

Document No. 1: Record of Telephone Conversation between

George H.W. Bush and Helmut Kohl

November 17, 1989

Chancellor Kohl initiated the call.

Chancellor Kohl: In my talks with [new East German leader] [sic] Krenz, I raised the issues of free elections, free trade unions, and freedom of the press. I suggested that we in the FRG will give comprehensive assistance under the condition that these reforms, which the people are expecting, will be carried out. If they do not carry them out, the government will fall. There will be more movement on Saturday and Sunday. I expect more than a million people will visit the FRG. I hope that the opening of the border has had the consequence that travellers do not have to stay but can return to an improving home.

In view of world political developments, we will do nothing that will destabilize the situation in the GDR. I had a long conversation with Gorbachev. Of course, the Soviets are concerned. I told Gorbachev that if Krenz does not carry out reforms as in Poland and Hungary, the system will fail.

The President: Thank you for your support in your public comments. It is important that Germans see that they have the support and sympathy of their allies.

Chancellor Kohl: Tomorrow night at the EC meeting, I will report on Poland, Hungary, and the GDR. I will put in an urgent plea to support the American initiative for Poland. I will pledge that if the U.S. is willing to put up \$250 million for stabilization, we will put up the same amount. All in all, that amounts to \$500 million as a stabilizing measure. I do hope that others will be able to put in the remainder.

The President: Let me say that we appreciate the FRG's stand and your stand personally. In spite of Congressional posturing, the U.S. will stay calm and support reforms in just the way you talk about. The euphoric excitement in the U.S. runs the risk of forcing unforeseen action in the USSR or the GDR that would be very bad. We will not be making exhortations about unification or setting any timetables. We will not exacerbate the problem by having the President of the United States posturing on the Berlin Wall.

The Wałęsa visit went well. He was reasonable, and relatively pleased about the Congressional aid package. I have followed up on giving the IMF a push in its negotiations with Poland. It will be difficult to reach a conclusion by the end of November--which is your timetable--but may be possible in December.

Chancellor Kohl: If negotiations are completed by mid-December, that would be acceptable, but it cannot be later than that.

The President: We will push and encourage others to do the same. You might tell the EC that we have talked and push others to help.

Chancellor Kohl: I had hoped we might get together as you prepare for Malta, but unfortunately I cannot come before your meetings. What about our meeting in Spain, even for two hours?

The President: We are in a tight time frame. I would value your judgment and would like to get together. I gather you cannot come to Camp David.

Chancellor Kohl: I have an enormous problem with freeing myself for two days. With the developing situation, I would like to stay here. There is also a budget debate in our parliament. You have a Naval base [in Spain] [sic]. Perhaps you could make a stopover.

The President: Here is my point: I am absolutely determined to get advice and suggestions from you personally before I meet with Gorbachev. That is very important, because of the German Question. I understand your logistical problems. I want to suggest that after Genscher is here, you and I set aside an hour or more next weekend to talk by phone. Maybe we can have secure communications, so that I can understand every

nuance of the German Question. I will be available for as much time as possible. Input from the FRG, from Chancellor Kohl, to Gorbachev is more important than at any other time or for any other meeting.

Chancellor Kohl: We should try to arrange that. Perhaps Monday we should have a long conversation.

The President: That would be good if we cannot figure out another way. I think there are nuances of difference in the Alliance. I want to understand them.

Chancellor Kohl: That is true.

The President: I will have proper consultations. More important than large consultations, I need to understand Germany. Woerner has invited us to come to Brussels. I will do that. You and I could have a separate breakfast--or supper if we get in early.

Chancellor Kohl: When will you arrive?

The President: Sunday night, maybe in time for dinner. Maybe you would buy me dinner.

Chancellor Kohl: I would be able to do that. We can arrange that, either on December 3 or December 4.

The President: Or before the meeting, for two hours over breakfast.

Chancellor Kohl: That is possible. Let us envisage having breakfast on the 4th.

The President: Let's do it.

Chancellor Kohl: We can talk about it.

The President: It is important, so that I do not miss the nuance of Germany's or Kohl's positions. After Genscher is here to see Jim Baker, we can talk. Brent can also talk to Teltschik. If there is any disconnect, I may request that our top people get together.

Chancellor Kohl: Let me make a suggestion. Genscher will be in Washington on Tuesday. The second part of the week I will send a personal memorandum of my position. I will call you on November 27 for an extensive discussion, and we will meet before the conference in Brussels.

The President: We will get back to you on which time is better.

Chancellor Kohl: All right. Let's envisage a meeting on the 3rd. Next week you will receive a paper from me.

The President: Let me make one personal comment. When you told me that you thanked the American people for their steadfastness, I passed that along and it was received warmly. I want to thank you for that comment.

Chancellor Kohl: It was only natural.

The President: If anything comes up that is unforeseen, call me or I will call you.

Chancellor Kohl: I will do so.

[Source: George Bush Presidential Library. Obtained through
FOIA. On file at the National Security Archive.]