

## **Nov. 9, 1989 East Berlin Press Conference: Schabowski's Mistake?**

Gunter Schabowski was supposed to announce eased travel restrictions for East Germans. Instead, his answers left reporters with the impression the Berlin Wall had fallen. Here's an excerpt from the Nov. 9, 1989, news conference:

**Riccardo Ehrman (reporter, ANSA):** Don't you think it was a big mistake, this draft law on travel that you presented a few days ago?

**Gunter Schabowski (East German Politburo official):** No, I don't think so. Ah... [talks for three minutes] And therefore, ah, we have decided on a new regulation today that makes it possible for every citizen of the GDR, ah, to exit via border crossing points of the, ah, GDR.

**Ehrman:** Without a passport?

**Krzysztof Janowski (reporter, Voice of America):** From when does that apply?

**Schabowski:** What?

**Peter Brinkmann (reporter, Bild):** At once? At...?

**Schabowski:** [Scratches head] Well, comrades, I was informed today ...[puts on his glasses, reads out press release on visa authorization procedure]

**Ehrman:** With a passport?

**Schabowski:** [Reads out rest of press release, says he doesn't know the answer on passports]

**Second East German official:** The substance of the announcement is the important thing...

**Schabowski:** ...is the...

**Fourth reporter:** When does that go into effect?

**Schabowski:** [Rustles through his papers] That goes, to my knowledge, that is...immediately. Without delay.

**Third official:** [Quietly] That must be decided by the Council of Ministers.

**Janowski:** Also in Berlin?

**Brinkmann:** You only said the FRG, does this also apply for West Berlin?

**Schabowski:** [Reads] As the press department of the ministry...the Council of Ministers has decided that until the People's Assembly enacts a relevant law, this temporary regulation will be in effect.

**Brinkmann:** Does this also apply to Berlin-West? You only said the FRG.

**Schabowski:** [Shrugs, frowns, looks at his papers] So...yes, yes: [reads] 'Permanent exit can take place via all border crossing points of the GDR to the FRG or to Berlin-West.'