

November 11, 1955

Record of Conversation between N. A. Bulganin, N. S. Khrushchev and A. I. Mikoyan with Norwegian Prime Minister E. Gerhardsen and Minister of Trade A. Skaug on 11 November 1955

Citation:

"Record of Conversation between N. A. Bulganin, N. S. Khrushchev and A. I. Mikoyan with Norwegian Prime Minister E. Gerhardsen and Minister of Trade A. Skaug on 11 November 1955", November 11, 1955, Wilson Center Digital Archive, AVPRF, fond 0116, opis 44, papka 179, delo 11, listy 66-79; translation for CWIHP by Daniel Rozas.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/118468>

Summary:

Gerhardsen and Skaug discuss trade between the USSR and Norway; control of the border river Pasvikelv (Paatso-loki) and the mutual exploitation of its hydro-energy resources; Norwegians citizens located in the Soviet Union, and Soviet-Norwegian cultural ties.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

coms. N. A. BULGANIN, N. S. KHRUSHCHEV and A. I. MIKOYAN with
Norwegian Prime Minister E. Gerhardsen and Minister of Trade A. Skaug
11 November 1955

BULGANIN greets Gerhardsen, Skaug and accompanying officials on behalf of the Soviet government and attending leaders of the Soviet state and expresses satisfaction that the meeting had been arranged. BULGANIN asks what ideas Gerhardsen has regarding the agenda for today's meeting.

GERHARDSEN thanks for the welcome and invitation of the Norwegian representatives. Notes that the Norwegian side would like to discuss 4 specific questions, namely: trade between the USSR and Norway; control of the border river Pasvikelv (Paatso-loki) and the mutual exploitation of its hydro-energy resources; certain Norwegians located in the Soviet Union, and Soviet-Norwegian cultural ties. Gerhardsen notes that the Norwegian side perceives this meeting as a venue for simply a general exchange of opinions on the principle points of these questions, without opening discussion on any specific details.

BULGANIN expresses agreement with these proposals.

GERHARDSEN, moving to the question of trade negotiations, states that right now a Norwegian trade delegation is visiting Moscow and will hold several days of talks with the USSR Ministry of Foreign Trade. As far as we know, both sides have reached a significant level of agreement during the course of these talks, and it would be good to sign a trade agreement while Gerhardsen and the Norwegian Government delegation is in the Soviet Union.

KHRUSHCHEV states that it would be desirable to hear the opinion of the Norwegian representatives regarding what changes can be incorporated in our trade relations that would make significant improvements for the future; during such a high level meeting it would be good to discuss in particular the principles of further development of our trade.

SKAUG replies that the Norwegian side would like to discuss the question of trade on a fairly detailed level. The Norwegian delegation had intended to do so during tomorrow's meeting with A.I. Mikoyan, which has already been scheduled. Skaug says that the Soviet-Norwegian trade agreement currently being negotiated does not on the whole differ from the trade that the USSR and Norway have been lately engaged in. What does constitute a change is the intention to sign a general 3-year agreement which will serve as a blueprint for annual agreements regarding the lists of goods to be delivered by both sides. The Norwegian side foresees that the process of such annual negotiations can be used to broaden the minimum scope of shipments provided by the general 3-year agreement. Norway, emphasizes Skaug, is a country with a very one-sided economy, and its well-being to a great extent depends on developing foreign trade. Thus, the Norwegian side is interested in finding ways to develop trade with other countries on the basis of mutual benefit. At the present time Norway owes the Soviet Union a certain sum of money, and Norwegians are interested in broadening their exports to the USSR and liquidating this debt within a certain time-period.

MIKOYAN agrees that there is no need to discuss the details of this question today, but emphasizes that he completely agrees with the question raised by N. S. Khrushchev. To limit our trade relations to only that which has already existed before would mean having no progress.

Judging by everything, the Norwegian government would like to strengthen friendly relations and build further rapprochement with the USSR. In such a case, can we not move further than the extent of our previous economic relations? We, on our part, are ready to do this, but we would not want this to be accompanied by discrimination either with respect to Norway or with respect to ourselves. We would like to receive from our partners that which they can give and which interests us, and ourselves intend to give them that which they need, without foisting upon them any kind of undesirable goods. Shipments of herring and grain is too narrow a base for trade between our countries. Shouldn't we think about how to expand this base?

KHRUSHCHEV - how to go from herring to more substantial items?

SKAUG - we also believe that we should not give too much decisive importance to the previous state of our trade when planning for its future. We must examine the question of how to broaden the assortment of potential shipments of goods from both sides. Recently, during the current trade negotiations, the Soviet side stated that certain export goods which Norway had previously imported from the Soviet Union, no longer interest the Soviet side. This concerned us and we had intended to discuss this question in Moscow. Fortunately, during the last few days of our delegation's talks in Moscow it was possible to significantly correct this and agree that the list of shipments would be broadened accordingly. However, the Norwegian side is far from believing that this represents the final results. Clearly ways must be found to increase both the general extent of the exchange of goods between our countries, as well as the assortment of items being shipped. This can be assisted by annual negotiations over the lists for shipments within the parameters of the comprehensive three-year agreement. The details of all these questions can be further discussed in Oslo between the USSR Trade Office and the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, and in Moscow between the USSR Ministry of Foreign Trade and the Norwegian Embassy.

Skaug again emphasizes that the Norwegian side would highly value the possibility of signing a trade agreement between the two countries right now, during Gerhardsen's visit to the Soviet Union.

BULGANIN - You spoke of measures by the Soviet side to limit imports of Norwegian goods. What goods do you have in mind? At what cost could Norwegian exports to the USSR be broadened?

SKAUG - The main articles of Norwegian export are products from the fishing and lumber industries, as well as certain types of metals. Specifically, we were speaking of exporting to the USSR artificial fibers, fish filet and frozen herring. Right now these goods, which are an important part of our exports, are included in the shipment lists, and we are pleased by that. Of course, it is certainly possible to expand the shipment lists with additional items. That must be examined.

KHRUSHCHEV - I would like to ask directly: what are we talking about? You might say perhaps that I am switching to a political track, but trade, which for us represents one of the functions of the state, is not apolitical; it is one of the elements of overall policy. Bulganin and Mikoyan raised questions here in an evasive manner - diplomatically. I would like to speak directly, without diplomacy. The Western countries have established the Atlantic bloc - NATO which we view as a military alliance directed against us. Don't misunderstand me: I don't intend to tie you up in a discussion to convince Norway to leave NATO. That, of course, would be pretty good, but that is not now of the essence. All countries belonging to NATO are subject to the dictates of the USA with respect to limiting trade with the USSR. And that, to speak the truth, is exactly what we are very aggressively against. This discrimination of the USSR in the area of trade is a foul thing. It is foul not because it has hurt us a great deal. Such discrimination will not suffocate us. How many years has this policy of the United States to limit and even completely cease trade with the Soviet Union existed,

and still the USSR has not suffered from it, its military and economic might has not been shaken. But the policy of trade discrimination affects us. When we conclude trade agreements with member countries of NATO, this prohibition against the export of "strategic" goods looms before us. Thus, we on our part are very cautious in developing trade with these countries in "permitted" goods. The Americans, for example, offer to sell us stale grain or butter that is already becoming rancid, even trying to posture that they are showing us some great kindness and are practically saving the USSR from hunger. But we are not hungry. You can see that for yourself during your stay in the Soviet Union. Walk in the street, look. If you find any dystrophies, we will give you a bonus!

We understand the economy of neighboring Norway; understand that it must trade in sea and forest products. We are aware that to maintain trade with Norway, we must purchase these products. But if the Norwegians, in their turn, try to trade with us without breaking the prohibitions of NATO, then such trade - I must say this directly - will vegetate or altogether wither away.

It is perfectly clear to us that Norway does possess a substantial enough assortment and amount of strategic items to make trade with Norway a way for us to significantly improve our strategic assets. But that is not the point. There is the example of our mutual neighbor - Denmark. The Danes were building tankers for us, and then stopped building them, and we, in response, stopped placing our orders with Denmark. And we will continue not to place orders with Denmark until the Danes agree to build tankers for us. This is in no way an ultimatum on our part - only an intention to break their ultimatum. The fact is that Denmark had already been building tankers for the USSR, have all the means to continue doing so while profiting from it, and Dutch firms are showing full readiness to fulfill our orders. And nevertheless, we are being rejected. This no longer constitutes a business action, but a political one. Understandably, under such conditions we cannot cooperate with Denmark. Such is our principle; such is our position on questions of trade. Thus, in our trade with Norway, in addition to herring, there must be, even if only symbolically, a contingent of other, "strategic" goods.

I am not a diplomat and am speaking to you about all this directly.

Our relations with Norway are good. We don't see any kinds of clouds on the horizon which could dampen these relations, so there is every reason to expect further improvement in our mutual relations.

SKAUG - The Norwegian side believes that trade between two countries must be built on the basis of mutual benefit.

KHRUSHCHEV - Exactly, one must buy that which one needs.

MIKOYAN - and we will not accept here any Paris agreements or NATO limitations.

SKAUG - Trade between Norway and Russia has been already going on for hundreds of years, especially between the northern regions of our countries, and the main goods of exchange had always been fish and grain. Whatever can be said of recent events, it must be acknowledged that Soviet-Norwegian trade has always been mutually beneficial, and trade during the post-war years was relatively good, when compared to the pre-war years.

Today there was a mention of aluminum shipments. The lists of product shipments for this year had provided for the shipment of 2 thousand tons of aluminum from Norway to the USSR. I am not certain whether this shipment will be fully fulfilled in time, since the dry summer has greatly reduced Norway's hydro-energy reserves and forced us

to shut down a number of factories, including those producing aluminum. But I can firmly say that the full amount of aluminum agreed upon will be delivered to the Soviet Union, though possibly with some delay. We believe that aluminum is a suitable product to be traded to the USSR and must constitute an important element in the further development of Soviet-Norwegian trade. We will also be able to increase the amount of aluminum delivered to the USSR in proportion to the growth of our aluminum output.

Today there was a mention of the difficulties of the political situation. But so far, we have not met any such difficulties in our trade with the USSR. As far as I know, we have not refused deliveries of any products that the Soviet Union had wished to purchase from us. Of course it is important to discuss these questions in greater detail, but one thing is clear: we are interested in purchasing from the USSR raw materials and, most importantly, grain (grain has always been our traditional import from Russia), but we are also interested in examining the possibility of expanding our imports from the USSR to include various types of finished products. We are already exporting automobiles and certain types of machinery from the Soviet Union. As far as automobiles are concerned, Western European countries are actually accusing us of discriminating against them in favor of the Soviet Union. Indeed, currently we are exporting more cars from the USSR than from all the Western European countries combined. And we intend to continue doing so, as we believe this to be beneficial for the development of our trade. I believe that in the future, trade between Norway and the USSR will develop in the direction of increased imports from the USSR of finished goods, but the foundation of our exports to the USSR will continue to consist of products from the lumber and processed lumber industries, as well as seafood. This constitutes the most significant portion of our exports overall.

KHRUSHCHEV - We agree. The practical discussion of specific questions can be continued tomorrow with com. Mikoyan. Then let our Asst. Chairman of the Council of Ministers and your Minister of Trade be responsible for the final results.

GERHARDSEN - On our part we have no objections. However, I would like to know whether the Soviet side believes it would be possible to sign the trade agreements during the time of our visit to the USSR.

KHRUSHCHEV - This is possible and must be done. Let us give our trade representatives the appropriate instructions and bring this good matter to a finish.

GERHARDSEN - Now, perhaps, let us move to the second question. Pasvikelv (paatsoloki), as you know, is a border river passing between Norway and the USSR. There is a significant potential for exploiting its hydro-energy through the construction of a power plant. We must also adopt certain mutual steps to regulate its water flow. It seems to us that it would be worthwhile to reach an agreement today on the creation of a joint Soviet-Norwegian commission of technical experts, which would study these questions in detail and present their proposals to the governments of both countries. We believe that such an agreement would be useful in a practical sense and would also make a good impression, at least in Norway, as a positive investment in our cooperation as good neighbors.

As far as practical details are concerned, in our opinion, each side could build its own power plant independently, but it would be good to agree on the amount of hydro-energy that would be allotted to each of the two sides.

BULGANIN - We agree with the proposal of creating a joint commission of experts.

KHRUSHCHEV - Do the Norwegian representatives have at least some approximate numbers on the maximum power generating capacity of a plant built on the Pasvikelv

river?

MIKOYAN - Around 40 thousand kilowatts.

GERHARDSEN - Yes. There are two plans. One would provide for the construction of a plant with 40 thou. kilowatt capacity, the other - slightly less.

KHRUSHCHEV - We agree with the proposal for the commission. Let the experts study this question well, look into it, research it, and report on the amount of water, how best to construct the dam, the area that must be flooded, etc. When the experts provide us with the technical data, we will then discuss on how to build the power plant or plants. It is possible that it would be worthwhile to carry out the construction jointly, establish some kind of a joint enterprise and then share the production, i.e. the electricity.

BULGANIN - We are inclined favorably toward this proposal.

GERHARDSEN - Can we therefore say that we have agreed on establishing the joint commission?

BULGANIN - Yes. Details regarding the terms of its establishment, personnel, etc., can be discussed during the talks with com. Mikoyan.

KHRUSHCHEV - Perhaps tomorrow during the talks between Mikoyan and Skaug, it will be possible to reach some sort of agreement on this question, so that it could be signed afterward.

GERHARDSEN - I will move on to our third question. Following the war, a number of Norwegian citizens found themselves in the Soviet Union. The circumstances of their disappearances vary, with some disappearing during the war, and others - after the war. For example, one sailor disappeared in the USSR during wartime, and, while all his comrades who were with him have long since returned to Norway, this sailor - a navigator - never returned. Perhaps he died, we don't know, but his relatives, of course, would like to find out his fate. We would like to request that the Soviet organs again investigate these questions. There are other persons who are in a similar category, I don't want to go into details here. There is also another category - the so-called frontiersmen. These were young people who during the war went to serve the fascists, the Germans, and participated in the battle against the Soviet Union. Of course, these are traitors, first to their own country, but also to our ally, the USSR. Taking into consideration the insistent requests of their mothers and other close relatives, we would like to ask, if possible, to also learn their fate. Many of them were only 16 years old during the war.

Finally, I would like to mention one specific name - the Norwegian Osvald HARIU. He arrived in the USSR in 1943, was sentenced to 15 years prison, of which he served 12 years. Now we would like to ask that he be released from serving his remaining years, taking into consideration the insistent requests of his relatives, as well as the fact that Hariu's release would make a very good impression in Norway.

We can give you a list of all the Norwegians to whom I was referring here, so that the appropriate Soviet authorities could once again take up the investigation of this matter.

BULGANIN - We will assign MID USSR [Foreign Ministry] to acquaint itself with this list, report to us, and then we will again discuss this question during our next meeting. I must, however, note that on this point there will be many misunderstandings.

According to the report which our Ministry of Internal Affairs made following a careful investigation, the majority of Norwegian subjects who had been located in the USSR have long ago left the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, let our MID once more investigate this matter in accordance with your list, and during the next meeting we will return to this question.

KHRUSHCHEV - It is important to bear in mind that relatives usually wait a long time for their soldiers to return from the war alive. But war is such that many people are killed. For example, right now the Italians are demanding from us information about many Italian citizens who were sent to fight against the USSR, and then "did not return." But we have buried these persons who had intruded into Soviet territory with weapon in hand. That's how it usually is during war. So a strange thing happens: Mussolini waged war against the Soviet Union, and now we must account to the Italian wives and mothers for their soldiers, who had charged at us with fire and sword. It would be wiser if they voiced their demands to, if not Mussolini - from whom you won't get much now, then perhaps the current Italian government, which is currently maintaining such a policy that one would think they want to repeat the military events of the past. Here in the Soviet Union, we also had many people who perished or went missing, including close relatives of Soviet leaders, but we know that there is no point in making demands on anyone about this matter.

As far as your request is concerned, we will investigate this matter and give you an answer, so as to not have any more discussions on this question and to a certain extent untie your hands when you face your own people. We have absolutely no reason to keep Norwegians in the USSR, if they exist here in the first place.

GERHARDSEN - States that he is satisfied with the answer he has been given and would like now to move to the fourth and final question - on cultural cooperation between Norway and the USSR.

Recent cultural ties between our countries has have been developing in a positive manner. Norway is regularly visited by famous Soviet artists, sportsmen, and various delegations. On our part, a number of Norwegian delegations have visited the USSR, and derived great benefit from these trips. The Norwegian side is interested in developing further such cooperation and finding the most appropriate forms for it. As far as exchanges of delegations are concerned, they, in our experience, are most valuable when maintained within the context of collaboration with professional organizations and associations. In addition to exchanges of delegations, other forms of cooperation could be found, for example, individual visits by scientists, engineers, and workers in order to gain practical experience in the other country. It is difficult to talk here about the details of this, but perhaps we can agree on certain principles. The close contact between the youth organizations of Norway and the Soviet Union can serve as a good foundation.

BULGANIN - We have exchanged opinions and are in agreement with the ideas that have been put forth here by Mr. Gerhardsen. We support and welcome his proposal. How can we put this into practice? Perhaps we can assign MID USSR to draft a corresponding agreement, and then we can examine and sign it during our next meeting.

GERHARDSEN - In principle we support such a proposal, but now, during the time of our delegation's visit to the USSR, it would be difficult to sign such an agreement. However, we have a draft of a small clause for our joint communique, which addresses the question of cultural ties. We will hand it to you and perhaps you will take a look at this draft.

KHRUSHCHEV - We agree. In general, development of cultural ties is a very useful matter and must continue to be developed.

At some point (and here I am digressing, shifting from governmental matters to party matters) it would perhaps be useful to exchange opinions regarding contacts between the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] and the Norwegian Workers Party. You need not be particularly wary of this: the devil is not as frightening as he is made out to be. Let us get to know each other better, perhaps we will exchange delegations, acquaint ourselves with each other's work. We have done a lot for the working class of our country. Your government is headed by the Workers Party. Contact could be useful.

GERHARDSEN - In Norway there is a very strict differentiation between the government and the party. Although I am the chairman of the Norwegian Workers Party, I am here in the capacity of the Prime Minister, and it would be inappropriate for me to engage in official discussions on party-related questions.

BULGANIN - We can also talk unofficially.

KHRUSHCHEV - We personally would not like to force you into such talks. We only put forth the thought, threw you the ball, and what you will do with it is your concern. I did not have in mind of holding such talks today, but only intended for you to be aware that we can move in that direction as well. When and what form this will take on - that can be explored later. I must say that you joined NATO not because you were enjoying life. Clearly you were seriously frightened by the "threat of Soviet aggression." Sweden thought better of it and decided not to join NATO, while Norway stepped right into the lion's jaws. If I can speak of leaders, in the USA, where the government is headed by President Eisenhower, a man admired by us all, but he is surrounded by such persons as the Minister of "Psychological Warfare" Rockefeller and others like him. We, on the other hand, are working people. I, for example, am a hereditary miner. I don't intend to cause you to quarrel with America, but who is closer to you in social position the American capitalists or the representatives of the Russian working class? I think that you fell into the American capitalist family by accident. We don't harbor any special hostility in connection with this. We made certain mistakes in our policy, in connection with which we were incorrectly characterized in the eyes of Norwegian public opinion. In that regard, we blame ourselves above all else. But the situation needs to be corrected, and we are working towards that. We believe that it is abnormal that the government of the Norwegian Workers Party has closer ties with the arch-bourgeois government of the USA than with us.

We have good relations with Finland, but then Finland has a bourgeois government. Kekkonen is bourgeois, but he is a good friend of ours. Why then must we have worse relations with Norway than with Finland? That is also abnormal.

GERHARDSEN - Perhaps we could discuss these questions in a less official setting. Here I would like to make only a few general observations regarding Norway's foreign policy. Norway has always been a neutral country and would like to remain such. Despite this, in 1940 it was attacked by Nazi Germany and was occupied for 5 years. Under no circumstances do the people of Norway want to repeat that situation. War is an evil, but military and political suppression is an even greater evil, and we decided to do everything to ensure that this would never be repeated. We had hoped that the UN would ensure peace and security for all countries. Things took a different turn. Then Norway realized that it has only one path to take - to cooperate with other countries that can ensure peace and security for Norway. Given that, we always were and are guided by the fact that NATO is not an aggressive organization, but an alliance of countries with the objective of protecting its members from foreign attacks. More than anything, the Norwegian people desire that trust be reestablished between the great powers, which would provide the best foundation for reducing international tensions and lay the path toward a stable and prolonged peace.

KHRUSHCHEV - All this is perfectly suited for a statement during a press conference.

In this respect it is a classic answer. But what about reality? In reality the matter is rather different. NATO is an organization directed against us. To preserve it means to maintain that we intend to attack someone. But that is slander. I know that right now we will not agree on this question, and I did not think otherwise. But the question remains, and it must be resolved in the interests of peace.

Entry into NATO probably cost Norway a substantial increase in its military budget. But what for? If you are expecting a conflict with us, then why expose your flank?

MIKOYAN - Our troops were deployed in Norwegian territory when Norway was completely helpless. But we withdrew them, acted like friends. How can one then talk about USSR bearing some sort of hostile intentions against Norway?

KHRUSHCHEV - There is a saying: the way to God is high, the way to Czar is far. But we live right next to you. It is true, London is close to you, but for us Norway is closer. And the USA is completely far away, while we are planning to build a power plant together. And then what - tear it down again? This forms into a kind of a knot. This question needs to be unraveled, and even if not right now, now is still a good time to start thinking about it. That is how we view the matter, and I say this openly, without sticking to the classical forms of Mr. Gerhardsen.

GERHARDSEN - If my answer was a classical one, that does not necessarily mean that it was a wrong one.

KHRUSHCHEV - No, of course not. It is so right that it could even be placed in an encyclopedia.

GERHARDSEN - From our point of view, this is true. We are neighbors, and we should maintain closer relations. We want friendship with all countries, especially with neighboring ones. But the basis for all of today's world problems is the disagreement between the great powers. I don't want to say that the Western powers are without reproach. They have committed their own mistakes. If regular people do not want war, then why not address the question in a practical manner and not provide the conditions for a stable peace? In our country, as in other countries, people are well aware that the Soviet Union can do much in this regard. We, as representatives of a small country, can tell the leaders of the USSR about the hope with which they are looked upon by people from all countries thirsting for a stable peace. We believe that our responsibility lies first toward those countries with which we have been collaborating most closely in recent times. We will relate to them everything that we have heard today. We will also take note of it in our thoughts and actions in the future.

KHRUSHCHEV - We understand that much depends on the USSR, since it is a large and powerful country. But we have already done much to begin with, and have received no response in return. We reduced our armed forces, without waiting for a general agreement on the matter. We supported England and France's proposal on arms reduction, but Eisenhower suggests mutual photography without arms reduction, which, of course, does not provide for security or reduction of tensions. Clearly, they are not intent on arms reduction. An important role is being played here by the economic interests of weapons manufacturers, which are influential in Western countries. Thus we are forced to moderate our arms reduction, so as not to weaken ourselves in front of a possible aggression.

That is how the matter stands. But all this is already above our official program, not for the communique.

BULGANIN - proposes to end the discussion here, and reminds the Norwegian guests of his invitation for breakfast.

The meeting lasted from 10 to 12 o'clock.

Present on the Norwegian side: Gerhardsen, Skaug, Brodland, Sommerfeldt, Heiberg, Ekeland, and interpreter Krane.

Present on the Soviet side: N.A. Bulganin, N.S. Khrushchev, A.I. Mikoyan, I.G. Kabanov, V.A. Zorin, V.S. Semenov, G.P. Arkadiev.

The meeting was recorded by [signature] [A]leksandrov)

□□