

May 25, 1968

**Summation of Informers from the Transcarpathian
Oblast, Ukrainian SSR**

Citation:

"Summation of Informers from the Transcarpathian Oblast, Ukrainian SSR", May 25, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Spr. 28, Ll. 152-160.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/113085>

Summary:

A report summarizing various conversations from the Transcarpathian Oblast, submitted by Ukrainian KGB Chief A. Zabchenko

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

No. 5/357425 May 1968UzhhorodSecretCopy No. 1TO THE CPSU CC POLITBURO MEMBER ANDFIRST SECRETARY OF THE UkrCP CCTo Comrade P. E. SHELESTKyivPer your instruction, we are reporting the population's reactions to events in the CSSR, based on materials received by the UkrSSR KGB Directorate in Transcarpathian Oblast from 14 to 24 May 1968.Information flowing into the UkrSSR KGB Directorate in Transcarpathian Oblast from 14 to 24 May indicates that the overwhelming majority of the population in the oblast, as before, correctly understands events in the CSSR and approves the corresponding measures adopted by the CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet government. . . . 180In characterizing reactions to events in the CSSR, the next largest group consists of citizens who, despite being patriotically inclined, are improperly assessing the events and are drawing inappropriate conclusions from those events for a variety of reasons, including that they have been misled by Western radio broadcasts.A workman at the Khust felt-stripping factory, B. M. Lukechko, who was born in 1922 and is a member of the CPSU, declared:"Our Communist Party has many enemies. More people hate us than we even imagine. The events in Czechoslovakia are of interest to many people. I believe that the much-anticipated deployment of the Soviet Army into Czechoslovakia would be unfortunate. It would lead to no good, and after this even more people would hate us."A resident of Seredne village in the Uzhhorod region, N. E. Danats'ko, a non-Communist who was born in 1914 and is a physician in the district hospital, said in a conversation with other residents of the village, referring to rumors about the forthcoming dispatch of Soviet troops into the CSSR:"This would be difficult to imagine, considering that the Soviet government would not want to incur the wrath of other nations. The Soviet government would not take such a risk, since this might spark the flames of war in the heart of Europe."A resident of Pavshino village in the Mukachevo region, Maria Kizman, who was born in 1951 and is a 10th-grade student, writes in a letter to her brother who was called into military service in Zaporizhzhya: "Many young men from our village have been taken into the army. They were in the Pidhorodna barracks for three days, and then moved off to the Czechoslovak border . . ."It hasn't yet been the case that the lads were afraid to go into the army; you'd speak with them, and they'd say only one thing: 'Yes, we still have some days left at home, and then we'll be off somewhere . . .,'" and they almost cry. All of them are this way. Now every day you go into the cafeteria, and they're walking around and drinking, and you can hear them all around the town. They'll regret leaving Pavshino."A group of collective farmers from the market-garden brigade of Storozhnytsya village in the Uzhhorod district, when discussing recent events, said: "The citizens of Czechoslovakia—the Czechs and Slovaks—are hostile to one another and are unable to get along. That is why Soviet troops will be sent to Czechoslovakia."A resident of Khust, D. D. Szogot, a hairdresser of Hungarian nationality who was born in 1913 and is not a party member, said in a conversation with a customer:"I served from 1937 to 1940 in the Czechoslovak army in Slovakia, and I know that the Slovaks have strong nationalist inclinations. 181 I would even say that they are more strongly nationalist than the Ukrainian underground fighters here were. Now that Dubcek has come to power, the Slovaks will be inciting nationalist enmity even more."A stoker at the Khust ceramic factory, Vasyli' Vasyli'ovych Ruda, who was born in 1924 and is not a party member, said in a conversation with his fellow workers:"President Svoboda demanded that the Soviet Union return Transcarpathia to the CSSR. Svoboda will carry out his designs and not yield on them because he fought together with the Transcarpathians against fascist Germany." 182 In addition, information continues to flow in about tendentious and patently hostile reactions both to events in the CSSR and to the measures adopted by the CPSU CC and Soviet government:A worker at the Irshava weaving plant, Yu. V. Vovkanych, who was born in 1935 and is not a party member, said:"Everywhere people hate the Russians. In Poland they threw thousands of the best people into prison because of their hatred for Russians. Romania is against the Russians. The Czechs also have overturned the regime that subordinated itself to the Russians. The Soviet regime in Czechoslovakia will be eliminated with the help of America."A former Uniate priest, Andrii Bits'ko, who is 57 years old and is now an upholstery specialist at the Mukachevo furniture combine, said:"The policy of the new CSSR government is structured properly; they want to have a genuine democracy. Take any example you wish. In the USSR they prohibited the ringing of church bells because the noise would disturb the tranquility of the population and its leisure. Supersonic jets flying over the city create much more noise than the bells ever did, and the population has

complained about this; but no one has prohibited these flights, which are continuing as always. Now where's the logic in that?"The people of the CSSR have reached a point where the church can act and develop freely, unlike in the USSR. Political events in the CSSR will develop in the same way that they did here under Khrushchev once Stalin was gone. All of those whom Stalin persecuted, Khrushchev set free. 183 Dubcek is doing precisely the same with those whom Novotný persecuted."Mykhailo Mykhailivych Demes, the head of the sausage division at the Khust public cafeteria factory, who was born in 1923 and is not a party member, complained that he isn't being permitted to show what he can do. He then said:"These events don't alarm me because Transcarpathia will again go over to Czechoslovakia, where the old system can be restored as it existed until 1939, and I'll become a wealthy private entrepreneur. I'll show them what I can do."A dentist and resident of Mukachevo, Jozef Ida-Mois, who is a Jew born in 1914 and is not a party member, said in a conversation:"Events in the CSSR expose the weakness of the socialist camp. The CSSR, like Romania, will soon be able to carry out an independent policy, in particular with regard to the Jews and Israel."Jews are happy that the Czechs and Slovaks have an animus against the Russians, but the USSR is using all manner of pressure against the CSSR, including economic pressure."A teacher at one of the schools in Mukachevo, Vasyl' Vasyl'ovych Kampo, who is 52 years old and is not a party member, said:"The friendship between the USSR and the CSSR hindered the development of Czechoslovakia, as it earlier did with Hungary. The only difference is that the Czechs are much wiser than the Hungarians were in 1956. The Czechs have taken power into their own hands without any bloodshed, and are acting very intelligently. They haven't done all that much for now, but they'll gradually be able to do more. Everything is being done to establish the same sort of regime that existed in Masaryk's time."A senior merchandising specialist at the Vinohradiv housewares plant, Vasyl' Medved, who was born in 1926 and is not a party member, said: "The Czechs are fine lads; they'll soon leave the stupid Russians behind as they rebuild Czechoslovakia the way it was under Masaryk. They lived so well then; they essentially had everything to their heart's content. If they call me into active duty in the army, I won't return any more to Transcarpathia. I'll run away to the West."A worker at the Tyachiv scrap metal loading facility, Mykhailo Vakarov, who is 38 years old and is not a party member, declared:"If the Soviet Union undertakes any military operations against the CSSR, Russia will be confronted not only by the other socialist countries, but by the whole nation of Ukraine."Information continues to flow in about the assessments of events in the CSSR made by citizens of that country who are currently in Transcarpathian Oblast on private or official business, as well as about assessments made by citizens of the USSR who are returning from trips to Czechoslovakia.For example, Juda Simkhovych Fogel, a sales worker in the city of Rakhiv who was born in 1918, told others after he returned from his parents' house in the CSSR:"On 1 May one of the columns of demonstrators in Prague were carrying a placard with the inscription 'Greetings to Israel.' In cities of the CSSR, including Prague and Bratislava, they're selling postcards with the portrait of the former president of the bourgeois Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Masaryk, in many shops. Citizens there are speaking with hatred about Novotný, describing him as an illiterate. They're all collecting and telling jokes about him. Whenever a street in the city is being torn up, they say that the repair crews are searching for Novotný's diploma. 184 The Czechs affirm that they support friendship with the Soviet Union because Czechoslovakia receives bread, oil, ore, and other goods and raw materials from the USSR. They condemn the events of 1956 in Hungary and declare that fascists and counterrevolutionaries gained sway there, whereas they, being cultured people, will struggle for democracy through other means."A resident of Prague, Ivan Lendl, told one of his relatives from the Irshava district of Transcarpathian Oblast, who was recently visiting him and has now returned home, that in the wake of Novotný's dismissal the authorities are releasing all the political prisoners from jail and are returning their property to them.Workers at the factory where Lendl works have had discussions to the effect that because General Svoboda struggled for the liberation of Transcarpathia and is now president, the Czechs might demand the return of Transcarpathia from the USSR, and the Sudetenland will be given back to the Germans.By now, political parties have been created in the CSSR: the Democratic, Socialist, and People's Parties. These parties are growing very rapidly; many

members of the Communist Party are leaving the KSC and joining the new parties. Later on, Lendl said that during staff meetings at their factory, the workers ask Communists who will return money and property to the former prisoners—the state or the Communists? 185 They are demanding that the Communists return their money, since they were accomplices of Novotný. As a result of this attitude toward Communists, many of them are refusing supervisory duties and are becoming rank-and-file workers. According to Lendl, only the Communists are still loyal to the Soviet Union. He asserted that the same sort of events will soon begin in Poland. A teacher from the Uzhhorod middle school No. 8, Emyliya Pavlovna Dobys, who was born in 1929 and is not a party member, was in Prague from 1 to 10 May on personal business. At a teachers' collective she said that when she met with Czechoslovak citizens in Prague, they often voiced dissatisfaction with our country. According to her, you could hear statements like: "We and you are not on the same path"; "What did we learn from you over these past 20 years"; "We won't permit you to dictate to us"; and "Trading with you is disadvantageous because the Americans sell the same things for only one-fifth the price." Dobys also says that many young people are wearing pins with Masaryk's portrait, and that German is being spoken everywhere in Prague. The residents of Prague are well aware that troops have been deployed along their border in Transcarpathia. Having returned from a private visit to the CSSR, Mykhailo Stepanovych Magyar, a teacher born in 1935 who lives in Khust, said in a conversation with his brother: "During my stay in the Sudetenland, I could see that almost all the prisoners have been let out of jail, and they are now publishing articles of a virulently anti-Soviet character in different newspapers and demanding friendship and cooperation with the FRG. They are busy recounting the torment, degradation, and insults that they supposedly experienced." Having returned on 8 May from the CSSR, a collective farm worker in Bedevlya village in the Tyachiv district, Mariya Vasylovna Tyashko, who was born in 1937 and is not a party member, said: "In conversations in the CSSR they say that democratization is under way, and they no longer need friendship between the USSR and CSSR. An artist from one of the drama theaters in Prague (whose name I don't know) spoke in this vein, describing the Russians as unfriendly. Half the audience in the theater greeted this statement with applause. "The Germans who were expelled from the Sudetenland express hope in letters to their relatives that their former names will be restored. The Czechs view citizens of the USSR with disdain and speak in their presence about the need to sever the friendship and seek new paths of democratization." Having returned from the CSSR, a worker at the Uzhhorod shoe factory, L. I. Mykovych, who was born in 1915 and is not a party member, says that he was pained by the speech that the poet Jan Procházka gave at a press conference demanding that the KSC and the government fully relinquish any control over literature and the arts and that all remaining restrictions on publishing be eliminated. 186 Students and intellectuals, according to Mykovych, are actively taking part in these events. The young people are not working at all; they're simply holding meetings. Varvara Morytsivna Kallus, a resident of Uzhhorod, says: "Affairs in Prague are very serious and dangerous. So-called 'modern' youth, under the sway of American propaganda, are out on the streets. Members of the KSC (friends of Kallus) are dismayed; they feel that the rug has been pulled out from under them, and they don't understand where it all will lead. "In Prague they're talking about how Germans from the FRG are speaking about the forthcoming occupation of the Sudeten region, just as Israel seized the Arab territories, and then they'll have to let the UN get involved in the matter." Petro Iosifivich Grimut, a CPSU member who was born in 1938 and works as a supervisor at the automobile factory in Mizhhir'ya, said: "Being in the CSSR on a visit to my uncle, Nikolaj Grimut, who is a pensioner, I heard such statements as: 'We all hate the Communists of the Soviet Union and especially (and here he names one of the leaders of the CPSU). 187 Even Khrushchev did not permit such interference in the affairs of foreign countries as he is doing now, but our country will move along its own path of development, and we will get by without help from the Soviet Union.'" Another citizen of the CSSR, Georgi Klevec, who was born in 1919 and is a native of Repinne village in the Mizhhir'ya district, spoke with great malevolence about the Soviet Union and [Soviet] Communists. Nikolaj Grimut and Georgi Klevec intend to travel to Transcarpathia this year on personal business. L. F. Bolyubakh, a foreman at the Mizhhir'ya autopark and CPSU member who was born in 1919 and who recently

traveled to the CSSR as a tourist, reports that one of the CSSR citizens in Prague told Soviet tourists the following: "You come here simply to buy things. You in the Soviet Union do not have, and never had, any sort of truth and justice. You just live a big lie." In addition, Bolyubakh says that a huge number of Germans, predominantly young people, are currently in the CSSR. Gabriel Putraš, who is living in Prague and is obviously a clergyman, writes in a letter to the secretary of the Mukachevo diocese, Mykola Logoida: "To our great regret, we on this occasion can in no way give a happy account of the life of our church. In Eastern Slovakia the Uniates have risen again, which has inflamed passions, as manifested by egoism, crude invective, and hatred toward everything that comes from the East, even toward things that are objectively good. . . . If the government completely rescinds the decision made in the 1950s to disband the Uniates in our country and does not return things to where they were on 1.1.1968 as we propose, the Uniates will be fully reestablished in all the parishes where they operated earlier." The priest Ivan Puškaš, who arrived in Uzhhorod from Eastern Slovakia (in the CSSR), said in a conversation with the Uzhhorod priest Dmytrii Shoka: "The Greek-Catholic episcopate is already active and is taking priests and parishes into the Uniate church." I. Šcada, a resident of Brno, writes to his relatives in Mukachevo: "A situation has arisen here that is turning into a revolution. Everything is returning to the past, and very little of socialism remains. They're rehabilitating all elements supportive of Masaryk." A serviceman in the Czechoslovak army, Štefán Vasilevič Popjuk, born in 1915 and a native of the Rakhiv district in Transcarpathian Oblast, traveled to his relatives on personal business, and during the registration at the district police department after his arrival on 11 May, he said: "A. Novotný, being CC first secretary and president, accumulated all power in his own hands and sent to prison military servicemen who fought in the corps under General Svoboda. He ordered certain others to be shot. Svoboda himself was demoted. The people of Czechoslovakia demanded that Novotný appear on television to speak about his mistakes, but he refused, so they dismissed him and we went for three months without a president." 188 Characterizing the situation in the CSSR at present, Popjuk said that four political parties already exist there, and another two will soon be set up. All of them will function in accordance with the principle of equality and on the basis of the Communist Party program. The restoration of capitalism in Czechoslovakia will not take place, since the old aristocracy under Masaryk and Beneš no longer exists, and even the Germans living in the CSSR do not support the idea of returning to the former bourgeois Czechoslovakia. Popjuk emphasized that he knows a great deal about the crimes of Novotný, since he worked until 1962 in the CSSR state security organs. During the conversation, he also noted that military exercises involving the CSSR, the USSR, Bulgaria, and Romania will be held on CSSR territory. 189 As Popjuk asserted, at present you can travel freely from the CSSR to the FRG so long as you do it in civilian clothes, because German intelligence has its sights set on military personnel. A citizen of the CSSR, Lysý, who is a teacher and lives in Medzilaborce (in Eastern Slovakia), 190 was recently in Mukachevo and said in a conversation with one of her relatives: "A struggle is under way in the CSSR for democratization, with three aims in mind: the return of land plots to the peasants, the legalization of private enterprise, and the legalization of private crafts. The driving force behind these events comes from young people and students, who are demanding a return to the order that existed under Masaryk and Beneš." When Irina Slezan recently arrived in Uzhhorod from Košice, where she lives, she said: "During the initial days of the 'movement for renewal' in the city of Banská Bystrica (in Western Slovakia), acolytes of Hlinka (the former premier of 'independent' Slovakia) went out onto the streets yelling fascist slogans and songs, but they were promptly called to order." 191 Information about this matter continues to flow in. Materials warranting higher-level attention will be reported to the UkrCP Transcarpathian Oblast committee and the KGB of the UkrSSR. CHIEF OF DIRECTORATE OF THE KGB UNDER THE UkrSSR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS IN TRANSCARPATHIAN OBLASTA. ZHABCHENKO 180 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Omitted here are a few pat quotations from oblast residents who supported the Soviet Union's policy toward Czechoslovakia. 181 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The period to which the speaker is referring marked the inception of Slovak "independence" after German forces occupied the Czech lands. Nationalist sentiment in Slovakia was especially pronounced during those years. 182 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Ludvík Svoboda had been the wartime commander-in-chief of

the Czechoslovak armed units that fought alongside the Soviet Red Army. He subsequently was appointed minister of national defense in Czechoslovakia, a post he held until being demoted in the purges of 1950. See Svoboda's memoirs of his wartime experiences in *Z Buzuluku do Prahy* (Prague: Orbis, 1961).¹⁸³

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This statement seems odd coming from someone who cares as deeply about religious freedom as the speaker does. On religious matters, unlike on most other issues, Khrushchev was nearly as repressive as Stalin. Khrushchev launched a violent anti-religious campaign in 1954 and eased it only slightly in the latter half of the 1950s. Then, in February 1960, he appointed a hardline ideologue, Vladimir Kuroedov, to oversee religious affairs, marking the start of another intense anti-religious campaign, which continued almost unabated through the remaining four-and-a-half years of Khrushchev's tenure. Although the Brezhnev era was hardly a time of great religious freedom, Brezhnev did allow more scope for religious worship than Khrushchev did.¹⁸⁴ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Novotný, the son of a bricklayer, received only an elementary education and served as an apprentice to a locksmith. He received no secondary schooling and was devoid of intellectual curiosity. Before World War II, he was a middle-ranking KSC official, but at the close of the war he landed the key post of regional party secretary in Prague. By remaining staunchly loyal to the party leader, Klement Gottwald, Novotný continued to advance in the party hierarchy, especially after Gottwald moved against Rudolf Slánský in 1951. Novotný's rise to the highest post in the KSC thus was attributable to Gottwald's largesse, rather than to any gifts or acumen on Novotný's part. Novotný's lack of education and his limited intellectual capacity made him a frequent target of private jokes.¹⁸⁵ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: After the Communists seized power in Czechoslovakia in 1948, they acquired vast amounts of property through the expropriation of businesses, factories, farms, large estates, and other holdings both large and small. Although "ownership" (i.e., effective control) of the property was transferred in some cases to state agencies and public organizations, ultimate control rested with the Communist Party. In 1968, a good deal of discussion emerged in Czechoslovakia about the possible compensation for those who had been unjustly imprisoned under Gottwald and Novotný, as well as restitution for people whose property had been confiscated in 1948 or after. (The proposals, however, were never intended to cover potential claims from the roughly 3 million ethnic Germans who had been expelled from the Sudetenland in 1945.) The law on judicial rehabilitations, adopted in late June 1968, provided for material compensation in some cases, but the law was never implemented. The Soviet invasion in August 1968 put an end to any further discussion of the matter, and it was not until after 1989 that a program of restitution and compensation was finally adopted (though again excluding the Sudeten Germans).¹⁸⁶ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Jan Procházka, a well-known writer, was an outspoken proponent of freedom of expression and other reforms throughout the Prague Spring. At the 4th Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union in June 1967, he denounced official censorship and called for "freedom of creativity," demands that led to his removal as a candidate member of the KSC Central Committee. From that point on, Procházka was often cited by Soviet leaders as a key organizer of the "anti-socialist" forces.¹⁸⁷ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The context (especially the next sentence) suggests that the person singled out here was Leonid Brezhnev.¹⁸⁸ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The speaker is mistaken here, evidently because he believed that when Novotný was removed as KSC First Secretary in early January 1968, he was also removed as President. In fact, Novotný retained his post as President until 21 March, when he finally resigned "for reason of ill health" under intense political pressure. Svoboda was formally approved as the new president on 30 March. Hence, Czechoslovakia went only nine days, not three months, without a president.¹⁸⁹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The notion that Romania would have participated in the maneuvers is obviously far-fetched. The Romanian leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, had kept Romanian troops out of most Warsaw Pact activities from the mid-1960s on, and he was strongly supportive of Czechoslovakia in 1968. There was never any likelihood that Romania would contribute troops to the joint maneuvers.¹⁹⁰ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Medzilaborce is a small town in the northeastern part of Eastern Slovakia, along the border with Poland.¹⁹¹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Zhabchenko's parenthetical interjection about Hlinka is mistaken. Andrej Hlinka, a Catholic priest who founded the ultranationalist Slovak People's Party (Hlinková

slovenská ľudová strana) in the interwar period, died in August 1938, eight months before Slovakia became nominally independent. Although Hlinka himself was not a fascist, some of his followers, who formed paramilitary units known as the Hlinka Guard, openly advocated a fascist, pro-Nazi program. One of the members of the pro-Nazi group, Vojtech Tuka, served as prime minister during Slovakia's brief period of "independence" (1939-1945) after Germany occupied the Sudetenland, Bohemia, and Moravia. Tuka and his supporters were increasingly able to outflank Hlinka's clerical successor, Jozef Tiso, the president of Slovakia, who, despite his strongly Christian nationalist leanings, initially hoped to forestall the outright Nazification of Slovak society.