

April 20, 1989

CPSU Politburo Discussion on the Report of Eduard Shevardnadze Regarding the Use of Violence in Tbilisi

Citation:

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Summary:

Politburo meeting on the violent crisis in Georgia, based on Eduard Shevardnadze's report regarding the Tbilisi massacre.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Meeting of the Politburo on 20 April 1989. Discussion on the Report of Eduard Shevardnadze regarding the use of violence in Tbilisi.

Gorbachev. The crisis in Georgia was not a bolt from the blue. The whole country suspected that something was brewing there. Shevardnadze many times drew our attention to this. [Georgian First Party Secretary] Patiasvili, as far as we know him, is not deaf to national interests, but he shares with other comrades the elements of panic-mongering, suspiciousness and, even more, reliance on force. He lacked guts to conduct political work. (...)

I have long kept saying - let us learn how to work in conditions of democracy. And now events confirm it. Our cadres regard the political method as a manifestation of weakness. Force - this is the real thing! In Georgia they could not transform themselves [perelomit sebia] in democratic way, to lead genuine advocates of perestroika, to attract people even with extreme views. (...)

Regarding this, I would touch on another theme, information that is necessary for decision-making. When I receive ciphered telegrams, for instance, I immediately see the handwriting of the GRU or the KGB or any other ministry. When they analyze the situation in the Baltics, I can see right away what is true and what is packaged as truth. (He turns to [KGB head Vladimir] Kryuchkov) - Vladimir Alexandrovich, I am looking at you! It is important to what extent one should attribute [nationalist] disturbances to trouble-makers - teenagers, and to what extent it is about profound undercurrents in the nation...

In Georgia CC members should have walked out to the people. And they, as it turned out, sat in a bunker. And relied only on force. Only later we began to receive truthful information from Tbilisi. Perhaps someone from the KGB should have gone there to obtain information. In a word, if we don't have truthful and timely information, objective data, we cannot take correct decisions. And in these matters one should think seven times, one hundred times, and only then act - take a decision.

Ryzhkov. We were in Moscow in those days, and what did we know? I am a Chairman of the government and what did I know? I read about the deaths of people in "Pravda." CC Secretaries knew [what happened]. And we, Politburo members, in the Government, knew nothing. And why Shevardnadze's trip [to Georgia] was canceled - I also do not know.

True, we in the Politburo should not panic. But we must have timely and truthful information. How could this have happened? The army was used against the people. The military district commander was acting there, and we in Moscow were not aware of it. And if he comes and arrests all the Politburo of Georgia? Will we also learn about it from the newspapers? And Mikhail Sergeevich [Gorbachev] seems to not have known. So what is actually going on here? Armed forces are used, and the General Secretary learns about it only the next morning. How then do we appear before Soviet society, before the whole world? In general, wherever you turn, things go on without the Politburo knowing about them. This is even worse than if the Politburo had taken bad decisions.

Gorbachev turns to Yazov. Dimitry Timopheevich, from now on the army cannot take part in such actions without Politburo decisions.