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Call for an Open Dialogue: Egon Krenz's Government Program (October 24, 1989)

On October 18, 1989, Erich Honecker was forced to resign, and his hand-picked successor, Egon Krenz, assumed the leadership of the GDR. But when Krenz proposed an open dialogue with the emerging opposition movement, the public remained skeptical, primarily because he had justified the Chinese bloodbath at Tiananmen Square only a few months earlier.

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The task given us by the people, honorable representatives, imposes upon us, today more urgently than ever, the obligation to react to the demands of the times competently, consistently, and with the courage to be truthful, and to find better solutions to the difficult problems in our country. Everything we do is always measured primarily by its effects on the people. [ . . . ]

The renewal of our society which we are attempting needs the firm socialist foundation we have laid together. We all agree on this point – all of us in the democratic alliance; renewal requires solidarity and identity rooted in history, without denying the mistakes and distorting biases which also accompanied the establishment of our new order in the past decades. [ . . . ]

Diversity of opinion prepares the ground for sound and open dialogue. The chance to find the most effective, and, therefore, the best, solution for our citizens is to listen to the pros and cons in the debate on the best form for the development of our society. The basis for this lies in Article 1 of our country's constitution: "The GDR is a socialist state of the workers and peasants. It is the political organization of the workers in town and country, under the leadership of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist party." All the reforms, honorable representatives, which we must bring about – and we want to bring them about – are dedicated to this task demanded by the people. [ . . . ]

The cooperation of all political parties, the democratic alliance of all popular forces in the *National Front*, is taking on a new importance. This requires an objective dialogue that makes it possible to consider questions and suggestions on participation in communal and societal decision making processes, by all those obliged by the constitution to act in the national and international interest. [ . . . ]

We should do everything in our power to avoid aggravating the situation or even provoking any confrontation at all. This would threaten much of what has already been set in motion.

Regarding demonstrations, no matter how peaceful their planners and organizers intend them to be, in these complex times the danger always exists that they might not end as they began. Many of our citizens have good reason to be concerned when this places our society, already challenged by so many new things, under additional pressure. As important as dialogue and discussion are – and I am strongly committed to these processes – the people’s livelihood is earned only through conscientious, collective work, conditioned on the individual responsibility for the whole. [ . . . ]

The demonstrations may have served a purpose, but our society – and by this I mean all our citizens – needs more than ever before an objective dialogue on conflicting ideas and opinions. It does not need confrontation among its citizens, as recent events have shown. We all share this responsibility, and I would like to emphasize once more that we are dedicated to finding political solutions to political problems. [ . . . ]

No one should draw false conclusions from the political developments in the GDR. The German Democratic Republic is a sovereign socialist state, and everything that happens here is the result of the sovereign decision of our country and its citizens. NATO proposals and “suggestions” aiming to abolish socialism through reform continue to have no chance! [ . . . ]

Source of English translation: “Egon Krenz’s Government Program” (October 24, 1989), in Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993*. Translated by Allison Brown and Belinda Cooper. Berghahn Books: Providence and Oxford, 1994, pp. 65-66. © Berghahn Books.

Source of original German text: Egon Krenz, *Das Wohl des Volkes ist unser elementarer Leitsatz: Erklärung des Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR vom 24. 10. 1989 vor der Volkskammer der DDR* [*The Well-Being of the People is our Basic Guiding Principle. Declaration of the Chairman of the Council of State of the GDR before the Volkskammer of the GDR on October 24, 1989*]. Berlin, 1989, pp. 5-15