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Minutes of Conversation between Gorbachev and Romanian Leader Ceausescu

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Summary:

Minutes of Conversation between Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev and Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu on the status of the East European regimes and Soviet-Romanian bilateral relations. The two leaders discuss the history of Communism, the events taking place in other East European countries, the future of Romania and the Soviet Union and the nature and state of bilateral relations between the two countries.

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Minutes of the Meeting between Nicolae Ceausescu, and Mikhail S. Gorbachev,
Moscow, 4 December 1989

At the meeting were also present comrades Constantin Dascalescu, Prime Minister of the of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania, and Nikolai I. Ryzhkov, President of the Council of Ministers of USSR.

M.S. Gorbachev: Comrade Ceausescu, first and foremost I would like to congratulate you on behalf of the entire leadership of Soviet Union for the successful finalization of your Congress.⁷ I believe that you are satisfied with the results of your Congress. Within Romanian society, among the Romanian communists, as our comrades have told me, the reaction to the decisions of the Congress has been a positive one. From me as well as from the leadership of the Soviet Union, I would like to communicate, to you and to the entire Romanian party leadership, a friendly salute and good luck in bringing the decisions of the Congress to fruition.

N. Ceausescu: I would like to thank you for your good wishes and, in turn, to express to you, in the name of our party leadership and me personally, a cordial salute to you and the Soviet leadership. Of course, I am happy to have even this short meeting although there is need for a longer meeting.

Gorbachev: Of course, we will try to find time for that as well.

Ceausescu: There are a lot of issues to discuss. Thank you for the good words regarding our Congress. It was a good Congress and there were a lot of good decisions taken during the Congress. Now we need to work on putting them into practice.

Gorbachev: Always, after a great event, especially after a Congress, we have to deal with a lot of obligations. This has always been that way. [Here,] at home, the situation demands a great deal of attention. We already consider it sensitive. Our main preoccupation rests in shedding those elements that have impeded our development. Of course, we are committed to our political choice and we cannot agree with the idea that the path we have taken until now has been a path of mistakes and unfulfilled promises. This is a complex process and a change in the world as our revolution has been can not be appreciated only in "black and white," even if we are to judge it under large, historical criteria and we are not to exaggerate. I believe that we can not admit, from the perspective of truth and morality, that the accomplishments of the previous generations are under-appreciated. They lived, sacrificed their health and even life, and though there have been dramas, they were happy. That is why we, through our perestroika, [hope] to accumulate all that has been good and open up prospects for the renewal and perfecting of our society. Of course, this process is complex. However, we hope for a successful end, though we know it will not be a quick one.

Ceausescu: At our Congress we had a special passage about the Great October Socialist Revolution and about the great realizations of the Soviet people. What the Soviet people have accomplished cannot be forgotten.

Gorbachev: This [that there were no realizations] is one of those falsities, even more stupid than those that are usually being told.

Ceausescu: Of course, in such a grandiose activity there have also been mistakes and abuses, but history only records that which assures advance. I salute your position, Cde. Gorbachev, in regards with the necessity to show, with the backing of facts, what socialism has accomplished, because through that, the Soviet people will be mobilized in support of the new objectives. Yes, we need to constantly perfect the organization of society, the economy, all that stands at the basis of a closer path towards socialist ideals.

Gorbachev: I think this is a very consistent remark since we ourselves have been late in solving certain problems though they were ready to be solved.

Ceausescu: I hope you realize that no matter what we shall do now, in ten years it will again be outdated if we do not always keep an eye out for what is new.

Gorbachev: Absolutely.

Ceausescu: What is important is that we reach socialism so that we offer the people a better spiritual and material life.

Gorbachev: I will ask Comrade Stoica to translate for you the last article I wrote regarding the ideals of socialism and their relationship with perestroika. There I have talked about all those issues.

Ceausescu: I have looked over it. I received an executive summary.

Gorbachev: It is hard to get the overall idea from summaries.

Ceausescu: I'll think about it [the article] and I'll give you an answer.

Gorbachev: Very well.

Ceausescu: This is my idea: two delegations, one from each of our parties—if we could find others it would be great but now it might be harder—to elaborate a declaration regarding socialism and its prospects.

Gorbachev: I am not opposed to that.

Ceausescu: I can assure you that a lot of parties are waiting for such a declaration and will certainly salute the fact that the Soviet Union participates in this issue.

Gorbachev: Excellent.

Ceausescu: Of course, not the old forms—we have criticized them, you remember—but, let's face it, the entire world pays a great deal of attention to the actions of the Soviet Union. I am, of course, referring to the communist movements and the progressive forces.

Gorbachev: Fine, let's give this task to the ideological and international sections [of the Central Committee] and let them begin work, most likely in the scientific field at first and maybe after that in the political field.

Ceausescu: After that we can look at it together. Since we are discussing such issues, let us begin to discuss the possibility of a congress of the Communist and Workers Parties. Of course, I do not want to take a decision right this minute, but a lot of parties have expressed interest in such an event. As a matter of fact, one of the decisions of the congress has been that [the Romanian Communist Party] will pursue this idea. We could form an exploratory committee.

Gorbachev: I have a different idea.

Ceausescu: They should start working on it.

Gorbachev: I am inclined to agree more with the idea you proposed in your letter. However, we in the socialist countries should have a debate regarding this issue. How could we establish a larger meeting without first establishing our position regarding the problems we face?

Ceausescu: This will take a long time to prepare for. Even the creation of a group will have a positive influence on the socialist countries. You should know that no one desires a conference where they say this and that. Thus, it would be great if an exploratory group would be formed and if they would start working on this issue. This could be a great help for the socialist countries.

Gorbachev: We are of the following opinion: the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party should run an opinion poll since this is not a very good time to have a conference. There was a time when there was a friendly attitude regarding such a debate, but after that a process of renewal about the role of the party began and now there is a different desire taking shape: everybody wants to clean his own house.

Ceausescu: I want to state openly that, for a time, we ourselves have been against such conferences.

Gorbachev: Now others are opposed.

Ceausescu: But we have received requests from many parties and, since this is such a dire time for the communist movement, we have a responsibility to do something even if a small number of parties might show up. Do you know what Lenin said in 1903?

Gorbachev: No, I do not.

Ceausescu: No matter how few we are, we must raise the flag. The people need to see that we are taking action to extend the influence of socialism and the revolutionary movement.

Gorbachev: I was under the impression that what we do regarding the renewal of socialism does raise the interest of others in the development of socialism.

Ceausescu: We do not have the time to discuss this. There are some good things, there are a few things that are not as good, and if we are to discuss this right now we would need a great deal of time. There are some good things.

Gorbachev: Yes, we only have a short time. But we should think about this.

Ceausescu: I am against creating such an exploratory committee without the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev: Maybe it would be better like that.

Ceausescu: I don't think that would be a good idea.

Gorbachev: The concept of equal rights [among the parties] suggests that.

Ceausescu: This is so, but I think that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union must not be left out of such a debate. However, as I mentioned before, we need not decide this issue right now. I do hope that you will think about this problem.

Gorbachev: We will consider it and give you an answer.

Ceausescu: This is an actual problem and we must have an answer. There are many such problems today and the people feel the need to receive answers. After all, the people think that if the social-democrats, the liberals, the Christian-Democrats can all meet...

Gorbachev: The conservatives...

Ceausescu: The conservatives, yes... Then why can not the communist parties meet as well?

Gorbachev: Because, some time ago, Cdes. Ceausescu and [Italian Communist leader Enrico] Berlinguer were against that.

Ceausescu: We were against a certain format... and history proved us right.

Gorbachev: I was against it myself, but there was not much I could do at the time.

Ceausescu: Then why don't we work out a common declaration and, if other parties will agree with it, so much the better. I understand you agreed with this point.

Gorbachev: We will think about it and we will give you an answer.

Ceausescu: Very well. Should we start discussing bilateral issues now? Or would you rather finish up the more general problems first. We are very preoccupied about what is going on with a few European socialist countries. We understand the drive to perfect, to renew, but I do not want to discuss this right now. The format of this renewal places in grave danger not just socialism in the respective countries but also the very existence of the communist parties there. If we allow this flow of events, a dire situation will develop. In any case, one can not say that socialism did not accomplish anything in those countries. I believe that the Soviet Union, and I am referring primarily to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, could have a certain role—not by the force of the military—to help produce a better orientation. You were speaking today about a better orientation for those parties and countries. Of course, a meeting between the socialist countries and our parties could help, but we have to think hard about the actions taking place in some countries.

Gorbachev: Here we need to ask how we all could act and more importantly how they should act. Who prevented Czechoslovakia and the East Germany—countries that had a high level of economic development and high living standards—from beginning in time the process of modernization and [from] taking into account the changes that began to take shape in the development of society? If they would have done this at the right time, today's events would be different. We too, in the Soviet Union. If we would have taken care of the modernization of the technology and of economic development at the right time, there would be a different approach today. There was a lot of talk at the time, in meetings and during congresses, about the technological and scientific revolutions, about the development of our country. Yet in the end, all was set aside. Right now we have a report in the Central Committee about the technological and scientific revolution from 1973, and, look, 15 years later, we are just beginning to do what needed to be done then. I believe that we have lost a lot of our prestige because we have not taken direct action regarding those problems at the right time.

Ceausescu: This is true.

Gorbachev: Whether or not we like the methods employed by Comrade Ceausescu, we know that a lot has been done in Romania, and, in an objective manner, all are free to chose their own methods to accomplish progress and the construction of socialism. That's about it. Look at the situation in which our common friend, Comrade [deposed East German leader Erich] Honecker is today. We have a great deal of mutual sympathy, but as of late, he did not want to speak with me, and I did not have a chance to speak with him. After all, I told him: Comrade Honecker, it is your job to decide, we will not decide

for you, we do not force you to adhere to our decisions. As a matter of fact, I know that the both of you have criticized me...

Ceausescu: No, we did not criticize you. On the contrary, we decided that we should meet more quickly and discuss what we could do to work better together.

Gorbachev: Sincerely speaking, I am very uncertain about the future of Comrade Honecker.

Ceausescu: I am very sorry about this and that is why I even brought it to the attention of the public, something must be done, because this cannot be continued in this manner. That includes, of course, Comrade [deposed Bulgarian leader Todor] Zhivkov.

Gorbachev: I believe that [as far as] Cde. Zhivkov is concerned, the situation will be a lot more normal. I do not know what the situation is there [in Bulgaria]. Of course, over the years, a lot of things have accumulated. If there are no grievous abuses, I believe that the situation will come to a positive end. However, politics can not be done this way. We, at the leadership level, try to concentrate on political problems, not to decide who has done what. You know that there are always certain elements of society that will raise such problems. What can we do? You seem concerned about this, tell me, what can we do?

Ceausescu: We could have a meeting and discuss possible solutions.

Gorbachev: In East Germany, they [the Communists] have already discussed it and have excluded them [the old leadership] from the party.

Ceausescu: Yes, I saw that, but at this time, in East Germany there are already influences from outside at work, from the Federal Republic of Germany.

Gorbachev: [deposed Czechoslovak leader] Milos Jakes is an old friend of mine. I told him: you have a great country, a well-trained population, well-educated and well-organized, you need to make the necessary changes faster, faster. Otherwise, you'll end up like us, having to solve your problems under the marching of boots. Jakes listened to me and said: then we shall wait until others come to power in the Soviet Union. He waited, and this is what happened. Those are two countries with a great economic situation, rich countries, the richest countries, except for us, the richest of them all.

Ceausescu: Beginning with 1968 we said: we need to develop our economy because no one will help us otherwise. We have taken steps in that direction.

Gorbachev: You have done a lot.

Ceausescu: Until 1984 we did not import even one liter of gasoline from the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev: You had no need for it. You had your own gasoline. This is already clear now.

Ceausescu: I just wanted to remind you.

Gorbachev: In any case, you have done a lot.

Ceausescu: We have worked on and succeeded in bringing about the development of society and the economy. What you are doing now we have tried in the past. We created then the so-called private-holders and after a year we saw they are getting rich and we put a stop to the entire situation.

Gorbachev: Is this the future you see for us?

Ceausescu: If some get rich by playing the market, that is not a future, you know that I'm sure. We have introduced the idea of economic self-rule, the new economic mechanism, and the leadership councils.

Gorbachev: As I listen to you I cannot help but think that in a year you have time to visit every administrative region in your country.

Ceausescu: Maybe not quite all the regions.

Gorbachev: Tell me, though, in a country as big as ours, how could we rule in the same manner as you? We need to think of different methods.

Ceausescu: We, too, have autonomy, but there is a difference between the autonomy of republics or even regions and the autonomy of factories. In any case, general direction and control from the center are necessary, even for the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev: Comrade Ceausescu, we too desire a powerful center, but we think of it in a somewhat different manner.

Ceausescu: This must be done. Of course, the republics must have a great deal of autonomy. So must the administrative regions. We are going as far as villages now. Yes, we are a small country...

Gorbachev: It's not small, it's medium size...

Ceausescu: In any case, it is mistaken to allow the factories, even at the national level, to be outside central control. A lot of autonomy, a lot of rights, of course, but under a central guidance. About 20 years back, we gave them a lot of rights and, the first thing they did was to take loans and make all kinds of poor economic investments. Then we realized that we needed to control certain things so we took some of their liberties away. For Romania, \$11 billion debt in 1980 was a grave problem. As a matter of fact, I can tell

you that in my discussions with [Soviet leader Leonid]Brezhev at the time, he told me: don't go and get yourself in debt. He told me that a number of times, but my mistake was that I gave too much discretion to the factories and all of them decided that if they have discretion then they can take credits from outside.

Gorbachev: It is the fault of the government!

Ceausescu: Comrade Dascalescu was not then prime-minister.

C. Dascalescu: I came when we began to pay.

Ceausescu: After that we made some changes and we put a stop to that situation while paying back the debt.

Gorbachev: Of course, we do not want to create a bad situation, we want to succeed.

Ceausescu: Everybody wants that. The Soviet Union has countless possibilities to overcome the problems you are experiencing now. You can become a model socialist economy.

Gorbachev: This is exactly what we want to do. Maybe those goals are too high, but those are our goals. Maybe our generation will not finish all the changes, but we could do a lot. What is most important now is that we establish the foundation for change, that we determine the future direction in a correct manner.

Ceausescu: In a few years the Soviet Union could surpass its difficulties, mainly because it is an economic force.

Gorbachev: This is so.

Ceausescu: You are criticizing research and development but you have a powerful sector in those fields.

Gorbachev: Absolutely.

Ceausescu: The mistake was that you have placed too much emphasis on the military side of research and development and you have neglected the other aspects.

Gorbachev: I know.

Ceausescu: I understand that the international situation necessitated such behavior. But you do have a powerful research and development sector, very powerful... it could solve easily any problem. And, after all, the other socialist countries, they might be smaller, but we can work together in this field.

Gorbachev: If we think about the countries in Europe, with all the problems they are experiencing, they are modern nations.

Ceausescu: The changes that have taken place... they need to be stopped and we need to get under way.

Gorbachev: We have considered that as well. Maybe we have different methods, but this is the method employed by all others. What is important is that we strengthen socialism. The rest is the other's concern. There are different rhythms, different methods. Of course, we need to consider the differences between the republics, between their populations, between their economic development.

Ceausescu: But it [the system] must be kept, [must be] improved.

Gorbachev: Not just kept, comrade Ceausescu!

Ceausescu: When I said that it must be kept it was understood that all that is necessary must be kept.

Gorbachev: Absolutely. Now, what are the bilateral problems you want to discuss.

Ceausescu: First and foremost economic relations. Of course, the prime ministers have not had a chance to meet.

Gorbachev: Then they should meet.

N.I. Ryzhkov: We shall meet on 9 January 1990.

C. Dascalescu: This would be a meeting within the confines of COMECON. We desire a bilateral meeting.

Gorbachev: You'll survive until 9 January. [Veti mai trai pana la 9 ianuarie!]In any case, what are the problems that preoccupy you?

Ceausescu: I am under the impression that we have discussed those problems already. The prime-ministers must meet and resolve the problems already discussed. We need to think about the next five year plan.

Gorbachev: I think that they have already discussed those problems.

Dascalescu: Only for 1990.

Ceausescu: Of course, there are topics of discussion. We consider that we could improve our collaboration. This is the foremost issue on our minds. Of course, I don't think it necessary to get into issues that would require a lot of time. We can not debate now those

topics but, if we agree on a time for the prime ministers to meet, that would be a good thing. In Romania, the time is now ripe.

Dascalescu: I have written to comrade Ryzhkov on this topic, this is the fourth letter this year.

Ryzhkov: The time was not right.

Ceausescu: This might be true, but we need to make time for a meeting. At that time we could look at the issues of collaboration in the fields of production, specialization, even the realization of certain goals. Why do I bring up those issues? Because, especially in the member countries of COMECON there are many debates and now, bilaterally, we could solve those problems much more easily. Some believe that the Americans will come and invest billions of dollars in their economy. Of course, they will reach certain conclusions. It is their business, but, until we clarify the many problems, we could solve many of them through a bilateral solution. I don't want to get into it right now, I just wanted to mention this right now.

Gorbachev: Maybe the Romanian government could explain what it expects from the Soviet Union. Comrade Dascalescu could write a letter listing the resources you would need.

Ceausescu: I would like you to note that I do not desire to resolve the problem of raw materials only through the Soviet Union. We have worked closely with the developing countries and we desire to accentuate this trend. We can even give them some credits now. As a matter of fact, we have now to recover 2.7 billion dollars from those countries.

Gorbachev: In a year?

Ceausescu: No, those are credits given by Romania to a few developing countries.

Dascalescu: This year Romania has outstanding credits for almost 500 million dollars.

Ceausescu: We would like to participate actively in the development of those countries and, in turn, assure our access to raw materials.

Gorbachev: Then we should talk about our particular problems.

Ceausescu: From the Soviet Union we have imported 5 million tons of petrol, beginning in 1984, and from other countries we have imported 15 million tons. Thus we need not resolve this particular problem only with the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev: And how much do you extract from Romania?

Ceausescu: Only about 10 million tons since we no longer have reserves.

Gorbachev: But there was a time when you were mining about 22 million tons.

Ceausescu: It was closer to about 15 million tons, but that was some time ago. We no longer have reserves. We thought about going to 10,000 meters depth.

Gorbachev: Our extraction is also falling.

Ceausescu: There are a number of fields in which we could collaborate. For example, we could collaborate in the energy field, based on new technology.

Gorbachev: I would be interested in discussing the nature of this collaboration rather than simply trading goods.

Ceausescu: We, for example, import about 7 million tons of iron ore from the Soviet Union. From other countries we import about 12 million tons. As such, we do not desire to import raw materials only from the Soviet Union. We import coal from the United States..., some time ago we invested 100 million dollars there, so we own property there.

Gorbachev: There, the Japanese have a lot of property.

Ceausescu: The Japanese invest on a grand scale. Thus, we want to discuss this collaboration because we want to participate. We were informed a few days ago that you would like to open two new exploratory sites in Lvov and Kharkov. We would like to participate, to collaborate with you in Mongolia. As a matter of fact, we have been discussing this for a long time since the Soviet Union is interested in investing there as well. We have invested in coal in China. We do not want to ask for anything, we do not want aid from the Soviet Union, we want to collaborate.

Gorbachev: There can be no help from us... you need to help us.

Ceausescu: We would like to collaborate on economic principles—this is our intention.

Gorbachev: Comrade Dascalescu should think about the proposals we have discussed.

Dascalescu: I shall wait for comrade Ryzhkov in Romania.

Ryzhkov: I apologize, comrade Gorbachev. I will meet with comrade Dascalescu and we shall discuss what problems we need to address in our bilateral relations, including the issues regarding the next five year plan. I am not against [this] and I assume we will talk about specialization and cooperation, in production and every other aspect, but I want to mention that, and this is not targeted at Romania, we will present a report on 15 December regarding our plans for the development of the economy. We have prepared the necessary documents and have distributed them to the deputies for debate. When we prepared those documents, we began with the idea that we need to move from the exchange of goods, the barter system, towards regular commerce. This is why, on 9 January, when the meeting between the chiefs of governments will take place, we will

bring this problem up. We know that many countries agree with us, many have suggested that we move from the barter system to world prices and payments in hard currency. We understand that this can not be done over night. Maybe we will need to wait 1-2 years until we can switch over to this system. This does not mean however that we can not or will not negotiate long term deals, even in regard to bartering for goods, but we have no other solution in the long term. Neither for us, nor for the other countries, can [we] continue in this [old] system. This is why you should think about this yourself.

Ceausescu: I understand what you are saying. After all, we ourselves exchange goods for hard currency. We have chosen the convertible ruble as our currency of choice, but we do not barter. Of course, we seek to reach a balance of payments, but this takes place throughout the world. With the United States for example, we calculate the prices in dollars but exchange goods.

Gorbachev: If we think about moving to the world system, then we need to adopt the world's methods. Many countries, Czechoslovakia, Poland and even Bulgaria have brought up the idea that we need to move to world market prices and thus to commerce using hard currency.

Ceausescu: That is very good. We consider that this problem must be discussed with due seriousness. For example, we and the Chinese deal in Swiss Francs.

Ryzhkov: So do we.

Ceausescu: We do however make sure that there is a balance of payments—only the calculation of the value of trade is in hard currency. I do not believe that for the Soviet Union it will be acceptable to move from the ruble to the dollar. Of course, this is a problem for the Soviet Union to decide on.

Gorbachev: We desire that, in this whole process we also incorporate the redesign of our financial system and the system of prices, to try to quickly reach the convertibility of the ruble. The most important thing is to integrate ourselves in the world market, otherwise we have no basis of comparison.

Ceausescu: This problem will need to be discussed, discussed for a long time.

Gorbachev: We will then propose this at the meeting, on 9 January, and we hope that by that time you will also have a position.

Ceausescu: We do not consider this to be the most opportune time to make this move.

Gorbachev: Why?

Ryzhkov: 1990 will continue the same why but we expect to make this move in 1991.

Ceausescu: It is not about 1990. I am thinking more about the next five years.

Gorbachev: Why?

Ceausescu: Because this will not strengthen the economy of the socialist countries nor that of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev: Why?

Ceausescu: For us it is not a big deal to do such a thing. Even now, with China and the other countries we have about a 60 per cent exchange in hard currency.

Gorbachev: I will tell you this: this is not a short time plan. We must make this change, maybe we will end up in debt, but we must adopt this system. We must create the opportunity for the energy sector to earn hard currency and make investments. Today this is the least developed part of our economy, but it not only about the energy sector. In general, our industries must compete in the world market and understand that they must make ends meet. How long can we continue to push them along?

Ceausescu: It is not about pushing them forward, the economic activity must be planned on sound economic principles.

Gorbachev: Comrade Ceausescu, it is easy to talk about it now, but in a few years—Comrade Ryzhkov suggests that it may take about 2 years—we can also use credits to take care of moments of transition. But we need to adopt the system right away.

Ryzhkov: We think that we need to get our economists with the Romanian economists and calculate the balance of payments if we are to move to the world system. It will be a complex system in any case.

Gorbachev: We have a lot to discuss both with respect to the method of restructuring but also regarding concrete issues.

Dascalescu: What is concrete is that I expect Comrade Ryzhkov in Bucharest. We cannot discuss the balance of payments in Sofia.

Ryzhkov: I can not come before the meeting in Sofia. In the first trimester of the next year I could be there.

Dascalescu: Let's say February then?

Ceausescu: That remains to be decided among yourselves.

Gorbachev: Then Comrade Ceausescu, we should continue to keep in touch. I am very glad that we have commenced an exchange of opinions. Sincerely speaking, I appreciate this at its face value.

Dascalescu: I have a request for Comrade Ryzhkov, regarding natural gas.

Ceausescu: The problem of natural gas is not one for the future, it regards the situation at this time.

Dascalescu: For the past few days, something must have happened on your side, we are receiving 7 million cubic meters less a day. We were told that this will only last a few days. Could you please analyze this problem?

Gorbachev: This happens every year. Always something more.

Dascalescu: It is not more, it is less.

Ceausescu: What will we say about our bilateral meeting?

Gorbachev: You can issue a press release, we will issue a press release. Here is a short text. (the news release is read)

Ceausescu: Maybe the part about the bilateral collaboration needs to be better developed. We can say that there has been an exchange of opinions regarding cooperation between our countries. We should make a separate paragraph about this thing.

Gorbachev: Very well, let's talk about the situation of our relationship and their prospects.

Ceausescu: Very well.

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