

Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Wojciech Jaruzelski, April 13, 1990

Gorbachev: A warm welcome to you in the Kremlin. I am glad to meet again. We will have an opportunity to synchronize our political clocks. We are united by many things. It has fallen to our lot to decide a multitude of common and immediate problems.

I think this is a timely visit. We are watching the situation in Poland carefully. I would like to hear your view. We should exchange thoughts on the prospects for the Warsaw Treaty, and about the general situation in Europe.

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You could say that right now populism is raging [in the USSR]. And populism multiplied by nationalism produces an explosive mix akin to detonating gasoline. It does not easily lend itself to rational control. In this respect the attitudes in your country's society to some degree resemble the situation [in the Soviet Union].

Jaruzelski: We are all children of one epoch. Mazowiecki, being a rationalist, understands the danger of such a situation. He holds to common sense and realizes [his] responsibility for the situation in the country. In this respect we--the representatives of leftist forces--and he are allies.

Mazowiecki also realistically appreciates the need for normal relations with the Soviet Union. In general, there are two wings in the former opposition. One is pro-West and anti-Soviet, the other is pro-West but not anti-Soviet. By his background and philosophy, Mazowiecki keeps to the Western orientation. But at the same time he is a realist and understands the significance of Soviet-Polish relations. His positions have solidified as the result of his visit to Moscow. He felt the attention and respect for him from the highest Soviet leadership.

I would like to emphasize in general, Mikhail Sergeyevich, that the attention you give to members of the Polish leadership justifies itself completely and yields good political results. Of course, the president of the USSR cannot meet with every Polish leader. But when, for example, [Andrzej] Stelmachowski visited the USSR Supreme Soviet and spoke to A.I. Lukyanov, and Ye.M. Primakov, he came back to the country elated, ready to contribute actively to the development of a constructive relationship with the Soviet Union. It is important to consider the psychological element here as well. Many of the current representatives of "Solidarity" were repressed, interned, or just oppressed. Of course they reacted negatively to this. And now when they see normal, respectful treatment many are quickly changing for the better.

Public opinion polls conducted in Poland show a high level of sympathy with the Soviet leadership during the last several years. Thus, in 1987, 76 percent of people surveyed stated that they liked M.S. Gorbachev; in 1988 it was 79.6 percent; and in February of this year it was 78.8 percent. Correspondingly, 6.2, 5.2, and 4.9 percent declared their antipathy. And this was at the same time that anti-Soviet attitudes were being disseminated quite persistently, especially with the approaching 50th anniversary of the Katyń tragedy.

Gorbachev: The documents on Katyń that will be transferred to you were recently found in the security archives--in a place where almost no-one thought to search until now.

Jaruzelski: I would like to share with you, Mikhail Sergeyevich, my thoughts on the calculations the U.S. is making for the long-term perspective in relations with the Soviet Union,

Lithuania, Ukraine, and all of Eastern Europe. I see two major trends. On the one hand there is a realistic approach that aims at decreasing the number of difficulties the Soviet Union is encountering in the perestroika process. On the other hand, there are extremist tendencies. It comes down to [the idea] that since the Soviet Union's difficulties are increasing, there should be as many of them as possible in order to bring about the end of the Soviet Union. It seems the first tendency predominates right now. But the temptation to create a kind of cordon against the Soviet Union is also telling.

Gorbachev: It seems that some people would really like to create a, so to speak, contemporary cordon sanitaire that would become the political preserve of the West.

Jaruzelski: I think that a constructive approach should not consist of creating some kind of a cordon but the other way around: [it should consist] of building a bridge between the West and the Soviet Union. After all, the East European countries had and now have traditional ties with the West, especially Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. But on the other hand, they had and still have economic and other ties with the Soviet Union. Socialist ideas will not disappear without a trace, either. People in these countries often remind me of Moliere's hero, who didn't know he was speaking in prose. In Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR people yell "Away with Socialism!" and at the same time they demand social security, or this or that form of welfare they have had, which is practically a demand to retain the achievements of socialism. With time they will begin to remember and value what had been before: inexpensive books, kindergarten, apartments, the absence of unemployment, etc. In many ways we ourselves provoked the present negative reaction when we tried to treat everybody alike, to make 99.99 percent of the voters vote for us, and to the accompaniment of thunderous applause. For too long we were afraid to accept all the good ideas the West had to offer. But with time there will be a sobering up. It is now already clear that we should not idealize the West's approach to such issues as human rights. It has been supporting Ceaușescu for almost 20 years, while the human rights situation in Romania is far worse than in other East European countries.

Gorbachev: By supporting Ceaușescu the West tried to use him as a Trojan horse against the Soviet Union. That was the most important thing. That is why they practically closed their eyes to the most flagrant violations of human rights.

Jaruzelski: As for Lithuania, I mean to say that it is a matter of the Soviet Union's internal affairs. I think we should not tolerate the adventurism of "Sajūdis."¹ I had some experience in interacting with Lithuanian nationalists. In 1939 I was in Lithuania and made it to Siberia only from there. At that time I already felt how strong the anti-Russian and anti-Polish attitudes were in Lithuania. The nationalist tendencies were especially strong in the Shaulist guard detachments. During the Warsaw uprising they served in the gendarmerie.

Gorbachev: During the period of the German occupation the dirtiest work in the concentration camps was done by the Lithuanian nationalists. More than 700,000 people were killed there. Our press published information about this recently.

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¹ The Lithuanian Reform Movement, Sajūdis, was formed initially to preserve Lithuanian culture. But after its televised October 1988 founding Congress it quickly developed into a mass political movement that played a central role in the drive for national independence.

Gorbachev: There are aspects related to Catholicism here as well. It is important to keep religious issues from being used by the opposition for political purposes. I reminded Pope John Paul II about this once again in a letter, which I sent recently through V. Zagladin.

Jaruzelski: A Solidarity congress will soon take place in Poland. [Solidarity] has so far appeared in the form of a trade union. While leading it, Wałęsa will have to become involved in a conflict with the government, which is headed by Solidarity. This is stimulating a division within the union.

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It is absolutely clear that it is necessary to make unpopular decisions in the economic sphere. For that we need the consent of the majority of the people. That can be obtained only through elections.

Gorbachev: That is also a very difficult question for us. The people who proposed [to introduce] unpopular measures all at once, in one sweep and without the necessary preparation were not taking into account the real state of affairs.

Jaruzelski: In Poland, for at least ten years, we prepared the necessary economic reform and the cadres who would be able to correctly understand and implement it. That is why it is easier for the current administration to make substantial reforms, especially since now it is possible to improve relations with the West considerably.

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As for the Polish Roman Catholic Church, after your visit to the Vatican one senses a certain stabilization and improvement in its approach to the Soviet Union. However, in general, the Church is being pushed considerably into the background by Solidarity. Right now it does not need the Church as much as it did before. The Church notices this and is worried. In relation to this, I think, a visit by [Cardinal Józef] Glemp to the Soviet Union would be beneficial; he wants to come. Perhaps Anatoly Ivanovich Lukyanov from the Supreme Soviet could meet with him, and maybe you too, Mikhail Sergeyevich, should spare him a few minutes.

Gorbachev: This should be done. It was good when Glemp was here for the millennium of Christianity in Russia.

Jaruzelski: In the army the situation is good right now. Discipline is better than it ever was before, not to mention in comparison to the situation in the Czechoslovak or the GDR armies. There they vote every time whether they should conduct exercises or not. The improvement in discipline is of course also connected to the reduction of the army. There were attempts by the former opposition to spoil everything; for this purpose they sought approaches to the military men. But in the absolute majority they remained unsuccessful. I pay special attention to this. ...

We will have to update relations considerably between the Warsaw Treaty and NATO, and take into account the fact that the GDR army virtually does not exist anymore.

In connection with the corresponding statements by E. A. Shevardnadze, as well as the recent statement by the Soviet government, we should start resolving the question of the Soviet troop presence in Poland on a practical level. Their partial withdrawal is already foreseen for this year or next. We should determine the timetable of their further presence in Poland without delay. The fact is that this is a kind of "bomb" that could considerably undermine you and us in

the eyes of public opinion. I have in mind the fact that Soviet troops in Poland receive food and services at sharply reduced prices, with major subsidies from the Polish government. I think we need to solve this problem, since we are talking about sums that are, strictly speaking, not too considerable. ...

One more question, Mikhail Sergeyevich. Across from the Polish embassy in Moscow on Malaya Gruzinskaya Street there is a Polish Roman Catholic Church building, which was at some time built with the money of Polish citizens. Right now it serves as a kind of storage space. It is said that there are plans to refurbish it as a concert hall. But perhaps a compromise decision can be reached--perhaps an organ could be installed there so it could be a church and a concert hall at the same time. It would be good if, let's say, Józef Czyrek discussed this with your qualified colleagues and organizations, and came to a decision on this issue. I think this should also be done in view of the forthcoming visit by Pope John Paul II. ...

Your last decision regarding the Katyń tragedy was a great support to all the people in Poland who speak out in favor of strengthening friendship with the Soviet Union.² This removes the claims some people would like to present to the current Soviet government. Let them not blame us, but the people who are truly guilty.

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Gorbachev: Thank you for the interesting and substantive information. Everything that is happening in Poland is of great interest to the Soviet Union, especially since every now and then such facts come up that sharply affect our public opinion. I am talking about all kinds of extremist tricks that touch upon the memory of Soviet soldiers who died during the liberation of Poland. In the decades that we have lived in close collaboration and cooperation, we have grown used to perceiving the Polish people not just as neighbors, but as friends. I will say directly that for us Poland is not of opportunistic but of strategic significance, and we plan to have a corresponding relationship with it, respecting the Polish people's freedom of choice concerning the path and model of its development.

But of course we do not close our eyes to the fact that for years Western states forged their positions in Poland, as in Lithuania and the Baltic States in general. However, the last word is with the Polish people. There are no politics without respect for the people, their aspirations, and their choice. That does not mean, of course, that we do not have our own assessments of the situations in this or that country, and in Poland in particular. Different circles [in the USSR] are watching the situation in Poland. Some recommend that we copy Polish shock therapy for the economy. We are interested in that, although we have no intention of copying anybody.

We value the realism of Poland's new government, and hope that the normal and friendly development of Soviet-Polish relations will correspond with the mutual interests of our people and countries. This is all the more important right now, during the process of unification of the two German states. On all of these issues we value our mutual understanding and cooperation with Poland. I ask you to communicate this to the head of Poland's government, Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

² On April 13, Gorbachev presented Jaruzelski with complete lists of names of Polish servicemen executed by the Soviet NKVD near Katyń in 1939, thus establishing Stalin and Beria's responsibility for the killings, and filling in the most controversial "blank spot" in the history of Soviet-Polish relations.

You touched upon a very important issue in our relations with the Western countries. Indeed, the two directions you spoke about can be traced there. During contacts with Western politicians I always drew their attention to the fact that they should not succumb to the temptation to stir up the situation in Eastern Europe. I agree with you that so far the side of reason has the upper hand in the policies of the West. This is also evident in Western politicians' attitudes toward the situation in Lithuania. But we must be careful.

The situation in Eastern Europe should be judged within the framework of pan-European processes. From this point of view it would be absolutely unrealistic to preserve what the alliance countries had in terms of military-political and economic relations. But at the same time the political commotion--striving to reject absolutely everything at once--would also be most detrimental. This kind of commotion is especially telling in Hungary, and to some extent in Czechoslovakia. Even the West would not be keen on a hurried dismantling of the military-political and economic structures that exist in Europe. It would be much smarter not to liquidate them, but to modify them in consideration of the processes taking place on the continent. And these are exactly the processes that fit into the idea of the common European home. All realistically-minded politicians have to take this into account, including Kohl, as much as he hurried ahead with forcing Germany's unification at first.

I think that your considerations regarding the Warsaw Treaty as well as the position of the Northern Group of Soviet Forces can be calmly examined in the context of Soviet-Polish relations. Here it is important not to send any kind of false signals to anybody. These questions must be examined in the context of the pan-European situation and the changes that are and will be taking place here. The Soviet government's main statement about this was made in February of this year.

As regards our economic relations it is absolutely clear that we have approached a limit where we have to substantially renew them. Right now probably everyone agrees that integration into the world economic associations is necessary. This is a normal, healthy process. Isolation has affected our rates of development quite negatively, and it slows down scientific-technological progress. To be sure, changes in the pricing system and exchange payments are needed. Corresponding changes are necessary in the CMEA mechanism as well. Of course, it should not be done the way it was in Lithuania, where one unbeautiful morning [they] found out that they had been thrown overboard by the Soviet Union. At the same time, the transfer to new prices and a new system of exchange payments cannot be put off anymore. We are in favor of starting this transition no later than January of next year.

I think that we could sign a declaration, which would correctly reflect our evaluation of the current state of affairs as well as the prospects for future developments.

I agree with you about the importance of exchanging cultural objects, which have always had an important place in the relations between our peoples, and I am sure that they will bring us even closer. In this connection, I wanted to consult with you in particular about the proposition by our minister of culture, N.N. Gubenko, who sees an opportunity to return to Poland several cultural objects, which, our scholars say, are from the XV-XVII centuries. Right now they are stored in the Hermitage, where they came as trophies from Germany, which had taken them from Poland during the war. Soviet and Polish specialists could probably evaluate these relics and discuss possible ways of transferring them back to Poland.

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To briefly describe the situation in the Soviet Union, [one could say] that its acuteness is generally based on the fact that we have moved away from the administrative-command system and from the party's monopoly on power, but we have not arrived at a new system yet, where economic and political methods of leadership would predominate. That is why the ship of our society and government is rolling and pitching on the waves so much. We have decided to compress to the maximum the transition period from one system to the next. We are speeding up the transition to sovereignty by the soviets [elected councils] and the renewal of the CPSU; we are radicalizing economic reform. This last question we will consider in depth tomorrow at the Presidential Council with the participation of the Federation Council. One may say without exaggeration that decisions of a historical scale await us. The government has reviewed these issues several times. We have to switch to an adjustable market with the full-fledged application of prices, credits, and commodity exchanges. The entire infrastructure must be radically renewed.

Two questions are especially acute: the withdrawal of volatile funds and protection of the poor and low-income layers [of society]. Earlier, we had planned this transition for 1992-1993. But we will have to do it sooner, as early as this year. Tensions in society have reached their limit. It is as if we were in a cellar that has been flooded with kerosene up to our waist. There is the danger of an explosion. We must make a choice, there is no way back. In the past everything was based on using more and more new resources. Now they have run dry. Right now we probably have the most politically loaded society. Extremists are going so far as to call for an assault on the Kremlin, Smolny, Lubyanka. And in some places they are mounting assaults. At one point this would have terrified us, but right now party members are ready to come out of the trenches, although not everywhere by a long shot. In a number of places party leaders have won posts as soviet chairmen in open and honest competition.

Recently, members of the Young Communist League [Komsomol] pressed me on the question of the unification of party and governmental posts. I explained to them that right now, when a realignment of powers is underway, we cannot allow a split in society, we cannot let two centers form. This would ruin everything positive that we have been able to achieve over the last several years. Right now Gorbachev is criticized by the left and by the right; and even among the first obkom secretaries there are some who have urged people to vote against me for president of the Soviet Union.

Jaruzelski: I have already had to experience this. Even now I encounter some relatively rude and unjust reproaches. By the way, [former party leader Edward] Gierek says in his just published memoirs that Jaruzelski is a Soviet protégé while he, Gierek, fought for Poland's independence. He even writes that supposedly I went together with [former Soviet Defense Minister Andrei] Grechko on a holiday to hunt in Afghanistan, where I have not been once in my life.

Gorbachev:

A vital question is the renewal of the Federation. The USSR Supreme Soviet recently adopted a law on the conditions for exiting the Union; the question of the distribution of powers between the Union and the republics is under consideration. The point is to give the republics more freedom and to fill the Federation with real substance. It seems we will have to make provisions for different levels of independence for some republics. Even in the tsarist empire,

Finland, Poland, and the Caucasus, for example, had a status that took into account their special features.

Regarding your thoughts on the Lithuanian problem, you are right. We want Lithuania to feel independent within the Federation. But if the Lithuanians decide to leave the USSR after all, then, of course, the Union and its republics--Belarus, RSFSR--will undoubtedly have the right to secure their rightful interests to the full extent.

Jaruzelski: How do you see Estonia and Latvia's positions?

Gorbachev: I think they are striving for a different kind of freedom and will not follow the path that the current Lithuanian leaders have started upon.

The difficulty of the situation is that many people in our country do not want to see the new reality. They demand that present-day conflicts be solved through the old forceful methods, and they proclaim the rejection of such methods to be a betrayal of socialist principles; as if socialism today can be spread through blood and violence.

Jaruzelski: They do not want to, and evidently they cannot, understand that the matter at stake right now is the prevention of a catastrophe.

Gorbachev: If the Romanian version [of events] had taken place in Russia, the whole country would have been razed. And considering its strategic power, it is more likely that the whole world would have been devastated as well. My innermost aim, the chief strategic goal, is to complete perestroika, the democratization of society, and for once to have a renewal take place in Russia without blood, without civil war. It is very difficult to do right now not only because the problems themselves are very difficult and acute, but also because now that I have been elected president the pressure has increased: [people say] you now have such powers, strike!

Lithuania's leaders are narrowing the field for political maneuver through their thoughtless, adventurist actions. It is shrinking like a wild ass' skin. In connection with this I warned U.S. politicians who are interested in the Lithuanian situation that not everything in this conflict depends on Moscow. We are dealing with adventurists. I told [Sen. George] Mitchell [D-Maine] straightforwardly that if something like this had happened in one of your states you would have imposed order there within 24 hours.

Jaruzelski: At one time they dealt a strong rebuff to the South's attempts to secede, and they still celebrate it annually.

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