

Interview with Edward Shevardnadze on the Soviet Union's foreign policy (26 June 1990)

Caption: On 26 June 1990, in an article for the Moscow Communist daily newspaper Pravda, Edward Shevardnadze, Soviet Foreign Minister, outlines the new trends in the Soviet Union's foreign policy.

Source: Pravda. 26.06.1990, n° 177. Moskva. "Interview c Eduardom Scheverdnadze (26 iunia 1990)".

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Speech to the 28th Congress

Foreign policy

I have been asked by the newspaper *Pravda* to answer the following questions:

- 1. The readers of *Pravda* are becoming increasingly concerned about the concessions made to the West. What is your view?**
- 2. What lessons can be learned from the revolutionary events that changed the face of Eastern Europe?**
- 3. The readers of *Pravda* would like to know what will become of the Warsaw Pact. How will its activities adapt to the new environment?**
- 4. Do such events as the reunification of Germany and its planned accession to NATO not raise doubts as to the successful creation of a common European home? How do you think the changes in Europe will affect the Helsinki Process, including the inviolability of the postwar borders?**
- 5. Do we overstate the importance of Soviet–American relations whilst understating relations with the Third World? How can we reconcile global and regional issues?**
- 6. Do you think that we have been successful in removing ideology from international relations?**
- 7. Our media sometimes criticises the embassies for spending hard currency when we have so little of it. Do you agree with this?**
- 8. Which changes made at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since your appointment do you consider to be decisive?**
- 9. Do you have any plans to write your memoirs?**

As you can see, the questions are quite varied. I would say that most of them deal with major issues of policy, its basis and philosophy, while others are of a personal nature. So it would be more logical and justified to give a more comprehensive answer to what most interests the reader, namely, is our foreign policy the right one? This answer is not aimed at avoiding the ‘awkward’ questions; I will also address those, but rather in terms of policy considerations.

I would like to begin with some general comments.

In principle, a country’s foreign policy is, as a rule, more consistent, more faithful to its aims and guiding principles than any other area of policy. But it always does more than simply give a modified, more up-to-date interpretation of its mission; it is also enriched by new ideas and views on a grand scale and it is constantly acquiring new tools to do its job. Policy is judged by how much it seeks progress, whether it is open to new social trends, whether it is realistic and meets the state’s needs and those of the country as a whole.

At the same time, foreign policy is rather an ‘inert’ system. It cannot easily be changed. This is not only because it involves dozens of departments and organisations, thousands of politicians, Members of Parliament, diplomats and experts. But the position of other countries is also an essential factor. New ideas can be put forward, new ways of thinking can be formulated, but these remain empty words if the international community does not respond to them and support them. No country, even the largest and most powerful, can do everything on its own. And no country will be permitted to act as it pleases in the international arena.

Foreign policy is viable only when it is based on the rule of law, on conviction, on compatible interests and

goals, cooperation and interaction. Policy based on force, either as an element of diplomacy or on its own, always leads countries into political bankruptcy or disaster. Great empires have perished while countries without armed forces are flourishing.

Foreign policy cannot give what it does not have. Back in 1917, many people complained about the foreign services of the United Kingdom, France and the United States for allowing the Russian Revolution to happen. And who can forget the witch-hunt in the USA in 1949 against ‘those who lost China’? That was when Joseph McCarthy began his amazing career and America entered the dark ages of McCarthyism. McCarthy named those in the State Department who had weakened the USA in its fight against global communism. And strange as it may seem, similar accusations have recently been made in our own country. It seems that there are those who would like to use torture to find out ‘who lost Eastern Europe’.

It is painful and sad for me that there are people who claim that the Soviet Army did not liberate some of the countries of Europe, but instead seized them as the spoils of war. They make jingoistic declarations which offend the dignity of sovereign states.

I consider it my moral duty to apologise before the people of the countries in Eastern Europe for the offensive and unacceptable accusations of my fellow compatriots.

We must accept it as given that there are many problems that cannot be solved by diplomacy, just as they cannot be solved by force. As with domestic policy, foreign policy cannot defend an indefensible cause, a cause which contradicts the universal concepts of equality, freedom and democracy, and which goes against the natural course of history.

A policy based on ideology and permeated with ideology can survive popular power only when it is founded on the principles of good, justice, humanism and spirituality. Nothing good ever came from the ideology of sectarianism and intolerance. Society follows neither the ascetic hermit nor the holy fool, even if they tell the truth about the state of that society. When we talk about removing ideology from international relations, we mean that we need to remove corrupted ideology and ideological extremism.

I made this digression in order to say how the limits of the possible, the realistic and the reasonable in terms of foreign policy are to be seen in the context of the new political thinking.

In our country the pendulum of public opinion, or a certain part of it at least, swings between two poles: everything was either good or bad. I do not intend to discuss this point. I wish only to say that one must be equally responsible when assessing the past as when choosing a path for the future.

‘Does the Warsaw Pact have a future?’ That is what I’m being asked. Let us look back at history. The Warsaw Pact didn’t always exist. It came into being in 1955. I remind you that NATO was created in 1949. That means that there was a time when there was no NATO, no Warsaw Pact. And as with any agreement, the Warsaw Pact is not indefinite; it was concluded for a fixed period of time. It came into being in specific historical conditions and functioned during the long years of the Cold War in an atmosphere of fierce military and ideological conflict. Unfortunately, our organisation was not well disposed to change, did not always move with the times, was never modernised or improved in terms of its military and political structures. Of course, all that has repercussions today, in this totally different environment.

Nevertheless, the Warsaw Pact existed and will continue to exist while it still meets the real needs of its Member States. At the recent meeting of the Political Consultation Committee in Moscow, a declaration was adopted which set out the coordinated plans for far-reaching transformation of our union, its doctrines, strategies, objectives and how it organises its activities. A committee was created to draw up recommendations.

The same lesson might be drawn from the Warsaw Pact and from the ‘revolutionary events that changed the face of Eastern Europe’, that for a system to be stable and viable it must be based on the free will of the people and states.

How can we respond to those who ask how we could have permitted the changes in Eastern Europe to happen and why we agreed to withdraw our troops? Reading between the lines, what they are really asking is why we did not use our tanks to 'restore order'.

It cannot seriously be suggested that we could have done that, that we could have solved the problem in that way. Have we not learned anything from the lessons in Afghanistan? Have we forgotten 1956 and 1968? Perhaps we have seen enough dead and wounded internationalists.

But we see again and again statements and publications in which our Eastern European policy is implicitly criticised. Clearly our foreign policy is not quite right; something is badly wrong. But if one is to criticise oneself seriously, one should not dwell upon such questions as 'Why did we not stop?' We must see it through until the end. However, without speaking of the moral and legal aspects, it very often adversely affects relations with other countries, leading to conflict and even to war. As I see it, those who advocate the use of force should not be addressing the state bodies; instead they should be talking to the guys who will be in harm's way and their mothers, people who will be dragged into any war.

They should learn that socialism, friendly relations and good-neighbourliness and respect cannot be based on bayonets, tanks and blood. Relations with any country must be built on the basis of mutual interests, on mutual benefits, on the principle of freedom of choice. This is how we run our affairs and it has led to huge improvements being made in the world. Of course there have been problems, but slowing down the process of change could have led to tragedy.

There are those who are trying to insinuate that the decision to withdraw troops from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Mongolia and the GDR was taken behind the backs of the military. This is not true. Our military comrades were the main players in all the negotiations. All the issues were examined, and decisions taken, in a collective way.

That the social repercussions of this downsizing were badly prepared is a separate issue. We forgot that soldiers were men with needs, with families, with children. This was a grave error which must urgently be rectified.

I believe we have been asked about the pan-European process.

The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was signed in 1975. Soon after I became a Minister it was my duty to participate in the events to mark the 10th anniversary of its adoption.

It was already clear by then that the Helsinki Process was in trouble. It became clear that the process had to be centred on the idea of easing and finally bringing an end to the split in Europe, of reducing military confrontation and establishing cooperation between the 35 states in security and other fields. From this came the proposal to build a common European home. This idea was put forward by Gorbachev during his first visit to Paris in the autumn of 1985. I might even say that this was a significant political idea which was ahead of its time. It was based on the changes forecast in Europe, on an understanding that European security should be built collectively.

The Final Act enshrined the principle of the inviolability of national borders in Europe. It is precisely because of this that the question of the borders of the future reunified Germany does not pose any particular problem to any of the four great powers, to Poland, Germany or any other nation.

The prospect of a reunified Germany stirred up memories and alarmed many people, not just in our country. But let's try to look at this issue in another way. How much longer can Germany remain divided? Years? Decades? Forever? For how long can our soldiers guard the Elbe? Years? Decades? Forever?

Even if one leaves aside the moral factors, what is the bigger risk? Keeping a great nation divided when it will inevitably seek reunification, or having it reunify as part of an overall European settlement? I believe

that only the second option will lead to peace and stability. The issue therefore is the quality and reliability of the international settlement to be reached while building German unity. It is not a question simply of merging two states into one, but rather of ensuring that Germany never again becomes a threat to peace and that the legitimate interests of the other European countries are taken into account.

There is already anxiety about how to plan for the inclusion of Germany into NATO. This has to be clarified. Firstly, the Federal Republic of Germany has long been a member of NATO. Therefore it is a question only of enhancing NATO's power through the accession of the German Democratic Republic, when and if the GDR becomes an integral part of a reunified Germany. I am far from suggesting that we should not worry about the possible expansion of NATO. We are far from being indifferent about what will be the new military and political status of Germany. But this issue will most likely be seen differently depending on the changes that take place in Europe. These changes — and on this there is wide international consensus — will take the following form.

— German reunification should be accompanied by a general and significant reduction in troop levels and arms in Europe to a level sufficient for defence, including a reduction in Germany's military arsenal.

— At the same time the Helsinki Process will be institutionalised. We see this as including regular summit meetings and meetings between foreign ministers, political consultations at ambassadorial level; a CSCE Secretariat should be created, as should a centre for the exchange of information on military activities and a centre for conflict resolution.

— It is not only necessary to transform the blocs into predominantly political alliances; it is also necessary to agree on certain principles for relations between these alliances and their member states. The best option would be to adopt a politically binding declaration of intention with regard to mutual relations.

Much depends on the decisions that are taken at the July session of the NATO Council in London. It would be no exaggeration to say that the choices made there will have far-reaching consequences for both Germany and Europe.

Of course, reviewing the political architecture, doctrines and strategies will require time; it will not happen overnight. Therefore it will be necessary at the outset to determine a transitional period during which no significant military or strategic changes should be made in the GDR, and in particular Soviet troops should remain.

I am referring to key aspects of a future settlement of the external dimension of German reunification. It will, of course, include many other elements. I am convinced that the framework of the '2 + 4' mechanism will allow agreements to be reached whereby the legitimate interests of all parties are represented. I would just like to ask that the reader not regard the situation as one-dimensional or static. Reunified Germany will exist within a framework which fundamentally differs from the past or present, including in strategic and military terms.

We are convinced that there will be close political and economic ties between a reunified Germany and the USSR, and that we will be able to cooperate and work together in the interests of the future of Europe and peace.

We talk a lot about stability in Europe and in the world. I think that we all understand that much of this relates to our 'domestic' affairs, to the state of our economy, to a healthy political and moral climate in our country, to the success of our programme of perestroika. A strong and stable Soviet Union is vital for the European and global balance, guaranteeing peace for all.

Quite frankly, I am always astonished at the complaints that Soviet diplomacy allegedly 'overestimates the importance of Soviet-US relations and underestimates relations with other countries'.

Relations with the USA have been and will always be crucial for us. It could not be any other way. Only the

USA has the means to destroy the USSR, and only we have the means to respond in kind. A conflict between us would result in a global catastrophe. How could one not give priority to Soviet–American relations?

It is not on a whim, but from a sense of responsibility that we are involved in a series of negotiations with our American partners, that we are drafting and concluding agreements and treaties, that we are building a truly new relationship with this great power. Ongoing dialogue, summit meetings and cooperation at ministerial level are preconditions for the survival of peace and for buttressing international stability. This is in the interest of all countries, large or small, developed or developing.

I cannot accept the claims that Soviet diplomacy has forgotten the Third World. In recent years we have increased both the quality and the scope of our relations with developing countries. We have established or increased our level of diplomatic relations with dozens of countries. Many Third World leaders have visited Moscow since the beginning of perestroika. We have visited dozens of countries which had never previously had a high-ranking Soviet representative visit.

Nevertheless, we are still not satisfied with our relations with developing countries. Not so much on a political level as on the level of economics, culture, technology and other areas. We are significantly limited by the state of the Soviet economy and the structures of foreign economic relations.

The Third World has its own regional conflicts and global problems to deal with, such as ecology, development strategy, debt, the proliferation of modern technologies for peaceful ends and preventing the proliferation of technologies used in the manufacture of nuclear and chemical weapons, missiles and other weapons. Everything here is interrelated and can be solved only if we do not divide the world into categories but treat it in a holistic way.

I am glad to have been asked whether we are not granting too many ‘concessions to the West’. I am pleased because I have long wanted to respond to such claims. I recognise that the readers ask this out of the best of intentions. But I would also like to respond to those who are directly responsible for the security of the country, who approve our position during negotiations but then turn around and criticise it in the media, claiming that Soviet foreign policy is ‘incomprehensibly soft’. I would like to respond to some newspapers such as the *Rabochaia Tribuna* (the Workers’ Tribune), which printed an article with the headline: ‘There’s no such thing as a free lunch.’

We have always been of the view that arms limitation talks are absolutely vital for the security of the country and for the world. I will be forthright in saying that limits are necessary not only for us but also for our partners as they have more powerful economies, better technology, healthier finances and a better standard of living and so are better able to keep up in the ‘open’ arms race. For me it is an axiom. I would not be here if the saying that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’ were not true.

Swapping three SS-20 missiles for one Pershing-2 makes sense and, I would claim, is cheap. The Pershing could undoubtedly reach our General Headquarters, whereas the SS-20 could not reach their Pentagon. Are the ‘experts’, who continue to compare the quantitative aspects of the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles, not aware of this?

Sometimes such claims are based on ignorance. At the recent Communist Party Congress of the RSFSR, one comrade claimed that in a speech in Copenhagen I had announced the withdrawal of Soviet tactical missiles from Central Europe. I am not upset with him, as he was not to know that my remarks referred to a document signed by the Minister for Defence and the Chief of the General Staff. This position was worked out for the Soviet–American summit meeting.

I would like to explain how disarmament talks work. The delegations to these talks are drawn from the relevant departments on the basis of parity. Generals, colonels and other officers take part in the negotiations, along with representatives from the defence industry. To let you into a secret, it was in the General Staff that our positions were agreed and guidelines worked out. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

which has only one voice within this group, has no way of ‘imposing’ its opinion. The recommendations worked out by this group are presented to the political leadership and, if necessary, a report is made to the President. I would like to stress, therefore, that all decisions are carefully worked out and that positions are reached on the basis of consensus.

It would seem that we have entered the era of openness and so diplomats are openly criticised for ‘making concessions’ (though we are not told which ones) and for supposedly putting the country’s ‘security’ at risk. Has the time not come to talk about security more openly? The Soviet taxpayers have the right to know what kind of ‘security’ they are paying for. In order to make a qualified assessment of the ‘concessions’, the people have to know the comparative characteristics of the various systems and their reliability, to have information on the military programmes and their cost.

One can only welcome the fact that the defence industry has started to help the nation to survive, to improve the economy and to produce consumer goods. But we need also to discuss the problems. Why, for example, do those who have allegedly strengthened the country’s security remain silent, those who put into production chemical weapons and continue to produce them when nobody else in the world is doing so? Either we develop the technology and spend at least three billion roubles to destroy these weapons, or the toxic substances will transform entire regions into a wasteland.

Some comrades, it seems, still refuse to believe that state policy is indeed based on the mutual elimination of nuclear and chemical weapons, the reduction of armed forces and armaments, and is being guided by the principles of what is really needed and non-offensive defence.

When people are informed they will tell the diplomats and the military about where we need to stand firm and where we can make concessions. I should be glad if the readers of the *Rabochaia Tribuna* said how much cheese they think we could have bought with all the money that was spent on creating unnecessary and outdated military technology.

I would like to stress once again that foreign policy decisions are not taken by one person, who might have a tendency to grant concessions, but are worked out by representatives from many entities. On the whole I think that it is quite normal that we argue. That can only be a good thing for the country and its defence.

Now permit me to respond to some personal questions.

We have made an effort to make the diplomatic service more professional, competent, proactive, transparent and democratic, so that it meets the requirements of perestroika and helps it to progress. There has been some success, but there is still work to be done. I cannot say that I am satisfied with what we have achieved.

And as for my memoirs, I have no such plans. To be honest, I have not had the time even to think about it, although of course there is much I could write about. I became a minister at a very interesting time; without exaggeration, at a turning point in global politics. I was witness to, and very often a player in, major events.

Most of all, I am pleased that we were able to sign the Geneva Accords and bring our boys home from the war in Afghanistan without harming the country’s dignity and prestige, preserving Afghanistan as a friend and good neighbour.