

Document No. 3: Record of Conversation between Mikhail  
Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher

September 23, 1989

Thatcher: [...] I know that it is not easy to carry out political reform. You began to implement the reform from above, and it would be impossible otherwise. Here, as I understand it, you are in full control of the situation. But to carry out economic reform is even more difficult; I know this from my own experience. [...]

You have now reached the stage where every new step is more difficult than the previous one. It is important for people to see results, even though it is a politically ungratifying task. For instance, I had to wait for two years before the first results. All that time I was criticized, and when the success came it was received as something natural, and nobody thanked me. [...]

Thatcher: But you need to teach the people to live day by day, not on future credits.

Gorbachev: We are teaching--teaching with life.

If you add to what we have just said the fact that these processes are unfolding in a country with 120 nationalities and ethnicities, you can imagine what a tight knot all the problems together present. As you know, the CC CPSU Plenum which has just ended analyzed the issues of

inter-ethnic relations in depth. The Plenum's resolutions are very important. Their essence is to balance the nationalities policy, to rejuvenate the Soviet federation and to fill it with real meaning. I will tell you honestly, until now our state has been considered a federal one only formally, but in reality everything worked like in a typical unitary state--from the top down. The decisions of this Plenum are supposed to change that, to create mechanisms which in practice would help to remove tensions from inter-ethnic relations without interfering with the basic interests of individuals, nationalities, and society in the economic, cultural, and other spheres. Otherwise, inter-ethnic tensions could bury perestroika. This is how the issue stands now.

I would also like to state openly the following thought. Sometimes I hear, even here in the West: Why do we have to open up so many fronts simultaneously? But how can you reform the economy without reforming the political system? It will not work. And we already have the sad experiences of Khrushchev, and Kosygin with Brezhnev. How can you reform both the economy and politics without democratizing society, without glasnost, which incorporates individuals into an active socio-political life? That will not work either. How can you make prognoses and form

healthy inter-ethnic relations separately from the economic, political, and democratic reforms in society as a whole? How can you carry out perestroika itself without rejuvenating the party?

All these issues are inseparably linked, and that is why we are saying that perestroika is not just a reform, it is a genuine revolution, our second socialist revolution. And we are making great efforts to carry it out.

[...] Thatcher: I would like to raise the issue of the situation in the countries of Eastern Europe. I was very impressed by the courage and patriotism of General Jaruzelski in Poland. For you, of course, the future of Poland and its alliance with you has great significance. I noted that you calmly accepted the results of the elections in Poland and, in general, the processes in that country and in other East European countries. I understand your position in the following way: you are in favor of each country choosing its own road of development so long as the Warsaw Treaty is intact. I understand this position perfectly.

Now I would like to say something in a very confidential manner, and I would ask you not to record this part of the conversation.

Gorbachev: As you like.

(The following part of the conversation is recorded from recollections.)

Thatcher: We are very concerned with the processes that are underway in East Germany. It is on the verge of big changes, which are being caused by the situation in that society and to some extent by Erich Honecker's illness. The thousands of people who are escaping from the GDR to the FRG are the primary example. All that is the external side of things, and it is important for us; but another issue is even more important.

Britain and Western Europe are not interested in the unification of Germany. The words written in the NATO communiqué may sound different, but disregard them. We do not want the unification of Germany. It would lead to changes in the post-war borders, and we cannot allow that because such a development would undermine the stability of the entire international situation and could lead to threats to our security.

We are not interested in the destabilization of Eastern Europe or the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty either. Of course, the internal changes are apt in all the countries of Eastern Europe, but in some countries they are more pronounced, in some countries not yet. However, we are in favor of those processes remaining strictly

internal; we will not interfere in them and spur the decommunization of Eastern Europe. I can tell you that this is also the position of the U.S. president. He sent a telegram to me in Tokyo in which he asked me to tell you that the United States would not undertake anything that could threaten the security interests of the Soviet Union, or that could be perceived by Soviet society as a threat. I am fulfilling his request.

Gorbachev: Thank you for the information. In general, you formulated our position correctly. We think that the socialist countries should make their own decisions about their internal affairs; they should be able to choose which road to take, and at which tempo, in implementing their socialist choice. We do not want to, and we will not, interfere in these processes; but we were, of course, helping, and we shall be helping our friends and allies.

As far as Erich Honecker's health is concerned, he is planning to participate in all the events commemorating the 40th anniversary of the GDR. I can inform you that I am planning to visit the GDR on October 6 and 7 for the celebration of the anniversary.

Thatcher: Thank you.

The confidential part of my talk is over; you may now  
resume recording.

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[Source: Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Fond 2. Opis  
1. On file at the National Security Archive. Translated by  
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