

October 22, 1968

**Letter from Dr. Baumann to Deputy Minister for
Foreign Affairs Gen. Dr. Kiesewetter**

Citation:

"Letter from Dr. Baumann to Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Gen. Dr. Kiesewetter", October 22, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office), MfAA, M3/72. Contributed and translated by Radoslav Yordanov. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/301066>

Summary:

In a confidential letter to Deputy Minister Dr. Kiesewetter, Dr. Baumann discusses Cuba's evolving relationship with socialist countries following Fidel Castro's August 23, 1968, speech, which supported the USSR's actions in Czechoslovakia. While Cuba's stance brought it tactically closer to the Soviet bloc, ideological differences persist. Internal pressures, economic challenges, and pragmatic needs have led the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC) to adopt a more flexible approach in relations with socialist nations, signaling an interest in strengthening state and party ties. Baumann notes this shift as an opportunity for fostering mutual understanding and cooperation, although fundamental disagreements remain unchanged. The CPC's evolving conduct reflects both external influences and internal necessities, marking a cautious yet significant recalibration of its foreign policy. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

Confidential

To Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Gen. Dr. Kiesewetter
Berlin

Havana, October 22, 1968

Dear Comrade Minister!

During the trip to the celebration of the "100 Years of Struggle" near Manzanillo/Oriente, I had the opportunity to have a long confidential conversation with the Chargé d'Affaires of the USSR, Comrade Dunin, about Cuba's relationship with the socialist countries, especially the USSR and the GDR.

I informed Comrade Dunin, the only representative of our five countries, of the impending visit of our party delegation, pointing out that I would not inform the other comrades until after the conversation with Dr. Hart.

There was an exchange of views on F. Castro's speech of August 23, 1968, and the resulting possible effects on Cuba's relationship with our countries. We fully agreed that F. Castro's response to the events in Czechoslovakia has objectively brought the Cuban party a considerable step closer to our parties, because in the given situation the position of the Communist Party of Cuba represented real help for the socialist brother countries involved. The discussion in the speech of the causes of the developments in Czechoslovakia, which were primarily attributed to alleged revisionist tendencies in our politics, is not new.

(p. 1)

At the same time, however, it makes clear that the CPC continues to distance itself from the views of the majority of our parties on the known fundamental issues.

We agreed that the position of the Communist Party of Cuba on Czechoslovakia should be viewed primarily as a tactical measure, the main causes of which lie in the coalition-based domestic political and economic situation in Cuba itself and does not change CPC's strategic orientation .

This view is also confirmed by statements made by leading Cuban officials to the delegation of the Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior. According to the Councilor of the Bulgarian Embassy, Comrade Koen, it was explained in a small circle that the CPC was more distant from us than ever in ideological and political questions, while in its tactical attitude it had come closer to the socialist countries - particularly as a result of the events in Czechoslovakia. The Cuban side is clear that strengthening the socialist countries is objectively vital for the Cuban revolution.

During the discussion, Comrade Dunin said: Irrespective of the fact that the Soviet Embassy does not expect any qualitative change in the basic political and ideological conception of the CPC, all available opportunities for improving relations must be exploited. Just like the SED, the CPSU is also making renewed efforts. A certain willingness to compromise on the part of the CPC is becoming apparent as far as shaping state relations is concerned.

Dunin's comments indicated that both the Ambassador, Comrade Soldatov, and Comrade Suslov, at their recent meeting with Carlos Rafael Rodrigues in Moscow, proposed to the Cuban side an exchange of delegations at a high level in order to exchange views on fundamental questions of international politics and to resolve outstanding issues in bilateral relations. The leadership of the CPSU - based on

(p. 2)

Comrade Kosygin's last visit to Cuba - apparently thought that a Cuban delegation would come to Moscow first. Dunin said that the Cuban side was trying to evade the issue. It was obviously not interested in high-level discussions with the CPSU and was

trying to at least gain time.

In early October, the Cuban ambassador in Moscow, Garcia Pelaez, visited Dunin and said that Cuba was interested in improving relations with the USSR. Facts had to be established. Progress could be made on many issues. Everything would be fine. As the position on Czechoslovakia had shown, Cuba was in agreement with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries on important fundamental issues. We had to be patient and not rush into high-level talks. The right time would come.

Pelaez was obviously sent ahead to bring the Communist Party's opinion to the attention of the Soviet side again in this way.

Comrade Dunin estimated that the visit was primarily connected with the upcoming negotiations on the 1969 annual protocol on the exchange of goods, since the Cuban side, given its complicated economic situation, has high hopes for these negotiations. (It is a fact that the supply situation is still tense. There is reliable information that food had to be brought from Havana and other provinces to Camagüey and the north-western regions of Oriente because supplies in the cities there had almost collapsed. In the army, there are increasing signs of discontent, insubordination and desertion, which are connected with the poor food supply. Information about desertions of individuals and entire groups has been confirmed by Cuban, Soviet and Bulgarian sources. In Oriente, around 50 men were arrested, led by two captains, who are accused of having prepared a breakthrough to Guantánamo).

(p. 3)

Comrade Dimin stressed that the Soviet Union will use all available opportunities in relations but considers high-level meetings to be unavoidable. According to recent statements by the new Soviet military attaché, Comrade Amosov, the Soviet side has abandoned the idea of inviting the Cubans to Moscow first. The Cuban side has apparently been suggested to receive a party and government delegation from the Soviet Union in Havana this year. No further information has been available on this matter.

Finally, I would like to summarize again:

The events in Czechoslovakia prompted the Communist Party of Cuba to take a more realistic view of Cuba's position in the balance of power in the world, its relationship with the Soviet Union and our countries, the current internal situation and stability of the country and the viability of the revolution. The results of the internal discussion within the leadership bodies of the Politburo and the Central Committee led to a correction of the negative position originally announced by Fidel Castro himself.

Without making any fundamental conceptual changes to the Cuban revolutionary doctrine, a number of factors (which still need to be analyzed in detail and which will become clearer through the discussions of the Central Committee delegation) led to a change in the conduct of the Communist Party of Cuba towards the Soviet Union and its allied socialist brother countries. This line, which had already been apparent in detail, for example in the conduct towards the GDR and our party, became more obvious with the speech of August 23, 1968.

The CPC is beginning to correct its tough confrontational policy towards our parties, as expressed in the Third Plenum and in its strict rejection of any discussion of contentious issues, in favour of a more flexible line in its relations with our governments and parties.

(p. 4)

Recognizing objective needs and facing internal pressure, the CPC is ready and interested not only in developing state relations with our countries, but also in bringing relations at the level of parties and mass organisations out of the stage of stagnation and accepting a substantive exchange of views. The speech of August 23 was undoubtedly an important starting point.

The forthcoming exchange of views, initially with the delegation of the SED, the CPSU

and possibly other sister parties, will have a positive overall effect on the development of relations. If differences of opinion persist, this exchange of delegations will lead to a greater mutual understanding of each other's positions on fundamental issues. It can promote cooperation on all fundamental issues of international politics on which full or approximate agreement is reached.

If this exchange of views continues over a longer period, it could have a positive effect in terms of promoting unity and reducing divisions between our parties.

In the context of this process and the opportunities currently available to us, it must be clear to us that so far the CPC's position has remained qualitatively changed in the key areas where differences of opinion exist.

This can be clearly demonstrated by the statements of leading Cuban comrades as well as the speeches and numerous publications in connection with the first anniversary of the death of "Che" Guevara and the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the national liberation struggle.

With socialist greetings

Dr. Baumann

(p. 5)

PS

I thank you for your letter of October 18, 1968 (VD 103/68), from which I can see that there is no difference of opinion regarding the assessment of F. Castro's speech of August 23 and its possible effects on the development of relations with our parties.

This letter was already drafted before the courier mail arrived. I have therefore made no changes - despite some repetitions - as it appears to be a useful supplement to my letter of September 24, 1968 (VD 152/68).

As far as the red line information 139/VIII is concerned, I do not understand the severity of your letter. Without wanting to engage in pointless polemics, I maintain that this information does not correspond to the facts in the two points mentioned.

(p. 6)