

## Document No. 54: Transcript of the Meeting of Five Warsaw Pact States in Warsaw, July 14–15, 1968

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*The July 14–15 Warsaw meeting involving the leaders of the USSR, Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria was the venue at which the so-called “Warsaw Five” came to a consensus on the likely need for military intervention in Czechoslovakia. This excerpt from the minutes of the session<sup>26</sup> shows that the Soviets at the time believed they could not rely on the Czechoslovaks (for obvious reasons), the Romanians or the Albanians when the time came to act. Polish leader Gomułka was the most vocal in his criticism of Czechoslovakia at the meeting. He feared that the spillover effect of the reform movement would cause serious control problems in his own country, weaken the Soviet bloc, and possibly change the entire correlation of forces in Europe. Among other lengthy speeches by each leader, Bulgaria’s Todor Zhivkov noted that the only solution was the use of external force. Brezhnev, who had shown some reluctance toward the idea of an invasion up till now, expressed support for Gomułka’s evaluation of the situation.*

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[...]

*Cde. Gomułka:* There is obviously a danger that our bloc would be weakened. All political questions are being decided today on a world-wide scale. I would not consider it possible that socialism would give an unambiguous reply to capitalism, or capitalism to socialism, in the form of some kind of neo-capitalism. Problems are not being solved on the scale of a single country, they are being solved on a world-wide scale. Well, this is quite obvious, and the development of power, of our communist movement, depends on that. We are living through an unfortunate period now. Many tendencies exist within our movement, many anarchistic concepts, many eccentric concepts. This is the big weakness of our movement. We have all sorts of things— anarchy, revisionism etc., anything you want, comrades—may be found within our international movement. We, the Warsaw Treaty countries, have up to now represented the decisive force of internationalism and socialism. We are the force that represents socialism in the world. Neither China, nor Cuba, nor even Korea represent the true picture of socialism. The Warsaw Treaty states are the showcase of socialism. Socialism is what we represent. Such is the case with our level of force, too. It exists in direct proportion to our internal unity. The GDR, Hungary or Bulgaria do not represent our power. These countries do not represent the decisive power factor, it is our Soviet brother who represents this force! The Soviet Union and the power of its nuclear weapons keep the imperialist world in check.

Comrades, [our] problems are not of the sort where everything can be decided by means of power. If everything could be decided by power, military power would be

<sup>26</sup> For other excerpts of this important session that relate more specifically to the Czechoslovak crisis, see Járómír Navrátil, *et al The Prague Spring 1968* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1994), pp. 212–233.

decisive. However, moral strength and the impact of socialism on our position among the socialist states are decisive for the unity of our countries; they are also decisive for our keeping tight together in line.

What is happening in Czechoslovakia now should change the correlation of power in Europe.

[...] We have long been aware of the fact that no declaration from West Germany or any guarantees on paper shall ever secure the safety of our borders. Only our common and united action may secure them. This is not a matter of borders; this is a matter of socialism. This is not a simple attack on our borders; it is an attack on socialism and our unity. When observing the present Czechoslovak approach, their contacts with West Germany, the various delegations [that are formed] and meetings that are held, all these official or unofficial invitations, we have to conclude that the Czechs in effect repudiated the resolutions that we had adopted last year during the Warsaw conference of ministers. We agreed there, didn't we, that all conferences would be held jointly, on a common basis? And where did they take counsel? Apparently, with all their democracy, they wanted to keep silent for weeks—they invited a representative of parliament, for instance. The Czechoslovak deputy chairman of parliament traveled to Bonn. They gave various pledges as to what they would say about it or the kind of negotiations they would they lead. [...]

I am therefore convinced that the Czechoslovak comrades have already abandoned their alliance with us. They have broken our bilateral or multilateral resolutions. They have ceased to consult with us on matters of importance.

[...]

This is the third time we have met to consider the questions of interest to us today. The first time was at the meeting in Dresden [on March 23, 1968], together with the Czech comrades. The second time was at the discussions of the problem in Moscow, without the comrades from Czechoslovakia. And finally we are gathered here for the third time, having invited the Czech comrades to take part only to find that they rejected the invitation and said in response that they would recommend bilateral meetings. At Dresden our assessment of events in Czechoslovakia was one and the same. Together we stated then that the events in that country are of an anti-socialist and even counterrevolutionary nature. Not all the Czech comrades accepted that position, although they acknowledged that certain things had been occurring over which they had no control... There were no major differences of view, although the Czech comrades rejected the notion that the underlying process was counterrevolutionary. They wanted to disavow this assessment. At the meeting in Moscow there were divergent viewpoints, and our position was not so unified.

[...] What is the current situation in Czechoslovakia? What is the nature of events there? We believe that the country is being peacefully transformed from a socialist state into a bourgeois republic. At the current stage the process is still in its initial phase. Our second basic point might be put as follows: In Czechoslovakia a process is under way whereby the CPCz is abandoning the precepts of Marxism–Leninism and is being transformed into a social democratic party. This process is already far advanced, and its main stage will occur with the Extraordinary CPCz Congress scheduled for September. Fundamental changes in the nature and complexion of the Party will be

a prerequisite for the transformation of the country into a bourgeois republic. Without such changes, the transformation of the country would be impossible.

Our conclusion is that novel events are under way, with no parallel in the whole history of the socialist countries. No parallel at any rate in terms of scale. A new process has begun—a process of peaceful transition from socialism to neo-capitalism. Until recently this problem hadn't even been conceived. As a result there had repeatedly been superficial approaches to the very concept of the process of counterrevolution. The whole essence of our understanding of the danger of counterrevolution was inappropriate. Today we are not talking about a return to capitalism in the classical sense, that is, in the way we understood it during the interwar period. To look at the problem only in this way would lead us down the wrong track. [...]

[...] It would be difficult to maintain that in Czechoslovakia today the same methods could be used as were used in Hungary in 1956. The Hungarian events in the fall of 1956 were of the classical counterrevolutionary type—armed counterrevolution. When speaking about the process of counterrevolution, many people operate on the basis of old assumptions; they think that the process will develop in the same way as in the past. Those who still rely on these old assumptions will not grasp our assertion that today the process is different. The means used now are different, and so are the methods of using them. The methods are meant for the longer term. The sort of counterrevolutions we had in the past won't occur today; they will transpire differently. This is a process that might last many years. [...]

In the socialist countries class antagonisms have been suppressed. That applies to Czechoslovakia, too. There are no social classes right now capable of restoring the old order. However, reactionary forces are present. There is a social basis for counterrevolution. This is particularly true among the intellectuals and the whole mentality of broad social circles. [...]

[...] I think that a dominant majority of the leadership of the Czech Party have become captives to revisionism. And it is always the case that when a government is taken over by revisionists, they first of all do away with all their ideological enemies.

[...]

[...] We must frankly say that what is going on in Czechoslovakia could have grave consequences. The whole system of socialism is in danger of being weakened. Today if you take account of matters not from the standpoint of one country, but from the standpoint of the whole world, a single fundamental question still looms: Who will win out over whom?<sup>27</sup> We are living through very difficult times, when the international workers' movement has been beset by various negative and centrifugal tendencies: revisionism, nationalism, and even strands of anarchism. We can be a real force in the world only if there is unity among us. We must remember that those of us gathered here bear a special responsibility. Our countries are the fist of the socialist system. We provide an example of socialism to the world. It is we who provide that example—and not China, Korea, Cuba, or Vietnam. We are the showpiece of

<sup>27</sup> *Translator's note:* In Polish (and Russian) this is "*kto kogo*," the phrase coined by Vladimir Lenin in the early days of the Bolshevik Party. The phrase amounts to a stark zero-sum conception of politics.

socialism, and the working masses of the entire world look up to us. The greater our strength, the greater our unity. [...] We Poles are well aware that our borders can be safeguarded effectively only if the countries of the socialist commonwealth maintain a united stance. And this by no means applies just to our own borders; every attack on these borders is an attack on the whole of international socialism.

*Cde. Kádár:* [...] If you consider the matter from the standpoint of the existing situation, the basic question is whether you would call what is going on there a counterrevolution or whether it should be called something else. The crux of the matter is whether the entire process can be uniformly regarded as counterrevolutionary... In my view the whole process has dangerous tendencies within it. I would not say, however, that the Party there is being transformed into a social-democratic party.

[...]

In reaching a decision we must remember the Hungarian events of 1956. We must recall the experiences of that period. The problem we are discussing, the struggle over the changing situation in Czechoslovakia, is of an international character, since that struggle also has come under scrutiny at the international level. During the struggle over Hungary in 1956 all the fraternal Communist Parties took part in lending us support. The question is to find what support we can provide now.

The situation in Czechoslovakia is steadily deteriorating. It is much more alarming than it was during our meetings in Dresden and in Moscow. Back then we expressed the wish that in Czechoslovakia itself forces would emerge that would be able to turn the situation around. Now this task is more urgent than ever. It is urgent to find Marxist-Leninist forces in Czechoslovakia, to whom we ought to provide full support.

*Cde. Ulbricht:* Our Political Bureau supported the idea of calling today's meeting. We had assumed that the CPCz CC Presidium would send its own representatives. We had hoped so because we observe that the situation in Czechoslovakia has given rise to new, negative elements. It therefore was appropriate and justifiable for us to want an exchange of views with them. However, the CPCz CC Presidium refused to take part in our meeting today and proposed bilateral meetings. ...With the publication of the reactionary "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto, the leadership of the Czechoslovak Party is not in a position to find a solution on its own. The only way is to find a solution jointly.

*Cde. Kádár* recounted his discussions with Dubček, which he called different things. They want to wait for a general disruption. Dubček does not grasp the situation. I am amazed by the analysis that *Cde. Kádár* offered. Do you not see, *Cde. Kádár*, that the question is not only about Czechoslovakia. *Cde. Kádár* said that we are dealing with revisionist forces there. I can't agree with that. The question is about counterrevolutionary forces. The "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto expresses their goal: to destroy the Party's power. If the "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto is not counterrevolutionary, then certainly there is not a counterrevolution. The reality of the situation in Czechoslovakia indicates that there is a counterrevolutionary underground. There is a gradual shift toward bringing this underground counterrevolution to the surface. ...

The Czechs' plans for counterrevolution are obvious. There can be no further

doubt about this matter. The counterrevolutionaries want to prepare the Party Congress in such a way that they can crush and eliminate the Marxist–Leninists. The “Two Thousand Words” is unambiguously counterrevolutionary. They next will move to multi-party elections and try to get rid of the Party, and will then want to change the constitution.

I don’t know, Comrade Kádár, why you can’t grasp all this. Don’t you realize that the next blow by imperialism will take place in Hungary? We can already detect that imperialist centers are concentrating their work now on the Hungarian intelligentsia.

In my view, Cde. Gomuška gave a principled and accurate assessment of the situation in Czechoslovakia. The interference by imperialism in Czechoslovakia is being carried out within the framework of a long-term global strategy, a strategy spanning at least ten years.

[...]

An idea has been floated to create a trilateral alliance among Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. This is an old idea, which was first conceived during the time of Masaryk [President of Czechoslovakia in 1918–1937], who wanted to set up the so-called Little Entente consisting of those three countries. Back then this concept was aimed at establishing the “special authority” of Czechoslovakia in the framework of this alliance. Today the concept is intended to separate socialist Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union and the whole commonwealth of socialist countries. Ceaușescu and Tito support it and have even given their official backing.

[...]

*Cde. Zhivkov:* The representatives of our Central Committee and Political Bureau of our Party share the view of the situation in Czechoslovakia presented by Cde. Gomuška and Cde. Ulbricht. Unfortunately we cannot agree with the view offered by Cde. Kádár, nor with his conclusions. We want to depict things accurately and call a spade a spade.

[...]

There is only one appropriate way out—through resolute assistance to Czechoslovakia from our Parties and the countries of the Warsaw Pact. We cannot currently rely on the internal forces in Czechoslovakia. There are no forces there that could carry out the types of tasks we wrote about in our letter. Only by relying on the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact can we change the situation.

In Czechoslovakia we must restore the dictatorship of the proletariat, which has been trampled underfoot. All the state and Party organizations have been taken over by revisionists and counterrevolutionaries. The Party Congress must be derailed. It is essential that we reestablish the Party and restore the Marxist–Leninist content of its activity. We must prevent the social-democratization of the Party. A decree must be prepared to dissolve the various counterrevolutionary and bourgeois organizations. There is no other way out.

[...]

*Cde. Brezhnev:* [...] Like all the other delegations present here, we understandably regret that the Czechoslovak comrades, whom we invited, are not taking part. No matter how their absence is explained by the CPCz CC Presidium, one cannot help thinking, comrades, that this is typical of the current situation whereby the

Presidium does not wish to heed the advice and suggestions of its friends. It openly rejects the possibility of collectively assessing matters that not only concern Czechoslovakia itself, but also affect our common interests.

[...]

The delegation of the CPSU Central Committee fully endorses the assessment of the situation in Czechoslovakia presented by Cde. Gomulka at our conference. We agree that the events taking place there are dangerous not only because they are openly directed against the socialist gains of the Czechoslovak people, but also because they undermine the positions of socialism in Europe and are playing into the hands of imperialism throughout the world. This is the essence of what Cdes. Ulbricht and Zhivkov said as well.

What is happening in the ČSSR passed long ago beyond a purely national framework and is now impinging on the fundamental problems of the vitality of the entire socialist system. One might say that Czechoslovakia has become one of the focal points of the bitter ideological and political struggle between imperialism and socialism. The attempt being made by the anti-socialist and counterrevolutionary forces to bring about the downfall of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and remove it from power is essentially an attempt to strike a blow against our common ideological platform, the great Marxist-Leninist teachings, and thus to compromise the very principles of socialism.

One cannot help seeing the other side of the question as well. By jointly exploiting the ongoing events for their own purposes, the internal counterrevolutionary forces and the imperialist reactionary forces are counting on being able to turn Czechoslovakia back along a capitalist path, to weaken the strength of the Warsaw Pact, and to annihilate the unity of the socialist system and of the entire world communist and national liberation movement. It goes without saying that if the international reactionary forces succeed in carrying out their plans, there will be a direct threat to the security of our countries. That's why we agree it is essential to do everything possible to prevent such a development from arising.

[...]

Based on a sober analysis of the facts, and taking account of the experience of our own and other fraternal parties, we seriously warned the Czechoslovak comrades about the menacing course of political developments in the ČSSR and about the existence there of a certain social milieu that is conducive to the activities of anti-socialist and counterrevolutionary forces. We urged them to be aware of the danger of taking a conciliatory approach to attacks made against the Party and the socialist gains of the Czechoslovak people.

Not only did we express our concerns; we gave them comradely advice about a number of measures that could be taken to improve the situation. We recommended steps that might prevent things from developing in an undesirable way. The Czechoslovak comrades agreed with these suggestions, and they spoke about their own plans and about how the CPCz leadership is determined to put an end to the activities of counterrevolutionary elements and to assert control over the course of events.

Unfortunately, these proposals and plans were not carried out. The situation in the country has deteriorated as far as it can.

[...]

It is necessary, in my view, to give special consideration to still another question.

Nowadays, on television and radio in Czechoslovakia, certain prominent figures are referring to our recent meeting as some sort of interference in the internal affairs of the ČSSR. This question, comrades, must be made more precise. When the plenum of the CPCz Central Committee recognized the necessity of removing Cde. Novotný from the post of first Secretary and then of dismissing him from the post of President, we said nothing in regard to these changes. That was the internal affair of a fraternal party and country. When there was a change of Secretaries of the Central Committee and of members of the Central Committee's Presidium, and also a change of ministers, we again, as you recall, said nothing about it (I mean we said nothing openly in the press). We believe that this is the internal affair of a fraternal Party, its Central Committee, and its National Assembly.

However, comrades, when the situation has developed into an open political massacre of all Party cadres, when exhortations are made to change virtually the whole Party leadership from top to bottom, when one hears ever louder voices calling for a reorientation of the CPCz, and when the fate of the whole Party and of the socialist achievements of the Czechoslovak people is under challenge, then this is a different matter. If there exists a real threat that the political content of the CPCz will be transformed into some sort of new organization—in the best of instances into a social democratic one or perhaps even into a petty bourgeois character—then this, I repeat, affects the interests not only of Communists in Czechoslovakia and not only the people of Czechoslovakia, but the interests of the entire socialist system and of the whole world Communist movement. We would be correct to regard such a turn of events as a direct threat to the world position of socialism and a direct threat to all our countries.

Any attempt to thwart such a process cannot be considered interference in internal affairs. This is an expression of our international duty to the whole Communist movement and our international duty to the Communists and working people of Czechoslovakia. Confronted by the growing danger that socialism will be dislodged in one of the countries of the socialist commonwealth, we cannot shut ourselves off, comrades, into our own national apartments. That would be a betrayal of the interests of Communism.

Communism develops and exists only as an international movement. All its victories and all its achievements are related to this. Anyone who departs from internationalism cannot consider himself a Communist. Our countries are linked to the ČSSR by treaties and agreements. These are not agreements between individual persons but mutual commitments between friends and states. They are founded on the general desire to defend socialism in our countries and to safeguard it against all and any hazards.

No one has the right to dissociate himself from his international commitments or his allied obligations. It must be emphasized that the demagoguery we hear about this nowadays is out of place.

We respect the right of every Party and the right of every nation. We recognize the idea of specific national forms of socialist development in different countries. But

we also believe in a common historical fate. The cause of defending socialism—that is our common undertaking. Our Parties were united in their understanding of this at the meeting in Moscow at the beginning of May. We are certain that such unity characterizes our meeting this time as well.

There has never been a case in which socialism triumphed and was firmly entrenched, only to have a capitalist order restored. This has never happened and we are certain it never will. The guarantee of this is our common readiness to do whatever is necessary to help a fraternal Party and people defeat the plans of counterrevolution and thwart imperialist plans in relation to Czechoslovakia.

Our delegation declares that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, our government, and our people are fully ready to offer Czechoslovakia all necessary assistance.

[...]

[Source: KC PZPR 192/24/4, *Archiwum Akt Nowych*. Translated by Mark Kramer and Marian J. Kratochvíl.]