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Gorbachev: I met before the holidays [of November 7, commemorating the Bolshevik revolution] with representatives of Estonia and Latvia. They have a feeling that there is no way other than to leave the USSR. No attempts to adopt republic-wide economic autonomy [khozraschet] will give them independence. So they think. They are convinced that because the Center is not ready to grant real independence there will be no real economic autonomy either. This is being used as an excuse to leave the USSR.

On the one hand, this is blackmail. But we must retain the initiative. And experience shows that the most blatant nationalists can go far. Tomorrow we will revoke the laws the republics have passed about their independence. However, we must keep in mind that aside from separatist attempts there are real problems and we should decide on them. And fill [the concept of] republican economic autonomy with real substance so that later we will not have to agree to yet another "wretched Brest-Litovsk peace."ⁱ We have no other option but to stick to our concept, and to

implement it instead of beating around the bush and wasting time.

Sitaryan: There is and will be no compromise with the Baltics.

Pavlov also believes that compromise would be impossible to achieve.

Gorbachev: And you expect to keep them [in the Union] through fuel prices, via the energy sector?

Vorotnikov: If we confront them with unacceptable economic terms, then it would be a signal for them to leave the USSR.

Gorbachev: But we should show them: those who choose separation doom their people to a miserable existence [proziabanie]. And they should come to feel it. We must take a progressive stand in general, instead of bargaining here and there.

Vorotnikov: If we publicly reveal everything about how we are conducting negotiations with the Balts, Russia will blow up.

Gorbachev: We must sort out the main issues: 1) The Federation; 2) Property; 3) Prices. If a Federation exists, prices should be common for everyone, otherwise there will be borders, customs. 4) social differentiation from republic to republic. All the experience we have in the

different republics should be summarized in a single new concept.

Abalkin: We need a law on the order of secession from the USSR.

Gorbachev: As the economic situation worsens in the country, the Balts come up with a new tune: "We do not want to perish in this common chaos."

Ryzhkov: Among them everything is aimed at preparations for secession. All these discussions with us are just for show, for buying time. As soon as they win elections, they will adopt a decision to leave. What should be done? Introduce a common free market among isolated republics? But that would mean chaos. What we should fear is not the Baltics, but Russia and Ukraine. I smell an overall collapse. And then there will be another government, another leadership of the country, already a different country. There is an evolution visible among the Russian collectives in the Baltic Republics--from confrontation to unity with the local population.

Medvedev: The only way is to act through economics. I do not believe that everybody will necessarily and single-mindedly vote for secession.

Gorbachev: Task number one, also for the mass media, is to propagandize our platform. All that is there we will

fight for. And we are lagging behind in this. Even the term "our common home" has disappeared from television screens. We must have a program of action for the mass media. I ask you, Ivan Timofeyevich [Frolov],ⁱⁱ do whatever it takes but get this program done. Our decisions are gradually getting pulled apart [rastaskivaiut]. They have gotten used to us making decisions and just moving on. And the next day these decisions are already forgotten.

In the republics we are already being attacked on the issues of language and citizenship. And where are we? We need to form a pan-Union consciousness, common agreements, we need to argue and argue that separation is fraught with very serious consequences. Our platform must be defended and propagandized on television daily. We must convince [people] that we are prepared to take a step, and that this would be a substantial step in the direction of solving national issues.

Vadim Andreyevich [Medvedev] is right, progress can be achieved through economics. But even here we need to thoroughly and concretely show the constructiveness of our approach and through that bare the intentions of their endless "new propositions." Perhaps we should work out a draft for republican economic autonomy. An exemplary one.

And publish it with commentary, discuss it at the USSR Supreme Soviet. We must act to forestall them.

Many alarmist words have been said here. Are we exaggerating a bit? Is the situation really so menacing that we should cry wolf? No? No. Then we must act. Summarize what has been said at this Politburo session and work out a line. So far the Balts have been imposing their logic on us, not we on them. And the problem of secession is not the problem of a single republic; this problem will be resolved by the whole country.

A commission is created including: Sliunkov, Vorotnikov, Lukyanov, Karimov, Girenko, Sitarian, Pavlov, Nikitov.

[Source: Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Fond 2. Opis 2. On file at the National Security Archive. Translated by Vladislav Zubok.]

ⁱ The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed on March 3, 1918, between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers. As the price for extracting itself from World War I, Russia incurred heavy territorial and resource losses, and was subject to widespread criticism as a result, although the effects were short-lived due to the Allies' victory in the war.

ⁱⁱ Ivan Frolov, editor-in-chief of Pravda, had just been promoted to his position in October 1989. He later became a full member of the Central Committee.