



April 1, 1969
**Minutes of the 18th Meeting of the Executive
Committee of the Presidium of the Central
Committee of the Communist Party of
Czechoslovakia on the events of March 28 and 29,
1969**

Citation:

"Minutes of the 18th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on the events of March 28 and 29, 1969", April 1, 1969, Wilson Center Digital Archive, NA, Prague, A ÚV KSČ, f. 02/6, a.u. 18, b. 1, in Jitka Vondrová – Jaromír Navrátil: Komunistická strana Československa, vol. 4 normalizace (listopad 1968 – září 1969) (Praha – Brno 2003), pp. 242-61; translated for CWIHP by Jiří Mareš. Published in CWIHP Working Paper #69, "The (Inter-Communist) Cold War on Ice." <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/119587>

Summary:

The Czechoslovakia Executive Committee discusses the anti-Soviet protests of March 28-29 following the defeat of the Soviets by the Czechoslovak national team at the hockey world championships in Stockholm. Segments dealing with procedural or organizational matters and parts where the discussion repeats itself or digresses to other, unrelated issues have been omitted.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Czech

Contents:

Translation - English

[...]

[Alexander] Dubček: I received a report on the security situation in the republic.

[Stanislav] Provozník: Reading the report of Comrade (Jan) Pelnář.

Dubček: The report is being read so that it can be included in the minutes. [We have] multiple documents on what happened in Czechoslovakia's territory in connection with the events. I intended to present this information to show that the picture of the events would be related to [the letter. The letter submitted by Vladimir] Semyonov is known to [Oldřich] Černík and [Ludvík] Svoboda. The Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia adopted a declaration yesterday, and a meeting of the government has been convened at 4.30PM today. The Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia must take up a position, distance itself from the events, and discuss what to do next. Urgent measures need to be taken - it is absolutely [necessary] to place publishing activities under control so that they do not incite against the Soviet Union.

[I suggest] that our activities in these days should be as follows: It is necessary to take immediate measures, preventive rather than reactive. The party leadership, the Ministry of Interior and the government must have enough information on and evaluations of the security situation, so that adequate security measures can be adopted. The most important thing now is that we must discuss how to proceed from now on, as the position and the letter, as you could hear, are adamantly clear and of course formulated in a different tone than used until now. The letter ends with a warning of sorts, and makes the party and state leadership responsible, after a fashion, for the internal events.

Of course, some facts and phenomena have emerged on the surface in these days. If the Soviet Union indeed has some organized people or centers, as they call it, surveyed, it would be a serious matter. One of the reasons why I wanted to inform you about the opinion of the Ministry of Interior was that the ministry, in cooperation with other state authorities, has not submitted any report or memo. It has not performed any fundamental legal analysis that could confirm or disprove the conclusions on organized counter-revolutionary activities in the country and traceable to Western intelligence agencies. I am not drawing any conclusions; I am just stating the fact.

It is necessary to consider the immediate steps we need to make and to take up a position with respect to the nuisances, to think about our own measures the party and the government would have to make to prevent such events developing into a situation that would lead to serious disturbances and an armed intervention against civilian population. It is perhaps necessary to take preventive measures in all areas to avoid it.

We could not prepare ourselves for this. Before our meeting, I refused to receive Semyonov. Our position should be formulated by the Presidium of the Central Committee. Consequently, and in compliance with what I have said, I believe it is necessary to consider, along party and government lines, how to prevent the tendencies aimed against the Soviet Union, as they could produce an undesirable situation.

[...]

Svoboda: How have our people been informed about what happened? I suggest drafting a statement that would not be approved by the Presidium of the Central Committee. But it's not only the statement; what have we done to prevent a recurrence? No, I refuse to do this. Some authority needs to cover this. We need to take a statement on this. It is an extremely serious matter. We are surprised over all the things that happened. I heard yesterday that 99% of our people disagreed with what happened in Wenceslas Square.

One must feel ashamed over what happened. If they had succeeded in setting the Aeroflot office afire, all the buildings around would have burnt down as well.

Just think about it. A hundred and fifty thousand people in Wenceslas Square, 30 to 50 demolishing things, causing a lot of damage, and the others are just looking. Would something like that be possible in another country? We must be ashamed for

that.

Dubček: We will have a lot to do until the evening. We must draft the statement so that it can be published tomorrow. We must politically distance ourselves from the demonstrations and warn about their repetition.

[Josef] Smrkovský: I would like to remind you that, insofar as mentions about me are concerned - I read them in newspapers - they are not true. I was not in Wenceslas Square. It's written in newspapers, but I drove from the Wallenstein Garden and when we arrived to Národní Street, the road was closed there, so we drove back along the Masaryk Station. On my way home, I avoided Wenceslas Square. I was not in Wenceslas Square. I did not step out of the car on my way to and from the office. They recognized me in the car and it was like a black man's wire service; Smrkovský is here.

[...]

[Gustáv] Husák: In my opinion, the internal statement should not contain any mention about Smrkovský c. I believe it is necessary to say, in very concrete and specific terms, why we condemn the protests and why the condemnation is related to other measures. In plain terms, to state our position and also to say what to do with the situation. Černík should postpone the government meeting until we have agreed on our position. Then Černík can inform the government and also citizens on political measures. The government should implement them even if it does not have all supporting information at its disposal. I am under no illusion we will convince people.

Svoboda: We need to hear the Minister of National Defense.

Husák: We must express our opinions. We must reach an agreement, with the situation being like before August 21 ...

Dubček: The government must be tasked to propose measures. We need someone to work on it.

Černík: We have been working on concrete measures. We will not adopt any statement. As to members of the government, I can have them waiting until the morning, if necessary. I thought we would rework the letter, sit here overnight, and draft some measures. The measures will not be formulated by public servants at the Office of the Government. My people are sitting and trying to come up with something, but the measures must be implemented by government ministers. The minister must be obliged [to do it]. The government consists of ministries with thousands of public servants.

Dubček: We will have a discussion and agree to measures, if Černík agrees with the procedure. While the other comrades will be drafting the measures, we could have the discussion and coordinate the procedure.

Černík: The Presidium of the Central Committee will proceed according to its appraisals of potential conflict situations that may occur. It's getting out of our hands. As soon as the situation calms down, we will adopt measures that will be implemented in the event conflicts and disturbances occur. The leadership will be completely written off, if our political situation appraisal mentions that we do not offer any resistance to right-wing forces or that counter-revolutionary forces have started advancing. In the light of the events, it is our critical appraisal [the conclusions of which] must be implemented. Either there exist counter-revolutionary forces, there is a risk of a counter-revolution, in which case we have to take measures, or there are none. We must anticipate developments.

In my opinion, a thorough discussion of the resolution by the Presidium of the Central Committee should be followed by the matter being discussed by the Central Committee as well.

The developments so far indicate that we have deeply underestimated the situation and its political ramifications and that the party and the government have been very superficial when examining movements and trends within the society. We approach any mention concerning reactionary forces in a defensive manner. We are disoriented. This prevents us from seeing the situation realistically. We must examine movements within the society. The society is not homogeneous, which is reflected in a very strong anti-socialist orientation of a part of it. Let us not be afraid of that and

let us not perceive the society as one or two nations that have nothing in common with the class-based approach to the development of different societal strata. The Marxist leadership of the party cannot abandon this view. We are not isolated and extremist forces have their connections all over the world.

I don't know whether it is possible to prove this to all around the world, if someone furnishes a proof to the opposite. There's one serious matter I want to warn you about. We must produce a clear enough statement, because the party can no longer orient itself. I am calling for it, because if we are not united, we will not gain a single millimeter, we will not make a single step forward. With the first so-called spontaneous event, we will pay for it. The Soviets will repeat a hundred times that a victory of anti-socialist forces in Czechoslovakia is unacceptable.

We have been politically underestimating the situation. The reason why we do not see movements within the society is that we do not want to admit to ourselves that there are some forces working against us. This does not make us a Marxist-Leninist party. Someone bangs the presidium over the head [and nothing happens]. At the moment, the party is disastrously incapable of any action. The party, as a political organization in the country, must give work to people, but also be able to take action if necessary. I believe our party, as an action-capable force, is disintegrating and I do not dare foresee when its organization will break up.

The evidence I provide in support [of the above] is that the party has been fighting for the November resolution for four or five months, and stewing in its own juice for four months. We have been feeding that to the people for four months, and, in the meantime, 500,000 people have organized themselves in the Communist Party, who allow themselves to be led into anti-socialist activities that might result in a disaster, without the Communist Party and the state being aware of it.

This is to say that we have repeated warnings a hundred times, and will repeat them again for another five hundred times, but are unable to draw any conclusions. We are unable to turn the party into a united force. Even we, eight members of the Executive Committee, must be united. Otherwise the party cannot be controlled. Our ideological attitudes are a guideline for millions of people. It is necessary that Comrade Smrkovský, as a member of the party leadership, understands the challenge and expressly identifies himself with the November resolution, using politically sound reasoning, to convince those Communists who are leaving him and to get rid of those tottering around him. Otherwise his speeches are of no use.

I ask myself a question whether I can bear the historical responsibility for what will happen in this country. Political and ideological unity, that's the cornerstone. If there are any differences in opinions, they concern only the concept of the leading role of the party in the socialist society and nothing else. In many respects, the transformation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia into a truly leading force must be interpreted and perceived bearing in mind that it is the party which provides political and ideological guidance to the society, that it is a force which transforms [the society] and leads people to participation in the exercise of power. If this concept cannot prevail within our group, we will not be able to do anything. After all those years, there is not other model. If such a model exists, it will be an interim one, but it will permit new cadres to grow in it. If necessary, it will be replaced. If necessary, we will suppress our enemies. Political power must cover the party's back.

We do not have an action-capable party. The party will be pushed out to the periphery of the power struggle. I cannot just look and say nothing about it. I have my opinion. We in the leadership keep quarrelling all the time. Let us either present a different concept of the party, or demobilize. In the latter case, however, we will be yielding the ground, which I cannot agree with. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia is turning into a party other than Communist. People say: The Communists are fighting each other and the time will come when we will push them out of their positions. We will have to deal with this.

As to the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, our enemies say that fundamental political forces include the RTUM, cultural unions and independent organizations. These are anti-Communist positions. The party will show its power and take action. As a matter of fact, the party has been undergoing a revival and coming back in front of the eyes of people.

The essential question is who should be placed in the head of the party so that people would follow him. Young people follow none of us. Until we find an answer to this question, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia will not be a leading force.

As to mass media: We are facing a dilemma. This or that. There is not other way. We will adopt a preliminary censorship act. [János] Kádár advises us to use it to manage our day-to-day political matters. We will either use this tool, or manage day-to-day political business through cadres, in which case we will have to throw some people out. A year and a half has shown us that the way we have been doing things until now is not possible. Personally, I feel inclined to use Kádár's system. [I recommend] to have a look and implement it as soon as possible. [We have to] eliminate all-out criticism of leading functionaries, attacks against the Soviet Union and socialist countries, including semi-invectives, as well as criticism of the country's security and Defense capabilities. As regards these matters, I propose to implement censorship immediately. Communist journalists must be told: either you will write what the party needs, or you will be thrown out!

On state administration structures: [Frequent] cases indicate that the situation in the army is good. Still, we should have a look at the political condition of the army. We should not overlook or put up with the fact that some members of the officer corps took part in the riotous protests. Comrade Svoboda, I suggest that we consider declaring the things that have happened as constituting treason and demand a new oath of loyalty from officers. People who will accept only some of the political postulates of the oath and not the entire oath of loyalty will have to leave the army.

As to security and police forces, we will have to insist on thorough compliance with disciplinary regulations and draw appropriate conclusions if they are not complied with. We have taken measures to increase the number of policemen. We will implement them to make the security and police forces strong.

We should draft up concrete measures around the five abovementioned issues, even at the expense of being in session for two or three days. During that time, we will put together the things that need to be dealt with. Otherwise, I am afraid, we will not find a way out of our predicament. This must be a step toward making our approach more vigorous. Strong and energetic steps will be accepted by most people. There is no other option. They have started the war and there's nothing else we can do.

Husák: The Soviet note forces us to have an unembellished view of the matters. If I get it right, we may wake up one day into another August 21. If we lose power, we will lose all other functions around it. What will that mean for the country and the political leadership? It is not possible to think that this view is exaggerated and incorrect. We can give a thought to what has led to this situation and how we have contributed to it. And we have contributed a lot.

I have read some newspapers, e.g. "Literární listy." They are full of anti-Soviet and seditious propaganda, [articles] about [Jan] Zajíc or Šumperk. So much hatred in articles about the Soviet occupation of our country. The "Zítřek" weekly writes about August 21 events and uranium in every issue. Not to speak of "Práce" and "Politika"! So many hostile articles! How could they not provoke this situation? And all this under our leadership and tolerance of some things.

These sentiments were set up by mass media. This atmosphere was present before August 21 and it is still here. It is being fed by legal mass media, not just against the USSR, but also against the party or against the Communists in Slovakia. And still we keep saying: things in our country are being consolidated for the better. How many times have we lied to ourselves like that?

The students' strike in November and [Jan] Palach in January. It is all a single concept. A conscious political concept that may fall like rain from heaven, or is being intentionally instilled into people. What has happened here is a consequence of our policy and of its implementation.

Our model produces anti-Soviet sentiments. We can repeat that over and over again. Since August, there has been no political concept work whatsoever in our leading bodies. We are so democratic we are afraid to stomp on toes of anti-socialist forces. And, similarly, we are afraid to seek help among the working class. The tragic aspect is not in that a few people go and demolish something; it is in dozens of other people just looking at it. Where can they learn that it is a dangerous thing to play with? There

is not a single line in any newspapers saying that it was a wrong thing to do. Not even in official reports. A journalist dares to support the party leadership and others just fall on him.

Hundreds of thousands of people who took part in the riots live well. Why should they change their opinions? They have social certainties. But they don't care. All this means that the actual situation differs from how we perceive it. Such a situation plays into the hand of hostile forces. And if it persists for months, what kind of mindsets can it be good for? We are now embellishing the situation. A public poll shows that 5% of respondents are against the socialist system and a conclusion is immediately drawn! Our assessments of the political situation are not correct. We have underestimated some forces, and we continue to do so. We are proud of not having arrested anyone since August. Who can tell there was no politically motivated act committed in August? We will look like satraps one of these days.

The law must be obeyed also by the citizen toward the state, not just from the state toward the citizen. It affects the society which is disintegrated. We allow our police to be attacked and then say: why are the police doing nothing about it? [Because] they do not feel sure the state will protect them. And still they are expected to protect. What kinds of campaigns are broadcasted on radio and TV? We can see their mass effects. It is enough to read foreign articles and summaries of articles and broadcasts from abroad. We claim the Czech nation will endure, that we will knock the enemy down at the end of the day. This has been fed to people for months and we are just bickering as if nothing is happening. [Newspapers] write that speeches of the first secretary are stupid, but no one learns that leaflets are printed and distributed. We have not drawn any conclusions from any of such events. Any adventurer can launch campaigns among young people and we just pretend nothing has happened, although it is clear that someone will make such an attempt again. We know the campaigns are organized by right-wing elements. We have allowed matters to run unattended. We have defended some things, but they were few and far between.

The Palach case was an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist action and Smrkovský carries [during Palach's funeral] a wreath so that the whole world can see the Chairman of the National Assembly sympathizes with anti-Soviet elements - and we keep our mouth shut. And then we tell each other that everything is consolidated and that no mobilization is needed. Our entire concept is rotten! The implementation of our resolutions is almost nonexistent. We do not maintain records. Smrkovský says he was not in Wenceslas Square. He claims it was [his] job to attend Palach's funeral. Wherever there is any buzz, he has to be there. December events were damaging for the party, and all they took was a single press statement by [Luděk] Pachman to the effect that the Executive Committee disagrees with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its resolution. And our efforts were wasted. When I was delivering a speech and the radio was present, it was an opportunity to explain my position to masses. But I have not heard anything suggesting that it was broadcasted. All I heard was music.

I will now return to the youth congress. The party leadership sent a delegation there. Smrkovský was not its leader. The head of the delegation is speaking and Smrkovský enters. The whole congress hall is running amok. Smrkovský is greeted by young people. Under such circumstances, the head of the delegation can hardly be expected to finish his speech. Smrkovský immediately asked for the floor and downplayed the speech of the head of the delegation. The national hero arrived. And, as we know, there are multiple examples like this among the top leadership. Who will elevate the authority of the Executive Committee? I know what transpired at the congress, as I was there. The speech of the head of the delegation was not appreciated by anti-Soviet forces present there. Standing ovations went to Smrkovský. He has not done anything yet to disprove this image. His speech did not avert a collision between congress participants and the delegation. Didn't he [Smrkovský] hear what was going on in the congress hall? His day-to-day conduct presents him as a national hero. I cannot help but ask myself a question whether it is possible, under the circumstances, for Smrkovský to continue as a member of the supreme body of the party. I am presenting this issue for discussion. Depending on how the situation develops, we will have to ask this question at the meeting of the Central Committee. With this political course of the party, the departure from the leadership will also

concern some other members of the Presidium of the Central Committee, who have not yet found a clear political line. If the party does not toe a uniform line, if its leadership is not unified – including the Executive Committee, the Presidium of the Central Committee, or the Central Committee – what kind of unity can we expect among lower echelons of the party?

We have allowed anti-Socialist forces too much room to move. I don't think it's relevant whether this also applies to counter-revolutionary forces. What I see as relevant is the serious internal political situation. There's a political situation hostile to the course of the party in the country, and forces capable of mounting massive actions start prevailing. What did the masses and crowds of people in the streets have in mind? They expressed it in their slogans. Reactionary forces know how to politicize such issues. This is the critical situation into which matters have got.

I believe that if we discuss these matters within the Presidium of the Central Committee, the outcome of the discussion will clearly show that errors and mistakes made by our own supreme bodies have played a significant role in the current political situation and the crisis of the party. In my opinion, the November resolution continues to be the right base for further work, but it must be clearly interpreted and [its essence] correctly implemented. What caused the protests all over the country? They were a bit calmer in Slovakia. Anti-Soviet sentiments rose steeply. They can again attract anti-left forces. Even in the party.

It is a continuation of our discussion within the Executive Committee and the Presidium of the Central Committee. We can always revisit these issues. Lessons learned from the situation can be reflected in our approach toward the implementation of the party policy.

On the Marxist character of the party: One can give a thought to what has been left of it. So many bourgeois elements have found their way to our political life. Some leading representatives have introduced marketplace elements into their speeches. Those in favor of revolutionary methods approach problems [in the same way] as the protesters. The word "Marxist" has disappeared. Nowadays it is an insult. How can ordinary people interpret that? What has remained of all the documents? We are now reaping the harvest which we allowed the enemy forces to sow.

I agree that the Presidium of the party followed by the government should take up a political position; the events are not random or accidental, but rather a product of systematic efforts of right-wing forces. Our declaration should list specific measures we intend to take.

As to additional measures: Prosecutors use allegedly inadequate regulations as an excuse. Consequently, it is necessary to pass a brief act on public order disturbances allowing the perpetrators to be brought to justice. There is no other way out. Which legal acts need to be amended? The November act, because if a state authority decides the court does not have any say in the matter, it is an anomaly. [It is also an anomaly] if they can handle the same case in different ways.

The management of mass media requires a systematic approach. The media received first documents they were [ordered] to publish. Their representatives made an agreement not to publish them and did not fulfill the task. They thus took a political action against the party.

As to magazines: Anyone who monitors weeklies knows that, for example, there is not a single issue of "Politika" or "Zítřek" which does not violate the government directive. I believe that, under the circumstances, the situation requires a radical cut in some cases and the publication of the magazine in question must be suspended. There are certain limits of patience. [Editors] have claimed these were manifestations of the original revolutionary atmosphere. Such magazines have to be stopped and appropriate cadre-related measures taken. Any half-baked measure will turn against us. Those who are afraid can sit at home and do nothing. If we worry, we will never find the way out of the crisis.

With the measures adopted by the Ministry of Interior having been made known to the public, it is now necessary to investigate the causes of the events. A few people are nabbed; then they are released – and nothing happens. It is necessary to investigate where their protests started. Prosecutors are not doing anything about the protests. There was a case in Bratislava: a member of security forces got punched

in the stomach. However, prosecutors claim they are not allowed to detain the attacker for one week. Legal measures are needed. The investigation must be conducted in a way permitting the inspirers of such incidents to be identified. Public inspirers include radio, TV and press. Their activities have done a lot of damage to power [structures]. [Miloš] Čeřovský and those like him have created legal obstacles preventing a thorough investigation of such acts.

There exist permanent contacts between our people and those across the border. These are political contacts. Every piece of our in-house information is leaked in a few hours. I will give you a few facts on these issues. I warned there had been a meeting of 80 people in Vienna. They reached an agreement as to what would be done abroad and at home. You took it as a joke. We know that they are continuing; that there exist channels by means of which many people at home are controlled and instructed from abroad. We haven't expatriated a single person among those who defected. The situation about their flats has not been solved yet. People reside there without an appropriate certificate. Not a single measure could be taken against those did not return. Everything has been swept off the table. We did not approve anything. They should be given an extra year. The border is open. There are many people abroad, waiting which way the tide will turn.

Foreign journalists and the Radio Free Europe were broadcasting from Wenceslas Square. West German film crews were in Bratislava. Everything with an official permission. They were invited to come here. Ten million people agree with their opinions. Reading West German newspapers is all that it takes. Hostile elements have permissions allowing them to stay abroad. We must press on heads of personnel departments. [František] Pavlíček defected and we have left him in the position of the Art Director of the Vinohrady Theatre. All opposition forces were connected to someone. [Pavlíček] had ties to them. And there are many more like him sitting in the party apparatus!

It is necessary to draft a reply to the Soviet note and the statement. It is a political document. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia raised a question to the effect that the consolidation process would take some time. We will need to find some room. The principles issued in January must be enforced very strictly. For every organization or association, it holds true that an adopted resolution must be fulfilled. This principle must also be enforced in what we do. Throughout the party, at different levels, from the bottom upward, there are letters demanding the implementation of the resolution and you don't want to see them! I have read them.

I believe the Executive Committee and the Presidium of the Central Committee must take steps that will mark a radical turn in the implementation of our policy. They must adhere to resolutions and explain specific measures to the general public and attempt to bring the latter to our side. I believe that people will back us up. We must make the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia a Marxist party. Those who do not want such a party can go. We will publish not only the statement, but also the set of measures. We will notify the party of our actions and tell the public how we intend to do it. We will not budge a millimeter from the line. This is the way to rescue.

[Lubomír] Štrougal: The situation is serious. Newspapers will be out normally. In addition, the "Reporter" and "Listy" weeklies have already been printed. We naturally do not know what they contain.

Dubček: I suggest checking and then doing something about them. A hundred [of our] people have been placed in relevant institutions. If there's something against the policy of the party and the government, we will place an embargo on it. Instructors need to be checked as well.

Štrougal: The Executive Committee does not have enough clout if it cannot push through the resolution about TV. Nobody listens to me. I always explode when watching some programs. And people responsible for TV broadcasting do not stop them, do not take any remedial action. Let relevant ministers help avoid any recurrence of such situations.

Husák: With respect to magazines, the Presidium of the Central Committee they should submit one issue in advance.

Štrougal: That's tantamount to stopping them. You do not understand the situation.

Dubček: We have appointed an instructor/supervisor. He can stop a TV program. Otherwise the Executive Committee will have no authority. If you think it is necessary to stop TV broadcasts, we will do it. This is what the leading role of the party consists in. We do not have the unity we want to have. If we did not adopt a resolution, none of us could avoid responsibility.

Husák: Černík has proposed to impose an embargo.

Dubček: If Comrade Černík proposes an embargo, it means a nationwide one. In this respect, we should show our unanimous consent. We will send out an official notification announcing that those in charge will be made responsible according to the law.

[Štefan] Sádovský: It is necessary to accept the proposal and let authorities know. The distribution of magazines in respect whereof there exists a reasonable suspicion must be stopped immediately. Havlín and Kempný should immediately sit on this and submit a report. Until the latter is available, the distribution should be stopped.

Provazník: The weeklies should be checked immediately, or their distribution stopped.

Černík: Give me your approval for that. Preliminary censorship is introduced.

[Martin] Dzúr: (... very excited, reporting on the meeting with [Andrei] Grechko)

I convened the complete Military Council. We assessed the event at the meeting. Our conclusion was that the command of the Czechoslovak Army was united and had been exercising, for the most part, exercising its best efforts to consolidate the situation. This is reflected in the implementation of the November resolution and order of the President of the republic. Although the situation in the Czechoslovak People's Army is difficult, and also complicated by the ongoing restructuring process, the armed forces fulfill their tasks and secure the Defense of the country in a responsible manner. The Czechoslovak People's Army fulfills international commitments and obligations approved by the government. It is struggling for the ideological and action unity in the armed forces, based on the November resolution. We have issued good directives and guidelines. The command of the Czechoslovak Army has drafted working assessments of all members of the command and their approach to the fulfillment of tasks. These will be used to determine binding steps and conclusions.

I have put together a 21-strong commission which will investigate matters on the spot. Its conclusions, including the strictest possible consequences, will be implemented. We will do everything that is necessary to inform the whole army about the problems. We intend to convene all editors and instruct them to condemn these acts and publicize them, including photographs. This is an urgent matter. The events of March 29 must be condemned; we must apologize and make sure nothing will disturb our future coexistence [with Soviet troops].

The Military Council asks the Presidium of the Central Committee and the Federal Government to clearly define the role of our army in their statement. In my opinion, the culprits should be punished. It should be emphasized that any attack against Warsaw Treaty armies is contrary to the state's best interests. The Central Committee and the government should impose decisive measures against forces undermining the alliance with the USSR and openly declare that the government instructed the Ministries of National Defense and Interior not to deploy armed forces against anti-Socialist elements, as such deployment would result in mistrust in the army and a negative attitude of the public toward its command. The Press Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia must be instructed to publish articles and programs on the importance of the alliance with the USSR. At the same time, censorship preventing attacks against the Soviet Union must be introduced. [I propose] to approve, subject to discussion, my report, prepared in my capacity of the Minister of National Defense, and to order every professional soldier to sign a statement in which he will undertake to strengthen cooperation with the Soviet Army and Soviet troops temporarily stationed in our country in his line of work. [I propose] to take a measure under which it will be possible to use earmarked units for the purpose of preventing further provocations. The Military Council is convinced that radical measures are needed. There is no other way to play with this kind of fire. If the Central Committee does not back up our army in an earnest manner, I am

expecting consequences that have been looming for some time.

Dubček: Is this a prepared position?

Dzúr: It is a position that has been drafted off-hand, which should be presented to the Presidium of the Central Committee and the Federal Government.

Svoboda: The situation is serious.

Dzúr: The Central Committee must be convened as early as possible. The Military Council is my working body.

Dubček: I have two questions. First – should we take up a position concerning the publication/media activities before the government adopts its own position? Second – does the leadership of the Ministry of National Defense regard the strength and status of our army as reliable enough in the event the government and party leadership will have to rely on it if a military intervention against an attempted coup or armed uprising? Would the Czechoslovak Army be able to suppress them using its own forces? Your statement mentions that the party leadership and the government should take up a position on promoting the importance of the Warsaw Treaty and ensuring the existence of the rule of socialism in Czechoslovakia. Are you referring to Defense against an outside enemy, or are you suggesting that the party may be unable to be the ruling party?

Dzúr: The document was prepared as a proposal of the high command of the army rather than as my personal proposal. The first time I read it was here. It is a raw document. I counted on the Presidium of the Central Committee being in session today and issuing its statement. We want to discuss our position tomorrow morning. We want to support the position of the Presidium of the Central Committee and the government. The Military Council has been acting in accordance with the promise it gave to Grechko.

Dubček: There is a proposal to publicize the fact that there are two visits. It will leak out anyway by tomorrow.

Dzúr: It has already been published in the Soviet media. It will be published here today. Editors were after me. I did not want to give them a statement right away because I wanted to discuss it first with you. It should be given some consideration. I do not want the public to perceive it as something we do under the Soviet pressure.

As to the strength of our army, I can guarantee it will fulfill all its defensive tasks. On the other hand, although I am against demonstrations, I cannot place our army against those who just want to march along without any protests. The army will oppose the counter-revolution. If there is a clear and present danger, it will cooperate with other Warsaw Treaty armies.

Our proposal is to instruct the Press Department of the Central Committee to make sure that the community of the Warsaw Treaty nations is given wide publicity. The security of Czechoslovakia can only develop within this coalition.

I have a comment on slogans »Long live Hitler!«, »Hail to the Soviet Army!«. According to information from the Minister of Interior, the banners were prepared in advance.

As to the leadership, it is a rather difficult matter. If the political leadership of our country, the politburo and the Presidium of the Central Committee presented a united position, the situation would be much clearer. The information that Comrade Smrkovský had taken part in the Wenceslas Square protests was very unpleasant for us.

Smrkovský: That's not true.

Dzúr: I only repeat what we were told. Opposition sentiments do arise. It's not just a question of today; they also appeared earlier, when members of the leadership did not present a united front. This situation has also been reflected among members of our army.

Husák: Does this also apply to places with Soviet garrisons?

Dzúr: They [Soviet Army commanders] adopt measures to protect their garrisons. These must be perceived in a broader sense. They are convinced that our state and party leadership is not in control of the situation and that counter-revolutionary forces are reinforcing their positions. As a matter of fact, these forces do have increasingly

stronger positions here, and we are afraid to call it a counter-revolution. This is why the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Soviet government say they will not release Czechoslovakia from their sphere of influence, no matter what.

[Peter] Colotka: Have there been any movements of Soviet troops?

Dzúr: We are not familiar with the situation at the border, not even at the border with the People's Republic of Poland. I can use other ways to learn about the situation from personnel of the Ministry of Interior. Grechko gave an order and Soviet APCs appeared in Prague earlier today.

Štrougal: There are troop movements in southern Moravia as well.

Dzúr: Their numbers will immediately be increased by 10,000 to 20,000 troops.

Dubček: The ministry leadership will take measures after the government's meeting.

Dzúr: The recommendation of the Military Council should not wait for the government's approval. The Ministry of Interior made its position known to me.

Dubček: As to the use of the army, there is a certain system.

[...]

Dubček: We should have some supporting information for the statement, which would outline some practical steps that are being made to prevent a major internal disaster in our country. I considered earlier whether we should draft a communiqué or statement describing specific measures. I think we will have to think many things over by tomorrow. Issuing a communiqué on the statement of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU is a big risk. I see a way out in a statement of the party. Or we will wait for a statement along our government line. It will not be taken into account after the statements of the national governments, Czech and Slovak...

There is a draft of the statement, which is of course insufficient, but it is necessary to take it as a basis and submit it to the Executive Committee and then to the Presidium of the Central Committee. We have to adopt practical steps and measure toward the security situation in the country, i.e. measures falling into the purview of the Ministry of Interior, so that the leadership of the state and the party is informed about developments, and also certain preventive measures to avoid a situation which could get out of hand, particularly in Prague and also in places where Soviet troops and HQs are stationed and located.

In this respect, we should propose, along the lines of the party and state authorities, practical steps and measures that would create a situation providing a guarantee that the radio, TV and press will not be used to incite such actions.

[...]

The measures will declare an embargo on all news, articles, editorials and other documents aimed at the USSR or containing elements that could create a tension between us and the Soviet Union, e.g. requirements to eliminate the presence of the Soviet Army in our country.

[...]

We will have to be united to fight the counter-revolution and then ... We have not spoken about causes. That would produce a conflicting atmosphere. In our further assessments, we will see whether this republic is strong enough to suppress the counter-revolution, if necessary. An intervention of other armed forces will be a result of a politically tense situation. We will then consider further steps to make sure the situation will not get out of hand.

Husák: Shall we give a brief report to regional and district committees to the effect that the Presidium of the Central Committee has been discussing the situation resulting from the protests?

Štrougal: I of course do not want to hold things up. We are supposed to react to the situation. We have been sitting here as the Executive Committee for some time, and the situation looks very grave. A spark is all it takes to ignite a fire. In my opinion, our statement must not deal with formalistic phenomena. And not just the events in Wenceslas Square. We have to provide more than general guarantees. After the »Smrkovský« action and events connected with Palach etc., I dare say that the party is in the gravest situation it has ever been. The party is disintegrating. After three or

four months, we have an organizational split of the party in the Czech Lands at our hands. [There] is a certain organized segment of people who are able to endure anything, including [the introduction by the Soviets of a regime similar to] the fascist occupation. The party is organizationally split.

There is a different situation in Slovakia, where Husák and the leadership collectively fight against incorrect opinions and eliminate opportunistic principles from the party's work. He has practically reorganized the party.

[Josef] Špaček was to draft a resolution. However, what he has prepared is a right-wing platform. Perhaps "right-wing" is not an entirely appropriate term. The party is disintegrated. The last four or five weeks during which we did not place issues which needed to be dealt with on our agenda have thrown us into a very deep crisis. The party is indeed disintegrated.

We have to answer the questions. We want to approach practical issues related to the party in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism. Organizational work should reflect the leading role of the party. The leading position should be established everywhere. The statement must provide answers to some of the questions. If we bypass the leading role of the party in the political system, we will not touch upon the causes. The party demands answers to these questions. If not provided, the party will be disoriented. It will pave the way for non-democratic factions and movements which will bring about a disorganization of the society. We are having a communiqué drafted, and we do not know what to put in it. I agree with Comrades Černík and Husák. We have to tell the basics to the party and the society. This is not a propaganda document. We must strongly oppose these opinions. We must criticize that part of the media and those Communists among journalists that have been lending themselves to different things except one – the development of the party line. As to the anti-Soviet wave, we have waited until something happens. This is not just hooliganism, but a conflict of opinions. Anti-Sovietism is a basic weapon of right-wingers and anti-socialists, who want to separate the party's policy from the basics of the action program and from the party leadership. And they have been successful. Slovakia reacted to anti-Soviet sentiments in a different way.

We have been talking about the leadership. Smrkovský has to be anywhere where something is going on. There are rumors he spoke at the regional [party] educational facility and mentioned a danger from the left. I believe he is worried about the danger from the left. Smrkovský has failed to comply with instructions concerning unity and non-unity. The collective principle has never before been violated as much as it is today. Smrkovský should get his act together. He is only after his own authority. We require trust in the party. There is also lack of unity in the Executive Committee. This is one of the reasons why the Executive Committee is unable to resolve problems. No one lusts for blood, but this is too much. I am asking myself unpleasant questions. Mass organizations are creating their own atmosphere, not a party one. If we do things the way we have done them until now, we will separate the party from the people. This is how mass media have been acting.

Criticism and self-criticism of the non-unity of the leadership is needed. If you want to hear my opinion, the party cannot do without it and will not become united again unless it says how matters have developed since the XIIIth Congress [of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Barring that,] it is impossible to justify August 21. I rule that out. We have to make a distinction between positives and negatives. We cannot accept the opinion that the party was in command of matters. We have to carry out the analysis. Otherwise the party will not orient itself, as it is unable to answer the question what the post-January policy consists of on its own. In this respect, the leadership must define essential questions.

As to the normalization [of relations] with the USSR, we find ourselves in a terrible situation. I don't want to analyze causes or our economic needs. The political aspects are clear. We have to deal with issues in a very concrete manner, from both internal and external positions, to get out of it, to make the Soviet government and the CPSU see that the party plays its role in our country.

[...]

We have to assume an honest stance with respect to our relations with the USSR – in the draft reply to the Soviet note, some segments come from the Brno school and

they are not in line with our policy. This cannot be accepted. We have to outline a plan. It is necessary to note that we have to approach problems rationally. Černík says we are nationalists. If we make a sensible presentation, we will be able to dramatically convince the masses. I agree with what Černík and Husák said here, which means we have to present a clear statement on the lack of unity within the party leadership and criticize it. The lack of unity is splitting the party. We have to adopt concrete measures and do so in a well-considered manner. However, we must not yield the ground to those who were in Wenceslas Square. We must establish bodies that would be capable of crushing the petty bourgeois manners to pieces. It is no longer possible to share power with someone else. No one should be allowed to present the lack of unity as democratic centralism.

The situation in the party is close to an organizational disintegration. There is no tool of remedy for such a situation. The disintegration can actually take place and then it will be necessary to create a new party. The responsibility is ours. We have to take up a completely different attitude to it. The leadership must be united. It must restore and regenerate itself. This is a categorical imperative.

[Evžen] Erban: There is an agreement in that we have to produce a communiqué on the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee, the Executive Committee and the government today. The public will know that proxies of the Soviet government have talked with us. Let us be careful. It must be emphasized that, having heard the reports of the Minister of Interior and the Minister of National Defense, we are issuing a communiqué and a list of measures that will follow. This is also how the Presidium would present the report.

The November resolution has not been implemented vigorously enough. Discipline must be stressed as well. The Presidium of the Central Committee will deal with divergences from the party line and breaches of discipline, and will also draw appropriate conclusions. I agree with the criticism addressed to some members of the media. Other measures will follow. I want to talk about it at a meeting of the Presidium of the National Front. It would be good if someone from the government came as well. The top-level body of the National Front would meet tomorrow morning, discuss the situation, and take up a position. We will declare the party leadership is committed, in the spirit of the November resolution, to exercise efforts to defend the post-January policy. There are voices to the effect that Dubček and the government have betrayed the cause and that only Smrkovský is fair. Communists are disenchanted about it. I want to emphasize the single and uniform line. Normal people demand vigorous personal sanctions. We have to clearly state that the Soviets do not prevent us from implementing the post-January policy. The matter with V. Palt... is a shame ... we have a statement of the Historical Society to the effect that they will oppose our alleged attempt to liquidate Smrkovský.

Kádár said that Moscow was against Dubček and also others. The Hungarian party favours a peaceful solution. Kádár said: Seeing what is happening in your country, we are worried and monitor the developments. You cannot endure the crisis for long. The society is full of tension.

We know that the party has been gradually disintegrating. We are helpless. We are afraid to show the authority of the state. There are provocations on TV every day. Now they have adopted a more sophisticated approach, using hockey games. As long as we are bogged in the crisis, every opportunity is good for them. Emotions will soar. A hundred people can influence millions of others.

There are talks that Smrkovský was in Wenceslas Square. The question is whether he is morally entitled to join us. It is not about forcing him here and now. There is something else at stake today. Will we want a nationalist, anti-Communist party? The party serves the people. I am juggling balls in the National Front to prevent it from becoming a tool against the party.

It must be emphasized that we are saving the January [1968]. We are thus giving an argument to Communists in the West. Tito says the Soviet invasion and occupation were conducted to prevent a continuation of the post-January policy. [Leonid] Brezhnev asks: What proof can you provide to support it? He says we use Czechoslovak specifics as an excuse. He says: We claim you have freedom of press which, in our experience, cannot be called freedom. Otherwise you would go against journalists who are opponents of the party.

[...]

As to the Presidium of the Central Committee, it must be informed. Comrade Smrkovský should rethink his position in today's politics and get rid of the forces which perceive him as their protector. He is not fulfilling what he has promised. We have to defeat political parasites. Otherwise all of us will carry the blame. Our opinions differ, and this is becoming a key issue.

Dubček: If Comrade Smrkovský did not understand, it would be a real tragedy.

Erban: Now I do not want to dramatize matters any more. If just a half of what has been said and written about Smrkovský were true, the Soviets would start having the same feelings as half a year ago. The West would start disgorging its guaranteed information. The leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia must support our position from January's positions. If it fails, the present political crisis will continue.

Smrkovský: We all know how serious the situation is. When discussing the measures or where we should go from here – all the measures should be designed and implemented in a way that would prevent new demonstrations, new actions, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Everything must be thoroughly considered so that there would be no undesirable action, in spite of all our efforts and will. We must not allow a situation which Marshal Grechko referred to, a situation when the Soviet would no longer talk to us. Such actions must be prevented. It would be appropriate to distribute, after the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee tomorrow, relevant information to lower tiers of the party along all lines – both those of the party and those of the state. I repeat that we must use all means available to prevent any actions.

As to mass media: without the impression we have obtained from the letter, it would not be a problem to pass a resolution and implement strict censorship immediately. However, there is another option, namely that the Communists working in the media could achieve what we want to achieve through the censorship themselves. They are divided. We must not be afraid to talk about it. I spoke with some journalists in the morning, whether they would be willing to accept this commitment if they were informed. In any case, we must introduce an embargo on the publication of matters that contradict the situation.

On the [Communist] party: I want to talk about its ability to act. I say the matter is about something else. We must and we should convene, within a week or ten days, the Central Committee which would discuss the document and proposals concerning future steps which still need to be finalized, and then properly inform the entire party. What we want to decide cannot be a responsibility of the Presidium of the Central Committee and of the Executive Committee only. We should present the matters to the Central Committee. It would then take decisions in all relevant matters.

Comrade Štrougal has been talking about a split, but what is our ability to act, to perform? What have we done since August along state lines? What have comrade secretaries been doing? Comrade Štrougal mentioned nine secretaries, claiming that someone wanted their heads. The fact is that we have not seen a single document from them in this body for half a year. When talking about the party's ability to act, it depends on the party's head, department leaders and secretaries. It will be necessary, in connection with the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, to address many words to our own ranks. The party apparatus will have to do better, to get all commissions moving, so that the party's leadership, Presidium and Executive Committee have good information for their deliberations and decision-making.

As to Comrade Erban: I sympathize with his attitude, as Comrade Erban's position is based on our upholding of what we call the post-January policy. However, no one, in half a year, has cared enough to examine the action program of the party. It was born in different circumstances, in different times. The question is whether it would not be advisable to modify the action program to the circumstances we find ourselves in now and, based on the above, to identify the most fundamental problems we have to deal with – in other words, to formulate a clear and concise program indicating how to proceed with the policy of the party and the government, to carry on with the [implementation of the action program instead of allowing] deadlines elapse and

leaving matters unsolved. If we took our plan of work, we could see how many matters were supposed to be resolved and how many of them remain outstanding. If the party and the state apparatus have enough topics for their work, if there is a clear and concrete program and we are able to implement it, then, in my opinion, we will carry on with the post-January policy.

Erban speaks about it. He can formulate a question and define the conditions under which the party cannot face a political conflict with people. Everything would be lost. There would be the government, the party, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, but the people would stand against us. I know that this would lead to bitter ends. Thus, the fundamental question is whether we will be able to carry on, albeit in a restricted form, with what we set up [in January].

I will not react to all accusations. I reject the allegation made by Comrade Husák. I am not a representative of right-wingers. I cannot be blamed for something that someone else has said. I cannot be blamed for what happened in December at the Parliament. I wanted to know whether I was acceptable for Soviet comrades. If I were an obstacle of good relations [I promised] I would resign. You told me you had not talked about it. I later learned that, during the last dinner in Kiev, Brezhnev said that he acknowledged that a representative of the Slovak nation would be the Speaker of the Federal Assembly. Since that time, I said: Let us put this in a resolution. Then we would not have to discuss it any more.

[...]

Dubček: I propose to suspend the meeting of the Executive Committee and work on the statement. Quite a lot of essential opinions have been voiced here. They provide guidelines as to how a comprehensive analysis of the situation. [I recommend] to finalize the proposal, submit it to the Executive Committee and then to the Presidium of the Central Committee; to prepare a memo for district committees stating that the Presidium has met today to evaluate the latest events. The memo would mention that we would take up a position, and it can also include a sentence to the effect that we condemn the things that happened and that the party leadership is concerned about the events and their use for the purpose of attacking the party and state leadership. We will also refer to Soviet visits. Furthermore, [we will mention] that the situation in the party and in the country is difficult and that the party and the government are preparing additional measures of which they will be notified.

[...]