

DOCUMENT No. 86: Summary of Alexander Dubček's Meeting with János Kádár at Komárno, August 17, 1968

Source: ÚSD, AÚV KSČ, F. 02/1; Vondrová & Navrátil, vol. 2, pp. 216–219.

This memorandum of a conversation records a meeting between Dubček and Kádár on August 17—arranged that morning at Kádár's initiative. At the Yalta talks, Brezhnev had urged that the Hungarian leader intercede with Dubček one last time. The Komárno meeting, however, took place just after the Soviet Politburo had decided, on August 17, to give the final go-ahead for "Operation Danube" as the invasion was codenamed.

The meeting memorandum clarifies a longstanding discrepancy in the historical accounts of Kádár's motives—whether he sought to forestall an invasion by warning Dubček to take immediate action, or was simply engaging in a deceptive charade at Moscow's behest, as Dubček implied in his own memoir, *Hope Dies Last*. Twice at the beginning of the conversation, Kádár indicates that he had spoken to Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgorny about his intention to meet Dubček, and had secured their approval. Those admissions would have been peculiar if Kádár had genuinely sought to mislead Dubček into thinking that the Hungarian leader was acting independently of the Soviet Union. Instead, by acknowledging from the outset the constraints imposed by his ties with the CPSU leadership, Kádár appears to be trying to signal to Dubček that the conversation could not be as free-ranging or explicit as either of them might have liked.

Although Kádár made no reference to the pending likelihood of military aggression against Czechoslovakia, he is reported in Zdeněk Mlynář's account, *Nachtfrost: Erfahrungen auf dem Weg vom realen zum menschlichen Sozialismus*, to have offered a final warning to Dubček as they parted in the train station: "Do you really not understand the sort of people you are dealing with?" Dubček, in his memoir, records Kádár's remark about the Soviet leaders as: "But you do know them, don't you?"—very similar, but not identical. These meeting notes do not contain this final exchange.

The minutes were prepared by E. Újváry, a senior staffer at the CPCz CC's International Department.

... [Pro forma introductory material has been deleted.]

The Hungarian side was represented also by Cde. Erdélyi, a member of the HSWP Central Committee and deputy minister of foreign affairs.

The meeting, which took place in the building of the district committee of the Slovak CP at Komárno, was held at the request of Cde. Kádár.⁶⁰

At the beginning of his remarks, Cde. Kádár said he wanted to have a personal meeting with Cde. Dubček with no protocol attached. The HSWP CC Politburo had agreed to his proposal. He said he was glad it had been possible to arrange the meeting. He mentioned the Bratislava meeting of the delegations from the six fraternal parties and noted that the brevity of the meeting as well as the heavy workload had not made it possible to discuss certain topical issues. That was why he had come up with the idea of having an additional meeting. Another factor that persuaded him of the need for such a meeting was, as he put it, some events that had occurred since the last bilateral meeting (at Komárno on Hungarian territory on 13 July 1968),⁶¹ particularly the talks between the CPCz CC Presidium and the CPSU CC Politburo at Čierna nad Tisou and the Bratislava meeting of the six fraternal socialist countries. Cde. Kádár then informed Cde. Dubček that after the Bratislava meeting he had spoken several times to Cde. Brezhnev on the phone, who also thought a meeting between the first secretaries of the CPCz

⁶⁰ Kádár's own brief report on the meeting, presented to a joint session of the HSWP Central Committee and the Hungarian Council of Ministers, August 23, 1968, can be found in PTTI, 288, F. 4/94 oc. See also a one-paragraph description of the Kádár–Dubček meeting in Zdeněk Mlynář's *Nachtfrost: Erfahrungen auf dem Weg vom realen zum menschlichen Sozialismus* (Köln: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1978), p. 157, and Dubček's own account in his posthumously published memoir, *Hope Dies Last*, p. 173.

⁶¹ See Kádár's statement in Document No. 52. See also Document No. 51.

and the HSWP would be useful. He added that on 12 August 1968, he had met Cdes. Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgorny in the Crimea.⁶² This meeting had further convinced him of the need to meet Cde. Dubček. He had mentioned this to the Soviet comrades, who welcomed the idea and thought it a very good move.

After this brief introduction, Cde. Kádár said it would be good if they continued their discussion where they had left off at Komárom.

Cde. Dubček also said how pleased he was to have another meeting with Cde. Kádár and agreed to his proposal to have further talks.

Cde. Kádár said that since his meeting with Cdes. Dubček and Černík at Komárom, he had constantly thought about an idea which, he said, he had put forward in connection with the Moscow meeting of five fraternal parties.⁶³ That meeting, in his opinion, had created an unpleasant situation, and it was a mistake to have held it; but he added that this mistake was followed by another. He was referring here to the decision of the CPCz CC Presidium of 8 July 1968, dealing with the letters from the five fraternal parties of the socialist countries.

Cde. Dubček replied that this decision by the CPCz CC Presidium should not be seen as erroneous. The CPCz had expressed its position favoring meetings of the fraternal parties. As far as the Warsaw meeting of the five fraternal parties was concerned, Cde. Dubček said that the CPCz CC Presidium had not been informed that it would be held. They were first told about the meeting by the Czechoslovak News Agency.⁶⁴

Cde. Kádár repeated that the decision of the CPCz CC Presidium on 8 July 1968 had created a new and difficult situation. He added that he did not at this point wish to elaborate on the causes of these mistakes, for what was important now were the bilateral talks held at Čierna nad Tisou and the Bratislava meeting of the six fraternal parties. The HSWP leadership viewed these meetings favorably and considered them to be of great importance. He remarked that the HSWP delegation had an easy time in Bratislava because it had welcomed both the bilateral negotiations at Čierna nad Tisou as well as the Bratislava meeting.

Cde. Dubček again averred that the CPCz CC Presidium's decision on 8 July 1968 could not be seen as an erroneous step. He said that the initial mistake had been the decision of the five fraternal parties to meet in Moscow, and the second mistake had been the convocation of the Warsaw meeting, again by the five fraternal parties.

Cde. Dubček went on to say that the leadership of his party had also informed the CPSU Politburo that it considered the Warsaw meeting of five fraternal parties to be a mistake, both in procedure and substance. In this context he added that the letter from the CPCz CC Presidium should have been discussed by the leadership of those fraternal parties to whom it had been sent before the Warsaw meeting as an expression of the CPCz's consistent respect for internationalist principles in relations among fraternal parties. But this was not done.

The Warsaw meeting, Cde. Dubček went on, adopted a document concerning one party. Apart from the fact that the meeting's evaluation of the situation differed from that of the party directly affected, the meeting was claimed to be in that party's interest. No one bothered to ask the party concerned whether this was really so. That is why, Dubček said, we considered this step to be a mistake not only vis-à-vis the CPCz but also vis-à-vis the whole international communist movement. Referring to the Bratislava meeting of the six fraternal parties and the document it adopted, Cde. Dubček said the document expressed a cause common to all the participants, for which we will all fight. That is why the CPCz is putting its entire weight behind this document. He said the content of the Bratislava document would be reflected in the proceedings and conclusions of the Extraordinary 14th CPCz Congress. The content of the document is reflected in several decisions and official statements made by the CPCz during the post-January period.

⁶² See Document No. 83.

⁶³ For a transcript of this meeting, see Document No. 31.

⁶⁴ See Documents Nos. 51 and 62.

He said that after Čierna nad Tisou and Bratislava, the CPCz CC Presidium had taken a number of measures with regard to the clubs (K-231, KAN), the National Front (a law), the social democrats, and so forth, and that by the end of the month there would be a meeting of the CPCz Central Committee and of the National Assembly where legal, personnel, and other measures would be taken to implement the conclusions from Bratislava. Relevant measures are also planned in the CPCz CC Presidium.

Finally, Cde. Dubček again explained that the Bratislava document did not contradict the tasks and wishes of the CPCz. He emphasized that the document had created some basis for future unity, although it must be recognized that Czechoslovakia's internal political situation is more complicated than it was before the Warsaw meeting. The CPCz encountered these problems when carrying out tasks for the whole of society. Cde. Dubček also said he wondered whether some of the other participants interpreted the Bratislava meeting in the same way.

Cde. Kádár remarked that we ought to remember that these parties had not changed even after the Bratislava meeting, which did not mean, however, that we should not reinforce the platform jointly adopted in Bratislava.