

As profound political and social change continues to sweep across Eastern Europe, this has been an especially interesting and rewarding time to visit the Soviet Union.

We have had extensive and extremely frank talks this week with President Gorbachev, Prime Minister Ryzhkov and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. We have, also, had very useful talks with a number of important leaders in Kiev and, here, in Leningrad.

What particularly struck me in discussions with Mr. Gorbachev was his realism in assessing the very serious problems his country faces, his determination to resolve those problems and his confidence that they would, eventually, be overcome.

President Gorbachev made clear that he was embarked not only on a reform of political institutions and economic structures but on a revolution in people's attitudes in his country, to instil a greater sense of individual responsibility. He considers the reforms both indispensable and irreversible. And I am in agreement with this assessment. He is, also, determined to create a federation in the Soviet Union which allows the various nationalities greater autonomy, particularly in culture, language and the economy. Our discussions, also, covered human rights, emigration and religious tolerance. There have been genuine improvements in the protection of human rights in the USSR and President Gorbachev indicated that new legislation would be passed soon on emigration and religious rights.

Internationally, we are departing from a sterile period of East-West confrontation and embarking on one of more fruitful relations, a course that ultimately promises genuine democracy in Eastern Europe, more prosperous East European trading partners, and profound reductions in the emphasis on defence, in all capitals of the world.

Eventually, as governments continue to emerge in Eastern Europe that have the freely given support of their people, European stability will be put on a durable basis. But the transition period will have to be managed carefully. And, in fact, the people of Eastern Europe and the leadership of the USSR are handling the changing situation very prudently.

In these swiftly changing circumstances, NATO retains its great importance because it is the locus for discussion of the Western response to political change in the East and for coordinating positions in the crucial conventional arms reduction discussions in Vienna and on the superpower negotiations in Geneva on strategic weapons.

NATO is a political, as well as military, organization and is an indispensable part of the Western diplomatic infrastructure. It was clear from my discussions with President Gorbachev that neither side thinks this is the time to abandon the Alliances. President Gorbachev signalled, in fact, that it would be imprudent to change