

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

February 10, 1990

(Present at the conversation from the German side were H. Teltschik, from the Soviet side A.S. Chernyaev).

M.S. Gorbachev. I am pleased to welcome you, Mr. Federal Chancellor. It is very good that you came to Moscow. In times like these we need to be constantly in touch. Events are developing dynamically, so there is a lot to talk about.

I often remember our conversations in Bonn last summer. Back then, we were discussing certain issues but could not imagine they would need to be resolved in such a short time. Ideas that at the time seemed like daydreams have come down to earth, they became objective reality of primary importance. It is very good that since our last meeting we have actively remained in touch, exchanged messages, talked on the phone. This helped us to feel and understand each other better.

These are complex times, to be sure. Here in the Soviet Union, we keep ourselves on our toes, so we do not, as they say, make a mess of things. Of course, we need restraint and balance not only in domestic affairs, but in foreign policy as well.

You are the guest, you have the floor.

H. Kohl. Thank you for the warm welcome, for the greetings. Our meeting today is overdue, the conversation will be very important.

M.S. Gorbachev. I agree.

H. Kohl. I also recall with satisfaction our meetings and talks in Bonn, and I connect today's conversation with them. Last summer, we indeed had a very thorough and serious conversation. I would like to go off those conversations and speak with you just as sincerely and openly.

[...]

We believe that NATO should not expand its scope. We have to find a reasonable resolution. I correctly understand the security interests of the Soviet Union, and I realize that you, Mr. General Secretary, and the Soviet leadership will have to clearly explain what is happening to the Soviet people.

It is one thing when we are talking, but it is different when ordinary people talk. They remember the fate of their fathers and brothers. This is quite a normal phenomenon. However, if we do not act, the situation will become critical. We have to avoid this. We are ready to take action together with our partners, neighbors, and friends. Your statement that "one who comes too late is punished by history" is very popular with us. We are prepared to follow this.

M.S. Gorbachev. Thank you for your thoughts. I have a few questions. It seems on the practical level, you are facing the question of economic stabilization of the GDR.

H. Kohl. The GDR needs a different economic system.

M.S. Gorbachev. When it comes to the monetary union, is there any timeframe under consideration?

H. Kohl. I cannot answer this question for the following reason. If I had been asked this in late December, I would have said that such a transition would take several years. That would be reasonable, it is what the economists say. But no one is asking me right now. People are deciding everything with their feet. Chaos is breaking out. A reaction is likely follow in a few weeks, maybe months.

M.S. Gorbachev. So, immediately after the election?

H. Kohl. Quite possibly. I also do not want to rush. However, I already mentioned the appeal of the East Berlin magistrate to the senate of West Berlin. Next week, the mayor of West Berlin will come to me and say that we have to pay. And I cannot refuse him. The situation is such that people are doing whatever they please. But we need economic order. That was the crux of my famous Ten Points. They stipulated, point by point, solutions to questions of creating a contractual community.

M.S. Gorbachev. I did not understand your reasoning about concluding a new treaty to settle finally the issue of borders. Are the borders not fixed? Or do I have an inaccurate translation?

H. Kohl. Yes, the [question of borders] was settled in the Moscow and Warsaw Agreements. But these agreements were concluded with the FRG. Therefore, we are talking about confirming what was said in these agreements. If the GDR and the FRG unify, the new German parliament will have to confirm the provisions of these treaties.

[...]

H. Kohl. I would like to propose the following. If the unification process accelerates after the elections, we will need to discuss the issues of economic relations promptly and in a confidential atmosphere. We do not want the Soviet side to have a lack of confidence that commitments to the Soviet Union will not be fulfilled. If things go as expected, then some of your partners in the GDR will disappear. This can cause misunderstandings, which should be avoided. Therefore, I propose to discuss in a quiet and confidential environment, without any publicity.

M.S. Gorbachev. I told Modrow and I will tell you: if the processes develop rapidly, economic problems will arise before the question of a federation or confederation does. You are right: what is an economy without currency?! During the time when a major restructuring of economic relations between the FRG and GDR takes place, I told Modrow, it is important not to destroy but to enrich our partnership. But I understand that the burden of GDR's problems will fall on the shoulders of the Federal Chancellor. We are ready to participate in creating associations and joint ventures that will arise on the territory of the GDR.

This set of questions fits into the historical relations between Germany and Russia. We can enrich what we have, instead of losing it. But I am getting to the most important part. Here everything must be weighed and considered. The core is still the military component. It plays a decisive role in determining the European and world balance. You touched upon this subject. Our formula includes – the threat of war should not come from German soil; the post-war borders should be inviolable. And the third point – Germany’s territory should not be used by external forces.

The question arises: what status should united Germany have? I know the Chancellor does not accept neutrality. They say it would humiliate the German people. Perhaps it seems unfair to the current generation, given this generation’s contribution to European and world development. It is as if we were disregarding this generation. This is not normal, you cannot do this in politics.

Yet, I see a united Germany outside military formations, with sufficient national armed forces for defense. I do not know whether this status is called “independence,” or “non-alignment.” India, China – these are countries with such a status! It does not humiliate them. Why should such a status humiliate Germans? It is not neutrality. It is power, and not just European, but global. We should “play around” with this idea, weigh it from various points of view.

It would not be serious if one part of the state was in NATO, and the other in the WTO. Somewhere on one side of the river you have one set of troops, and across the river, another set of troops. Let us “play around” with this idea, Mr. Federal Chancellor. They say: what is NATO without the FRG. But we could also ask: what is the WTO without the GDR? This is a serious question. There should be no divergence in military matters. They say NATO will fall apart without the FRG. But it would be the end of the WTO without the GDR, too. If we agree about the main things, it is important that we are in accord here as well.

H. Kohl. It is not the same thing. One only has to look at the map.

M.S. Gorbachev. If we unilaterally withdraw all troops from the GDR, you won’t be able to hold on to NATO either. We need reasonable solutions that do not poison the atmosphere in our relations.

In any case, I think this part of the conversation should not be made public. Let us say that we had a fruitful conversation on a wide range of issues of European and world development, and that this exchange of opinions will continue.

H. Kohl. This is very important. Of course, we have to come to some sort of agreement. The U.S. should not be on the sidelines in this matter.

M.S. Gorbachev. Certainly. Yesterday I spoke with Secretary of State Baker. He said that after the elections, representatives of the two German states and four powers could meet and talk, in order to add validity to the process while not including others in the conversation yet.

H. Kohl. I like this idea very much. However, for the sake of clarity, I would like to state very clearly that we do not accept a separate conference of the four powers.

M.S. Gorbachev. Nothing will be decided without you.

H. Kohl. The two German states, or, if things develop quickly, the one German state has to be at the table with the four powers. It would be very good if this table was in Germany.

M.S. Gorbachev. It is quite possible.

H. Kohl. It would be important to us for psychological reasons.

M.S. Gorbachev. The question is, where? Two legs of the table on one side of the border, and two on the other?

H. Kohl. Such a meeting would be very important, and the decisions made there should suit the USSR, the U.S., and the FRG. [...]

[Source: *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros*, ed. by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev, Moscow: Ves Mir, 2006), pp. 339-355. Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive.]



National Security Archive,
Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University,
2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037,
Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu