

Document 5. Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Erich Honecker  
October 7, 1989

Gorbachev. I repeat what I already said in the car: for us the GDR is a priority ally, we should start from that. The last decades were not cloudless from the point of view of the development of our countries and of the international situation. We always acted in a certain context. And those were the conditions of the cold war, and we had to take that into account. What unites us today is not an accident: our relations go back in history. And on this solid basis we can resolve any particular issues of internal or external order. I think that today we understand our own role better, and our responsibility, and we do not have any suspicions toward each other. We have all the grounds to speak about mature relations between our two peoples, parties and countries.

[...] But for that we need to be together, we need a high level of mutual understanding, a new quality of cooperation in all spheres. This is the view of our entire leadership. We should be decisive and firm in transforming international relations. And of course our cooperation should take into account the specifics of the turning point in the development of the socialist civilization

We started feeling in the first stages of perestroika that radical changes in our country correlate with a great confusion in the minds, among the communists as well.

[...] Why am I saying this? The party cannot act in any other way except by internalizing all the impulses that the society transmits.

Yesterday I said that the achievements of the republic were persuasively presented in your speech. It was good that you also looked into the future. On such a day and in such a speech, obviously, there was no need to develop that theme any further. As I understand, you would have to deal with that immediately after the celebrations and in the course of preparations for the congress. The problems that worry us need that. The initiative should belong to the party, to the leadership, one cannot be late.

Honecker. I would like to once again express my appreciation that you were able to take part in the celebration of the GDR anniversary. I asked you about it already on the way back from Magnitogorsk, starting from the assumption that the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the republic is our common cause. Fraternal cooperation of the GDR and the Soviet Union is now in the blood of the majority of the population. And even though there were certain ups and downs in our relations, the cooperation between the CPSU and the SED always had the decisive importance.

We already had several conversations about perestroika. You have achieved great successes in your foreign policy. As far as the internal processes in the Soviet Union are concerned, we cover them in detail in our mass media.

Today our opponents are demanding reforms. The party should strengthen its work on explaining certain ideological issues, which used to be given insufficient attention. We will solve these problems in the course of preparation for the congress. We set up a number of commissions, one of them carries out analysis of what socialism will be like in the XXI century.

I spoke about our problems in my speech yesterday. We are located on the border between the WTO [Warsaw Treaty Organization] and NATO, Germany is divided. This represents a source of the growing class struggle in all the spheres. Kohl said in an interview that if the GDR chose the road of reform, the FRG would provide assistance to it. But we will not allow [them] to dictate rules of behavior to us.

On the eve of the events, which I regret, Nemeth was a guest of the SDPG. They agreed that the FRG would give [them] credit of 550 million marks if the Hungarians open the border. And the Hungarians did that. Up to 3 million of our tourists used to go to Hungary every year. In connection to those events we had to repeal our visa-free regime of exchanges with the HPR [Hungarian People's Republic].

Today in Budapest they will apparently make decisions directed against socialism. I received an anxious telegram from Gross, but from here we cannot help them with anything. It would be hard to lose Hungary as a socialist country. All this causes the concern: where is socialism going?

The disintegration of some countries—Poland, Hungary—is seen in the West as an excuse for a strike against socialism. Now they are amassing forces against the GDR. Kohl in his meeting with me was saying nice words against Nazism, but at the CDU congress started to claim that socialism, allegedly, failed, and western democracy won. They are also demonstrating their military might. The FRG is preparing for maneuvers, in which 250 thousand personnel will take part.

Gorbachev. I share your opinion about the complexity of the processes that are taking place now in the countries of socialism. The West promises big sops for giving up one's positions. They are encouraging us to take more credits too. We are also experiencing complex processes in our society, but it is hard to get close to us. Hungary and Poland are another case. For a number of years their wellbeing was built on an artificial basis, and now this [situation] puts them into a state of dependency.

Honecker. As far as the developments in your country, we welcomed the September Plenum of the CC CPSU. It was justly said there that we should not give a free run to the demagogues. However, we see a lot of unacceptable [publications] in the Soviet journals that are being distributed in our country. I hope you will forgive us for reprinting the article about Yeltsin's visit to the USA?

Gorbachev. You had to react to that fact somehow. We were really disappointed that *Pravda* reprinted an article from the bourgeois press, as if they could not express their own opinion.

Honecker. We already discussed the situation that developed here, and we will continue that discussion on Tuesday. It is clear that we need to strengthen the existing structure by way of a more extensive engagement of the population in the implementation of the measures that are pressing. I agreed to meet with representatives of the parties of the popular front. It is necessary for the SED and other parties and the trade unions to move in one direction.

Ideological work assumes a special importance on the road to the XII congress. In general the mood of the working class and especially of peasants is good. The

working people support the party line. Of course, there are some issues, but we are lucky that we tackled the social issues in a timely manner, and primarily that we solved the apartment problem. We continue to harness the achievements of the STR [scientific and technological revolution]: for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary part of the enterprises received new fully automatic equipment, and for the XII congress the SED will carry out their further reconstruction on the basis of electronics. Increases in work productivity at such enterprises were from 300 to 700%. The combined enterprises showed themselves as a successful form. Overall, our relations are now assuming a new quality—40 to 50% of workers are employed at enterprises exporting their products to the USSR.

I will make only one comment. The pontoon crossing in Claipeda, which we built jointly with such difficulties, is not being used to its full capacity—3.5 million a year.

To sum up what I said here, I would emphasize that we are doing everything on what we agreed in our very first meeting. Compared with the Soviet Union, the GDR is a small state, but it is a power with a great potential in industry, science and technology. And it is very important that we now have unity on all the main questions.

[Source: Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Fond 1. Opis 1. Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev eds., *Mikhail Gorbachev I Germanskii Vopros* (Moscow: Ves Mir, 2006), pp. 205-208. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya.]