, namely that it was now being pushed into a defensive position politically, and he can only hope that it will once again be able to go back on the offensive. [...]

Thus far, the course of today's discussion in the Central Committee of the HSWP permits me to draw attention to still other points in connection with the entire event [...]

2. In spite of the verbally declared willingness on behalf of the Hungarians to solve the problem facing the GDR, the discussions with the GDR (foreign minister, head of the Consular Affairs Department, MfS, DRKⁱⁱ) represent an attempt at stalling and deliberately misleading the GDR. The Hungarian organs undertook no serious attempts of

their own to persuade those GDR citizens wishing to emigrate to return to the GDR. The efforts by our embassy's consular section to contact the GDR citizens in these [refugee] camps and explain the GDR's point of view were both delayed and impeded.

Simultaneously the Hungarian media provoked and supported a campaign directed against the GDR, which, upon being observed, encouraged the GDR citizens staying in the camps. Battle groups which were temporarily placed at the border as reinforcements were defamed by opposition groups, anti-socialist forces, and the majority of the press.

3. This campaign is judged at the same time to be a coordinated and successful attempt by the imperialist states, in particular the FRG, to take advantage of Hungary's political and economic position to exert pressure on the Hungarian leadership to solve the problem of those GDR citizens wishing to leave with the aim of looking out for all Germans. Here the imperialist policy of discrimination was consciously directed to foil, via the purposeful introduction of extensive economic means into Hungary, the solutions already initiated in accordance with the Berlin formula for the FRG's representation in Berlin and Prague with regard to the HPR. With the massive scale of the migration [Ausschleusang] of thousands of GDR citizens, a socialist country will establish in effect a public precedent supporting the FRG position, which is not in the spirit of international law. That follows the process already initiated of expelling Hungary from the socialist state community.

Characteristic of the preparation and implementation of the migration was the fact that the FRG always more openly and directly conducted the maintenance and care of the camp [...] and the deliberate preparation of the migration campaign. The Hungarian organs tolerated and covered up these acts by the FRG.

[Source: Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR-Bundesarchiv.
Translated by Christiaan Hetzner.]

ⁱ Oskar Fischer further relayed the letter to Günter Mittag and then to all members and candidate members of the SED-Politburo as well on September 11, 1989. [Footnote in the original.]

ⁱⁱ The Ministry for State Security, or Stasi, and the [East] German Red Cross, respectively.