
STENOGRAPHIC TRANSCRIPT of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party

25 August 1968, 11.30 hrs

Participants: comrades Nicolae Ceausescu, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, Emil Bodnaras, Chivu Stoica, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Virgil Trofin, Ilie Verdet, Maxim Berghianu, Florian Danalache, Constantin Dragan, Ianos Fazekas, Gheorghe Radulescu, Leonte Rautu, Vasile Vâlcu, Stefan Voitec, Iosif Banc, Petre Blajovici, Dumitru Coliu, Emil Drăganescu, Mihai Gere, Petre Lupu, Manea Manescu, Dumitru Popa, Dumitru Popescu, Gheorghe Stoica.

Invitees: Mihai Dalea, Vasile Patilinet.

Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu:

Comrades, we have convened the Executive Committee for two reasons:

First, to have a discussion about our meeting with [Josif Broz] Tito and other Yugoslav comrades.

Second, to let you know the contents of the letter of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union addressed to the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party.

On 23 August this year, we sent all of the communist parties in Europe the proposal to organize a meeting of these parties in Prague with the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and [Alexander] Dubcek because in this case we meant either the old leadership or the new one, since Dubcek belongs both to the old leadership and to the new one. Up to now, the reactions of the Western countries have generally been positive, but everybody links [the settlement of the situation?] with the participation of the six [socialist] parties. In principle, the Czechoslovaks agree and take the view that [the participation of the six parties] is good, but in essence the agreement of the five [parties] - which have given no answer so far - has to be obtained; however, we felt that - at any rate - to be able to come to the point, where it was possible, to hold discussions with the legal representatives was a useful exercise, and that the communist parties may really contribute to finding solutions to ensure that the Czechoslovak Communist Party was in a position to carry out its activity, and this was in accordance with the direction outlined by the Soviet comrades, that is to say the problems should be solved within the family as it was a family dispute. This was one of the issues.

Afterwards, also on 23 August this year, I had an interview with Otta Sik, member of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, vice president of the government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and František Vlášak, substitute member of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, minister and president of the State Planning Committee. These comrades had asked to come here, and I had told them that we would meet them in the capacity they had.

I told these comrades that in our view a guarantee of [appropriate] conditions had to be given to the party and government leadership, and that the issues should be solved by the constituted leadership.

I also told them that we are of the opinion that it was not good at all to act over the head of the internal leadership, and that any action should have the agreement of the president, that is to say they must not act over the head of the president - as in fact they intended to do - and I told them that if the president did not

agree, it would not be good; that it was our position that they should talk to the legal organs, the president, the party, and we think we acted well, and this corresponds to the position and principles we imparted to them; that it seemed to us that they had been advised by the Yugoslav comrades to set up a government abroad, and this would be a stupid thing to do. We added that it should be clear to them that if [Ludvik] Svoboda and the Grand Assembly accepted another government, that government would have to be accepted [by everybody] because otherwise this would mean an internal struggle, but it cannot be otherwise since the situation in Czechoslovakia would deteriorate, and it was on this basis that we had acted [in the past] and are acting at present.

You have seen that I also told you what Svoboda said as we think that it is in keeping with this spirit that we must act.

On the same day we addressed to neighboring socialist countries - the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia - the proposal to organize bilateral meetings to discuss the issues which had arisen and relations, and how to act with a view to normalizing the [relations] or to take the path of normalization.

We have only received an answer from the Yugoslav comrades, with whom we met last night – comrades [Josif Broz] Tito, [Eduard] Kardelj, and other Yugoslav leaders.

[The meeting] was in fact a briefing about what we had found in Czechoslovakia, the spirit in which we had spoken, and about our view that we must proceed from the fact that conditions have to be created [in Czechoslovakia] for the government, the president, and the party to be able to carry out a normal activity.

We added that the issues must be discussed with these legally constituted state organs, and that – naturally – the stage must be attained, where the troops would be withdrawn, but the first and essential thing that must be tackled and achieved – and we told the Czechoslovaks what this thing was – was for the current organs to be able to carry out their activity and reach the stage, where the troops are withdrawn. In practice, this position will not be reached tomorrow.

The first thing is for the government, the party, and the president to be in a position to carry out their activity in their current composition, to be active, and to reach an agreement with the five countries regarding the withdrawal of the troops.

It is in this spirit that we explained our standpoint to the Yugoslavs, and they agreed.

We also explained to them everything in connection with the congress that took place in Czechoslovakia. Naturally, it is a more complicated situation, however we look upon the congress as legally constituted since the delegates were elected at conferences. The fact that the congress was convened illegally is due to the conditions that were created. If things are regulated, [the Czechoslovak comrades] will continue the proceedings of the congress because they were not able to solve all of the issues their congress came up against.

We take the view that we must support the party leadership, headed by Dubcek, to carry out their activity, and decide when to hold the congress or continue it. In other words, we must start from recognizing what the congress has decided if [the Czechoslovaks] consider that the decision of their congress is just, and we must support this.

We expressed our opinion that it would not be appropriate to raise this issue before the United Nations. With this end in view we sent Corneliu Manescu, our minister of foreign affairs, to the UN with the instruction that he should not make any declaration at the Security Council. In general, he was not to become involved in press declarations either, and it would be desirable not to have a discussion in the UN General Assembly, but – at any rate – this whole issue is related to the president and the legal government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, and we must not back any other action of convening the UN unless the legal government and the president of Czechoslovakia require this, and – to our knowledge – they do not require such a thing

and are even against it since there are tendencies of the American side and other sides to propose the convening of the General Assembly of the UN to discuss the Czechoslovak issue.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

As far as I know, Czechoslovakia's minister of foreign affairs has left for the UN.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

Yes, he has, and he too received the instruction to ask for this issue to be taken off the agenda of the Security Council.

I am telling you now what I told Manescu.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

But what is the attitude of the Czechoslovaks?

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

They too are against this issue being raised at the Security Council: both [Alexander] Dubcek, and President [Ludvik] Svoboda.

Consequently, it is in this spirit that I explained our position to the Yugoslav comrades, and gave voice to our concern about the situation, the fact that discussions are held, and there are signs that troops are being concentrated, and that, to be sure, we are determined to make every effort to act to avoid any tension, but – as we have established at the plenary session – if the situation worsens, we will raise objections [against any intervention]. We also stated, however, that what we thought we had to do now was to act so as to avoid such a situation arising, and that they should act in the same sense.

We told them that we requested a meeting with the Soviet comrades.

Of course, they gave us a long presentation about their visit to Japan, and they also told us about their visit to Czechoslovakia, what they saw there, things that appeared in the press, and in the discussions.

They spoke less about their view and position, they all but forgot [these issues].

[The Yugoslav comrades] told us that they agreed with us, and that we should pay attention and exhibit moderation, with the only difference that they do this the other way round.

They said they had held a plenary session and drawn up a resolution which they were going to publish, where they would reject any attempt at intervention, a constructive declaration, which was adopted unanimously by their Central Committee. That is all they told us.

They also told us that there was unity amongst their people. They explained to us that they were in a difficult situation as well, which could be used by the Italians who laid claim to part of their territory, by the Albanians, and by the Greeks, who in a certain situation could take advantage [of it]. They said, however, that – naturally – they had no other alternative: if action was taken against them, they could not but defend themselves.

We told them, however, that we would like, and deemed it imperative to act – and they agreed –, to avoid reaching such a situation, and in this sense we had to insist on holding bilateral meetings, and seek political solutions. In addition, we should do everything we could to prevent anyone saying that we had not done anything.

This is what we have done over the last few days, and what we have discussed in our position [?].

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

Were the Yugoslavs agreeable to a meeting with the parties?

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

In principle, they deemed this a good thing, but I do not see the chances [of such a meeting taking place]. However, if [such a meeting] takes place, they will come, too.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras:

They expressed full agreement all of the time.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

[The Yugoslav comrades] said likewise that it would be a mistake for a [Czechoslovak] government to be formed in exile, but earlier they gave [the Czechoslovak comrades] somewhat different advice. But [the Yugoslav comrades] said that this would be a mistake, and in general they agreed with our position. I propose that the Executive Committee show its approval if it agrees with the way we acted, if [this way] is good, and if the position we established was also good.

(All of the comrades agree).

Let me read the letter sent to us by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPUS. (The letter is appended to this transcript).

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu reads the letter, after which the following discussion took place:

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

.....

Well, what proofs: the existence of broadcasting stations and of armed groups (workers' guards); these are really taking action because they are defending the enterprises, they defended the congress, and they are defending the broadcasting stations.

.....

Let alone the fact that they contend they will not intervene since this is a family problem.

Cde. Ilie Verdet:

So they say.

.....

Cde. Leonte Rautu:

When was the letter received?

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

We received it at 9 o'clock this morning. It bears the date 24 August 1968.

Cde. Leonte Rautu:

When did we send our proposal for a bilateral meeting?

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:
On 23 August this year.

Cde. Leonte Rautu:
Consequently, prior to this letter.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:
Here is my reply.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:
Have we already answered?

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:
I had a talk with A.V. Basov, the USSR ambassador at Bucharest, this morning, and I told him that we would inform the Executive Committee.

(Hereafter Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu relates his talk with Ambassador Basov).

What I would like to say is the fact that the party affirmed, both in the Executive Committee and the Grand National Assembly, the decision to make every effort to develop relations with the Soviet Union and with the socialist countries, as well as its loyalty to the existing alliances. To give, therefore, the power of law to the political orientation of our party and our people, I submitted it to the attention of the Grand National Assembly in order to exclude any possible speculation on the part of imperialist circles.

All of the comrades:
Hear, hear, very good indeed.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:
[I have told ambassador Basov that] I regret the fact that from the letter of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPUS it is not apparent that they know of these documents of our party and our Grand National Assembly.

Ambassador Basov cut in saying that the documents were known, that he had informed [Moscow] correctly. I retorted by telling him that I said what is apparent from the letter, just to underscore this fact, because it is not apparent from the letter.

I do not like to refer to the issues related to Czechoslovakia; our opinions, at least for the time being, are different, but – as a preliminary opinion – if the Soviet comrades and the other parties had at their disposal the data mentioned in the letter, why did they not adopt the approach of discussing these issues with the Romanian party and government as well (since Romania is also a member of the Warsaw Treaty) for the very purpose of clarifying [the issues] and thus avoiding any misunderstanding?

I must say that it would have been very useful for the entire [international communist] movement for consultation to have taken place even with other parties in the capitalist countries, just for the purpose of ensuring complete unity and of avoiding the situation that was created, and which – without the shadow of a doubt – is only to the advantage of imperialism and the reactionary forces.

I am telling you all of these facts as personal opinions.

We have affirmed several times that even though there are different opinions, consultation and discussion are

mandatory in order for one to be able to understand and clarify them. In the declaration of the Central Committee and, especially, the declaration of the Grand National Assembly, where the viewpoint of the Central Committee is also reflected, we expressed – in all clarity – the opinion that the situation in Czechoslovakia must be solved through negotiations with the legal representatives of the [Czechoslovak] party and state, and declared – it is true – that we recognized only these legal organs, but took the view that we could not do otherwise. To put it differently, we do not recognize a group of activists [as legal organs]. We were very much satisfied by the fact that, at long last, talks with [President] Svoboda were initiated. In the “Scântea” newspaper the communiqué of yesterday – including Svoboda’s appeal for quiet and calm – was published, and we feel we could not have done otherwise.

As was to be expected, however, [in an article in] the “Izvestia” newspaper the view is taken that supporting the legal government, President Svoboda, and the Central Committee – and I also say Dubcek – actually means supporting counterrevolutionary elements. This interpretation by the official newspaper of the Soviet government amazes us. I am asking myself the question: shall we publish this article in the “Scântea” newspaper? Will such an action serve the interest of the Romanian-Soviet friendship? Or even the TASS Agency’s declaration last night, which asserts that Romania takes the same stand as the imperialists? Should we publish this declaration in Romania? Normally, we should publish it. But the question arises: will this serve the interest of the Romanian-Soviet friendship? In point of fact, both these documents are in contradiction with the letter of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. TASS Agency is an official [press] agency of the Soviet government, of CPUS, which is the leading force in the Soviet Union. If Agerpres Agency issues a communiqué, this communiqué cannot be said not to represent the standpoint of Romania and of our party. I mentioned these facts because ambassador Basov said he had not read “Izvestia” yet.

I do not know whether comrade Basov noticed that just in this period of unrest and tension, in spite of the fact that our opinions about a series of issues – including the Czechoslovak issue – were different, we tried to lay special emphasis just on the friendly relations with the Soviet Union, and to underscore this fact in both my speeches and those of comrade Maurer, as well as in the documents of the Grand National Assembly. We did this precisely in order to avoid giving not our people, even for a moment, the impression that we had different opinions about a number of issues, and the friendship between the Romanian Communist Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, between the Romanian people and the Soviet people, was therefore being called into question.

Naturally, I cannot get around to reading all the newspapers, but I do not think that an article appeared in which the Soviet Union and its leadership were called into question. I do not know, maybe you found something, [comrade Basov], therefore I would ask you to let us know about it.

Comrade Basov replied that he had seen nothing of the kind, that he had not read the provincial newspapers, but in the central press he had not seen anything.

As I told comrade Basov, we feel that these differences of opinion are temporary, and wish to move beyond them as soon as possible. That is why we proposed to the Soviet comrades that we should have a meeting, and it is not because of us that this meeting did not take place. We proposed this both before and after the meeting at Warsaw.

Comrade Basov replied that it was only the day before yesterday that the the proposal was made, and then they had had their plenary session. I retorted that we had addressed this proposal both before and after the meeting at Warsaw, therefore it was not a matter of two days only.

Consequently, if the Soviet comrades really are preoccupied with the alleged “danger” in Czechoslovakia, it would have been normal for them to meet with our party and government, and to present the facts of the matter in question just to make sure that no misunderstanding whatsoever exists.

We have declared many times, including at [sessions of] the Grand National Assembly, that if a socialist state is attacked by the imperialists, Romania is ready to do its duty, and will do it. But for this purpose we have to meet and find out how the land lies.

I have to remark that in the letter of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union the wish is expressed for a strengthening of the unity between our parties to be reached. This wish totally corresponds to the desire of our party as well. We will welcome the earliest possible solution of the state of affairs in Czechoslovakia through negotiations with the party and state leadership of Czechoslovakia. We agree with the need to act in such a way that the situation in Czechoslovakia may be regulated and normalized as soon as possible, and the party and state organs may carry out their activity and really be able to repel any kind of imperialistic propaganda.

These were the few reflections I wanted to express. We will discuss [the contents of this letter] in the Executive Committee, and we will give an official reply to it.

I have further referred to other issues.

The Czechoslovak army was a strong army, among the strongest and best armed of the socialist countries, obviously with the exception of the Soviet Union. As you well know, Czechoslovakia has an old and good armament industry, it manufactures aircraft and missiles. The Czechoslovak people maintained a strong military presence within the framework of our treaty for defense against imperialistic aggression. It is clear that the events in Czechoslovakia did not result in any strengthening [?] of the Communist Party's position in Czechoslovakia].

We agree that it is necessary to reach an agreement with the [Czechoslovak] leadership organs so that a strengthening of the position in Czechoslovakia can be achieved, and it must be clear to us, comrade Basov, that any action which worsens the relations between our countries does strengthen our force but weakens it. To avoid this, we must act together and not undertake any actions that may weaken this unity instead of consolidating it.

It must also be clear to us that the participation of a socialist country in the fight against an imperialistic intervention requires that its armed forces be well organized, that its whole people support this position, and it is in this spirit that we are striving.

We know that in such situations any kinds of difficulties are likely to appear, that various stratagems can be resorted to domestically as well. That is why we appreciate that, as a result of the events [in Czechoslovakia], the situation in Europe became more serious, and we are seriously preoccupied with getting our people ready to discharge their duties. It goes without saying that we must not do anything that might worsen the relationships between our countries, between the socialist countries in general. Any worsening [of the relationships] is detrimental to the cause of socialism.

I think that nobody can remain indifferent if the Romanian people, its army, participates with its entire force, with all its determination in the repelling of any imperialistic aggression. Do you see in Romania things that do not chime with what I have told you?

Comrade Basov said he did not.

As regards Czechoslovakia, we have already taken measures to publish in the press only such information as is official. Now the press publishes things about Czechoslovakia that should not be published as they do not come from official sources.

I told comrade Basov that steps have been taken [in our country] to publish in the press only official information. Consequently, let us not take information from hearsay any more, but act in the spirit in which we have discussed.

A delegation of the Soviet-Romanian Friendship Association came to our country. I wanted to meet the members of the delegation before they left. I talked to them a little at the reception, and I asked them what

things of interest they saw in Romania. Surely, if the comrades spoke honestly – and I think they did – they told me very beautiful things about the way they were received, as well as their remarks concerning the way people work in our enterprises, and about the manner in which the party fulfils its leading role.

[The members of the delegation] saw the 23 August demonstration, and I asked them: what is your opinion? They said it had been an internationalist demonstration, with slogans of solidarity with all of the socialist countries, with the communist movement. Maybe they have some other remarks, which they did not tell me about.

Comrade Basov said that they told him the same thing, and that these were their opinions.

Of course, we do not want the party to be an administrator because it could not fulfil its role in this way. For this purpose we have managers, state organs that work. These, then, are the comments of the Soviet comrades who came, so to speak, from abroad.

We strove a lot to create, with our people, an atmosphere of friendship with the peoples of the Soviet Union, and this not only today, but ever since the party has been active. I joined the [communist] movement when I was fourteen (it was a more open discussion), and the first time I was arrested – in 1933 – the arrest was in connection with the celebration of 7 November. The problem of friendship with the Soviet Union, therefore, was not only a problem linked with a political event, but also a problem of conviction.

Of course, I cannot overlook the fact that many old [Romanian] communists were very deeply pained by what had happened in Czechoslovakia. They could not, and cannot understand, not because they have no friendly sentiments towards the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but for the very fact that they entertain the most sincere feelings of friendship for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Many of them stayed in the Soviet Union for a long period, fought in Spain, fought in the Soviet army as well, took part in underground activity in Romania, and it is this very thing that is unintelligible to them. We realize that this action does not serve the interests of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, of our communist movement. Our comrades fought side by side with most of them in Spain, they fought together with Svoboda on the front. Consequently, we know these people. They risked their lives so many times in the most difficult conditions. How can we believe that today they want to sell Czechoslovakia to imperialism, when we know them, we fought together with them in conditions in which they could have been shot at any step? Today they are leaders of the [Czechoslovak] party and state, and we do not know what might have led them to carry out a hostile, counterrevolutionary activity. They must be helped to organize themselves better.

Comrade Basov cut in here: yes, but they do not know how to organize because they took no measures.

Then they must be helped to organize better, and we expressed some criticism [on that score] when we were there. We told them: you have to appeal to the working class to a greater extent. We visited factories and saw that the working class fully supported them, but nevertheless we told them: the role of the working class must be emphasized more, and they agreed with us. We also gave them a number of comments about their press.

Of course, they must not revert to repressive methods because such methods do not serve the interest of socialism, however a control, a discipline, order are necessary. I noticed that the Czechoslovak comrades agreed with us and took action in this sense.

At the press conference we said that the press had first of all to serve the interest of friendship and collaboration between our countries.

Our comrades were side by side with them in the trenches in the fight against fascism. Comrade Gheorghe Stoica, who was a member of the delegation, met many commanders and subordinates from their time in Spain, and held discussions with them. They said: we understand and are determined to defend socialism. However, we do not want to resort to repression since it weakened the party. We want to mobilize public opinion in the struggle against such manifestations, but to this end we need more time. They were and are

right in what they said.

Why should we not, therefore, trust these [Czechoslovak] communists, who did not emerge as heads of the party and of the state overnight, but who – in the difficult conditions of illegality – led the struggle of the [Czechoslovak] people, of the working class in Czechoslovakia and in other states? People can make mistakes, who does not make mistakes? Is there a man who does not make mistakes? To my knowledge, even Lenin himself did not only once say that mistakes can be made, but he adopted a self-critical position, he said: here I made a mistake, here I made a mistake. He fought many times with a number of party activists, but nevertheless he had them work, he trusted them. I think he did well because all of these people contributed to the October Revolution. If he had had them shot, this would not have strengthened the revolution but weakened it.

I cannot remember reading that in Lenin's time, although there was a very severe confrontation of ideas then, he had anyone shot. And this did not weaken either the revolution or the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Look, here are all of these materials, and I pointed out the volumes in the library; it is good to peruse them from time to time, not to take quotations out of them – because they are related to the states of affairs at the time they were published – but to see how Lenin thought and acted, and thus to learn something.

Lenin severely criticized a number of communists from other parties, but he always appealed to them to unite, although there were different opinions in Germany and in England and in other countries. Why, then, are not other party leaderships, other parties trusted when they say they want to build socialism, and defend it?

(All of the above comments are not observations to the letter of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; they represent, so to say, only an open conversation between us).

We want the situation [in Czechoslovakia] to normalize, but with this end in view we have to meet and discuss. The fact must be understood that political issues cannot be solved by using weapons, by using armed force; the unity of the communist movement cannot be achieved by means of force.

Of course, it may happen that – at a given moment – everybody has the same opinions as you have, but at the first opportunity they will desert you. The unity obtained by means of force is not genuine unity, but a weakening of it. Unity can be achieved only as a result of conviction. Naturally, this presupposes discussions and confrontations of opinions, but is there anything wrong here? If we really want to be a force, to act together, let us discuss and clarify the issues. Let us learn from the way Lenin acted in both his party and the relationships with the other parties. Even Stalin himself, although he had many deficiencies – but I do not want now, and I have never intended to judge him because you have to know things very well to do this – but, at any rate, even in the conditions of the situation created in 1948 – he adopted the line of discussion with all of the parties. It is not a secret that, at the time, we had reservations regarding the issue of Yugoslavia. Zhdanov came here and when we raised this issue with him, he informed Stalin and the meeting was postponed. Stalin said: summon the Yugoslavs and try there to talk to them.

Cde. Leonte Rautu:

The Yugoslavs turned him down.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

[Stalin] did not take any stance, although his authority is known since he used to say: this is what I and the government have thought [decided].

Subsequently, however, the way the issue of Yugoslavia was dealt with turned out to be a mistake, but even under those circumstances Stalin did not resort to the army, though the situation was different: the war had just finished, and there really were conditions for the imperialists to take advantage of this thing. It was then understood that the issues would have to be solved by the Yugoslav people and the communist party of Yugoslavia. There are, however, a number of issues that would have to be pondered over a little. Where will happen if we begin fighting each another, if we enter a country with armed forces today, and tomorrow we enter another? Cde. Basov, do we strengthen the unity of socialist countries this way? In our opinion, we do not. On the contrary, we are weakening it. This is what preoccupies us. We are open to discussion of the issues.

If issues arise in one socialist country or other, let us give that country political support, let us discuss with the relevant comrades. If Czechoslovakia had been attacked by Germany or another imperialist country, everybody would have understood, and we could really have been able to mobilize the whole public opinion. You see, many communists – in our country and in other countries – grieve over the very fact that these [undesirable] things originate with the CPSU because all, or many of them, knew Lenin, all of them joined the party, and from the first steps they took they were related to the CPSU and the Soviet Union; people formed an ideal of them and this is very good. People cannot help being preoccupied and upset just for the very reason that they care for the CPSU and the Soviet Union, and are linked to them. That is why we made the following proposal: let all of the parties meet to discuss the issues, to see how to act, and how to overcome this moment. This is how we learned that communists must act, and that it is impossible to do otherwise.

People think, reason, and you cannot tell them: “Believe and do not question”, It is only the Bible that says it, but we live in another age. The Bible is the result of an age where there was only a limited amount of thinking, there were only a few people who were thinking. Today we have arrived at a level of development, where hundreds of millions of people are university graduates, intellectuals, they read, they think, they reason, and they cannot be satisfied with someone telling them: I said so. People want you to show them why a particular thing is correct. We must understand this in our social life as well, and only this way can we strengthen the role and the authority of the party. And all the more so between the parties.

Of course, it is more difficult, I realize that, that you must talk, discuss, argue, present facts. It may happen so. We were in Czechoslovakia, too, you also were there, [cde. Basov]. We came [home] with the conclusion that there was no danger to socialism there. Then let us gather together and try to clarify things. This is really going to take some time, but you cannot do otherwise. You cannot say, you must take me at my word. There is trust, but you reason, and we reason as well.

Different conclusions were drawn about an issue. Maybe our data or our way of reasoning are really not good. But for us to be able to convince ourselves that we were wrong, someone must demonstrate us that it is so.

This is an elementary thing, and it seems that this is how Lenin acted. Somewhere about 1919, 1920 or 1921 a delegation of the Romanian Socialist Party came to Lenin in connection with the intention of this party to adhere to the Third International. A discussion held in a quite contradictory manner took place, but Lenin did not get angry, and found solutions to the issue because he started from the obvious fact that the issues in Romania are better known by the Romanians themselves. Let us do things the way Lenin did. We are going to celebrate him in two years’ time. Let us learn something from his manner of approaching the issues, from his way of working.

We put the Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Yugoslav comrades [the proposal] for an exchange of opinions. The Yugoslavs replied right away, and we met last night. We had an exchange of opinions on the current issues. It is our intention to act together in such a way that a means of bringing the earliest possible solution of the

issues, and a strengthening of the relationships between the socialist countries be found.

Why in the world has not Romania been invited [to take part in] the solving of these issues?

We also take the view that this issue should not be submitted to the attention of the UN. As you saw, our representative at the UN was sent a message [with the instruction] not to take any stance there in this matter. At the meeting with Sik I told him our opinion, more specifically not to take any action which bypasses the president of the republic as it is not admissible for someone to act bypassing the legal bodies, which are the only bodies entitled to make decisions. It is also our view, therefore, that it would not be good for this issue to be discussed within the framework of the UN, but it should be solved in other ways.

Well, these were the discussions about this issue.

I did not directly refer to the fact that there were so many rumors about a possible intervention in Romania, but I think [cde. Basov] understood [the hint] from what I had told him.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras:

Very good.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

That would be all about the content, the main elements of the letter of reply.

Cde. Leonte Rautu:

And in this sense we have to establish [the content of the letter of reply].

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

In my opinion, comrades, the [Soviet] letter clearly contains a lot of absurdities, but I feel there is no point in our starting to discuss them because this would not be of any help.

We should mention that, as regards the attitude to Czechoslovakia, our assessments differ, but we feel we have to be emphatic and act so that we can overcome this thing, and to reply in this sense.

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

We have to reply in such a way that our reply cannot be construed as agreement. We certainly could not get into a polemic [then, at the time], neither can we [now].

Cde. Emil Bodnaras:

Let us take as a basis the line we presented to Basov.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

I fully agree, and I think that it is good for the Executive Committee to entirely approve the attitude we adopted on the issue in question in our discussions with the Czechoslovak comrades since it contains some important points. Comrade Ceausescu's declaration at the Grand National Assembly is still vivid [in our memory].

I also agree with the discussions and attitude of our comrades, who [went to Yugoslavia] and discussed the matter with Tito.

Third, I agree with the letter, [with the viewpoint] that there really is no point for us to get into a polemic since this [letter] is a combination, may the devil take it, of perfidy and lie, it contains everything of the kind.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

Then let us consider the letter [of reply] in this sense.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

I do not know whether in the history of relationships [between states] or in diplomacy, Comrade Ion Gheorghe Maurer knows better perhaps, there existed such a case, where the government of a country sent its army into another country, at the request of a group [in the latter country].

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

He [?] happened to respond, but never found that it was justified.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras:

And he never said this was an internationalist duty.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

That is why I think that we should do the following things: agree with the spirit in which the reply was drawn up, fully agree with the way we replied, the content of the reply, the tone, and the self-restraint because you cannot help being revolted by this letter, which is in full contradiction with the most elementary things. In spite of all this, comrade Nicolae Ceausescu replied very calmly (which is something, and very good), in cold blood, and with solid arguments to all of the aspects, so that the fact may be well understood that we are seeking a solution, not something else.

I think the way we replied was good.

However, in connection with the issue of the meeting, three [?] things must be taken into consideration. It is certain that a compromise will be made at the meeting. That is how things are in politics, especially in this situation – where the Soviet tanks are there (in Czechoslovakia) – you cannot do differently. However, there is also the issue of danger.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

A point of information. After Svoboda's speech, he now declares that Dubcek, Smirkovsky, and Cernik are participating in the talks.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

This is a quite positive aspect. It is tantamount to an official recognition.

Cde. Paul Niculescu-Mizil:

This is a speech of Svoboda's that was aired by several press agencies, in which he addresses the [Czechoslovak] people. He tells them that he would not have stayed a minute more in Moscow if this thing had not served the interest of solving...and so on..., that he wants to assure them that Dubcek, Smirkovsky, and Cernik also attend the meeting, that together they are getting the future talks on track, and that they all – and he repeats – they all, Dubcek, Smirkovsky, Cernik, and himself, appeal to the Czechoslovak people, urging them to be calm, not to undertake any kind of actions, that this would be the best way of showing support for the action they are currently undertaking in Moscow.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:
I think it is the best way.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:
We emphasize, at least if I understood this well from what comrade. Ceausescu said, that the recognition of the constitutional organs and the resumption of their normal activity is a good thing. But in no way whatsoever can a normal activity exist [in Czechoslovakia] when there are foreign tanks and troops there. This is a thing of paramount importance not only as a principle. This is a thing without which, in my view, we cannot conceive the independence of peoples in our propaganda. Second, comrade Ceausescu, I think that we must underline – and in our future discussions with [the Soviets] we will have to raise this issue more firmly – that we are against this thing, that even [as serious an event as] the occupation of another country is announced to us by a janitor.

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:
Our man was not a janitor, it was the officer on duty.

Cde. Paul Niculescu-Mizil:
Their man was a courier.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:
This issue must be raised as it is a fact, and it seems to me that there [in the Warsaw Pact ?] the making of decisions with unanimity is provided. I do not remember well, but the comrades who were there...

Cde. Emil Bodnaras:
They did not act in accordance with the pact.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:
There is a series of facts, Warsaw, Bratislava.
Third, I wholly approve of the line adopted on that score, however we have to see, we must not close our eyes and see [sic!] whether the fact is confirmed that the troops are heading for our borders. This is a fact, especially taking into consideration the practice, the perfidy, the lie, the surprise. At least we, who were in Prague, which [?] separated us from these events, did not feel anything. Not even when we had talks with [Walter] Ulbricht did such facts happen. Moreover, on Monday night I passed through [Czechoslovakia], and I stayed for an hour and a half at Prague.
We must see, very attentively, whether troops are heading toward our frontiers. Our people must know this thing. It goes without saying, calmly, and if the troops do not retreat and continue to...

Cde. Dumitru Coliu:
Where from?

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:
... from our frontier. This thing must be seen. I think there is nobody who believes that Romania is preparing to attack the Soviet Union or another country. We must not let this be a surprise in the long run. If we really are to discuss friendship and want to maintain friendship, [foreign] troops have no business near our borders. The very fact of their presence there cannot be an act of friendship.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

I would like to clarify the issue of troops. Naturally, this is a serious issue, there is something true in everything they say, they have movements of troops; it is also true that, as a rule, they have troops in all of this zone. In Debrecen there are two Soviet divisions, and there are the Hungarian troops, too. [These troops] actually moved. Similarly, as far as we know, there are a few permanent divisions at Kishinev. They really moved, and are making preparations. It is difficult to say: Hey, mister, why are you moving your troops? He may reply: Can I not do what I want with my troops?

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

What happened in Czechoslovakia after those maneuvers is clear.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

But surely, something is clear, these movements [of troops] have at least an administrative character, and we will have to keep track of them, to pay attention.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras:

The question is, do we have to do it here, in this letter?!

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

In the discussions yes, but in this letter no.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

In the discussions.

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

I would say that, if in essence we have reached an agreement about the content of the letter, and have agreed (several comrades: yes), we must not get into a polemic because this is wrong and it would not be of any use.

Second, not getting into a polemic, we, however, underscore in the letter – because, for a moment, there are still different points of view – that in order to clarify things it is good to hold talks, and with this end in view we proposed holding a meeting, not only of the parties [involved], but also of the governments, at a high leadership level, to discuss a whole series of issues. It seems to me that if we say this we say enough. There are many more issues that will be discussed at the [proposed] meeting.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

OK, but if they do not accept?

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

If they do not accept, it will be a new situation that we will have to analyze.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

If they do not accept, it means that this letter [the Soviet letter?] is only an attempt at camouflage].

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

If we are to think about what we have to discuss together with the Soviet leadership, with the Soviet party and state, then the list of issues is longer.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

It seems to me that this is one of the issues.

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

Nobody disputes [it], but there is also the consideration that comrade Ceausescu imparted to us, and it goes without saying that we are preoccupied with what happens on our borders. We do not stand with arms folded over our oars at all. Items of information come every hour. We pay a lot of attention to these things; the “weighing” [of information] is done with the greatest accuracy. This is an issue that preoccupies us.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

When you have weapons and tanks at your borders...

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

But this issue must be the object of a separate démarche, aside from these discussions. Then we will see, but let us not make any decisions for the time being.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

But if this issue snowballs further, the meeting stands with a question mark over it: will it take place or not, and this issue should be item No. 1 on our agenda.

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

That is correct. But there must be no concern from this point of view that the Presidium of the Central Committee, and all of the organs having responsibilities in this respect, do not pay attention to this issue, in spite of all of their individual and technical possibilities. It seems to me, therefore, that for now the discussion can be limited to the content of the letter.

Cde. Gheorghe Apostol:

Comrades, I think that the answer actually given by comrade Ceausescu when the letter from the Political Bureau of the CPSU was handed over to him may be looked upon as a basis for the reply we have to officially give to the CPSU leadership.

In my opinion, the discussion we had with comrade Basov was in accordance with the line established by our Central Committee, and was also apparent from the Declaration adopted by the Grand National Assembly. At the present moment, only political solutions to the issue of Czechoslovakia can be applied, and I feel that the way comrade Ceausescu raised this issue during his discussion with Basov is the best, and Basov is certain to convey this thing [to the Soviet leadership].

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

Without his own reply.

Cde. Gheorghe Apostol:

I do not know what his reply will be.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

His secretary also took the discussion down in shorthand. And we found that he gives correct reports, and gives his own opinions as well.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

He is not a sparrow hawk.

Cde. Ion Gheorghe Maurer:

He is an open and honest man. He is neither a sparrow hawk nor a dove.

Cde. Gheorghe Apostol:

It seems to me that the issue raised by comrade Gheorghe Stoica deserves attention and, in fact, you must know that the Presidium of the Central Committee thought about a series of measures that would enable us to cope with any circumstances, and it was already shown [that one of these measures] was the establishment of the workers' guards. The Armed Forces know what they have to do.

I think that for the reply to this letter we will have to find a moderate tone conducive to a solution of the issues, which would be of help to both Czechoslovakia and the whole [communist] movement.

The fact that we proposed this meeting with [the Soviets], [the Bulgarians], and the others will give us the chance to tackle all of the issues.

It goes without saying that this issue which preoccupies comrade Stoica and all of us all, namely the presence of foreign troops at our frontiers, is an issue to which we must pay attention, and the comrades who go there will have to remember this.

That is why, in my view, it is good that the reply be given as it was given here, underscoring the fact that we support bilateral discussions in the situation created as a result of Czechoslovakia's occupation.

The reply must correspond to the basis for the discussions that comrade Ceausescu had with Basov.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

Then, comrades, do you agree?

(All of the comrades agree).

Cde. Emil Bodnaras:

For comrade Stoica's peace of mind, all of the measures that are currently under way will be taken further to the end.

Cde. Gheorghe Stoica:

I did not refer to this, but to the diplomatic way. I see that they will not be able to enter [our country] very easily.

Cde. Nicolae Ceausescu:

Our position is that it would be a serious thing for our [communist] movement, and we have to act so that everything ends well.

Do you agree?

(All of the comrades agree).

Then the meeting is adjourned, comrades.

[Source: National Central Historical Archives (ANIC), Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Chancellery, File no.135/1968, ff. 6-29. Translated for the PHP by Viorel Buta]