

Information by the General Secretary of the BCP (Zhivkov) to the Politburo of the CC of the BCP regarding the Meeting with the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (Grósz), 18 April 1989

Comrades,

As you know, on the 16 and 17 April of this year, a comradely official visit of the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (Károly Grósz) took place. You are aware of the published information regarding the positions of both countries on the current national and international situation.

We welcomed comrade Grósz and his accompanying colleagues with particular attention, and discussed a wide range of questions concerning Bulgarian-Hungarian relations, our contribution to the socialist-economic integration among the member states of COMECON and their mutual responsibility as Warsaw Pact members to carry out decisions regarding international problems in the spirit of the new political thinking.

Without going into details, I would like to emphasize that:

- The talks were carried through in an atmosphere of friendship, openness, and sincerity.

- It would be proper for the Politburo to take a decision about creating an evaluation of our talks and on the agreements we were able to reach so as to delegate the administration of the appointed measures to the appropriate competent party, state, and economic authorities.

I believe you would agree with me that this visit could not have been viewed simply as a routine between two General Secretaries.

- It is true that this visit aimed at reaching an agreement and giving green light to some immanent issues in order to give our cooperation a new impulse.

- It is also true that, as is commonly accepted for a newly appointed General Secretary, comrade Grósz is currently visiting all the socialist countries, Bulgaria being one of them.

But for us, and I am sure for the Hungarian comrades too, was clear that the questions regarding the current situation in Hungary could not but dominate the course of the conversation.

- The forehand information we had shows that the situation there is worrisome and that was further confirmed by comrade Grósz.

- Of course, the concrete analysis of the current situation in Hungary is the right and responsibility of the Hungarian comrades. Each party carries responsibility in front of its people. We haven't made it our task to interfere in the internal affairs of the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Hungarian leadership neither during the talks nor afterwards, and certainly don't intend to force upon them our own recipes.

- However, we as Communists also have an international responsibility. Decades long friendship and common work and strife unites us with the Hungarian Communists and we also share mutual membership in COMECON and the Warsaw Pact.

- It should be added too that comrade Grósz personally insisted on these talks, requested the advice of the General Secretaries, and further stated that he would like to meet with us again. All this points to the conclusion that the situation in Hungary is worrisome indeed.

So, without underestimating all the other issues, I did not go into any details regarding finance and economy (comrade Grisha Filipov has already discussed this with his Hungarian colleague); instead, I took it to heart to give my opinion on the situation in Hungary.

After only mentioning our bilateral relations, comrade Grósz gave rather interesting and alarming information about the situation in Hungary. According to him, the internal situation in Hungary is very difficult:

- The economy is in a crisis; the payment of foreign debts has become an unruly process. The structure of the production is far from perfect. A great amount is being spent on obtaining natural resources. There are problems in the area of distribution. The standard of living has been stagnating in the past 10 years.

- All of this is reflected in the area of politics as well, where things are not too far from the 1956 situation. There is a serious split among the population, and the society is in a feverish state. The introduction of a multi-party system is pendant although the realisation that this is a step backwards is there. The newly created parties are approximately 9 and they all want to fill up their membership at the expense of the Party.

- The forces gaining strength and support are those which support a bourgeois, Western European orientation, the weakening of the ties with the countries of the socialist community, political and military neutrality, and constitutional changes in the spirit of all of the above. Pendant in this type of atmosphere are general elections.

- The Party is demoralised both from an administrative and a political point of view and faces the dilemma of either splitting up or admitting the existence of factions. Despite the already implemented changes in the Politburo's Central Committee, the danger of a split has not only diminished but increased.

- The foreign policy is influenced by the internal affairs. Contacts are being sought in order to obtain resources. Economic and political relations with Western Europe are being developed although none of the Western countries are offering anything out of mere friendship. No matter what dangers there may be, the country must open up and become integrated in the world economy.

- The main areas in foreign policy are the socialist countries as well as the duties toward the Warsaw Pact and COMECON. The aim is to strengthen the socialist countries so as not to give into pressure from the West. However, at this point, the economic ties with the other socialist countries are not developing well.

As it can be seen, comrade Grósz' information presents real ground for worry regarding the situation in fraternal Hungary.

Following comrade Grósz' information, I expressed my opinion. At the beginning, I informed him about the type of questions we are working on with regard to the reconstruction of the basis of the July Concept and the decisions of the December plenary session of the Party's Central Committee, and afterwards, I addressed the situation in Hungary.

My analysis was driven by two principle considerations. The first consideration was that while giving an evaluation on the current processes in Hungary, the necessity of a thorough *reconstruction* (perestroika) cannot be left unaccounted.

- Regardless of the misfortunate course of events, there is no alternative to the process of *reconstruction* (perestroika) in their country as well.

- Consequently, a positive evaluation should be given to the fact that in the last few years, when in a number of socialist countries, and above all in the Soviet Union, the question of *reconstruction* (perestroika) was theoretically and practically raised, the Hungarian government too took that direction.

- At that, the chances of *reconstruction* (perestroika) in Hungary, if I may put it this way, are potentially big, having in mind its revolutionary traditions, its economic and cultural level as well as the lessons of 1956, which are so-to-speak 'political capital' for the communists and above all for the Hungarian comrades.

This was one consideration.

The other consideration consists in the following:

History has taken such a course that the current *reconstruction* (perestroika) challenges not only our ability to bring socialism out in a new and quality condition but also, as experience in some countries and our political will and virility shows, to defend socialism and its basic principles and ideas.

What is the decisive thing?

- The decisive thing is to start from a correct political evaluation of the situation, of the whole combination of internal and international factors and come up with an efficient approach for the decision of pending problems.

- If not, this could lead to a critical situation, which would endanger not only the course of *reconstruction* (perestroika) but the fate of socialism itself.

So, coming from such principle considerations, I asked comrade Károly Grósz the main question, namely, the question about the current situation in Hungary.

I told him: You would probably not be surprised that we are worried about Hungary. Our government is worried. I am personally worried. Probably other of our Parties are worried too.

- I do not plan to engage our leadership in this, but for me, you are in an exceptionally difficult situation.

- If very energetic measures, including brave and risky actions, are not taken, you will lose control of the situation; you will complicate the situation both in the Party and in the society. We will lose Hungary as a socialist country.

It seems to me, I continued, that the current situation is similar to the one that developed in your country in 1956. You yourself said something of this kind.

- I remember 1956. I had recently been elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of our Party and I took part in the meeting of the First Party leaders of the European countries in Hungary. From your side you had Kadar, Munich, and one more I think.

- There were shootings in the adjoining neighbourhood. The situation was mastered by the Soviet Army but not all the contra revolutionary forces were liquidated.

- I remember Krushev's words. He said, "We did our job; we haven't come here to rule. We'll pull the troops back. You must take charge and rule by leading the Party and the people, giving resistance to the reaction."

- This was the conversation. In response to Münnich's hesitations, Krushev said to him, "We were in one tent together during the War; you are my brother. Take the power and rule. We are not conquerors. Take care that you get a hold of the situation."

I addressed the situation of 1956. I said to comrade Grósz: at the moment, in Hungary, according to my estimate, which you have confirmed yourself, the main question is the question of power.

- A situation has been created, which requires swift decisions and consistent actions.

- Of concern here are principle things, which must be mastered and directed without panic, without dejection.

- The moment has come when it is necessary to act.

It's necessary to make an exact political analysis of the processes. There is a lot of eager talk about a crisis in Hungary now. Isn't this, however, an artificially created situation that gets worse and worse each day?

- As is known, the Hungarian economy has a good standing in a number of areas, which allowed for the decisions of important social problems of the population.

- Even if we take foreign debts in account, these are responsibilities which will be taken care of in due time. They are postponed. And besides, Hungary has substantial export to the capitalist markets.

Of course, problems are problems. They must be solved. But their exaggeration, or the making of political concessions, unavoidably leads to deformations and to escalation of demagogical aspirations.

With respect to my statements to comrade Grósz, I addressed the following four questions:

The first concerns the question of socialism in Hungary or rather, the divide of socialism.

- No matter how complicated the processes are and what difficulties have been inherited from the past, the logic in the area of politics is inexorable.

- In the objective reality, there is a divide between socialism and non-socialism. We must overcome the divide, and in that, the tactics of our enemies which turn into a strategy – the strategy of eroding and destroying the Communist society in Hungary.

- In our country too, we feel pressure from outside, from Western centers and spheres. The pressure is big, but a divide exists and should exist.

The second question concerns the Party.

- It is an experienced truth that in places where the strength and the influence of the Party are weakened, our enemies find a shelter, and non-belief finds ground for growing.

I told comrade Grósz:

- Your Party has strength. You must unite yourselves and not allow the existence of fractures.

- We cannot, in the process of *reconstruction* (perestroika), not introduce changes in the Party; not deny even some of our positions up to now, which hinder its wholesome activities as a leading force. But the question has a genesis: the Party must be supported; otherwise there will be a collapse.

- And now the question is this – the Party must rule, it must fulfil its avant-garde role. The Party cannot be one of the forces or a secondary force. There is no other force which can guarantee the development of socialism.

- It is necessary to address the concrete circumstances, but at the same time, to protect the fundamental positions of the Party – this now is a decisive point.

The third question concerns the means of mass communication.

- We know what an enormous power the means of mass communication is. We remember also the role it played in 1956.

- In our country too, the media was given wide liberty to report mainly the shortcomings, without taking into consideration the success and the circumstances in which the country was developing.

- We immediately felt the type of political pressure and negative energy that started to accumulate as a result.

- So, we took measures, putting forth the following question to the members of the Communist Party: are they Communists or aren't they; are they going to work along the Party line or aren't they?

- In this type of situation such a measure is in the interest of both socialism and the people, and even the journalists. The opposite would mean to allow demagoguery to run high and low, and to flirt with the principles of socialism under the flag of *openness* (glasnost) and democracy.

The fourth question I raised to comrade Grósz was that it is necessary to attend to the working class; otherwise, it will be manipulated by the demagogues.

I told him:

- Your people live better than most of those in our socialist countries. Your market is one of the best.

- There are no disruptions among the working class, etc.

Therefore, continued I, if you don't get a hold of the situation in the near future, I don't know what may happen. I understand that there are difficulties. All of this is clear to me. But resistance must be given. Besides, the international situation has its influence too.

- Afterwards, I developed the proposition that in one major way, the situation now differs from the one in 1956, namely that then the Soviet Union helped by sending troops.

- Now it cannot be relied on that since the international situation is completely different. So, there won't be any Soviet troops.

In this spirit, I underlined in conclusion: comrade Grósz, the whole question is still fully yours and you personally must find a way to unite the Party, to lift her up, to tell the truth to the working class, the workers, and the people.

These demagogues will liquidate the Party and the socialist community. And it's not true that socialism hasn't given anything to Hungary. Nothing of this kind; the contrary – Hungary has developed. There are difficulties – that's true; there are unsolved problems – true; mistakes were made – they were, indeed.

I continued this conversation afterwards at the dinner table.

- What do you want from Kádár? For 7-8 years Brezhnev was basically a corpse. Both Kádár knows and I know that absolutely no dialogue with him was possible. We go there, I say something, the interpreter interprets it, and Chernenko then explains it to him.

- Dialogues were impossible. Recently, he did not even read. Instead, Chernenko read the notes they had made regarding our work.

- I have informed Politburo regarding these things. What can Kádár, Zhivkov, or whoever else do under these circumstances?

This was the spirit in which I spoke. It is easy, I said, to be a hero now, but then the situation was hard. If it is a question of personal heroism, I am always prepared for personal heroism, but the Party and the people are always behind me.

Comrades,

I was left with the impression that we are going to lose Hungary. That is how it is and we should be clear about it.

[Source: Bulgarian Central State Archives, Sofia, Fond 1b, Opis 35, a.e.71-89. Translation by Linda Popova, Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich]