

Memorandum from Mikhail Gorbachev to the CC CPSU Politburo on Topical Questions regarding Collaboration with Socialist Countries, June 26, 1986

As of late, I have often had to deal with questions concerning relations between the USSR and the fraternal countries and the condition of the world socialist system. These questions were prominent at the XXVII Congress. Certain practical steps were taken.

However, right now, as we are developing on a broad front the work of solidifying and implementing the Congress' resolutions, the need arises to exchange opinions on this issue more thoroughly, and to develop a conception that would allow us to speed up this process. It is important to eliminate everything that impedes the development of interactions with our friends; we need to provide a new impetus to that development in order to take a major move forward and release socialism's potential on an international scale. During the meeting of fraternal countries' leaders in Budapest we were convinced once again of the necessity of holding a broad discussion of questions related to this.

Over the last four decades, world socialism has turned into a powerful international formation. There are solid foundations for the new system in the majority of socialist countries, the leading role of the party has been consolidated, and maturity and national self-awareness have grown. The socialist countries have withstood serious internal and external trials and not one of them has returned to the old order. Bilateral and multilateral communication among socialist states have developed broadly, and the countries have formed international organizations--the Warsaw Treaty and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

All of these are our strengths. But we cannot deny the fact that in recent years, as the scientific-technological revolution has opened new vistas for developing the socialist system, that development has instead slowed down. Regrettably, it must be said that to a certain degree centrifugal forces have become evident within the framework of world socialism. There is a real danger of a weakening of its influence on the overall trend of international affairs.

What is the cause of all this? This is not a simple question; it cannot be disposed of with a one-word answer. However, undoubtedly one of the main causes is that the nature of relations established during the period of world socialist formation is coming into conflict with the necessities of life.

In the beginning, the Soviet Union, the largest and most experienced socialist state, led the fraternal countries by the hand, as it were. And they thought it necessary to follow our example, recommendations, and advice in everything. Economic relations developed with an accent on the USSR providing resource support through raw materials and fuel, and developing primary industries.

Such a system of political and economic cooperation was reasonable for the beginning stages of the formation of the world socialist system. But it became less and less justified as the fraternal countries gained power, as their economic strength and political stability increased and their international authority grew.

All of the Politburo members have a good deal of experience in communicating with the leadership of the fraternal parties and know well that over time there was less sincerity, frankness, and trust in our relations.

The regularity of contacts with fraternal party leaders was disrupted, and the meetings that took place often bore the stamp of showiness and formalities. The necessity of such contacts is especially urgent under present circumstances, when for objective reasons a period of change in leadership is taking place in the majority of countries.

We should admit honestly that Moscow has been viewed as a kind of conservative power that hindered reforms that were ripe for implementation. Some of our allies, afraid of a domineering reproach, cautiously introduced certain correctives into the practice of building socialism. Instead of jointly discussing topical issues of socialist development we often assumed the function of sole custodian of Marxist-Leninist teachings; at the same time we judged everything from our own standpoint, inadequately considering the novelty of the issues and the specific character of the fraternal countries. We did not very seriously and respectfully take into consideration their own searches [for solutions].

All of these shortcomings have built up over the years and have done real damage. Take this fact, for example: it has been 15 years since we agreed to embark on the path of socialist economic integration, but this process is sharply behind the integration process in Western Europe. In essence, in many aspects we continue to be at the commodity exchange stage. At the same time, since the CMEA countries were not able to make a collective technological leap forward and the Soviet side was not able to meet our friends' demands for up-to-date technology and equipment, those countries developed a tendency to resolve pressing social-economic problems by switching to the track of intensive management through credits from the West. It is well known what difficult consequences this has had for Poland, and to some extent for other countries of the community.

Our interactions on questions of foreign policy also leave much to be desired. Even the information from our allies, including on major issues of sovereignty and security, have been neither sufficiently complete nor timely. Almost all of the initiatives of recent years originated in the Soviet Union; the fraternal countries were left only to show support and approval. This led some of them to tend toward taking discrete actions [separatnym deistviyam] in order to provide for certain concrete interests and national ambitions (Romania, the GDR to an extent, Hungary). The potential for adopting a concerted foreign policy by the allied states was not fully exploited.

This conclusion suggests itself: a genuine turning point in the entire system of collaboration with our allies is needed. This would completely correspond to the ideas, purposes, and spirit of the XXVII CPSU Congress' decisions. As is now evident, this [idea] met with a sympathetic response--even satisfaction--from the leadership and aktiv of the fraternal parties.

With good reason, relations with the socialist countries were identified as the priority for the Soviet Union's foreign policy. First of all, we need to ensure that this general formula is filled with real content. We understand that the situation places a special responsibility for the fate of world socialism on the CPSU, and we cannot escape it. Our country was objectively placed into the leadership role in the socialist world as a guarantor of security for the fraternal countries and their social achievements. But we must fulfill this role not through exhortation and especially not through directives, but through ideological-political influence, constructive initiatives to deepen collaboration, the power of our example, and creative and effective resolutions for problems in social development.

What do the practical tasks of perestroika in our collaboration with the fraternal countries look like?

First of all, [our task] is to consolidate the socialist countries' unity, counteract centrifugal tendencies on the basis of truly deep, scientific-technological and economic integration, and transition from purely commercial relations to broad cooperation in production. A radical perestroika of the economic cooperation mechanism must be realized, which should result in concentrating CMEA work on the coordination of economic policies and the creation of organizational, monetary and financial, and legal conditions for the broad development of direct connections among associations, enterprises, scientific and development organizations, and joint firms. This sort of shift in economic relations requires a display of political will by all sides, and increased party control over these processes.

Secondly, a fundamentally different approach toward the evaluation and study of the fraternal parties' experiences is needed, and the implementation of this knowledge in our country. The highest judge can only be socio-political practice, and the main criteria are the acceleration of development and the consolidation of socialism in practice. This kind of attitude toward the collective experience will not only bring us great benefits, but will contribute to an increase in our country's authority and the respect of our friends and allies for our party.

Thirdly, cooperation, the exchange of experiences, and communications between collectives and the broad working masses should become the norm of our people's lives.

We need to decisively eliminate backward, bureaucratic orders in this area; remove obstacles that hinder people from traveling on business to fraternal countries; and develop economic, administrative, and legal rules. This would liberate the process of communications rather than fetter it, and allow the general collection of such problems to be resolved locally.

Fourthly, it is necessary seriously to improve and sharply stimulate the socialist countries' foreign policy collaboration mechanism. Despite the importance of relations with the U.S. and the major Western European states, relations with our allies must occupy first place. We must strictly observe equality of rights; we must act in full correspondence with Lenin's instruction that we want a truly voluntary union. It is important to consider our friends' opinions, their interests in all our policies not only in form but in practice as well. Give [them] a broader field for their foreign policy initiatives and actions on a coordinated basis.

The considerations stated here do not encompass the full diversity of issues relating to interactions with the fraternal countries under present-day circumstances. But it is necessary first of all to decide on the principal policy approach toward these issues.

It seems to me that after exchanging opinions at the Politburo, the CC CPSU, the MFA, and the KGB departments could be assigned to prepare a document, which would develop concrete measures on the basis of political evaluations for perestroika regarding our relations with the socialist countries, overcoming negative phenomena, and providing the necessary acceleration on this exceptionally important matter.

Gorbachev, June 26, 1986

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Translated by Anna Melyakova.]