

June 14, 1989
Conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and FRG
Chancellor Helmut Kohl

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Summary:

Gorbachev and Kohl discuss relations with the United States, Kohl's upcoming visit to Poland, and the status of reforms in various socialist countries.

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Translation - English

Third Conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and FRG Chancellor Helmut Kohl. June 14, 1989. Bonn (one-on-one).

[...]

Kohl. We would like to see your visit, Mr. Gorbachev, as the end of the hostility between the Russians and the Germans, as the beginning of a period of genuinely friendly, good-neighborly relations. You understand that these words are supported by the will of all people, by the will of the people who greet you in the streets and the squares. As a Chancellor I am joining this expression of people's will with pleasure, and I am telling you once again that I like your policy, and I like you as a person.

Gorbachev. Thank you for such warm words. They are very touching. I will respond with reciprocity, and I will try not to disappoint you. I would like to tell you the following with all sincerity. According to our information, there is a special group charged with the discrediting of perestroika and me personally that was created in the National Security Council of the United States. When Baker was in Moscow, we openly asked him about that. He and his colleagues were somewhat confused, but did not give us any clear answer, they were just trying to convince us that it was not so. However, I have some evidence that such group does, in fact, exist. I think, you understand me well, Mr. Federal Chancellor, you understand how I feel about it.

Kohl. Thank you for your openness. I heard nothing about such a group. Even if it does exist, I do not think it was created on George Bush's initiative, or that it was charged with the tasks that you have just formulated. Maybe if it exists, it has some kind of monitoring, but not subversive tasks. [...]

Kohl. I would appreciate it; seeing this to the end will strengthen your international prestige even more.

Now a couple of words about our common friends. I will tell you directly that Erich Honecker does concern me a lot. His wife has just made a statement in which she called on the GDR youth to take up arms, and defend the achievements of socialism from external enemies if necessary. It is clear that she implied that the socialist countries which implement reforms, stimulate democratic processes, follow their own original road, were the enemies. First of all she had Poland and Hungary in mind. This is certainly a strange statement.

Gorbachev. What are your relations with Poland like?

Kohl. The country is in a difficult situation right now. But we want to help it to get out of the crisis. As well as in the case with the GDR, we do not want any destabilization.

Tomorrow Francois Mitterrand will travel to Poland. We agreed that France will be the first to extend aid to Poland, to give them financial assistance in the form of credits. Then George Bush will visit Poland. As for me, I consciously decided to be the third to visit Poland-- after the French and the American [visits]. The Germans and the Poles are connected by something else. This year will mark the 50th anniversary of the beginning of World War II. I will probably visit Poland on those dates. Anyway, I would like my visit to contribute to the improvement of relations between the Germans and the Poles, even though I realize that it would be very, very difficult.

Gorbachev. We need to support the Poles, they do not have anybody who has more authority and respect than Wojciech Jaruzelski now.

Kohl. We also plan to give Poland financial support. I understand your words, Mr. Gorbachev.

We have rather good relations with the Hungarians. However, we also do not want destabilization there. That is why when I meet with the Hungarians, I tell them: we consider the reforms that are underway in your country your internal affair, we are sympathetic. However, if you would like to hear our advice, we recommend that you do not accelerate too much, because you might lose control over your mechanism, and it will start to work to destroy itself

Of all the socialist countries we have the most hopeless relations with Romania. There is no movement at all, just complete darkness and stagnation. I do not understand Ceausescu. How does he not see what a ridiculous cult he created in his own country? I cannot believe that he can seriously think that he made the Romanians the happiest people on Earth.

Gorbachev. It is certainly strange that this kind of family clan would be established in the center of civilized Europe, in a state with rich historical traditions. I could imagine something like that to emerge somewhere else, like it has in Korea, but here, right next to us-- it is such a primitive phenomenon.

Kohl. I like the Bulgarians. If you compare Bulgaria in the first post-war years and now--the progress is impressive--like day and night. Bulgarian representatives--leaders as well as simple professionals--often visit my country. They think and operate with very modern concepts, and they avidly absorb our economic experience. They also, as we can observe, implement it in their economic life quite effectively. I really like Todor Zhivkov. He has been in power for a very long time, I think, since 1956, when I was still taking final exams in high school. He is a very flexible politician. I met with him several times, and every time we met, he criticized those leaders of various branches of the Bulgarian economy who could not manage their responsibilities. It is curious that he speaks about it in such a way as if those individuals were not members of his own circle, and as if he did not give them any directives, just observed them from a distance.

I am mostly concerned by the situation in Yugoslavia. The economy there is choking, and nobody knows how to help it. We need to think about how to prevent the Balkans from becoming a source of destabilization. I have already said that in our policy toward the Socialist countries, toward the Soviet Union, we are staying on the clear course of non-interference in their internal affairs. However, a policy of non-interference could be of two sorts. It is one thing to sit in a theater seat, to watch what is unfolding on the stage, and, when the play is almost over, to rise and say that we have foreseen all that happened, and that it could not have been otherwise. How smart we are.

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