

Gorbachev's TV Address on Interethnic Relations

At today's meeting I would like to talk with you about the question of interethnic relations, a question which, so I believe—and I am sure of this—is of concern to every Soviet person today. People's tranquility and well-being, the fate of restructuring, and, if you like, the fate and integrity of our state depend to a considerable degree on its correct resolution. We, all of us, cannot fail to be concerned at the fact that intolerance, friction, and even conflicts on interethnic grounds—conflicts which dislodge people from the normal routine of life and which in a number of cases have resulted in human tragedies—have recently arisen now in one place, now in another. . . . Irresponsible slogans, political incitement, a gamble on the artificial counterposing and clashing of interests and on the squeezing out of certain nations by others, and appeals and actions of this sort could lead to a universal disaster. . . . As chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, I consider it my duty to warn of the growing danger of an exacerbation of interethnic relations and the associated consequences for society, for every family, and for every person. Everyone must obey the laws of the country in which he lives. Only this can guarantee the citizen's rights regardless of his nationality. And the state will uphold these rights with all the means at its disposal. No one must tolerate nationalist manifestations in any form—be they local nationalism or chauvinism. They are degrading for any nation and are insulting and indecent from the viewpoint of human dignity. We must not tolerate those who would like to use the friction that has arisen in interethnic relations for speculative or even criminal purposes. If intolerance is really needed somewhere, it is, above all, with regard to those who deliberately fan interethnic strife. I have already said this, and I wish to repeat this is playing with fire. Whoever has embarked on this path assumed very grave responsibility before his own people and society as a whole. . . .

What is seen as key to resolving the problems that have accumulated? . . . Each person, whatever his nation, must feel himself to be an equal citizen in any part of the country and must have the opportunity to enjoy all the rights guaranteed by the Soviet constitution. The equality of nations and peoples is inextricably connected with the equality of people regardless of their nationality. . . . We can expect a change for the better only if each nation and each people feel, I would say, confident in their own home and their own land. Therefore, all the necessary preconditions must be ensured for economic and social progress, the free development of language and culture, and the preservation and rational utilization of the environment in which the lives of their forebears has proceeded throughout the centuries. . . . Within the federation our peoples have come a long way in their economic, social, and cultural development and impressive results have been achieved, as I have said. . . . The social interests of all republics are firmly interwoven within the framework of the union, and a unified national economic complex based on a countrywide division of labor and production sharing has been established. The richer and brighter the blossoming of each nation is, the stronger our Soviet unity is. . . . I am convinced that the answers to all the questions that perturb us should be sought not in the destruction—not in the destruction—of unity, but along the road of resolutely renewing the federation in order to give it a second wind, as it were, and to fully implement in practice the principles on which Lenin based the union of Soviet republics. . . . The Soviet people have a single destiny. The questions that confront us, even the most complex questions, can

be and already are being resolved on the basis of democratic discussion, tolerance, and consideration toward one another. . . .

Dear comrades! I am appealing to people of all our country's nationalities, to you all. I am appealing to your minds and hearts. I am appealing to you to display the greatest responsibility toward the present and the future and to do everything to solve the accumulated problems in interethnic relations on the basis of friendship and cooperation and to lead the Soviet federation out onto the broad road of development in our common interests.

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