

## **From the One-on-One Conversation of M.S. Gorbachev with F. Mitterrand**

**May 25, 1990**

*(Present at the conversation from the French side was assistant to F. Mitterrand J. Attali, and from the Soviet side V.V. Zagladin).*

[...] M.S. Gorbachev. Right now, Europe is at the center of world events. So we can continue the exchange of views on European affairs that we began over breakfast. We can finish the discussion of the German question and talk about the outlook for the European process.

F. Mitterrand. Alright. I can easily present France's position. We have good relations with the Germans. But we are not blind. We never turned a blind eye to the way they concentrated all their efforts on making the unification of Germany happen as soon as possible. All this time I have been saying the following: I am not setting any preconditions for reunification, but I believe we must negotiate the consequences of German unification on the basis of appropriate guarantees. What guarantees am I talking about?

First, there is the question of borders. We need an agreement on their inviolability. Poland is particularly concerned about this issue. I received Jaruzelski and Mazowiecki in Paris in an effort to achieve clarity on this issue. We presented a concerted position on this matter.

I always told Kohl that the process of German unification must necessarily be accompanied by guarantees on the question of borders, and that he must clarify this issue. But he still has not done this, except perhaps in our last conversation. In that conversation he said that regardless of how events unfolded, the two German parliaments will hold special sessions to announce the bases on which negotiations would be conducted after Germany is unified. Until this point, his position was essentially like this: we cannot say anything until we reach unity.

So, he "backtracked" a little. This means the parliaments of East and West Germany will convene in June and make the corresponding statements. Clearly, the Poles need something more serious. That is how I see the current situation.

Second, there is the problem of Germany's relations with European Communities. I do not intend to delve into this issue, I am only pointing it out. I have always believed that Germany should make concessions and transfer some of its national competencies to the Communities, in order to allow them to move forward. In other words, it is necessary to go beyond "purely German will."

Third, there is of course the question about alliances. I would like to find out what are your current thoughts about the future of NATO and the Warsaw Pact? We already talked about it briefly today at breakfast. Personally, I do not see any way to prohibit Germany from making its choice once it unites and fully regains its sovereignty. That would go against the Helsinki Accords.

It is another matter that we must demand guarantees from Germany – before it happens. I think after the unification process is complete, nobody will be able to stop Germany from carrying out its intentions.

We once again return to discussing the question of maintaining the presence of Soviet troops in the East Germany and Western troops in West Germany. This is the essence of the problem, but its form is also important. I believe that movement in this sphere should not be too fast. Already, the mood of the German public is not what it was, let's say, on the eve of the parliamentary elections. We cannot say what it will be towards the end of this year.

Kohl was disappointed with the election results in two districts: Lower Saxony and Rhineland-Palatinate. Therefore, he would like to speed up the unification process in order to use the influx of votes from the GDR in the elections. It would be wise to prevent him from doing this, or rather, to make the process go slower. After some time, when new elections will include all Germans, the situation will be clearer and the initial enthusiasm will settle. What will happen next? If the same people as now become leaders of future Germany, people we already know, then the situation will not change. But if new people are elected, well, then we will see how to act.

What resources do we have? The U.S. is completely on the side of the FRG. They are in favor of immediate reunification. The UK takes a more restrained position. I even think that, in essence, they are opposed to German unification. But the British are unequivocally speaking in favor of Germany's membership in NATO.

So we do not have very many ways to "directly" prevent the Germans from doing what they want. I would like to know what you intend to do in this regard.

Further, there is such an aspect as the various European agreements. Firstly, it is necessary to ensure compliance with the regulations outlined by the Helsinki process. We have to give more weight to the substance of the OSCE. We need a permanent mechanism to hold meetings of foreign ministers on a regular basis, instead of occasionally. There must be a permanent secretariat with specific powers. By the way, the U.S. cannot complain about this approach, because they are themselves members of the OSCE.

As I mentioned at breakfast, it is necessary to avoid the temptation to isolate the Soviet Union. We have to avoid anything that could create even an impression that someone is aiming to do this... This is the motivation behind my intention to speak in favor of a dialogue between the USSR and the Group of Seven during its meeting in Houston. It is time to end the two-bloc state of Europe; at the same time, it is important to provide the Soviet Union with the necessary conditions for its security, while also taking into account the interests of its domestic security.

What do I mean? I am perfectly aware that German unification and its membership in NATO create very big problems for you. I am also experiencing difficulties in this regard, but of a different order. That is why I am stressing the need to create security conditions for you, as well as European security as a whole. This was one of my guiding goals, particularly when I proposed my idea of creating a European confederation. It is similar to your concept of a common European home.

M.S. Gorbachev. Thank you for the detailed statement, Mr. President. I think the source of the current situation is that two powerful processes have come together. First, it is the process

of West European integration, with the primary goal of creating a single market by the end of 1992.

On the other hand, the idea of a common European home arose from the momentum of our *perestroika*. Today Europeans are stronger than ever, and they feel it. I can see, I noticed this long ago, that the Americans are nervous. And not like before, when it was mainly about increased economic competition. Now they are worried about their positions in Europe as a whole.

These concerns began to increase when they saw that Europeans – both in the East and West – started moving from thinking about a common European home to taking real steps in that direction. These American fears are complicating the situation. There are mutual suspicions.

I know that they suspect France in the West, and the Soviet Union in the East, in spurring these processes in order to expel Americans from the continent. But you and I have never talked about such things even in private, not to mention publicly. We are not against an American presence in Europe. I think their presence is necessary. Otherwise, the Americans will become apprehensive, which is fraught with negative consequences. We have to be realistic.

Here is what I think about this situation. If Americans feel slighted, especially if there is any real danger of them getting somewhat distanced, then this will put in motion forces that can put obstacles in the path of the positive trends in Europe and the world as a whole. At the same time, I notice the United States is looking for approaches that would allow them to prevent the European processes from going beyond the scope that Americans prefer. They want to prevent the processes from developing in a direction that is undesirable for Americans.

F. Mitterrand. I completely agree with you.

M.S. Gorbachev. I think that our friend Kohl, with whom I have a good relationship, is in a big hurry and is trying to pull us into the ongoing process. But he can make a mess of things. I agree with your thesis that we should act without haste, we should coordinate our steps.

I am convinced there should be no rush with the timeframe. I see a way out of the current situation in synchronizing the European process and the process of German unification. These processes are already moving at different speeds, and it is hardly possible to achieve absolute synchronization. Such a thing in general is impossible in international relations. But we have to strive for a maximum alignment of the pace; such an approach would meet the interests of European countries – Poland and even Great Britain, with all its specific characteristics.

The Americans prefer Kohl's position. They believe it is the way to preserve NATO and their influence in NATO. Previously, the U.S. needed NATO in its military aspect, as a counterweight to Soviet military power. Now it turns out NATO will keep unified Germany in some kind of reliable framework. Quite possibly, this American approach aims to perpetuate NATO.

The Americans' persistence in defending the idea of NATO's necessity and usefulness makes me wonder: are the Americans thinking to use NATO to create some sort of mechanism,

an institution, a kind of directory for managing world affairs? But this would be contrary to the positive tendencies of European development, of which the USSR and France were originators.

The problem is how to combine all these things. I would keep on the agenda the question whether “the Four” still have some rights.

F. Mitterrand. Kohl, with the support of the United States, intends to complete German unification by the end of this year. This is a real problem.

M.S. Gorbachev. There is one very important aspect in this question. These, I repeat, are the rights of the Four Powers. Instead of concluding a peace treaty, there should be a document on the final peaceful settlement that would draw a line under the outcomes of World War II, including the German question. This should be some kind of international binding document that would record the most important elements. Such an agreement would become an integral part of the foundation of the future security structure.

It seems to me that it is time to think about new institutions. Why not think about establishing cooperation between the WTO and NATO? We should look for some sort of connections between these two organizations. In particular, it is already widely understood that there is a need for some kind of center for the prevention of crisis situations in Europe.

We hope that NATO will transition to a different doctrine than the current one. This, taking into account the work already carried out in the WTO regarding military doctrine, would open a suitable opportunity to politicize the two blocs and forge new relationships between them. If some form of cooperation and interconnectedness between the two military-political groups emerges, then, perhaps, a united Germany could become a kind of space, a field for such interaction. Then united Germany would not belong only to the WTO or only to NATO, but would become something that would be covered by both organizations.

I told Baker: we are aware of your favorable attitude towards the intention expressed by a number of representatives of Eastern European countries to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and subsequently join NATO. Well, what would the U.S. reaction be if the USSR expressed a similar desire? It is important to work through questions of specific forms of relationships between the two military-political groups, because the political face of the future Europe will depend on it.

The search for new forms of relationships between the alliances could be carried out in the context of developing the political organizations of new Europe. Then the agreements between the alliances would organically fit into the process in conjunction with what you mentioned about concrete measures and guarantees related to the unification of Germany – regarding borders, the presence of foreign military forces in Germany, the fate of international agreements concluded by the German states with other countries, and other elements of the settlement.

Then it would become clear to everyone that we are changing, that the East and the West are moving towards each other, particularly in Vienna; that two military-political groups are working together on such key issues as building German unity. New forms of economic

cooperation, including the European Bank, would meet these objectives as well. This bank could become the channel linking countries of the East and West.

To this we could add agreements to hold high-level meetings between all European countries on a regular basis, to create a permanent acting body in which foreign ministers would be represented. You spoke about it. Working in this direction would serve as an incentive for greater integration and unity of the new Europe, rather than pulling it apart. It would meet the challenges of overcoming the recent mutual suspicions. Then all Europeans, and not just the biggest among them, would truly feel themselves masters of their continent.

I think it would be useful if, at the level of foreign ministers, we could jointly start thinking about realistic approaches to these problems. Right now there are attempts from various sides to throw in "simple" solutions, which in reality contain great dangers. After all, we are talking about the fate of Europe, which, in turn, will determine the fate of the entire world. I am convinced that positive impulses for world development at the present day can come only from Europe. I simply do not see where else they could come from.

F. Mitterrand. I agree that this can become the subject of constructive discussions between us.

Right now, the real difficulty concerns the question of united Germany's membership in NATO. The U.S., as well as the leaders of the two Germanys, would like to resolve this question as soon as possible, and naturally in favor of such membership.

The opinion of the German public, of regular Germans, is another matter. Of course, this issue will be resolved by Germans themselves, but what option would you offer them?

M.S. Gorbachev. The presence of a future unified Germany simultaneously in both blocs.

F. Mitterrand. I do not think this proposal would be accepted, even though it is overall a smart one. All the while, I would like to remind you that I am personally in favor of gradually dismantling the military blocs.

It seems the question of future Germany's membership in NATO will be linked to the course of the disarmament negotiations. Specifically, will you make this link to the Vienna talks? You will not abandon such a trump card as disarmament negotiations. At least not until you get an answer on this aspect of the German settlement. In other words, will you slow down the course of disarmament talks depending on how German affairs develop?

M.S. Gorbachev. This could be one of the consequences I mentioned.

F. Mitterrand. I do not have the slightest doubt regarding the FRG's resolve when it comes to NATO, and the support they have from the U.S. It seems you will be discussing this at the upcoming meeting with President Bush.

M.S. Gorbachev. Absolutely. I spoke about this at length with Baker. I asked him to convey my views to the American President in detail. I told him he can consider it his "homework" before our meeting. In the conversation with the Secretary of State, I emphasized

that we are finding ourselves in a strange position when we are asked to act based on the wishes of Bush or Kohl.

F. Mitterrand. I am not a pessimist. But I think Bush will be very surprised when you present him with your proposal. He is not ready for it. To him, the idea of Germany belonging to two blocs will seem somewhat absurd. On the one hand, it gives Germany an unusually strong position, on the other, the Germans themselves will refuse it.

M.S. Gorbachev. To this I can say that this is Washington's view, whereas the Europeans have their own perspective...

F. Mitterrand. I noted what you said regarding a peace treaty or a peaceful settlement that would define all the necessary conditions for European security, as well as the USSR's security. It seems to me that such an approach would be better received than a proposal for Germany's simultaneous membership in two alliances.

M.S. Gorbachev. Well, it is one of the options we can discuss. You and I have a relationship that allows us to discuss such questions in a calm atmosphere. Why not think about this option: like France, united Germany could be a member of the political organization of NATO, but not a part of its military structures.

F. Mitterrand. I do not object, but it will be up to the Germans themselves to decide. Personally, I do not see any problem here for me.

M.S. Gorbachev. Nowadays, it is not enough for a politician to not object, he has to propose ideas. The opinion of the French president is very significant right now.

F. Mitterrand. I think a great deal about the question of securing Germany's commitment not to have nuclear weapons. All other problems are less important.

In early July, I will participate in a NATO Council session. Political issues will be discussed there. I do not participate in events that deal with military issues. This is due to France's non-participation in NATO's military command, as you know. In a joint press conference with President Bush in Florida on April 19, I found it necessary to emphasize that France's increased involvement in NATO is out of the question.

So, how will I prepare my speech for the NATO session? By that point, you will have already told Bush your proposal for Germany's simultaneous membership in both alliances. I, like any man, may be mistaken, but as far as I know my NATO allies, there is not the slightest chance they will agree to such a proposal.

You know who might welcome your proposal the most? The Germans themselves. I am talking about the public, not the "headquarters." The fact is that German public opinion is going through a period of uncertainty. It would prefer not to participate in the system of alliances at all. The German public already got reunification; now their agenda is to equalize the level of development in the different parts of future Germany. The Germans in general are apprehensive about nuclear weapons, and they would be glad if they are removed from their territory. So the

German public opinion could get behind your proposal, but realistically only a year from now. Because until then, no one will really consider German public opinion.

At my request Attali visited the U.S. and met with the U.S. military, in particular with Scowcroft.

J. Attali. There is not the slightest doubt about the importance the Americans attach to Germany's membership in NATO. They see it as an important condition for maintaining their presence on the European continent.

F. Mitterrand. So the Americans and Germans, who will be deciding this issue, will react negatively to your proposal. And after Germany obtains full sovereignty we won't be able to have any input at all. The Germans will say, "We have the same right as everyone else to decide our own fate." This will happen very soon – in eight months to a year. By then everything will be done.

M.S. Gorbachev. You are probably right.

F. Mitterrand. We can predict the reaction of other NATO partners. Great Britain, for example, takes a cautious and essentially adverse position on the German process but is more committed to the idea of keeping Germany in NATO than any other European country. Therefore, I cannot count on England.

M.S. Gorbachev. You can count on me. Even if you do not accept the proposal to act together, I will still express my point of view.

F. Mitterrand. But you are not a NATO member. Don't get me wrong. (*Laughing*). France cannot allow itself to end up somewhere on the sidelines of the North Atlantic Alliance. I am also not happy with how the German affairs are developing. I can speak about this with Bush, we have a good relationship, but not about Germany's participation in alliances. When it comes to alliances, my position is more of a counteroffensive.

I said the following: not only should we avoid doing anything to isolate the USSR, we should also avoid giving the impression that we are trying to isolate it. I emphasized that ultimately the question of Germany's membership in NATO is not the top priority. Especially as the FRG is already in NATO. Let the processes proceed as they may. In the meantime, the "4+2" group will continue its work, deciding the questions of a peaceful settlement, the OSCE will be strengthened, and we will see. But my interlocutors are not really listening to me.

M.S. Gorbachev. The Germans are constantly knocking at our door, giving us signals.

F. Mitterrand. I wonder, what do they want from you?

M.S. Gorbachev. They want me to support the unification process to the end, including their timeframe. But you and I talked about the fact that we are not against German unification.

F. Mitterrand. I am neither for nor against it. It is for the Germans themselves to decide. There are some aspects that are not solely dependent on them, but also on the "4+2" group as well as other European communities.

The Germans are striving to become absolute masters of their politics. They would like to get rid of the “4+2” guardianship. Something like this could happen: they could make some promises to the Poles, make plans to regulate the Berlin question and then declare to the “4+2” group – “There is nothing more to do here, you should leave.” This behavior can be called a power reflex.

So I ask myself: what resources do we have to make this process go in a different way?

Everyone accepts the argument about boundaries. Not just Poland, but also Denmark, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, France, etc. This, of course, is a positive element. We have everyone’s support when we talk about the OSCE. The situation is more complicated when it comes to the question of preventing the isolation of the USSR. When I put forward the idea of a European confederation, I was once asked, “Naturally, you would not include the USSR in the confederation?” I replied, “Of course I include it.” Moreover, it is the whole point of my idea. On this account I have the support of the countries I mentioned.

When it comes to Germany’s membership in NATO, I am ready to help, but I believe you hold the key. What can I do? Send a division there?

M.S. Gorbachev. It is simpler for us, we already have our divisions there. (*Laughter*)

Moreover, they are there on lawful grounds. If they are withdrawn, then we must ensure that it is also done in a lawful manner.

F. Mitterrand. You mentioned the question of Germany’s status of non-inclusion in military structures. This is a key point.

M.S. Gorbachev. I am constantly thinking over this idea. You are the first one I shared it with.

F. Mitterrand. Thank you. We have different obligations but common goals. We must ensure European security, not against someone but together with everyone. Of course, we are not talking about uniting against the Germans. Although, maybe I will take a risk saying this, but I feel safer with you than with them.

M.S. Gorbachev. Kohl is knocking at our door, looking for an invitation. This is understandable, he wants to make sure we do not interfere with him. He understands that we can influence the ongoing process, even though he thinks the process is already unstoppable.

F. Mitterrand. Of course, you have certain capabilities to influence how the events develop, with the understanding that we cannot stop these events. In this regard, the issue of timing is of particular importance. You expressed a very important idea about synchronization.

M.S. Gorbachev. We are not talking about absolute synchronization, of course. It is important to move matters towards this goal, to achieve an interdependence of processes...

F. Mitterrand. The truth is that I do not know how to say “no.” Even to the Germans. I probably will be revealing no great secret if I say that more than once, publicly and privately, the idea was suggested to me to transfer some part of control over our nuclear strategic means to the



Germans. No matter how many times I hear this, I always say “no.” I do not say “no” if I know that I will have to say “yes” at the next stage. If I say “no” to Germany’s membership in NATO, I will become isolated from my Western partners.

M.S. Gorbachev. My situation is more complicated. Our public has a widespread negative attitude towards Germany’s participation in NATO.

F. Mitterrand. I understand your concern. Our public also has a feeling of creeping unease.

For 45 years people have been living within the system of various alliances. They have developed certain conditioned responses. Therefore, any novelty causes concern. De Gaulle, for example, made a lot of people anxious.

I always repeat: European security is impossible without the USSR. Not because the USSR is an adversary with a powerful army, but because it is our partner. [This partnership] is in our interests.

M.S. Gorbachev. Once we already missed an opportunity to be together. It is important not to make big mistakes when it comes to this. New mistakes can have irreparable consequences.

F. Mitterrand. I understand you. By the year 1939, English and French diplomats accumulated many mistakes. They created a feeling of anxiety in Moscow. As a result, Stalin had to choose between two worrisome options instead of choosing between guaranteed calm versus uneasiness. This had dramatic consequences.

Regardless of the regime in the USSR, we must be friends. Now, when your country is democratizing, we see one more reason to move towards each other.

M.S. Gorbachev. Yes, it is clear that we are becoming closer.

F. Mitterrand. At the moment, you are blocked because you set the goal of keeping a future united Germany out of NATO. If the conversation turns out to be impossible, Germans and their NATO partners may choose a simple option – decide to join NATO.

I realize how delicate this conflict of interest is. That is why I always told my NATO partners: make a commitment not to move NATO’s military formations from their current territory in the FRG to East Germany. Out of the same considerations, I was in favor of reducing the number of shorter-range missiles. I opposed the modernization of the Lance missiles in early 1988, when France was under Chirac’s government. A few weeks ago, Bush issued a statement that essentially recognized that I was right on these points.

As you can see, I am ready to aid in the conciliation of the emerging conflict situations. However, in the question we discussed, I simply do not see how you can achieve your goal. You can toughen your position, but such an approach would be a source of destabilization in Europe. On all other questions, it is possible to come to an agreement one way or another. But the question of NATO membership stands apart. Even if you get concessions from the Germans,

they will be procedural, not substantive. For example, your troops may be allowed to remain for a year and a half, or maybe three-four years. But then they will be told to go away. So on the fundamental level, the Germans will not agree to your proposal. [...]

[Source: *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros*, ed. by Alexander Galkin and Anatoly Chernyaev, Moscow: Ves Mir, 2006), pp. 454-466. Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive.]



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