

Document No. 115: Minutes of the Political  
Consultative Committee Party Secretaries' Meeting  
in Budapest, June 11, 1986

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*This East German document records a revealing discussion among Warsaw Pact party secretaries on the question of disarmament. Taking place within weeks of the April 26 Chernobyl nuclear disaster, it shows how that accident influenced Soviet and East European perceptions of what a nuclear war in Europe might look like. As Polish leader Wojciech Jaruzelski put it, "No one should have the idea that in a nuclear war one could enjoy a cup of coffee in Paris five or six days later." The document also shows that the Soviet Union was pursuing across-the-board nuclear and conventional force reductions although the Warsaw Pact would remain better off than NATO. During this period, Gorbachev is still arguing for maintaining an advantage over the capitalist enemy with whom he sees no common interests other than in preventing war.*

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Comrade János Kádár opened the meeting. He welcomed the participants and expressed his satisfaction over the successful completion of the meeting of the PCC. The leading comrades of the fraternal parties had gathered to continue a practice already started in Sofia, namely to meet for comradely and casual discussion among leaders of delegations of the fraternal countries of the Warsaw Treaty. [...] These meetings proved to be a very useful form of collaboration. They will become an extremely important part of future concrete cooperation.

Meetings in this circle are rather recent, although they had occurred previously. [...] As had already been agreed in Sofia, each comrade can contribute the issues he is concerned about.

[...]

Comrade Mikhail Gorbachev expressed his deep satisfaction over the results of the meeting concerning the speech by Comrade Ceaușescu at the meeting of the PCC. [...] Comrade Gorbachev agreed with Comrades Ceaușescu and Kádár at the meeting of the PCC and highly valued the atmosphere at the meeting in the name of the Soviet delegation. [...] He also agreed that cooperation is going well.

[...]

Comrade Gorbachev stressed that the Soviet Union is currently witnessing serious problems.

[...]

Comrade Gorbachev informed extensively about the accident at the power plant in Chernobyl.

[...]

One should not pretend that nothing happened, that everything would be under control. Very serious problems are still to be faced, the majority of which are new to the Soviet Union.

[...] It was like war. People were evacuated, families were separated and only slowly found their way back to each other. All this was extraordinarily serious. The situation and its impact must not be played down in any way.

The tragedy of Chernobyl is closely related to the issue of disarmament. Medical experts all over the world clearly state that there would be no medical help in case of a nuclear war. Soviet and American physicians agree on this. [...]

Comrade Gorbachev provided information on the recent meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union. Such a consultative meeting took place for the first time in the history of Soviet diplomacy. It was realized that stronger control by the party would be needed in this field. Above all, a more specific orientation was necessary and a stronger party spirit needed to be infused. He himself has given a two-and-a-half hour presentation. A thorough discussion took place in an open atmosphere. Many issues had been raised concerning all areas of Soviet foreign policy. The main problem was the existence of a lot of laziness and old thinking [and] that Soviet diplomacy did not sufficiently respond to the challenge of current dynamic developments. The work of the foreign policy apparatus was not up to date with regard to its approach, analysis, and reaction to many events. However, the comrades also criticized many aspects of the work being done at headquarters, which is also contributing to the situation. In short, it was decided to modernize this area as well, and to fully adjust to the challenge of internal and international developments. Comrade Gorbachev also stressed the issue of perfecting cooperation within the socialist community with respect to the realities of today's world. The focus of this segment was on concretely shaping the increasingly close cooperation of the socialist countries. According to him, there was a major need for common action, for more active contributions by the socialist countries towards the general line and tactics of foreign policy. Based on a coordinated policy this includes a certain division of labor. He had already discussed these questions with Comrade Kádár. Also, he tried to frame these needs in a more general way in his speech at the meeting of the PCC. It was certainly not necessary for all initiatives to originate from the Soviet Union. It is important that the fraternal countries have a common basis and a coordinated policy. Based on this, many possibilities would arise for initiatives by the respective socialist countries.

One problem was accentuated during the meeting: Declarations at the highest level by the fraternal countries should be translated into negotiations through concrete proposals in the shortest time possible. Currently there is a gap at this point. Useful political declarations had been made that were jointly coordinated. However, real negotiations often did not rise to that level because old methods and the old routine are still in use.

[...]

Also the functional parts of the Foreign Ministry had been changed. A new Department for Arms Control and Disarmament had been created. This was a fundamental issue, asking for experts with specialized knowledge. Furthermore, departments for the peaceful use of nuclear power, for space-related issues, for international economic relations, and for humanitarian issues had been created. The Department of Planning was transformed into a Department for Analysis and Prognostication.

[...]

Comrade Gorbachev stressed that he considered it necessary to bring up these issues since those were important problems. He assumed that foreign policy activities of the fraternal countries should be active and replete with initiatives. The point was to distribute capacities accordingly.

Comrade Kádár brought up the question of regular scheduled meetings of the general secretaries of the fraternal parties of the Warsaw Treaty member-states. If the comrades would agree, Comrade Gorbachev would invite them to Moscow for such a meeting in the fall in the name of the Soviet leadership. A suitable date for everyone still needs to be found. At this meeting everybody will be entitled to ask any questions he has in mind. It is important to find the major parts of the chain which need to be linked together. It is certainly good to find one of these major parts of the chain, a main subject for each of the meetings. At the meeting of the PCC, one important subject, the integration and serious promotion of economic cooperation, had been mentioned. Maybe it would be useful to choose this as subject for the next meeting. If the comrades agree, this will now be considered as arranged.

[...] Fidel Castro and other comrades should not feel ignored. Therefore it must be considered in which framework the meeting should take place, whether in the framework of the Warsaw Treaty or Comecon.

Comrade Erich Honecker remarked that the meeting should be held within the framework of the Warsaw Treaty. Comrade Todor Zhivkov expressed the opinion that fundamental questions should be discussed first within the common framework, and then the other members of Comecon might be included.

[...]

Furthermore, Mikhail Gorbachev informed on the situation of Soviet–American relations.

[...]

A couple of days before his departure to Budapest, Comrade Gorbachev had received another personal message from Reagan. It did not contain anything really new, however it was written in a smooth and communicative style. Again Reagan had invited him to a meeting. This was also typical. The Soviet side is still working on its response, but the basic idea will be the same: if something substantial is scheduled for discussion, Comrade Gorbachev would join a meeting.

With respect to policy regarding the FRG, Comrade Gorbachev explained the following: he believes that the socialist countries should conduct a workable policy of pressure towards the [Helmut] Kohl government. The government of the FRG has started to feel that. The Soviet Union has transmitted the following to the government of the FRG: if Bonn would have something new to say in comparison to Washington, the Soviet Union would consider inviting Kohl to discuss with him current issues of interest to the Europeans and the entire world.

Kohl was cursing about this: Gorbachev would meet with the demagogue [François] Mitterrand and with [Bettino] Craxi<sup>50</sup>, but not with Kohl. The FRG would be in favor of continuing Ostpolitik and wants a dynamic relationship with the Soviet

<sup>50</sup> President of France and Prime Minister of Italy, respectively.

Union. He was told that one would [only] meet with him if he would show an independent political face as chancellor. He had responded that he would take notice of this attitude.

Comrade Gorbachev expressed the opinion that this would teach the government of the FRG a lesson.

[...]

Finally, Comrade Gorbachev said that he was delighted that the comrades had found the opportunity to meet within this circle. It was no less important than the meeting of the PCC itself that such a style [of meeting] was possible. This type of meeting would mean more mutual attention, more openness. He himself would be very much in favor of it. [...]

Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu started by remarking that the meeting of the PCC had produced good results.

[...]

With respect to the information from Comrade Gorbachev on the activity of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu expressed the opinion that these would, of course, be internal issues for the Soviet Union. The Romanian Communist Party would not intend to discuss that type of issue in the near future. However, he would like to thank Comrade Gorbachev for this information; he had drawn conclusions for himself. Those would refer especially to Comrade Gorbachev's explanations of the more active participation of the Warsaw Treaty countries in drafting and implementation of various issues in international affairs. Concerning cooperation in this area, it would certainly be necessary to draw more fundamental conclusions. It is not about general declarations; the jointly adopted declarations are fine with respect to the ideas that have been formulated. However, it is a long way from those declarations to their realization.

He brought up two issues in this context during his speech at the meeting of the PCC. The first was the Stockholm conference to be concluded soon.<sup>51</sup> It is necessary to ensure that it will not end without result. The second issue is the Vienna negotiations, which have already lasted 12 years.<sup>52</sup> These could also be brought to an end in a couple of months. Maybe the fraternal countries should not only adopt general declarations, but undertake concrete steps towards their realization. Of course, one would assume that the parties are in charge of foreign policy [formulation] while the foreign ministries conduct executive policy. The parties should take a more active role by realizing [efforts at] cooperation. This should be a matter of thorough discussion within these circles.

[...]

Comrade Erich Honecker expressed his deep satisfaction over the course and the results of the PCC meeting in Budapest. It had been correctly stated that it took place just at the right moment for considering the issues on the agenda more thoroughly. However, this meeting was also extremely important for achieving a much higher level of socialist construction, and for fulfilling the peace initiative of the Soviet Union

<sup>51</sup> Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe.

<sup>52</sup> Conference on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR).

and the fraternal countries. He would fully support a meeting of the general secretaries at the end of the year. [...] Since the most developed socialist countries are united in the Warsaw Treaty, he would deem it useful to meet first within the framework of the Warsaw Treaty, and expand this circle later.

The meeting in December could be approached in such a way that everybody would report his experiences. He himself would emphasize that cooperation has become more fertile and coordinated after the meetings in Sofia and Prague and after his talks with Comrade Gorbachev. This is true for the collective draft on common policy, as well as for actual operational cooperation.

Also, the recent conventions of the fraternal parties have taken place against the background of agreement on all fundamental questions of socialist construction and international politics. He would agree with Comrade Gorbachev, who remarked that all the fraternal countries would currently face strategic challenges and would have to decide on the methods which will determine whether they will achieve their goals.

[...]

It has also been said that currently it is most important on the level of international politics to develop a broad offensive approach. Hereby it must be taken into account that the public, and many governments, have given clear signs of agreeing to maintain the SALT II treaty and the ABM Treaty.<sup>53</sup> All governments of the NATO countries, except for the U.S., have come out in favor of retaining these treaties. They are in agreement with the majority of people on this issue. Even the representative of a government like the FRG, [Hans-Dietrich] Genscher<sup>54</sup>, has made a positive statement in this regard. Notwithstanding the reasons, he has also supported the idea of sticking with SALT II. This was the headline in today's papers in the West: Genscher against the U.S.!

The ABM Treaty on missile defense systems from 1972 also enjoys wide support among many governments.

A third issue was the new proposal by the Soviet Union and the fraternal countries on reduction of forces and conventional arms in Europe between the Urals and the Atlantic. This proposal has already been made public, and it will be difficult to ignore, especially since it included the question of [arms] control.

[...]

Comrade Honecker pointed out that he had already discussed with Comrade Gorbachev how the building of the European House must not ignore the FRG. It plays an important role within the European Community and NATO. Such a policy could provoke the wrong type of solidarity. Of course, it would be highly important for elections in the FRG in January 1987 to result in a government led by the SPD.

Despite all the good work the fraternal parties have accomplished jointly, and the SED on an almost daily basis together with the Social Democrats, nobody could foresee the results of the federal parliamentary elections [in the FRG]. The bourgeoisie does have many opportunities for manipulation. [...]

<sup>53</sup> The U.S.–Soviet Interim Agreement on Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms of June 1979, never ratified by the U.S., and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of May 1972.

<sup>54</sup> West German foreign minister.

(Comrade Ceaușescu remarked that in any event Kohl and his party will continue to play a major part in the FRG's public life.)

Comrade Erich Honecker agreed. There is even a question whether someone even worse could follow Kohl. He had talked twice very openly to [SPD candidate Johannes] Rau about how he himself would place his bets on the election. Here it became apparent, too, that the bourgeoisie is very well versed in manipulating public opinion. Sometimes public opinion is stirred up overnight.

The basic line for the SED would be clear: supporting progressive forces left of the CDU with whom good cooperation already exists.

[...]

Comrade [Wojciech] Jaruzelski welcomed the opportunity for a meeting of the general secretaries and of the first secretaries. This practice should be maintained. So far such meetings have taken place [only] in special cases. Now it had been proposed to meet in addition to discuss certain topics. One does not exclude the other.

[...]

Comrade Jaruzelski thanked Comrade Mikhail Gorbachev for the comprehensive information on the events at the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl and its impact.

[...]

However, it would be necessary to draw further conclusions. Among others, he had talked about that with the supreme commander of the Unified Forces of the Warsaw Treaty, Comrade [Viktor] Kulikov. The latter had demonstrated a deep sympathy for paying more attention to issues of civil defense. Another issue would be to examine all the plans and concepts, as well as all the military exercises of our alliance, and to approach them more realistically. For instance, no one should have the idea that in a nuclear war one could enjoy a cup of coffee in Paris five or six days later. This tragic event should be used to approach all these questions much more realistically.

With respect to the results of the meeting of the PCC, Comrade Jaruzelski remarked that a document had been adopted relevant to all European countries, but not only to them. At stake is not just the availability of nuclear weapons to certain countries only, but of arms being made available to all countries.

The fact that actually all countries are interested in these issues should be much more utilized by us. It would be important to prepare a scenario, and to come up with ideas already, for our potential reaction in case the counterpart tries to ignore our proposal.

Such a reaction by the adversary is already apparent, and we need to be prepared in order to be able to push the other side to the wall. The documents are written in a matter-of-fact way, but cannot elicit a major propaganda impact.

We have to present our proposals even more convincingly, and have to better coordinate the discussion of the adversary's arguments (e.g. on the superiority of the Warsaw Treaty in conventional [arms]). We have to find a common language, and must not remain too unspecific but provide concrete answers to the adversary's position.

Maybe it would be useful to set up a special team of representatives from the Foreign Ministry and the Unified Supreme Command in order to follow this process

efficiently in Moscow or elsewhere, and to draft recommendations for our propaganda in order to fully seize the opportunity.

Comrade Gustáv Husák agreed with the evaluation of the meeting of the PCC and its results. He also valued highly the information provided by Comrade Gorbachev. Everybody would feel that Comrade Gorbachev has brought fresh élan to the meetings of the general secretaries and to the cooperation among the fraternal parties and the fraternal countries.

[...]

Comrade Todor Zhivkov supported the positive evaluation of the meeting of the PCC. He emphasized especially the comradely, friendly atmosphere.

[...]

Comrade Todor Zhivkov expressed his sympathy for the accident at Chernobyl. [...] It would be appropriate to look at this tragedy in the context of nuclear arms. One has to come back to this question again and again, since this incredible danger for mankind exists. If such a plant would explode, e.g. in the FRG, the FRG would be turned into a desert and the neighbors would also receive terrible fallout. How much worse would a real nuclear strike be?

(Comrade Gorbachev pointed out that acts of sabotage would also be possible against nuclear power plants. Nowadays, there would be many interested in doing such things.)

It would be enough, as Comrade Zhivkov further explained, just to fire an artillery salvo on a nuclear power plant. The question of all questions would be how to save mankind from extermination and to preserve civilization. This question has not yet been answered. We need a more offensive approach in order to demonstrate more effectively our sense of responsibility for all mankind. In his opinion, the great opportunities for mobilizing large forces for the fight for peace would have to be better used with regard to this question.

(Comrade Husák remarked that the enemy had been successful in fueling panic on this issue.)

Comrade Gorbachev considered this an important remark. It was illustrative that no new power plant had been built in the United States since 1979, the year of the big nuclear power plant accident.<sup>55</sup>

[...]

Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu also asked for the opportunity to add something. In the report of the supreme commander of the Unified Forces he had noticed that expenses for military technology had risen from 40 to 60 percent. When economic questions are discussed at the general secretaries' meeting in fall, it would also be necessary to discuss the level of expenses for the military.

During the past five-year-period, the national economies of the fraternal countries had grown 12 to 16 percent on average. However, expenses for military equipment increased 50 to 60 percent. If this matter continues to be dealt with in the same

<sup>55</sup> The partial meltdown of a reactor core at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania on March 28, 1979, resulted in only minor off-site radioactive leakage and no immediate injuries but led to sweeping changes in the operation of U.S. nuclear power facilities.

manner, it will create development problems for the fraternal countries. He would suggest discussing this question at the fall meeting of the general secretaries. [...]

Comrade Mikhail Gorbachev pointed out that in the jointly adopted appeal, a reduction of forces, of conventional weapons, and of military expenses was proposed. As soon as this process would start, a reduction of military expenses would follow.

Comrade Ceaușescu remarked that he was concerned with a reduction of expenses beyond this proposal.

Comrade János Kádár suggested that Comrade Mikhail Gorbachev should summarize the results of the meeting in a concluding speech.

Comrade Gorbachev said that he did not see any need in doing so, and that Comrade Kádár should speak.

[...]

Comrade János Kádár welcomed the initiative by Comrade Gorbachev to organize a meeting of the general secretaries in Moscow in the fall. The previous three meetings in Sofia, Prague, and Budapest had been scheduled for specific reasons. They had been very well received by the Hungarian People's Republic. He valued in particular the open and comradely atmosphere of these meetings. Therefore, he suggested continuing along the lines begun in Sofia. There should be no formal meetings with a lot of paper on the table, and where formal resolutions would be adopted. If the general secretaries declare their agreement on certain issues, then this would weigh as heavily as the decision of some committee.

Meetings should continue to offer the opportunity for everybody to raise current issues of concern.

[...]

Comrade Kádár made his remark about the "papers" at meetings of the general secretaries more precisely. When he said that there should be no stacks of paper on the table, this did not mean that he is against any paper at all. Of course, Comrade Gorbachev could send a paper as background for discussion.

[...]

[Source: DY/30/2353, SAPMO. Translated by Karen Riechert.]