

From the One-on-One Conversation of M.S. Gorbachev with H. Kohl

July 15, 1990

(H. Teltschik and A.S. Chernyaev were present at the conversation)

M.S. Gorbachev. A warm welcome to Moscow, Mr. Kohl. We will be able to have an in-depth exchange of opinions on issues of mutual interest.

H. Kohl. I am glad we have two days of discussions ahead of us. We will have good conversations. I really like the quote from Bismarck, “When God marches through history, it is our job to grasp His coattails.” These words characterize our time, especially the first half of the 1990s.

Our generation, people our age, have a special responsibility. We did not directly participate in the war, our conscience is not burdened, but we remember the war, we saw its horrors. This distinguishes us from today’s youth. I feel it with my two sons. I use the expression “the blessing of a late birth” with regard to people of our generation. We have experience that others do not have. And we must fully put it on the altar of civilization.

M.S. Gorbachev. I want to support this idea in particular. We really do have the opportunity to compare the past and present. I was 10 years old when the war started and 15 when it ended. This is a particularly impressionable age. The current generation may be better, but we have unique experience. We felt the opportunity that is opening before us. Our generation can still have its say in history. There is less talk about who won and who lost. We have felt that we are one civilization...

I would like to “stake out” a fundamentally important idea in connection with our meeting. It so happened that in the 1990s, Russia and Germany again must do a great deal together. We must live in peace and harmony, mutually enrich each other, strengthen mutual understanding, build mutually beneficial cooperation. When our countries parted ways, it resulted in grave consequences for our people. You and I can make sure that our two nations are together. I put our relations with Germany on par with Soviet-American relations. They are no less important for the destinies of our people, for history.

H. Kohl. I agree with this completely. I have no doubt that the new quality of the relationship between Germany and Russia will benefit Soviet-American relations. The goal of my visit is to give an impetus to the processes in the relations between our two states, with an aim to sign, in a year’s time, an all-encompassing treaty between the Soviet Union and united Germany. This treaty would take into account all the worthwhile aspects of the existing treaties between the USSR and the two German states, and, of course, would introduce many new things.

I can say that if everything goes well, then in December of this year Germany will hold general elections. I cannot anticipate their results, but I am proceeding from the assumption that I will keep doing my work. Therefore, in a year we will be able to open a new chapter of Soviet-German relations, visible to everyone. We will be able to enter a new era.

The treaty should be worked out without special publicity, but intensively and without losing any time. After the general elections in Germany, the question of unity will be decided. There will be no more distractions and we will be able to achieve mutual success very quickly.

I am in favor of examining all the treaties and agreements that exist between us, looking to the future and deciding what is outdated, what can continue to work, and what needs to be formulated in a new way in accordance with the requirements of the times. I would like this treaty to encompass all the major aspects of political, economic, cultural and humanitarian relations; to create a solid foundation for mutual understanding and cooperation between the Soviet and German people going forward.

When we start moving towards this goal, then I am sure we will not be alone. Bush will join us as well. I felt this at the recent NATO summit. The idea of a Soviet-German treaty will have a beneficial effect on other processes, particularly on establishing cooperation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact under the aegis of the OSCE. The planned joint declaration of the two alliances will be of fundamental importance. I would like it to have the character of a non-aggression and non-use of force pact. Then all nations would breathe a sigh of relief. As you can see, our comprehensive treaty is called upon to play a historic role. A good cause is taking shape, it is time to make it a reality.

In the past four weeks I had to participate in three important meetings of leaders of Western countries in Dublin, London, and Houston. At all these meetings, we set benchmarks for the future, coordinated the course of our movement, essentially in one, positive direction. Although the pace of our movement will be different.

Your message to Bush was positively received in Houston. At that meeting, there was a clear trend in support of the ongoing and planned reforms in the USSR. The domestic political developments in your country will receive serious attention.

We have to keep in mind that Bush will have elections on November 4th. After the elections, he will be freer and more confident. You can proceed from the assumption that he will be with us.

If you have a clear focus on a policy of reform, on developing a corresponding concept of what and when you will implement, then I would ask you to put every effort to make sure such a concept is ready by November, or December at the latest. Important meetings are coming up, on a European and global scale. It goes without saying, as always at these meetings, there will be discussion about the course of reform in the Soviet Union. If you express an interest, we could send our economic experts to you for consultation.

For us, the main task in the coming months is to deal with the processes in Germany. The GDR's economic situation turned out to be significantly worse than we expected. The trend is that it gets more complicated every day, not less. We have to take this into account.

I am not going to push these processes. Previously, we had other ideas, we planned that events would take a solid and thorough course on their own. However, developments took a dramatic turn, which had consequences for you, as well. The situation forces us to work on

several things as once, so we have to count on each other and trust each other. In this sense, the general elections in Germany on December 2nd will be of decisive importance.

M.S. Gorbachev. You could say that you are facing your own *perestroika*. Your goals are big and difficult.

H. Kohl. We will help each other. We agreed on this last year during your visit to the FRG.

We kept our word regarding credits, and on the question of the presence of a group of Soviet forces in the GDR. It is such a time when we can rely on each other's words.

M.S. Gorbachev. We see your problems. At the current stage of our relations, it is necessary to strictly take into account the political context of our countries' development. We need balanced judgement, trust, mutual understanding and cooperation. We cannot solve everything with papers alone, we need an active dialogue, active communication. Although good papers are needed too.

H. Kohl. I agree. It means that in these two days we have serious work ahead of us. In my opinion, such issues as the future of the Soviet group of forces in Germany, united Germany's membership in NATO, and the size of the future German army are at the forefront. These are the three barriers we have to overcome. They are important in order to complete the work within the "4+2" mechanism, in order for Germany to gain full sovereignty. The ceiling for the German army directly affects NATO. However, in the foreground, of course, are the issues of relations between the USSR and united Germany.

M.S. Gorbachev. The dynamics of the events require increased attention from politicians. Everything is interrelated and must be considered in our movement forward.

We are making efforts to anchor G. Bush in positions that would facilitate such progress. He was under great pressure, I saw it. Nevertheless, he took major steps to bring our relations to a new level. I think our consistent policies and the development of our relations with the FRG are helping the U.S. to take a constructive position. This is good.

I discovered – I will say this frankly – the Americans are worried that you and I may be planning to drive the U.S. out of Europe. In a conversation with Bush, I firmly said that the presence of American troops in Europe is a stabilizing factor. For Bush, such a revelation came as a surprise, he even asked me to repeat it. I confirmed that cannot imagine a new relationship without the active role of the United States.

H. Kohl. He and I spoke at length on this subject. We know that for a long time, the Soviet Union was skeptical about the presence of American troops on the European continent.

M.S. Gorbachev. Our position changed after we analyzed the realities.

H. Kohl. This brought a new constructive element into the relationship between the USSR and the United States. In London and Houston this was received with great satisfaction.

Bush liked my quote from Bismarck. He is a realist and sees my problems clearly. Not everyone in Europe likes the processes taking place in Germany. The historical past to a certain extent still burdens our relations with Italy, France, and England. We know that it will take a long time before everything is forgotten.

Bush has a clear concept regarding Europe's development. He assigns a big role to Germany. A dynamic development of the relationship between the German and Soviet people will not raise any mistrust in Bush. The U.S. is in favor of it. Scowcroft told me a great deal about the Americans' constructive line regarding the Soviet-German convergence. You know him, he is a smart man.

M.S. Gorbachev. That is the impression I got from him during my conversations with the Americans.

H. Kohl. He is a keen and balanced politician, not some loudmouth general. Scowcroft knows Clausewitz and understands that Soviet-American relations should be put on a new foundation. This is one level. Germany is on a slightly different level. But the better the relations between the USSR and the U.S., the easier it will be for us to improve the atmosphere in Europe.

M.S. Gorbachev. The current political context is very different from what we had two-three months ago. There is evident movement in NATO towards a transformation, with an emphasis on the political range of action. In London, a big step was taken to throw off the shackles of the past. The fact that the Soviet Union is no longer regarded as an enemy by the West is very important for the development of plans for the future.

We know and appreciate the role the Federal Chancellor and the FRG's government play in the development of positive processes in Europe. We are watching it closely in the Soviet Union. Our public opinion is gradually, step by step, shifting in the direction of understanding the choice the German people made when they embarked on the path of unification. We cannot forget the past. Tragedy entered every family during those times. But we have to turn our face to Europe and take the path of cooperation with the great German nation. This is our contribution to strengthening stability in Europe and the world.

Some military men here, due to the specifics of their nature, and some journalists are suggesting that we are selling our Victory for deutschemarks, the victory we achieved at such a price, with such sacrifices. We cannot simplify the situation, but we must see the reality.

And yet, the situation is changing for the better. We can think concretely and with an eye to the future, leaving the emotional side behind, though not forgetting it. We both need to proceed from the premise: we see a goal, the future, and we see real problems that are interrelated and must be solved together. We cannot move forward otherwise. A key factor will be to draw up a new treaty framework for our relations. Therefore, I would like to give you our considerations for the treaty between the USSR and Germany. This is not a draft, these are just considerations. Maybe you will come up with something. And we will move it forward. This is the goal.

H. Kohl. I also have corresponding thoughts, laid out on paper, which I will give you right now. I want to emphasize that these are my own thoughts. They were not submitted for discussion to the federal government. I did not even get the help of the ministers when I drafted them. The ministers have a lot of employees, one will say something to another, and then everything will spill onto the pages of newspapers. For the time being, I also left out the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Finance.

For now, this is only a sketch of my thoughts and considerations. I want to mention that it has a lot in common with the German-French treaty. I would suggest that my closest colleague, Teltschik, and one of your close colleagues take a first look at the document. At the next stage we maybe could involve both of our foreign ministries. For now, I am in favor of confidentiality, because I do not want this subject to be discussed during our election campaign.

M.S. Gorbachev. I understand you very well, I will give instructions.

As we are preparing the treaty, we must take reciprocal steps, clarify positions so there are no misunderstandings. Some positions have already crystallized, the rest can be worked through. It is clear that the new Germany will be located on the territory of the FRG, the GDR and Berlin, and will give up any claim to redrawing the borders. There are other issues on which our positions are close, they can quickly be brought to a common denominator.

H. Kohl. There are a lot of things that do not present a problem for us, and we have gone very far on many issues. Two identical resolutions were adopted by the People's Chamber of the GDR and the Bundestag regarding borders. This is a very serious and significant step.

M.S. Gorbachev. We are proceeding from the premise that Germany will forego nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

H. Kohl. There can be no doubt about this.

M.S. Gorbachev. We must talk about the non-proliferation of NATO's military structures to the territory of the GDR, and maintaining Soviet troops there for a certain transition period, as well as the elimination of Berlin's four power status.

H. Kohl. In other words, about Germany's full sovereignty.

M.S. Gorbachev. Yes, but with the understanding that our troops will be reduced during the transition period.

There are two difficult topics: Germany's membership in NATO – here the question is clear. De facto, after the unification, NATO troops should not be on the territory of the present-day GDR. This is during the transition period, then the issue will begin to lose its acuteness. There will be a transitional state, during which Germany will legally be a NATO member, but its eastern part will remain within the scope of the Warsaw Treaty. Thereby, we will resolve the issue of Germany's membership in NATO.

The second. You insist that from the moment united Germany enters into existence, the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers should be abolished. This demand is not entirely

realistic, since we will need to ratify a corresponding document by “the Six.” It will take some time.

Theoretically, we could agree to record in the document on the general principles a point regarding the abolition of the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers. The prerequisite for this would be the conclusion of a new treaty outlining the conditions for our troops to remain in Germany during three-four years, or the validation of all the treaties with the GDR that currently regulate the presence of Soviet troops.

H. Kohl. We will carefully analyze these considerations. I think we can agree to the presence of Soviet troops on the territory of the former GDR for three or four years. We can later have an additional discussion to agree on the size of the forces. We may also find another alternative. One way or another, we are interested in ending the quadripartite rights and responsibilities, so Germany can become a completely sovereign nation.

M.S. Gorbachev. The presence of our troops must be regulated. It should not hang in the air, it needs a legal basis. Otherwise, they will be perceived as occupants.

H. Kohl. My goal is clear. Germany as a whole will be part of NATO. We both understand this. We know what awaits NATO in the future, and I think you are now in the know as well. My friend Werner told you about this, of course. NATO troops will not be on the territory of the GDR. If I understood you correctly, you do not want NATO’s sphere of action to extend to the territory of the former GDR for three to four years, while Soviet troops are present there. The territory of the GDR will transition into NATO’s sphere after the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

M.S. Gorbachev. It is a question of combining two principal issues. United Germany is a member of NATO. De facto, the former territory of the GDR will not enter NATO’s sphere of operation as long as Soviet troops are there. All the while, the sovereignty of united Germany is not questioned in any way. Once the transition period is over, we could begin negotiations on the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

H. Kohl. I think we need to conclude a separate agreement regarding the conditions for the presence of Soviet troops in Germany. If we turn to treaties that were concluded between the USSR and the GDR previously, it will be a psychological syndrome for the German people. We will hear the word “occupation,” which you mentioned before. Therefore, I am for a new, separate agreement.

M.S. Gorbachev. An agreement on the conditions for the presence of Soviet troops in Germany for a period of three-four years.

H. Kohl. Three to four years is not a problem for me. It will be a problem for you, because the economic situation on the territory where Soviet troops are stationed will change. This will affect them accordingly.

For me, the problem is where the soldiers will go after they leave Germany, and what will they do. We could help here. Psychologically, it would be easier for us to do this if we conclude

a new agreement, thereby erasing the last trace of the occupation period. We could provide assistance in training military personnel for civilian professions, particularly ones that will be useful for transitioning to a market economy.

M.S. Gorbachev. Plus housing.

H. Kohl. Only it should be described as housing for Soviet citizens, not for servicemen of the Soviet Army. There should be no intimation of a program of German assistance to the Soviet Army.

M.S. Gorbachev. We will resettle the returning servicemen throughout the territory of the USSR, which is not that small. So your concern will be lifted.

H. Kohl. A child must be given a proper name, so no one has any doubts.

In general, I would like to say that Germans speak favorably, with understanding and support, about providing assistance to the Soviet Union. We have a strong home front there. This is primarily your accomplishment, Mr. Gorbachev, and of your associates. Belief in the irreversibility of reforms, the positive changes in the Soviet Union, which originate in Moscow, have a profound beneficial effect on the German people.

The XX century will be over in ten years. In Germany, we are determined to have a worthy end to the century, together with the great Soviet Union, for the benefit of Europe and the entire world. The U.S. will support us. Curiously, the Americans have rediscovered Germany. Now every other senator in Washington claims to have a German grandmother.

We have a good relationship with France. However, there are certain problems. Until now, there was a balance. The FRG does not and will not have nuclear weapons, and our economy is stronger than the French economy and will become even stronger after unification. The question is, what is the cost of nuclear weapons? The Soviet Union is not planning to attack. NATO is also not preparing for war. In the meantime, nuclear weapons require quite significant sums from the budget. The French are having psychological difficulties in this regard.

In these circumstances Germany wants peace, a new relationship with great Russia. Germany's unification is not happening in opposition to other countries, rather in harmony with its neighbors and everyone involved. Peace with Russia for us will not be forced under the pressure of some circumstances, but made on a free, sovereign basis, as two equal partners. I would like to repeat: the entire history between Russia and Germany shows that there was never an inherent enmity between the Russians and Germans. The forces of evil, rather than good, set them against each other, and this brought tragic consequences. It is no coincidence that at one point two million Germans voluntarily came to Russia. They put down deep roots, and these roots need to be taken care of.

M.S. Gorbachev. In the breaks during the Congress, I walked around the Kremlin and three times met with Germans from Munich, Stuttgart, and other cities. Our conversations were always warm and heartfelt.

H. Kohl. Our people are becoming more and more optimistic every day. The progress in Soviet-American relations, the unification of Germany, a new chapter in relations with the USSR – all of this inspires confidence in a peaceful future. We outlined subjects for our upcoming talks. My delegation and I are ready for very constructive work.

M.S. Gorbachev. We started it in Moscow, and we will continue in the Caucasus. In the clear mountain air many things can be seen more clearly.

Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros, edited by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev, (Moscow: Ves Mir, 2006), pp. 495-504

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