From the diary of the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, I.M. Maisky, record of a conversation with A. Kerr, British Ambassador to the USSR, 6 April 1945

SECRET

# 6 April 1945

CONVERSATION WITH KERR

4 April

This conversation had in fact started on the 3rd of April in the evening at the Bolshoi Theatre, and was finished only on the 4th, after the breakfast Comrade Molotov and Zhemchuzhina[[1]](#footnote-1) gave for Mrs. Churchill. [...]

Kerr embarked on a lengthy discussion of some of the sharp changes in mood that take place all the time in English-Soviet relations. It would sometimes seem that all is well, all is secure, and all the current issues are well-regulated, when suddenly there is a sharp downfall as an unexpected conflict on an unexpected issue pops up.

The first conflict is followed by a second one, the second one, by a third one, and so on, and these are all caused by such issues that should not, in Kerr’s opinion, cause any conflict at all. The atmosphere of English-Soviet relations abruptly changes, becoming prickly and tense. This lasts for some time. Then something important happens, - be it a meeting of the three leaders, opening of the second front, or something else, - and English-Soviet relations level up, become friendly, even warm.

And then once again there is an incomprehensible and sharp downfall. All this is very hard and tiresome. And most importantly, this uneven character of English-Soviet relations contributes to a lack of confidence in their future.

[…]

He is very confused by what has happened after the Crimean Conference. It seemed that the atmosphere in Livadia[[2]](#footnote-2) was most amicable and warm. There was consensus achieved on all the issues. You could feel that all the parties wanted to reach mutual understanding. Kerr already started to think that a golden age had finally arrived in English-Soviet relations. And it is only two and a half months since then, and what a disappointment it has been!

I joked that if there were nothing bitter in life, you would not know the charm of sweetness, and then added that Kerr kept talking riddles. I would like to know what it is exactly that he is displeased with.

[…]

Kerr contemplated a bit and started to count off his woes on his fingers. There were four of these, namely:

1. The English prisoners of war issue[[3]](#footnote-3).
2. Poland issue.
3. Romania issue[[4]](#footnote-4).
4. San-Francisco issue[[5]](#footnote-5).

[...]

The most unpleasant is not even the discords that have arisen between us. The most unpleasant is the tone of your notes and messages. Why are they full with some specific acuteness? Can’t we discuss our discords in a calmer and friendlier way? You know that Churchill is an emotional man[[6]](#footnote-6). Your tone provokes a retaliatory feeling in him. I received several telegrams from the Prime Minister in the last few days, and they demonstrate that he is very agitated and disconcerted. I fear some unexpected explosion [...]

I recommended that Kerr be less upset and address the complications that had arisen without a bias. If he follows my advice, I am sure his large diplomatic experience will lead him to the right solution.

I. Maisky

[FPARF, f. 069, inv. 29, fold. 94, file 6, pp. 24–28]

Keywords: inter-allied relations, post-war Eastern Europe, post-war order

1. Zhemchuzhina, Polina Semyonovna (1897 – 1970) – Soviet stateswoman and Party figure, married to V.М. Molotov from 1921. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Livadia Palace served as the venue for the sessions of the Crimean (Yalta) conference and as the residence of the American delegation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In spring 1945, the enactment of the terms of the Soviet-British agreement on prisoners of war was encountering a number of difficulties touching on a wide range of issues (from mutual claims under the terms of the agreement for providing for their own prisoners to difficulties in providing transport for the repatriation process – see: SANO. Т. 2. S. 320–321). The matter was complicated by the accumulation of negative experience of cooperation on this issue. In a letter to the Chiefs of Staff of 30 March, Eden’s secretary, O. Harvey wrote of the ‘enormous – and increasing’ number of Soviet prisoners of war liberated in France and remembered that ‘there were until recently some thousands of Russians lodged in camps in this country and that they proved a constant source of trouble, not always of a minor character, between the Soviet authorities and ourselves’ (From FO to COS, 30/03/1945 (in: C.O.S. (45) 58) // TNA, CAB 80/47). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On the whole, the formation of Groza’s government inspired a harsher reaction from the Foreign Office than it did from Churchill. In mid-March, after one of Radio Moscow’s transmissions declaring that the Groza administration enjoyed the full support of the Allied Control Commission, Eden proposed sending a protest to Moscow by telegram, however, the Prime Minister vetoed the idea. See: Percival M. Churchill and Romania: The Myth of the October ‘Betrayal’ // Contemporary British History. 1998. Vol. 12. No. 3. P. 51–52. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. At the conference in San Francisco that had opened on 25 April and had been called to establish an international organisation for maintaining peace and security, heated discussions were triggered, including over the important issue of voting procedures in the Security Council. The proposal tabled by the New Zealand delegation that it should be possible to pass a range of resolutions (amendments to the Charter, etc.) by a simple majority vote, to which the British and Americans were favourably inclined, displeased the USSR. The French Foreign Minister G. Bidault wrote in a telegram on 10 May how ‘Russian is finding itself increasingly isolated at the conference’ (cited by: Gollꞌ Sh. de. Voennye memuary: Spasenie 1944 – 1946. М., 2004. S. 573). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Maisky himself, during his time as Ambassador in London, learned much about the specific traits of Churchill’s character and his ‘emotional-artistic nature’ (Maiskii I.М. Dnevnik diplomata. London, 1934–1943 / Sost. Iu.А. Nikiforov, L.V. Pozdeeva, О.А. Rzheshevskii; otv. red. А.О. Chubarꞌian. Kn. 2. Ch. 2. М., 2009. S. 250). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)