

THE SPECIAL THIRD CONGRESS
OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES OF THE USSR

**Speech by
USSR
President
Mikhail
GORBACHEV**

Moscow
Kremlin
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РЕЧЬ ПРЕЗИДЕНТА СССР МИХАИЛА ГОРБАЧЕВА
НА ВНЕОЧЕРЕДНОМ ТРЕТЬЕМ СЪЕЗДЕ НАРОДНЫХ
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Esteemed comrades,

I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the trust you have placed in me by electing me the Soviet Union's first President.

I am aware that I am taking on these duties at a difficult time for the nation. I agreed to run for President because I am convinced that there is a future for our fatherland and also because perestroika has become the meaning of my entire life.

I understand that special demands will be made on me now. I realised this acutely once again while I was listening to deputies discussing my candidacy. And I do not want to evade my duty to the people.

Perestroika, I believe, is the only possible way for a country such as ours to undergo a peaceful transition to a fundamentally different type of society, from an authoritarian bureaucratic system to a humane and democratic socialist society.

It is only natural that as President I am expected to present my view of the ground we've covered and my programme of action for the future.

The principal achievement of perestroika is democracy and glasnost, and this is the decisive factor in the whole course of further reform.

Despite the present complex situation and the host of difficulties and problems in the socio-economic sphere, it can be said that even in that sphere there are signs of a strategic change in direction towards popular interests.

We can all sense the first real results of political

change. A system of genuine popular government is being created and the groundwork is being laid for building a law-governed state. A hard, yet vital transition from a unitarian state to a fully-fledged federation has been started.

Having launched perestroika in this country on the basis of new thinking, we have also come up with a new foreign policy. It has altered the perception of the Soviet Union's role in the present-day world. Most importantly, this was done, one could say, right at the last moment, when the world was on the brink of global catastrophe.

That perilous train of events has been halted and international relations have begun to be put on the right track.

In short, comrades, the change being carried out is of historic significance. It is important that each one of us realise this, otherwise it would be difficult for us to understand correctly the many, sometimes painful, problems which accompany perestroika.

With changes coming thick and fast and our personnel and public opinion being, to be quite frank, unprepared for them, we have not of course had enough time to do everything properly.

The adverse coincidence of the Chernobyl accident, the Armenian earthquake and other natural calamities, and the dramatic worsening, for us, of the situation on the world market have all had a negative effect.

Blunders in our investment policy and in the anti-alcohol campaign have caused a lot of damage. Criminal negligence and activities which have stirred up ethnic strife, an even graver offence, have cost us a great deal, including in human life.

We have been hampered by inertia, ingrained dogmatic views, the habit of being passive, sitting idle and only doing what the boss tells us to. All these handicaps are still making themselves felt. I would even say that despite all the economic and social difficulties and other thorny problems, inflexible thinking remains the biggest stumbling block to change.

I cannot sidestep the issue of the various destructive anti-perestroika forces which are impeding reform.

Their actions create further difficulties and require cohesion and firmness on the part of all those seeking to renew our society.

I understand how dramatic the situation is, how complicated and unusual the problems are, and how emotionally charged society is, but I do not see any grounds for panic, let alone for a change of policy.

On the contrary, perestroika must obviously be radicalised. And I shall use my presidential powers above all to this end. Let me stress that I shall use them to promote reforms and make decisive progress on a democratic basis.

I believe it is essential to say this because both before the Congress and also here, at the Congress, some people have expressed fears about the President being able to usurp power. There is no reason for such fears. This is guaranteed by the Constitution, which is now guarded by the powerful, elected agencies of supreme state authority with authentic rights—the Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet.

It is further guaranteed by carefully designed checks and balances, which rule out the possibility of power being snatched by one person.

It also is guaranteed by glasnost and political pluralism, which have become a reality in this country.

A top priority, in my view, is to carry out a series of measures to defuse social and economic tension.

A lot of talk is heard about "indecision", "foot-dragging" and "delays" in taking required measures, and so on. There is a grain of truth in this. I would like to say, at the same time, that what we have lived through is an essential preparatory stage.

Without trying out cost-accounting and such arrangements as leaseholding and the contract system which we are not used to, and without reviving the cooperative movement, streamlining administrative structures and taking many other steps, we would not have developed our current understanding of existing problems and optimum ways of resolving them through economic reform.

And it would certainly have been impossible to draft

the fundamental bills which have either been enacted or are about to be passed by the Supreme Soviet.

Society had to go through all this. We were simply unprepared for sweeping changes, and even now we are still not quite ready for them. In a word, the preparatory phase was a truly indispensable one.

Of course, a thorough-going economic restructuring process also proved unmanageable without first dismantling the authoritarian-bureaucratic system as a whole. In addition, we lacked the legal prerequisites for effecting truly radical economic reform.

But now we do have them and it is possible, at long last, to get over the situation where the old and new forms of economic management—those based on a command style and on economic incentive—coexist antagonistically and weaken each other. This situation impairs the efficiency of both, worsens the instability of the consumer market, money circulation and finances even further, and hinders economic growth in terms of speed and quality.

The need to speed up the economic reform is also called for by the worrying situation as regards the fulfilment of the government's economic recovery programme.

Nothing less than a breakthrough is needed. Otherwise, adverse trends will grow even faster than before. I think we need to make some decisive moves to radicalise the economic reform.

First of all, it is imperative to bring out the immense constructive potential that is inherent in the laws on ownership, land and leaseholding, and in other legislative acts in the same package, which are now close to being adopted. I see their enforcement as a primary task of the President.

The laws cannot work all by themselves, and grass-roots initiative and enterprise will die out unless we create the right economic environment. We must apply ourselves to creating a viable domestic market.

This is the most difficult economic, political and psychological problem. It cannot be solved at one fell

swoop, so we should start dealing with it consistently right away and get rid of any fears and complexes we might have.

Price, supply and marketing reforms, changes in the way state orders are placed, and steps to create first commodity and then stock exchanges will become necessary in this respect. A changeover to a tax in kind on basic types of farm produce and raw materials, combined with the free trade of surplus agricultural products, will be a major step here.

Laws and decisions to demonopolise the economy should be adopted without delay.

Once it has a viable market, the state should have a reliable system of leverage to influence economic processes. This includes, in the first place, a rational system of tax on profits for enterprises and an income tax system for the general population, financial controls, the regulation by the state bank of money turnover as a single whole, and a vigorous policy as regards credits, including lending rates which correspond to actual economic conditions.

Most importantly, we need to cut government spending by a considerable margin in the near future in order to eliminate the state budget deficit and arrest inflation.

Simultaneously, we need to work out dependable social guarantees for the entire population, especially for those in the low-income bracket, and various social security measures, including a special system of subsidies to make up for rising prices.

The agrarian deputies and the country people they represent should know that I, as President, see everything related to the life of Soviet farmers and food supply as a priority.

The brunt of the responsibility for the practical implementation of all these measures will, of course, be on the government. But presidential decrees will be required on key issues to formulate tasks clearly, set deadlines, and name those responsible for meeting them.

Let us be totally candid: the carrying out of these far-reaching measures will impose new conditions on

society and may initially be accompanied by painful problems and affect some interests adversely. This is why we must reach mutual understanding and accord in society on all crucial issues.

Comrades,

The fate of perestroika will largely be determined by how we manage to reshape our federation. In my new capacity as President, I would like to reaffirm my commitment to maintaining the country's integrity.

At the same time I am proceeding from the premise that the adoption of measures to strengthen both the sovereignty of the Union republics and their economic and political independence, and to give the autonomous republics and other ethnic-territorial entities a higher status should become a special concern of the presidency.

Since I share some of the opinions expressed here on these issues, I believe it is necessary to work out without delay a new Union agreement which would face up to the realities and meet the requirements of the development of our federation and of each ethnic group. Here, it is necessary to envisage a differentiation of federative links to take into account the specific conditions and potentials of each of the republics.

In order to reaffirm the republics' sovereignty and their right to self-determination, including secession, as is laid down in the Constitution, the Supreme Soviet must consider and define a legal mechanism for secession from the Union as soon as possible.

Together with the Federation Council, the President will handle all these issues in cooperation with the Supreme Soviet.

Emergency measures are required to resolve painful problems that have emerged on the basis of inter-ethnic strife, above all the refugee problem. The governments of the respective Union republics and, if required, the Union Government should take decisions on this issue.

In fact, today we have the right to formulate the issue in this way. The Union republics, while strengthening their sovereignty and acquiring extensive autonomy, should also take on full responsibility for securing

the civil rights of people of all ethnic backgrounds living on their territories in keeping with our—that is Soviet—and international standards. This responsibility should be political, legal and material.

Recently a threat of nationalist, chauvinistic and even racist slogans being disseminated has emerged. One should counter this ruthlessly by applying the full force of the Constitution and the laws of the country.

In terms of other issues of political reform, the President, as I see it, faces the top-priority task of facilitating the earliest possible establishment of a renewed structure for the Soviets, making them fully-fledged organs of public self-government.

The new republican and local Soviets have acquired the necessary rights and opportunities, thanks to the laws on land and ownership. A law on local self-government and local economic management is to be adopted soon.

We are putting an end to the Party's patronage of the Soviets and to the Party's direct interference in the solution of specific state and economic issues.

Under these conditions, it is especially important that the Soviets get to grips with their new role as soon as possible and start working at full capacity. Otherwise, a dangerous power vacuum could form.

I believe it is necessary to emphasise the following: a mechanism is emerging, as a result of the establishment of a new system of Soviets, on which the President of the country will be able to rely in performing his functions.

How do I envisage the role of President within the system of organs of state power and management?

His most important role is that of a guarantor of the irreversibility of perestroika who will work firmly and consistently for the formation of a law-based statehood and a self-governing socialist society.

The division of power suggests a clear differentiation of functions but does not in any way rule out the possibility or even the necessity of their close interaction. I regard this as one of the main tasks of the Soviet head of state and his Presidential Council. This body is being designed as a collective of major political figures

and experts on key areas of state and public development who will work out recommendations on basic issues of domestic and foreign policy and come up, if need be, with prompt solutions.

I will also stress that, as I see it, the President ought to feel like and act as a representative not of a separate social group or political trend, but as an accredited representative of the entire people.

This, naturally, does not mean that he should abandon his own political convictions but implies his readiness to take into account the entire range of views and legitimate interests existing in society in the most objective and impartial way. He should act in accordance with the oath, placing above everything else the good of the country and the people.

In this connection I would like to clarify the issue that became here, at the Congress, a subject of lively and, at times, heated debate. I am referring to the combination of the posts of President and General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. I share the view of those deputies who believe that this combination—both now and in the immediate future—is dictated by the interests of perestroika.

The current Congress of People's Deputies began a new stage in the development of democracy in our society by amending Articles Six and Seven of the Constitution of the USSR. From now on the CPSU will work on an equal footing with other political organisations and participate in elections, working by democratic means for the right to form Union and republican governments and local bodies of power.

One of the most important functions of the presidential system with its specially created bodies is, in my view, to consolidate political trends and public movements. I am convinced that the democratic character of presidential rule presupposes dialogue and cooperation with representatives of various trends of public thought and their participation in the elaboration of presidential initiatives and projects.

Naturally, this applies primarily to People's Deputies of the USSR. In my opinion, the Presidential Council should include special officers to liaise with the Con-

gress, the Supreme Soviet, public organisations and associations, creative unions, scientific and cultural establishments and mass media bodies, which play an immense and important role.

Finally, the President should be a guarantor of the stability of public order and the security of citizens and the state. We all now feel the need to overcome the weak and amorphous nature of our administrative and executive power. As a matter of fact, this has been one of the main reasons for introducing the presidency right now.

There is growing anxiety in society connected with the threat of destabilisation. I am referring to certain attempts to achieve objectives by resorting to violence, fomenting intolerance and ethnic strife, and by putting pressure on state and public institutions through all kinds of peremptory demands.

Some groups and individuals obviously hope to foist their views on us by provoking fears of a civil war, a coup d'état, national disaster and so forth. But society as a whole does not accept such attempts to influence state policy and rejects these methods, for they are completely at odds with the objectives of perestroika and threaten our young, fledgling democracy. These practices must be resolutely rebuffed.

Another presidential mission is to vigorously combat crime, including violations against people's lives, property, dignity and security, and also illicit profiteering and shady dealings in the "shadow economy", which have assumed intolerable proportions. With this aim, it is essential to establish strict control over compliance with the relevant laws, to issue the necessary decrees and, of course, to strengthen law-enforcement bodies. I think it is necessary to accelerate the reform of the courts, investigation apparatus and procurator's office public prosecutors, in order to bring their status, rights and responsibilities into line with the tasks facing them.

While saying this, I do not relieve state and economic agencies, nor all our cadres, of their responsibility for eliminating the causes that give rise to crime. In many cases, crime is rooted in mismanagement, wastefulness, disregard for public property, lack of proper in-

ventory accounting, and disruptions of public order.

Using the new possibilities of Soviets and encouraging the active involvement of the public and the press will be of tremendous significance in achieving the desired order.

No system of power can replace morality, which is necessary in any human society. In the past, the inner development of an individual was denigrated as idealism in this country. But now we have to pay a dear price for this. We need a different, conscientious attitude towards work, science, education and the arts, towards culture in the broadest sense of the word. We need to create conditions whereby all spiritual values will be appreciated in society as a vital necessity for its full-blooded life and progress.

Basing ourselves on the rich culture created by our peoples during their long history—including the Soviet period—and on the values of world civilisation, we must ennoble the entire atmosphere of relations among people in our society and unite all those wishing the Motherland well.

It seems we have not yet become fully aware of this. The public here is torn apart by disputes between various groups: every now and then they escalate into a scandalous settling of accounts, especially among intellectuals, from whom we expect a great deal at this critical stage in the nation's history.

Some people question the very possibility and expediency of social cohesion. I disagree with them. At times of trial, the people always gather strength in order to hold out and prevail. Those whom the people look to for spiritual guidance are duty-bound to facilitate this unity in every way.

Of course cohesion is needed today around perestroika and its ideas, so as to overcome everything that stands in its way.

Let me now turn to our foreign policy. Over the past few years, it has stood the test as a policy of realism and common sense, making it possible to put an end to the Cold War and remove the direct threat of hostilities. The Soviet Union has taken a place in the world community that is worthy of its peaceful nature. And I

resolutely reject attacks on our foreign policy from dilettantes and irresponsible people.

In passing a resolution on foreign policy, the First Congress of People's Deputies became its guarantor on behalf of the Soviet people. All presidential actions should be strictly in line with the letter and spirit of that resolution.

The presidency has been introduced in the Soviet Union at a crucial stage in world development, when the structure of the post-war military-political equilibrium is undergoing radical change.

The Cold War has been done away with, but military confrontation has not yet been overcome. Therefore, while giving indisputable priority to political ways of ensuring security, the President must also guide the national defence policy along the principles of reasonable sufficiency, on the basis of the new military doctrine, and show concern for the Soviet Armed Forces. No other approach is acceptable. As President, I would like to assure you that this is how I shall act.

We need a profound military reform. We need to tackle a package of complex issues in this field, and this will be among the principal concerns of the President and the Presidential Council, acting, of course, in cooperation with the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to reiterate my commitment to the principle endorsed by the Congress of People's Deputies, whereby the use of the Armed Forces outside the country without the sanction of the Supreme Soviet or the Congress is ruled out categorically, once and for all. The only exception will be in the case of a surprise armed attack from outside.

What are the most immediate goals in our foreign policy? One of the main foreign policy objectives for the near future is the energetic advancement of the negotiating process on all major types of weapons in order to achieve tangible results, preferably this year.

Major decisions that will improve Soviet-American relations and allow our two countries to contribute to positive tendencies in world politics are being prepared for the Washington summit with President Bush.

Historic changes have taken place in all of our six Eastern European allied countries. Basing our relations with them on the principles of full equality and freedom of choice, and getting rid of anything that is inconsistent with the new thinking, we must preserve all that is valuable, all that is genuinely progressive and all that has been accumulated over decades of close contact.

The German question, now at the forefront of European politics, is particularly important. I have presented our view on this issue several times over the past few days. It is well known both to our people and to all interested parties. We believe that the Germans' implementation of their natural right to unity should completely rule out any threat of a war from German territory.

Everything else stems from this precondition: the rights of the four powers, the inviolability of borders, the connection with the European process, the inadmissibility of Germany's membership in NATO and the need for a peace treaty on the outcome of the Second World War.

The rapid pace of world developments lends new significance to the all-European summit, which will include the United States and Canada, to be held this autumn.

The time has come to think about replacing military blocs with a system of collective security and cooperation bodies, taking into account the emergence of a united Germany in the centre of Europe. We should orientate ourselves towards Helsinki-2, which could become a watershed between the two epochs in international relations.

We have signed joint statements and dozens of agreements in various spheres of cooperation with several major powers. Their strict observance on both sides is a major factor of stability, security and progress, and of real movement towards the "Common European Home" which we have committed ourselves to. It will be the task of the President to monitor the implementation of the principled and practical meaning of these documents.

The new thinking does not mean that our interest in

developing countries is diminishing. Our solidarity with those who are struggling for equal rights, social progress, democracy and decent living conditions remains firm.

In the Asia-Pacific region, we will continue to implement initiatives put forward in Vladivostok and Krasnoyarsk.

We have a lasting relationship with the great country of India. Our cooperation with the People's Republic of China is expanding.

The building of peaceful communities in Europe and Asia, in my opinion, should finally result in establishing a united system of security for the entire Euro-Asian continent.

The situation in the Middle East needs to be tackled, and we should resume our active policy in this globally important region.

Latin America occupies an increasingly important place in Soviet foreign policy, enabling us to collaborate in the promotion of positive international developments in this region.

The Soviet President should promote the USSR's involvement in world economics and international environmental protection.

Given the world's increasing interdependence, I would like to stress once more the importance of the role of the United Nations. I am convinced that the revival of its role and peace-making functions is a major step towards peace in human history.

Summing up what has been said, I would like to say that we all live in one home—sons and daughters of more than a hundred peoples with various ethnic and cultural traditions and unique characteristics. I believe the President of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics should promote national accord, a spirit of mutual respect and good-neighbourly relations in the country. My supreme goal and duty as President of the Soviet Union is to promote the principles of civil peace and to express and protect the interests of the people.

In executing presidential power I will rely on the support of our people, their will, moral qualities, wisdom, intellect and common sense.

I count on the support of the working class, which is playing a decisive role in promoting perestroika.

I believe in the creative strength of the Soviet farmer—the true master of the land. By liberating peasant labour we will resolve the food problem.

I am optimistic as I direct my attention and ideas to men of science and culture, to the entire Soviet intelligentsia, who will continue to carry through the prime tasks of perestroika that require major intellectual and spiritual efforts.

I pin great hopes on the young, on their practical involvement in the adoption and implementation of crucial political decisions and on the creative energy of youth.

I believe that I will also be able to rely on the wisdom and time-tested concern of the older generation for our common cause, on that generation's interest in consolidating the prestige of the power of Soviets.

I am addressing those who honestly fulfil their duty in the Soviet Armed Forces, creating firm guarantees for the peaceful transformations inside the country.

As President, I would like to wish the Communist Party—the country's most influential political force—success in implementing its Platform for the 28th Party Congress. The Party's major goal—a humane and democratic socialism—meets the people's aspirations and their desire to live in an open, democratic, just and prosperous society.

Our country is living through difficult times. But if we make a vigorous and concerted effort, we will undoubtedly be able to overcome these difficulties.

We need to discard the fears and gloom and acquire faith in our strength and capabilities, which are indeed immense. The Russians and all other peoples who have united into this great multi-ethnic state will succeed in reviving their common Motherland. And they will achieve this through perestroika and socialist renewal.



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