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Excerpts from the Conversation of M.S. Gorbachev and Francois Mitterrand

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Summary:

Excerpts from a dinner conversation between Gorbachev and Mitterrand where they discuss the political situations in Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland, and also comment on the US political system.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

From the Conversation of M.S. Gorbachev and Francois Mitterrand during the Private Dinner with R. M. Gorbachev and D. Mitterrand at the President's Apartment. France, Paris. July 5, 1989.

[...]

Mitterrand. So, you are going to Romania tomorrow. I appreciated the answer about Romania that you gave during your TV interview to the TV show "Antenne-2" and to the radio station "Europe-1" (The interview took place after the press conference at the Elysee Palace on July 5). But at the same time, we all understand that Romania is a real dictatorship. The only unclear moment is whose dictatorship is it--Ceausescu's himself or his wife's?

Gorbachev. Still, we should make a realistic assessment of the situation. Romania used to be a backward agrarian country, and now it is an industrialized developed state. The challenge is to complete the economic and social base that has been created with a fitting political establishment. For example, Romania has completely solved the housing problem. This is a big victory.

But Ceausescu is scared of democracy. By the way, he told me that the measures that we are now undertaking in the USSR in the framework of perestroika, he had already implemented in Romania 10 years ago.

Mitterrand. He told you that? Romania, of course, could use a perestroika. I visited Romania several years ago. After that I never came back.

Gorbachev. Ceausescu probably "wrote out" a whole plan of actions for you.

Mitterrand. Precisely. Since what year is he the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party?

Gorbachev. Since 1965.

Mitterrand. Every power is seeking a way to find its place in history. Besides, and I have already quoted these words by Tacitus yesterday, "every man always reaches the limit of his own power." That is why democracy must have a mechanism of political balances.

Contrary to Ceausescu, who is cracking down, Todor Zhivkov is acting in a smarter, I would even say, more cunning, way. For how many years has he been in power?

Gorbachev. He has led the Bulgarian Communist Party for 35 years now. I recall how I was at his meeting with students of the University of Sofia. They criticized him quite harshly, and he kept responding "They are right about everything."

Mitterrand. 35 years!

Gorbacheva. And you thought that two presidential terms in France--14 years--is too long for you.

Mitterrand. (Laughing) It is also long. Zhivkov is about eighty years old now.

Gorbachev. He is not in complete control of his legs, and facial muscles. When I see him, I remember Brezhnev.

[...]

Gorbachev. We discussed with him, in particular, the difficulties of the political process in the United States, the situation, in which the President always has to keep Congress in mind, and therefore sometimes he has to act timidly, or not to respond to Soviet initiatives.

Mitterrand. In the past, U.S. Presidents used to be the masters of the game. Roosevelt, and Truman made their own independent foreign policies. By impeaching Nixon, the Congress took its revenge. However, George Bush would make very moderate policy even without the congressional constraint because he is a conservative. Not all conservatives are alike. Bush, as a President, has a very big drawback-- he lacks original thinking altogether.

Gorbachev. The question about the American internal political process interests me also in terms of building relations between the Parliament and the President. In Italy, for example, the complicated relations between various democratic institutions lead sometimes to the incompleteness, to the disruption of political process. In our country we have to concentrate on the implementation of radical reforms. Therefore it is undesirable that the center's initiative was compromised by disorderly relations with regions, with other democratic institutions. We need to find some gold median here

[...]

Mitterrand. For a revolution you need a new class that could take power in its hands. The Decemberists were able to use a powerful popular burst of discontent, but they were not ready to take the power, and nothing came out of it.

Gorbachev. There was a lot of violence during the French revolution. Names of such heroes as Robespierre, Danton, and Marat are associated with revolutionary terror.

I think that there is such a situation in the world now that when people want to change their regime, their government, it is not by the way of revolution anymore.

Gorbachev. In Poland, for example, people want to avoid the repetition of the events of 1980 more than anything else. By the way, this is the reason why Jaruzelski's course for a dialogue with "Solidarity", Lech Walesa, and all of Poland's political forces is gaining wide support among the Poles.

Mitterrand. By employing cruel methods, the leaders of the French revolution were able to unite the population against the foreign threat. They were very effective in this. Just as Stalin was in his time.