

Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Miklós Németh
March 3, 1989

Németh: One more question. We made a decision--to completely remove the electronic and technological defenses from the Western and Southern borders of Hungary. They have outlived their usefulness and now serve only to catch citizens from Romania and the GDR who are trying to escape illegally to the West through Hungary. Hungarians no longer violate the border, they have an opportunity to leave the country legally. Of course, we will have to talk to the comrades from the GDR.

Gorbachev: We have a strict regime on our borders, but we are also becoming more open.

Németh: About relations with Israel. At the end of April-beginning of May, if nothing bad happens in the Middle East, we plan to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

[...]

Gorbachev: You know that Eduard Shevardnadze just returned from the Middle East. He met with the Israeli foreign minister. The Israelis put a lot of pressure on us, but we are not in a hurry because establishing diplomatic relations is currently our strongest argument. Therefore we tell them: go to the Arabs, agree to an international conference, and we are ready for normalization. The Soviet Union will recognize the state of Israel and its security on an equal basis with the security of other states of the region; we are even ready to give our guarantees. We have a lot of contacts, as you do. However, now we, together with the West Europeans--for example the British and the French--want to pressure Israel to take a more constructive position. Something of that kind is going to happen, and I would not want to sell my trump cards too cheap, so to speak. Maybe it would be helpful for your foreign minister to meet with our foreign minister and discuss this issue.

[...]

Gorbachev: It is important to be honest everywhere--in the Central Committee and in the Parliament, in conversations with people, and with oneself, with one's own conscience. Otherwise, a disintegration and collapse of personality is unavoidable.

Németh: We believe that now it is most important to create a majority in the Central Committee, which would unite around a single program.

Gorbachev: This, of course, does not exclude the existence of some opinions on the right and on the left.

Németh: Yes, it is important that the center stays strong.

[...]

Németh: I think that in this sense there are some extreme moments among [Imre] Pozsgay's statements. At the beginning of the events of 1956, there was genuine dissatisfaction among the people. However, later, the events turned into a counterrevolution and bloodshed. You cannot discount that.

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