

Mikhail Gorbachev's remarks at the Symposium of the New Policy Forum, Berlin, November 8, 2014 (1)

I

I am pleased to welcome all the participants and to see among them both the veterans of our Forum and some new faces. I expect all of them to make a contribution to serious and constructive dialogue which is so necessary now.

Our conference is being held simultaneously with the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the wall that divided Germany and Europe. I would like first of all to congratulate the Germans, and all of us, on the anniversary of this truly historic event.

Historic shifts that seem unexpected to contemporaries may later appear inevitable, preordained. But let us recall the time when it was all happening and how tumultuous and urgent the process of change was. Its outcome – the peaceful unification of Germany – was possible only because it had been prepared by great changes in international politics and in the minds of people.

Those changes were triggered by Perestroika in the Soviet Union. Having embarked on the course of reforms, glasnost and freedom, we could not deny that same path to the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. We rejected the Brezhnev doctrine, recognized the independence of those states and their responsibility to their own peoples. I said as much to their leaders during our very first meeting in Moscow.

When, under the influence of changes in the Soviet Union, internal political processes gained momentum in neighboring countries, and the citizens of the GDR demanded reforms and, soon afterwards, unification, the leadership of the USSR was faced with the need to make difficult choices.

Not just in our country, but in many European countries as well, doubts and apprehensions were being raised by the process of unification. One could understand the doubts of Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterrand and other leaders. After all, the tragedy of the Second World War was still fresh in memory. There were other reasons, too, for their wariness. Even more, the people of our country, which suffered the most from Hitler's aggression, had reasons for concern. Meanwhile, the events were unfolding with increasing speed, with the people being the main actor – the people who demanded change and declared their intention to live in a united country: "We are one nation".

During a meeting of the Soviet leadership in January 1990 we discussed the evolving situation and came to the unanimous conclusion that the Soviet Union should not stand in the way of unification – but that it must happen in a way that would be in the interests of the whole of Europe and of our country as well as the Germans themselves.

If we had evaded a realistic and responsible assessment or taken a different decision, the events could have taken a very different, dramatic turn. And the use of force could have led to bloodshed on a large scale.

We took the path that required political decisions and active diplomacy. In order to address the external aspects of German unification, the 2+4 mechanism was created. The most difficult issue was the problem of the united Germany's membership in NATO. I was in favor of a neutral Germany. President Bush objected: Why? Are you afraid of the Germans? So they must be included, 'anchored' in NATO. I replied: It looks like it's you who are afraid of them.

We discussed various possibilities. Eventually, it was agreed that the united Germany would decide for itself as to its membership in the alliance but, in the process, the security interests of the USSR must be taken into account.

This required intense talks. In the end, the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany recorded the following provisions:

- the presence of Soviet troops in the territory of the former GDR for a transitional period;
- non-stationing of NATO's foreign troops in that territory after the transitional period;
- non-stationing of nuclear weapons there;
- significant, almost 50-percent reduction of the personnel of the FRG armed forces.

Those were important obligations, which have been observed throughout the ensuing period.

During those years, the Germans have proved their commitment to peace and democracy and the government of Germany has pursued a generally constructive and responsible course of action in the international arena

I am confident that history will give high marks to the political leaders active at that time.

II

The unification of Germany was a major step in the process of ending the cold war. New prospects opened up for the world and particularly for Europe. The shape of a new Europe was emerging from the Charter of Paris signed by the leaders of all European countries as well as the United States and Canada.

It appeared that Europe might emerge as an example to others by creating a solid system of mutual security and becoming a leader in solving the problems of a global world.

Yet, the events took a different course.

European and international politics did not stand the test of renewal, of the new conditions of the global world in the post-cold war era.

One has to admit that since the creation of our Forum at the dawn of this century we have never met in such a tense and fraught environment. Bloodshed in Europe and the Middle East against the backdrop of a breakdown in the dialogue between major powers is of enormous concern. The world is on the brink of a new cold war. Some are even saying that it's already begun.

And yet, while the situation is dramatic, we do not see the main international body – the UN Security Council – playing any role or taking concrete action. What has it done to stop the fire and the killing of people? It should have acted with determination to evaluate the situation and develop a program of joint action. But this was not done, and it's not being done. Why? I would characterize what has been happening over the past few months as the collapse of trust – the trust that was created by hard work and mutual effort in the process of ending the cold war. Trust – without which international relations in the global world are inconceivable.

Yet it would be wrong to link it only to the recent events. I have to be frank with you here. This trust was not undermined yesterday; it happened long before. The roots of the current situation lie in the events of the 1990s.

The end of the cold war was just the beginning of the path towards a new Europe and a safer world order. But, instead of building new mechanisms and institutions of European security and pursuing a major demilitarization of European politics – as promised, incidentally, in NATO's London Declaration – the West, and particularly the United States, declared victory in the cold war. Euphoria and triumphalism went to the heads of Western leaders. Taking advantage of Russia's weakening and the lack of a counterweight, they claimed monopoly leadership and domination in the world, refusing to heed words of caution from many of those present here.

The events of the past few months are consequences of short-sighted policies, of seeking to impose one's will and *faits accomplis* while ignoring the interests of one's partners.

A 'shortlist' will suffice: the enlargement of NATO, Yugoslavia, particularly Kosovo, missile defense plans, Iraq, Libya, Syria.

To put it metaphorically, a blister has now turned into a bloody, festering wound. And who is suffering the most from what's happening? I think the answer is more than clear: It is Europe, our common home.

Instead of becoming a leader of change in a global world, Europe has turned into an arena of political upheaval, of competition for spheres of influence and, finally, of military conflict. The consequence, inevitably, is Europe's weakening at a time when other centers of power and influence are gaining momentum. If this continues, Europe will lose a strong voice in world affairs and gradually become irrelevant.

Here in Berlin, during the anniversary of the fall of the wall, I have to note that all this has also had a negative effect on relations between Russia and Germany. Continuation of the current course could cause lasting damage to our relations, which have until now

been exemplary. Let us remember that without Russian-German partnership there can be no security in Europe.

III

So how do we begin to get out of this situation?

The experience of the 1980s testifies that, even in apparently hopeless situations, there has to be a way out. The situation in the world was then no less urgent and dangerous than now. Yet, we succeeded in reversing it – not just normalizing relations but putting an end to confrontation and the cold war. Political leaders of that period can rightly take credit for that.

This was achieved primarily through the resumption of dialogue.

Negative tendencies can and must be stopped and reversed. The key to it is political will and the correct setting of priorities.

Today, the foremost priority should be renewal of dialogue, regaining the ability to interact and to listen to and hear each other.

First signs of a renewed dialogue have now emerged. The first, albeit modest and fragile results have been achieved. I am referring to the Minsk agreements on cease-fire and military disengagement in Ukraine, trilateral gas agreements between Russia, Ukraine and the European Union, and the suspension of the escalation of mutual sanctions.

In this context I want to urge you to consider carefully Vladimir Putin's recent remarks at the Valdai Forum. (2) Despite the harshness of his criticism of the West and of the United States in particular, I see in his speech a desire to find a way to lower tensions and ultimately to build a new basis for partnership.

We must – and the sooner we do it the better – move from polemics and mutual accusations to a search for points of convergence and a gradual lifting of sanctions, which are damaging to both sides. As a first step, the so-called personal sanctions that affect political figures and parliamentarians should be lifted so that they could join the process of seeking mutually acceptable solutions.

One of the areas for interaction could be helping Ukraine to overcome the consequences of fratricidal war and rebuild the affected regions.

IV

It will not be easy to achieve those short-term goals. But, at the same time, we need to pursue vigorous efforts in all the other areas of our common agenda. I would single out two areas where dialogue is vitally important and where much damage has been done to it. It is, first, cooperation in addressing global challenges and, secondly, pan-European security.

The global problems – terrorism and extremism, including of sectarian nature; poverty and inequality; the environment, the problem of resources and waves of migration; epidemics – are getting worse by the day.

And, different as they are, one thing is common to all of them: none of them has a military solution. Yet, political mechanisms to solve them are lacking or dysfunctional, lagging behind the pace of their deterioration.

The lessons of the continuing global crisis should persuade us that we need to seek a new model that would assure political, economic and environmental sustainability. This is a problem that must be addressed now, without delay.

Let me now speak about European security. I think we have seen once again that it must be pan-European. Attempts to solve the problem of security in Europe by enlarging NATO or through an EU defense policy cannot bring positive results. Indeed, they are counterproductive.

We must, therefore, go back to the drawing board and work on plans to build a system of European security that would provide assurance and guarantees to all its participants. We need institutions and mechanisms that would function in the interests of all. It has to be recognized that the OSCE, an organization to which a lot of hope was attached, has not been up to the task. Does that mean that it should be torn down in order to build in its place something new and yet unseen? I don't think so, the more so since OSCE has now assumed important control functions in Ukraine. But it is, I would say, a building that requires major repairs and some new construction.

Years ago, Hans Dietrich Genscher, Brent Scowcroft and other policy-makers proposed creating a Security Council, or Directorate, for Europe. I shared their approach. Along the same lines, Dmitry Medvedev during his presidency proposed an initiative that called for creating a mechanism of European preventive diplomacy and mandatory consultations in case of a threat to anyone's security. Had such a mechanism been created, the worst scenarios of Ukrainian events could have been averted.

Why have these and other European ideas been filed away in the archives? The leaders are, of course, to blame for it – but also all of us. I am referring to the European political class, civil society institutions, and the media.

We need to consider a non-governmental initiative to resume building a common European home. I suggest that we think about the form such an initiative could take. I hope that during our discussion ways towards it could be evaluated and specific proposals made.

V

I am by nature not pessimistic, and I have always described myself as an optimist. But I have to admit that it's very difficult to be optimistic in the current situation. Nevertheless, we must not submit to panic and despair or resign to negative inertia. This could draw us

into a vortex without a way out. The bitter experience of the past few months must be transformed into the will to reengage in dialogue and cooperation.

This is my appeal to our leaders, and to all of us. Let us think, propose and act together.

Notes

(1) Source: http://www.gorby.ru/userfiles/file/gorbachev_forum_eng.pdf

(2) Vladimir Putin: Remarks at the Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, Sochi - October 24, 2014 - URL: <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/23137>

(Vladimir Putin took part in the final plenary meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club's XI session. The meeting's theme was „The World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules“.)