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Hans Modrow's Reform Agenda (November 17, 1989)

Egon Krenz's tenure as leader of the GDR was brief. Within a month, he had been replaced by Hans Modrow, a popular SED District Secretary from Dresden. On November 17, 1989, Modrow outlined his reform program for reviving socialism and saving East German independence through closer cooperation with the Federal Republic.

We need an advance on trust from anyone willing to give it to us. I know that's a lot to ask. This is why I want to declare that this government will make only promises it can truly keep. [. . .]

We declare our support of workers' accomplishments throughout the past decades. In the last few days, we have repeatedly expressed our intention to maintain all we have achieved through hard work, not to give anything up, not to let all our efforts during difficult times go up in smoke. [. . .] The government's most important task is to lead the GDR economy out of its present crisis and bring stability and new impetus for growth. And we will tackle this task.

We are responsible and accountable to the Volkskammer. We understand this to mean that we are accountable to the people. And we welcome anyone who wishes to help us with this task. [. . .]

In view of this, the government needs new maxims to work by – namely, those considered to be virtues by the people: openness and honesty, order and legality, moderation and thrift, competence rather than slogans or empty speeches. What is required of employees in a business must also apply to the government, and to the state in general – quality work. And if this is not the case, then it must be demanded by the citizens, unrelentingly and publicly. [. . .]

Our economy has serious problems; the necessary material resources are limited. Its structure must be significantly improved, and fixed assets modernized in many areas. But the economic basis of our socialist state is strong and resilient enough to stabilize in the near future and become capable of gaining the momentum it needs. [. . .]

The government program requires reforms, as have been proposed, demanded, and drafted by political parties and other social powers and by the citizens at large. [. . .] Here I will mention the most important of these:

First, political reform, combined with legislative steps to strengthen constitutional security and law. This includes voting legislation, a law pertaining to the Council of Ministers and laws guaranteeing freedom of the press. Drafts for criminal law reform can be completed very quickly. The freedom of movement law, perhaps referred to as a passport law, will be presented following discussion.

Secondly, economic reform will be aimed at increasing the individual responsibility of economic units. This must lead to considerably greater efficiency, minimization of centralized leadership and planning and, perhaps most difficult, promotion of merit pay. I suggest defining such economic reform, including its contents and stages, by means of special consultation between Volkskammer committees and economic experts. Careful, unbiased examination of subsidy and price policies represents a significant task.

Third, educational reform is necessary. [. . .]

Fourth, we need a long-term program that can be implemented step by step and reviewed each year, dedicated to reconciling economic and ecological interests. I would like to add that, due to unnecessary secrecy, the GDR's record seemed worse than it really is. In the future, no one should be allowed to delete or delay planned environmental protection measures. And a new energy policy is needed which will lead to a reduction in fossil fuel consumption.

Fifth, administrative reform is necessary to democratize state leadership and administration, to make their activities more transparent, and, last but not least, to reduce administrative costs considerably, both financially and in terms of personnel. [. . .]

The intended political reform already under way has provided a new foundation to preserve and implement a policy of self-determination for the people of the GDR. This gives new strength to the GDR's legitimacy as a socialist state, as a sovereign German state. Not mere claims, but rather a new reality regarding life in the GDR will serve to clearly reject unrealistic and dangerous speculations about reunification.

The two German states, despite all the differences in their social systems, share a centuries-old history. Both states should take this opportunity to lend their mutual relationship a good-neighborly character.

If the two German states show each other unreserved mutual respect, they can create a worthy example of cooperative coexistence. The government of the GDR is willing to expand cooperation with the FRG to new levels. This applies to all issues: securing of peace,

disarmament, economics, science and technology, environmental protection, transportation, postal and telephone services, culture, tourism, and a plethora of humanitarian issues.

We are in favor of strengthening the community of responsibility of the two German states through a treaty-based union that goes far beyond that of the Basic Treaty and other previous treaties and agreements between the two states. This government is open to discussion in this regard. [. . .]

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