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Mikhail Gorbachev's Concerns about Reunification (December 5, 1989)

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, upset by the prospect of losing his East German client state and seeing his Eastern European empire crumble, berates West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, criticizing Helmut Kohl's initiative and warning against interference in GDR affairs.

Gorbachev: It is a privilege for us to speak with you, because we have known and respected you for a long time. People are usually easy on new people they hardly know, but with old friends it is possible to be direct and speak openly. With you it is okay to jump right into complicated matters. [. . .]

Genscher: We do not wish to draw any unilateral advantage for ourselves from the processes that are taking place in Eastern Europe and that are creating the kinds of problems that are inevitable when massive reforms are implemented. Our aim is to stabilize the situation by developing our relations with the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, and the GDR. That is a matter dear to our heart. We seek no individual action, no separate German path. Our country is integrated into the EEC, although that is not the whole of Europe. We also intend to promote the development of the Helsinki Process, because it is a guarantee of stability on the continent. No one should expect the Germans to take any steps that would be detrimental to the development of Europe. We are for stability in Europe, for rapprochement between its countries and peoples. [. . .]

I am not saying this as a private person, but as foreign minister of the FRG. The policies of our government are not the policies of a minority but a course that has the support of the majority of the population of the FRG and the overwhelming endorsement of the Bundestag. This guarantees that we enjoy the trust of everyone who works with us and, of course, also of the Soviet Union. We strive to increase this trust.

Gorbachev: I have listened to your statements with great attention and trust. If everything that you have said represents the genuine truth, then I can only welcome this, and we can conclude our conversation with a feeling of trust and optimism. But I must make several comments. There are two levels that concern us here. One is the philosophical-conceptual level, the one to which your statements refer. The other level involves the real, practical steps that we are observing with great attentiveness. Radical changes are taking place in Europe and throughout the entire

world. This is a turn for the good. Confrontation and the arms race are ending; mutual trust is growing. With respect to these changes, it would be very dangerous if provincial, regional, egotistical, and utilitarian approaches were to dominate. [. . .]

I will be very open in saying that I do not understand Federal Chancellor Kohl, who has publicly stated his familiar ten points regarding the intentions of the FRG vis-à-vis the GDR.¹ It needs to be stated openly that these points are ultimatums that are being raised in reference to an independent and sovereign German state. What Chancellor Kohl has said concerns the GDR but affects us all.

First, these ten points surfaced after we had had a constructive and positive exchange of ideas and (reached) agreement on a number of fundamental issues. Actually such a document should not have been presented before the partners had consulted on the issue. Or does the Federal Chancellor no longer need any of that anymore? He evidently thinks that his music – a march – is being played, and he himself has already started marching to it. I do not think that these steps will serve to strengthen our trust and mutual understanding, nor will they contribute to vitalizing the agreements we have already made with each other. How can we speak of “building up Europe” when such actions are taken? You know that we have spoken with Chancellor Kohl on the telephone. I told him that the GDR is a factor not only in European politics, but also in world politics, and that both East and West will pay close attention to all that is happening. Kohl agreed; he offered assurance that the FRG does not wish to destabilize the situation in the GDR and that its actions will be balanced. The chancellor’s actions, however, do not correspond with his assurances. I said to Kohl that the GDR is an important partner and ally of the Soviet Union. We are also interested in developing our relations with the FRG. This is a triangle with a special role in European and global politics. Everything about this triangle must remain carefully balanced. But now ultimatums are being made. Instructions are being given as to which path the GDR should take and which structures should be created. The leadership of the FRG is exerting outright pressure to take command. And I can assure you that all of us are feeling that. [. . .]

The reality is that both German states are sovereign and independent. This was decided by history. In order to remain realists, we must assume that history will decide the fate and the processes that take place on the continent in general, and will thereby determine the place and the roles of these two states. A pan-European process is underway. We want to design a new Europe and build a pan-European house. This requires trust. Relations between the two German states should develop within this framework. They will obviously become closer. But all of these processes need to take their normal course. Any artificial acceleration will only complicate or encumber the significant changes that are taking place in the development of the European states, that is, in a central area in global politics. I think that any sort of artificial acceleration would not be in the interest of the people of either German state. The two German states need to readjust their relations precisely within the context of striving for stability, on the basis of equilibrium and mutual respect. [. . .]

¹ Here, Gorbachev is referring to Kohl’s Ten-Point Plan for German Unity of November 28, 1989 – ed.

What is actually happening, however, is just the opposite. Yesterday, Chancellor Kohl declared – without much show of tact – that President Bush supports the idea of a confederation. What is that supposed to mean? What is a confederation? A confederation presumes a unified defense, a unified foreign policy. Where will the FRG be – in NATO? In the Warsaw Pact? Or will it be neutral? But what would NATO be without the FRG? How will things develop further? Have you thought about all of this? What about the agreements that exist between us? What kind of politics is that? [. . .]

Today you are dealing with the GDR in this way, tomorrow possibly with Poland, with Czechoslovakia, and then with Austria. [. . .]

I take full responsibility in declaring that you are not exhibiting the best political style, since you are not distancing yourself from Mr. Kohl. In any case, one cannot call it responsible and foresighted.

Genscher: Regarding the Federal Chancellor's statement in the Bundestag, I can say that it demonstrates the long-term nature of the policies of the FRG. It shows that the latter is a fundamental element in the process of integration throughout all of Europe. By turning to the GDR, the Federal Chancellor intended first and foremost to underscore the fact that we are prepared to help and cooperate at the present stage, but he also meant to demonstrate that opportunities exist for rapprochement in the future. What he said is neither a diktat nor an ultimatum, but merely a proposal. The GDR will decide on a free and independent basis how it will respond to this proposal. This is precisely what we assume. Of course, the GDR understands its responsibility toward European development. On the evening before my departure, I spoke with Chancellor Kohl in Brussels. His ten-point plan is not a timeline of urgent and imminent measures; instead, he is trying to determine the long-term outlook. The GDR will decide for itself, and answer for itself, whether it will respond to his suggestions with yes or no. We are interested in the internal stability of the GDR. It seems to me that the Federal Chancellor's statement offered a contribution toward strengthening this stability. There are no diktats and no ultimatums here. We know that neither Poland nor Hungary has gotten this impression. These ten points, our policies, are supported by all the parties represented in the Bundestag, including the SPD.

Gorbachev: The Germans should remember where politics without rhyme or reason once led in the past.

Genscher: We are well acquainted with the mistakes of the past and do not intend to repeat them. That which is presently occurring in the FRG and the GDR does not deserve such a harsh assessment. The people of the GDR are demanding their rights without any expression of aggression, totally peaceably. You must know that the GDR is my homeland, and I hear the demands of its populace with satisfaction and compassion. And the people of the FRG are

watching the events in the GDR with sympathy and great interest. All responsible politicians here are saying that the people of the GDR will decide what they need on their own.

Source: Soviet protocol of a conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, cited in Alexander von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands: Ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel* [*The Unification of Germany: A Global Power Game*]. Berlin, 2002, pp. 128-132.

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