

HIS EXCELLENCY EDUARD SHEVARDNADZE,
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UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS:

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, the theme of Open Skies implies an open-minded debate which may cover all its different aspects, from conceptual approaches to technical points.

My task, as I see it, is to set forth our vision of the problem, focusing on key issues and fundamental principles.

The Ottawa Conference is being held in winter, a winter which, for all the ups and downs in the temperature, has not been cold. Our meeting in the capital of Canada could be another clear sign that the Cold War is over, and Prime Minister Mulroney convinced us of that fact. It went on for over 40 years, leaving in people's minds the memories not only of a big political chill but, what is more, a fear, uncertainty about the future, and restrictions of what man values most, his freedom.

It is wrong to think that such restrictions affected societies only on one side of the Iron Curtain.

Passports stamped "Not Valid for Travel to Communist Countries" set a definite limit to freedom of movement in the West, too. And the prefix "anti" applied, in both its Soviet and American versions, to countless things common on both sides of the political watershed.

But why recall all of this now? Because we should not forget why the skies close or open.

As a poet once said, it is because someone needs it.

Walls, curtains and bans create fear, suspicion and intolerance. When the world had all of that in abundance, for long decades, everyone needed closed doors. As a result, the skies were closed and divided, as was the world.

Today, we need open skies, and not just the skies. The willingness of the participants in this conference to discuss this idea is evidence of tremendous changes in our perception of each other.

Last September in Wyoming, when my friend, Mr. Baker, suggested that we hold a round of talks on this problem outdoors, under the open skies, the weather was favourable to us. It was not windy, or raining, nor was the sun too hot.

This is the point I want to make: the idea of Open Skies is only good in conditions of good international weather, and prerequisites for it have now been created.