

The “Prague Spring” in the Documents of the Hungarian Radio



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ABSTRACT

It was fifty years ago, in 1968 that the “Prague spring”, an experiment to create “Socialism with a human face” was born in Czechoslovakia. Through the documents of Hungarian radio broadcasts, this study will trace the most significant events of the reform movement led by Alexander Dubček. The broadcast information, in its various programs, was almost invariably based on the reports of TASS, the Soviet Telegraph Agency and MTI, the Hungarian News Agency. However, the news actually aired was often re-shaped and augmented by the editors. The radio broadcasts were careful in dealing with the role of party leaders, such as of Janos Kadar. The Czechoslovakian situation remained the principle topic of the Hungarian political and public life for several months, especially in connection with the introduction of the “new economic reform” in Hungary. In the radio, the editors kept avoiding any reference to any similarity between the “Prague Spring” and the new Hungarian economic reform. The goal of the silence was to protect the Hungarian reform from interference from Moscow.

KEYWORDS

International politics; socialism; Czechoslovakia crisis 1968; Alexander Dubček; János Kádár; “New Economic Reform” in Hungary

It was fifty years ago, in 1968 that the “Prague spring”, an experiment to create “Socialism with a human face” was born in Czechoslovakia. Through the documents of Hungarian radio broadcasts, this study will trace the most significant events of the reform movement led by Alexander Dubček. The broadcast information, in its various programs, was almost invariably based on the reports of TASS, the Soviet Telegraph Agency and MTI, the Hungarian News Agency. However, the news actually aired was often re-shaped and augmented by the editors. I find it important to point out, that relying on solid sources, the events of the “Prague spring” have been exhaustively analyzed in Hungary where numerous works have been published about these historical events.²

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2 See in the first place an excellent summary of the public history and Party history aspects: a study by Csaba Békés titled “János Kádár and the Prague Spring”, which relates the events



From the files of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), we now know that the Hungarian party leaders played a remarkable part in the negotiations — the sequence of events can be traced quite accurately in the various party documents. The radio public, however, were not given detailed information: we can find only cautiously articulated statements about these discussions, and often, there was no mention of the meetings at all, which becomes evident when we compare the scripts of the news materials with the MSZMP files. Part of the reason for this was that in 1968, the memory of the 1956 revolution and the invasion of the Soviet troops was still painfully vivid, as well as the fact that at the time, Hungary's new economic reform, marking a digression from the Soviet model, was already in the pipeline, well ahead of the Prague reforms.

The agit-prop activities of the press, the radio and the television were under the supervision of the Socialist Party's Agitation and Propaganda Committee, who took firm actions as the events in Czechoslovakia developed. At their May 21st, 1968 session, the committee put regulations on the duties related to news release and the writing of commentaries as follows: *"It is the responsibility of our organs to support the positive forces and the evolution of a two-front struggle. We should refrain from any kind of evaluation that might pose difficulties for consolidation efforts, or from the transmission of views that might prove to be a hindrance to our own development."*³

WHAT WAS COVERED IN THE NEWS?

It was as soon as the January 6th morning news program (*Morning Chronicle, Reggeli Krónika*) in 1968 that the Hungarian radio gave an account of the fact that the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party had "relieved" Antonín Novotný of his position as First Secretary of the party "at his own request". His post was taken over by Alexander Dubček, First Secretary of the Slovakian Communist Party at the time.

Already at this CC session, there were some other important issues on the agenda — outlining the change in the policy of the party and the main direction of the trend: the democratization of the political life and the decentralization of power. According to the *Morning Chronicle* report, the (committee) discussed *"theoretical questions about the leading role of the party as well as problems related to increasing the topicality and effectiveness of party work"*. In its communiqué, the Central Committee announced that they had, *"in a democratic and critical spirit, and in full awareness of their responsibility, analyzed the present situation of the Czechoslovakian Communist party and pointed out the shortcomings that are apparent in the internal management of the party with regard to working methods and working style as well as to the concrete implementation of the principles of democratic centralism and democracy within the party"*. One point of the communiqué emphasized by the *Morning Chronicle* was that a decision had been

based on archived documents. Beszélő, 2008, Vol. 13, Is. 7, <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/kadar-janos-es-a-pragai-tavaszi-reform-probléma> (referred to further as BÉKÉS, 2008), [cit 2018-04-06].

3 The minutes of the May 21st 1968. Session of the Agitation and Propaganda Committee. Hungarian National Archives/ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára. 288. f. 41/95. ő. e. 4.



made to “*separate the presidential and the First Secretary of Party posts*”. It was also mentioned that the Soviet leaders had sent a telegram to greet Alexander Dubček on the occasion of his being elected First Secretary.⁴

Along with the Soviet leaders, János Kádár, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the MSZMP also sent a telegram to greet Dubček on the occasion of his election — as is reported by the *Evening Chronicle (Esti Krónika)*. On behalf of the party as well as in his own name, he wished “*good health, successful work and further achievements in his high commission and in his endeavors to promote the interests of the Czechoslovakian people and the international communist movement. It is my strong belief*”, Kádár said, [...] *that the fraternal cooperation between our peoples and our parties will continue to strengthen, in the spirit of proletarian internationalism*”.⁵

On March 23rd, one of the most widely followed radio programs, the *Weekend Foreign Policy Observer (Hétvégi Külpolitikai Figyelő)* broadcast a report about the session of the Central Committee of the Cz CP which ended on 22nd March. It was only a brief summary but it contained the most important resolutions made at the CC session, giving voice to some statements that hinted at a sense of danger felt by the Czechoslovakian party leadership. They pointed out that “*the leaders of the party are analyzing the movement of renewal that the Czechoslovakian society is going through and they welcome its — for the most part — creative tendencies. At the same time, the leaders of the Czechoslovakian party firmly refuse any attempt to weaken and splinter these progressive socialist efforts. This democratization is aimed specifically at [strengthening] democracy of a socialist character*”. It is also reported — without any commentary — that the “*presidium had given their approval to the draft of the party’s new action program*”. They also discussed the points of the program, with the purpose “*to complete the rehabilitation of all persons who were persecuted and victimized in the trials during the 1952–54 period, and whose punishments by the party have not yet been revoked*”.

The most important part of the news, of course, was the one about the change in leadership: the presidium approved of the content of the letter written by Antonín Novotný, President of the Republic. In accordance with the constitution, a resolution was made about the interim task management until the election of the new President, namely that the leading body of the National Assembly “*mandated the government to take over the presidential duties*”.

Without directly quoting them, the *Weekend Foreign Policy Observer* also gave an account of the rather cautious statements made by the representatives of the reform: “*several Czechoslovakia statesmen and party leaders have expressed their views about the foreign and home policy of our country*”. A characteristic example was their account of the TV announcement given by Ján Pudlak, first deputy of the foreign minister, who had been appointed the previous year, in which Pudlak emphasized that “*the key element of the main trend [in our policy ...] is our friendship and alliance with the Soviet*

4 Reggeli Krónika. Jan.6.1968. Archives of the Media Service Support and Trust Fund (Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelő Alap — further referred to as MTVA. Program script. Broadcast Jan.6.1968. 7:00–7:15. Kossuth Rádió.

5 Esti Krónika. Jan.6.1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast Jan.6.1968. 19:00–19:29. Kossuth Rádió.



*Union, which I confidently believe to be further enhanced by the new action program of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party.*⁶

At the same time, it is by no means accidental that the Hungarian radio public was given no coverage of the events of the Dresden meeting, which took place on March 23rd. In fact, the meeting was attended by all leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries — with the exception of Rumania. The meeting was initiated by the Soviet management, with the purpose of “consolidating the situation that has evolved in Czechoslovakia.” As it was claimed, the meeting was of particular importance since, “despite the warnings of the fraternal parties, the Czechoslovak leaders have not halted the democratization process, instead, they have been trying to present it as an effort to renew socialism, and have been naïve enough to believe that it does not pose a danger to the positions of the communist party.”⁷

As part of the transformation process, a supporter of the reform, ex army general Ludvík Svoboda was elected President of the Republic, who had been imprisoned during the show trials and then rehabilitated after Stalin’s death, with the approval of Khrushchev. György Halasi, the Prague correspondent of the Hungarian Telegraph Agency reported as follows about one of his first statements aired in the March 30 program of the *Evening Chronicle (Esti Krónika)*. In his speech delivered after taking the oath in the Prague Castle, the President of the Republic emphasized that “*the invaluable work of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party accomplished since the liberation [from Fascism] must be greatly appreciated*”. He also underlined that he “*fully agrees with the January resolutions of the Central Committee and is determined to assist in their accomplishment. He does this in the conviction that the party, together with the national front and the leading bodies of the state will be able to gradually solve all the problems*”. In his speech, he also remembered the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovakian state. After the war, Czechoslovakia “*opted for taking the path of social transformation, which meant that its foreign policy was oriented towards the Soviet Union, who had proved to be a true friend and ally in the hardest of times. Meanwhile, we started out from our own conditions in building socialism [... but] we keep doing our best to contribute with all our strength to consolidating the friendship and unity of the socialist countries and to implementing the principle of socialist internationalism. This is the right path to serve the interests and safety of our country*” — summed up György Halasi the main ideas of the new President’s speech.⁸

The April 1st evening news in *Esti Krónika* reported that the Central Committee of the CzCP continued their work, *discussing the action program of the party as well as the current political situation*. In his speech as first secretary, Dubček pointed out that “the process initiated at the January session by the Communist Party is of an explicitly socialist and democratic nature. The Party was right to emphasize the political aspect of the problems waiting to be solved and to take the lead in the process in an increasingly determined and convincing way, even if the CC has been unable to keep the course of

6 Hétvégi külpolitikai figyelő. March 23. 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script, broadcast March 23. 1968. 14:45–15:00. Kossuth Rádió.

7 BÉKÉS, 2008.

8 Esti Krónika. March 30. 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast March 30. 1968. 19:00–19:29. Kossuth Rádió.



the fast and complex events of the last 3 months within the pre-defined limits. Characteristic of the process is that for the most part, especially what regards the pace of events, it has been shaped by the ‘mass-creating’ activities being guided by the Communists yet spontaneous at the same time. Thus, the resolutions of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party could prevail without any orders from above.” The party relies predominantly on *“the interests and experiences of the broadest masses”*, which is *“approved of by the decisive majority of Communists and of the people”*. He called it an achievement that *“there is a growing trust in the party and a growing confidence within the Party”*.

At the same time, Dubček explained that *“the activity is not balanced enough yet and is sometimes instinctive”*. It is the *“responsibility of each party member to focus all their energy on the implementation of socialist democracy and to analyze and further improve the so far positive process. We must by no means ignore any extremes that can be damaging for the movement”*.

The reports kept laying great emphasis on the position of defense, highlighting the leading role of the party, but these statements were accompanied by more and more critical elements. This is quite palpable in Dubček’s speech, too, who stated that *“the party has always relied and will keep relying on the leading role of the working class [...] It does not suffice to simply acknowledge the mistakes of the past but we need to highlight the causes of their evolution. Therefore we need to do a very thorough analysis of our past economic and political development and to work out the program of the Party, within the time left until its 14th Congress.”* He also noted that *“since the January session, we have witnessed the revival of certain non-socialist sentiments, and even some voices of revanchism. But the Party will not let itself be seized by any potential attempt to legalize these sentiments under the guise of democracy or rehabilitation. The Party rejects any attempt directed at weakening and dividing the progressive democratic and socialist efforts.”* Dubček pointed out that *“in the future, more attention must be paid to the requirement that the members of the Central Committee represent a united stance on basic issues...”* It is necessary that the Party continue to be *“in accordance with the principle of democratic centralism so that they can demonstrate the greatest possible unity in their actions”*.⁹

The thorough debate on the action program continued the following day, and it was also covered in the April 2 evening broadcast of *Esti Krónika*. It was Halasi again who gave a summary of the events: One of the participants of the debate, Finance Minister Bohumil Sucharda, who had worked at the International Monetary Fund before, emphasized: *“We must make our companies understand that they cannot base their future on state subsidies.”* He also said that *“we need to explore additional opportunities of economic integration between the Comecon countries as well as to widen cooperation with the developed capitalist countries.”* He outlined the prospect of *“creating within 5–7 years the realistic possibility to make the Czechoslovakian crown convertible,”* in coordination with *“the other Comecon countries”*.

Jiří Hájek, Minister of Education at the time, later Minister of Foreign Affairs, a man strongly committed to reforms stated, among other things, that Czechoslovakia should *“take a more active role in the UN and its various organs”*. Another reform politician, Čestmír Císař, Secretary of the Central Committee and chairman of the

9 Esti Krónika. April 1st 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script, broadcast on April 1st 1968. 19:00–19:29. Kossuth Rádió.



National Assembly said that the Central Committee, which “was the initiator of the socialist renewal program will be powerful enough to correctly evaluate both its positive and its negative aspects and to guide the way towards further progress.” Čísař “took a stand on the need to thoroughly reshape the government”.

It was also mentioned in the report that many of the speakers had exercised self-criticism and asked to be relieved of their duties. Such was the case with Jiří Herih, who resigned from his post in the committee of ideology of the Party. Vladimír Kocky spoke of the mistakes he had made in his work in education and the field of international relations, and also asked to be relieved of his duties at the secretariat of the Central Committee. He explained that “it is no longer possible to go back to the old working methods but we must be determined to fight anti-socialist tendencies and to protect the positive achievements, which have always dominated in the work of the Party”.

There was only a brief mention of the speech made by Josef Smrkovský, who had been given a life sentence in a show trial, to be released from prison only in 1955. The politician, who was the most adamant representative of the reform process in the administration and who was elected chairman of the national assembly in April pointed out that “the process of renewal has brought about a political activity never yet seen in Prague”.¹⁰

Several news programs reported about *The acceptance of the reform program*. One of the detailed summaries was given in the April 5th evening broadcast of *Hřek*, where the leading news item was that the action program had been endorsed by the CzCP CC even before Dubček’s concluding speech. This was followed by an account of the program details, underscoring the issue of rehabilitation. “The plenum made a resolution to fully complete the just and comprehensive rehabilitation of persons persecuted and victimized between 1949 and 1954. Those who played a role in violating socialist justice must not take any important position in social and political life. The plenum declared that the party punishment of several writers had been of an explicitly administrative nature, and that the decision of the plenum made last September to that effect had been based on incorrect information. Therefore, the Central Committee hereby annulled the expulsion of writers Ivan Klíma, Antonín J. Liehm and Ludvík Vaculík as well as the party punishment of Pavel Kohout, and they also put a stop to the disciplinary procedure in progress against the writer Milan Kundera. The party organization of the Czechoslovakian Writers’ Association was called upon to re-evaluate the procedure of last year’s writers’ congress.”

On the other hand, there are also hints to a position of defense in the document of the Central Committee — as well as in the radio commentary — maintaining that “the foundations of the socialist society are strong, and there is no political weight of any effort to turn back on the path of progress”. They describe the situation in a remarkably responsible way, accentuating the events differently than before but also with a tone of caution: “The situation that has evolved is such where in the wake of a torrent of social criticism all the essential problems that have accumulated are being simultaneously exposed. It would be irresponsible to promise that solving these problems would be as simple and fast as their exposure. Many of the rightful demands simply cannot be met at once and at the same time, in absence of the financial and organizational conditions that it would require.”

¹⁰ Evening Chronicle. April 2nd 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script, broadcast on April 2nd, 1968. 19:00–19:34. KossuthRrádió.



In regard to party work, the resolution calls upon the party members to be more independent in their actions, noting also their changing position: the *“communists in Czechoslovakia are often forced into a defensive position when in fact, they should take the lead in the struggle for the new. Therefore, the resolution calls upon party members to be fast and active in solving the problems in political work within their own competence, in line with the action program and the new party policy.”*

Very firm is, however, the tone of the closing part of the document, taking a stand for the reforms as a distinctive path for the country: *“We have set off on a difficult journey: the Czechoslovakian way to build and improve socialism, which is our own, internal affair. In the spirit of socialist internationalism, in cooperation with all other socialist and progressive forces and on the basis of our alliance with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, we will be capable of realizing this goal.”*¹¹

The radio program broadcast in *Hétvégi külpolitikai figyelő* (Weekend Foreign Policy Observer) on April 6th, dealt with the accepted action program again, reporting further details. The news material, as they found it important to underline, was compiled on the basis of Dubček’s summative speech. *“Everyone, party members in the first place, must be aware of the fact that what we want is not any kind of democracy but a socialist democracy. Weakening the role of the party is out of the question; it is the effective and successful implementation of Lenin’s norms, in accordance with the new conditions that we want to achieve.”* As the first step of the action program, *“the government wants to achieve the improvement of socialist statehood by further democratization and the drafting of a new constitution. Special attention must be paid to the proposals aimed at reshaping the Czechoslovakian state in a federal form, which would point beyond a co-existence in which Czechs and Slovaks enjoy equal rights as [in this new state form] the demands of the other nationalities and the facilitation of their development will be taken into far stronger consideration than before.”*

They also quoted Dubček about another crucial point in the action program: *“the necessity for a consistent implementation of the new methods of economic management, and the importance of their quick- paced introduction”*. This was followed by the announcement of personal changes, which stirred great public interest both at home and abroad: during the session of the Central Committee, they elected the leading organs of the party, the presidium and the secretariat. (No names were mentioned in this broadcast.)

The closing sentences dealt with foreign policy, as yet another indication that Czechoslovakia had no intention of modifying her system of alliances. *“The core of our country’s foreign policy”,* they quoted Dubček, *“is a strong alliance and versatile cooperation with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, relying on the principles of equal rights, mutual advantages and non- interference as well as on international solidarity”*. Its fundamental theses are *“just as untouchable as the socialist nature and the untouchability of our further path”*.¹²

After the Czechoslovakian CC session and the acceptance of the action program, the Hungarian political leadership followed the events with growing concern. On

11 Hírek (News) April 5th 1968. MTVA Archives K 615. Press archives. Box 473. Broadcast on April 5th 1968. 22:00. Kossuth Rádió.

12 Hétvégi külpolitikai figyelő (Weekend Foreign Policy Observer, April 6th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script, broadcast April 6th 1968. 14:45–15:00. Kossuth Rádió.



16th April, Leonid Brezhnev had a telephone conversation with János Kádár. He made no bones about the situation, evaluating it as follows: *“We are on the threshold of losing Czechoslovakia.”* He proposed another meeting, inviting the party leaders to Moscow. The meeting took place on May 8th — Dubček and Rumanian party leader Nicolae Ceaușescu were not invited to the secret conference. Here, Kádár was trying his best to convince the East German, Polish, Bulgarian and Soviet party leaders that *“with the necessary support, the current leadership in Czechoslovakia should be capable of getting the situation under control”*. The conference participants, however, with the exception of Kádár — *“declared that the situation was, without a doubt, of a counter-revolutionary nature, and that the present leadership was powerless to consolidate the situation, therefore from this point on, the outlines of a new concept were taking shape with increasing clarity: in order to settle the critical situation by political means, there is a need for an internal take-over of power, to be carried out by ‘healthy forces’”*. In his speech, János Kádár also admitted that the situation in Czechoslovakia was “grave”: *“There is anarchy, which is taken advantage by anti-social [ist] forces.”* With regard to the action program, Kádár said that it was: *“a ‘big zero’, since it can embrace or include anything, both the defending and the giving up of socialism, therefore it can be easily exploited by anyone for their own purposes”*.¹³ Needless to say, the Hungarian audience received no information whatsoever about the telephone conversation between Brezhnev and Kádár.

On the other hand, there was a report about the Moscow conference convened on May 8th in the early morning broadcast of *Reggeli Krónika* on the following day. It was a brief announcement, with the usual clichés: the party leaders of the four countries discussed the international situation and the “topical issues of the workers’ movement”. The participants confirmed that they would keep *“informing each other about the situation of their respective countries, and they declared their firm intention to continue improving their fraternal relations and versatile cooperation based on the principles of Marxism and Leninism and the proletarian internationalism in every respect”*. The atmosphere of the Moscow conference was one of cordiality and amicability.¹⁴

In the May 8th program of *Esti Krónika*, there was a detailed report about another meeting, which also took place in Moscow through May 4th — 8th. Jiří Hájek, Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia returned home after a visit to Moscow. In Prague, he gave an interview for the chief editor of *Novosti*, the Soviet news agency. In this interview, Hájek emphasized that *„the love and respect for the Soviet Union in his country has long roots. Although there are some who are trying to cast a shadow on the Czechoslovakian-Soviet friendship, they will never succeed in it”*.

The Czechoslovakian foreign minister recalled a previous interview of his given to a Western correspondent: *“If you are hoping that one day Czechoslovakia will speak in a different voice, then you are greatly mistaken. Our country will keep speaking out as member of the socialist community.”*

The journalist of *Novosti* brought up that some Western newspapers had hinted at certain signs of change in the Czechoslovakian foreign policy. In his response, Hájek asserted once more: *“The Czechoslovakian orientation will not change. Czechoslovakia will*

13 BÉKÉS, 2008.

14 Reggeli Krónika. May 9th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script, broadcast on May 9th 1968. 5:30–5:40. Kossuth Rádió.



remain part of the socialist world system and friend of the Soviet Union in the future, too. We will do our best to actively utilize our country's geographical and economic potential and the creative powers of the working class, the peasantry and the intelligentsia." As to the issue of the European security, he took a stand on the "untouchability of the borders drawn after the Second World War. The Czechoslovakian politics will keep starting out from the fact of the existence of the two German states, and regard East Germany as our friend and ally. As for West Germany, Czechoslovakia takes into consideration the danger of a revival of Nazism and militarism on one hand, and the growth of anti-fascist, realist forces on the other."¹⁵

On the anniversary of Czechoslovakia's liberation [from Fascism...], Ludvík Svoboda, President of the Republic gave a speech at the grandiose rally to celebrate the Czechoslovakian-Soviet friendship. It was Halasi, the Hungarian radio's correspondent in Prague who gave a summary of the events, broadcast on May 9th in the evening news. In his speech, the head of state commemorated their joint fight against fascism and the 140,000 Soviet soldiers who were killed on Czechoslovakian ground in those fights. He underscored the importance of friendship with the SU, which "is based on firm traditions and ensures unflinching support for the independence and security of Czechoslovakia. [...] This friendship provides protection against the attempts of the forces that are determined to revive their revanchist plans against the independence and unity of our country". With regard to the current political state of affairs, he said that "the Czechoslovakian Communist Party has given a critical evaluation of the situation, condemning the mistakes of the past and facilitating fundamental changes in all spheres of social life. He stated that the party's action program and the government's program proposal reflect and express the needs and desires of every good Czechoslovakian citizen. The time has come [...] to turn from comprehensive criticism to concrete work. This does not mean that we should put an end to meaningful debates, rather, it means the gradual implementation of the new plans and proposals supported by the people." The President also emphasized that the country's "place is by the side of the forces of peace and progress. Therefore, the basis of our foreign policy will be our alliance and versatile cooperation with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries".¹⁶

Although the "reassuring" offensive of the Czechoslovakian party and state leaders failed to meet a favorable response in Moscow, the Hungarian radio aired some optimistic or at least neutral commentaries.

However, the news that in accordance with the plans of the united armed forces staff, the armed forces of several members of the Warsaw Pact were to perform a joint military exercise on the territory of Poland and Czechoslovakia in June, stirred considerable attention and concern. The fact was reported in the May 27th program of *Reggeli Krónika*, with the comment that the goal of the exercises is „to practise the tasks of cooperation and management and to increase the level of combat readiness required by modern military operations. The joint military exercise will be led by the commander-in-chief of the united armed forces of the Warsaw Pact.”¹⁷

15 Esti Krónika. May 8th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast on May 8th 1968. 19:00–19:29. Kossuth Rádió.

16 Esti Krónika. May 9th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast May 9th 1968. 19:00–19:29. Kossuth Rádió.

17 Reggeli Krónika. May 25th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast May 25th 1968. 7:00–7:14. Kossuth Rádió.



The idea of a military exercise was first articulated at the May 8th secret meeting in Moscow. Here, János Kádár, who felt that “*the other [... participants] will sooner or later rule out the the need for a military solution*”, warned that — “*although he agreed with the idea of putting pressure on the leadership and the society by means of an army exercise held in Czechoslovakia, [he believed that...] the problem cannot be solved solely by the use of army force, as these issues are far more complex than that*”. Kádár brought up the example of 1956. “*So he was trying to make the others, and Brezhnev in particular, aware of the fact that there is a huge difference between the stationing of Soviet forces and their employment for the purpose of making order, in that the latter can easily prove to be counter-productive.*”¹⁸ The operation started on June 20th, briefly covered in the evening news program.¹⁹

THE RADIO NEWS OF THE SUMMER DURING THE “PRAGUE SPRING”

At the May 16th session of the foreign affairs committee of the Czechoslovakian national assembly, Foreign Minister Jiří Hájek spoke about the basic principles of a new contract of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between Czechoslovakia and Hungary that was being prepared. The contract would be signed in Budapest, in June. The foreign committee gave their approval to the draft agreement — reported the *Morning Chronicle* in their May 17th program.²⁰

The Budapest visit of the Czechoslovakian party leadership took place on 13th–14th June, although it had been preceded by one more telephone conversation between Kádár and Brezhnev. The Soviet leader “*emphatically asked him to make Dubček understand the dangers that threaten the CzCP, socialism and himself personally. If they are to count on Soviet support, then they will need to — as a minimum condition — take control of the organs of propaganda (i.e. the press and the media), and also to break away and dissociate themselves from the revisionist groups.*”²¹

On June 14th, the *Evening Chronicle* gave a detailed account about the signing of the treaty of friendship and cooperation, and about the assembly held in the headquarters of MÉMOSZ (*National Alliance of the Hungarian Construction Workers*) following it, where both Dubček and Kádár made a speech. According to the *Chronicle*, at 4 p.m. the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian leaders signed the document: a “*contract of cooperation and mutual assistance between the two countries*”. Of Kádár’s speech, the report highlighted the part that the political leadership of Hungary supported the Czechoslovakian reform efforts. Dubček stated that “*the dominant political force of the Czechoslovakian society is the working class, which is prepared to accomplish its historical mission. The CzCP are now making every effort to achieve that the working class can put in force their creative activity.*” Then he dealt with “*the social-political role of the peasantry*”

18 BÉKÉS, 2008.

19 Esti Krónika. June 20th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast June 20th 1968. 19:00–19:26. Kossuth Rádió.

20 Reggeli Krónika. May 17th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast May 17th 1968. 5:30–5:40. Kossuth Rádió.

21 BÉKÉS, 2008.

of cooperatives and the intelligentsia”, declaring that “we intend to give an important role to all social forces in the extension of socialist democracy”.²²

In June, the Hungarian Radio’s news programs returned to the issue of the action program, giving an account of the elaboration of its points and its legal regulations. On June 25th, the *Evening Chronicle* reported that “the Czechoslovakian national assembly passed with one abstention a bill to temporarily settle the issues of judicial rehabilitation and the election of judges, proposed by the Minister of Justice. The bill authorizes the Czechoslovakian national assembly and the Slovak National Council to establish councils that would deal with issues of rehabilitation.” The bill “ensures that no one who committed a real crime can be rehabilitated.”²³ Thus, Dubček and his team went on with the implementation of the action plan, but at the same time they were trying to take further steps of appeasement.

In order to discuss the situation, Brezhnev invited the Hungarian party leaders to Moscow again. There was only a brief report on it in the June 27th broadcast of the *Evening Chronicle*, stating the fact of the visit and the names of the delegates. As they said, “the Hungarian delegation of the party and the government arrived in Moscow. János Kádár, Jenő, György Acél, Mátyás Tímár and János Péter were greeted by Leonid Brezhnev, A. N. Kosigin, N. Podgorni, M. A. Suslov and K. Katushev. The meeting took place in a cordial and friendly atmosphere. There will be a banquet held this evening, and the negotiations will continue tomorrow.”²⁴

The following day, the Hungarian radio news gave only a terse and formal account of the events again. The June 28th program of the *Evening Chronicle* reported that the negotiations started at 11 am, and that there were four issues on the agenda. The delegations updated each other about the internal political situation of their countries and analyzed the relationship between their two countries as well as the international situation and some relevant questions of the communist world.²⁵

Although we have, by now, learnt from archival documents and from academic literature what actually happened, the radio of the time kept silent about it. During the negotiations in Moscow, Brezhnev “depicted a dark picture of the Czechoslovakian situation: Dubček was gradually sliding to the right, the right side has taken the upper hand, Czechoslovakia was slipping onto the Yugoslav path and from there onto the bourgeois track”. Brezhnev “indicated that there are two things they can do in the present situation: sending a letter of warning to the CzCP and proposing a new meeting of the parties that attended the Dresden conference”.²⁶ This new meeting was planned by Brezhnev to be held in Warsaw, and the forthcoming events show that their course was following Moscow’s plans.

22 Esti Krónika. June 14th 1968 MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast June 14th 1968. 19:00–20:00. Kossuth Rádió.

23 Esti Krónika. June 25th. MTVA Archies. Program script. Broadcast June 25th 1968. 19:00–19:29. Kossuth Rádió.

24 Esti Krónika. June 27th. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast June 27th 1968. 19:00–19:29. Kossuth Rádió.

25 Esti Krónika. June 28th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast on June 28th 1968. 19:00–19:25. Kossuth Rádió.

26 BÉKÉS, 2008.



The situation was further complicated by the June 27th publication of a manifesto entitled *2000 szó* (2,000 words), which was “declared to be an unmistakably counter-revolutionary platform by the Hungarian leadership”.²⁷ Halasi’s report from Prague aired in the June 28th program of the *Evening Chronicle* elaborated on the details, too. The presidium of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party as well as the government “condemns the endangering of the action and government programs. This was the opinion expressed by Prime Minister Černík, when in the national assembly he stated the position of the government on the issue of the so-called ‘Two Thousand Words’ manifesto. The manifesto that appeared in a few Prague newspapers is aimed against the new policy and the present leadership of the Party. It derides the 20 years’ achievements of building socialism and calls upon the disruption of social organizations and the initiation of attacks against regional and local functionaries.” The article is “a call for counter-revolution, and is in stark contrast with the law about the defense of the country. As the presidium of the CzCP CC concluded yesterday: should the proposals of the manifesto be met by responses of approval, it would pose a grave danger for the policy of the party and the socialist state. The presidium of the Party deem the ‘Two Thousand Words’ manifesto to be politically irresponsible and they find it important to underline that they will take the necessary steps against any attempt seeking to implement the program of the manifesto, and ensure that the rule of law will prevail.” It was Oldřich Černík who stated the government’s stance on the issue: “He condemned the manifesto and expressed his firm belief that the people of Czechoslovakia will prevent the disruption of the national committees and the organs of the national front”.²⁸ Dubček “in practice, endorsed” the article, saying “that the manifesto failed to have any concrete result, and it is with political means that it should be contested...”²⁹

Dubček, however, did sense that the situation was getting critical, therefore he asked “Kádár to have an urgent, secret meeting, which did in fact take place on July 13 in Komárom, Hungary. But the hopes that Dubček and his companion Černík might have entertained came to nothing: instead of offering further support, Kádár and Fock harshly reprimanded them for having refused to participate in the Warsaw conference. Not only did Kádár declare that it was the biggest mistake that the Czechoslovak leadership had made since January but he made it clear that with this decision, they had taken a path that would end in disaster, meaning that ‘we are going to split, our paths will diverge and we shall fight against each other.’” The Hungarian news kept silent about the Komárom meeting.

For a better understanding of the events, we need to note here an important detail. János Kádár played an important part in grounding the Warsaw meeting. “On July 9th, Brezhnev informed us that at their session held the previous day, the Presidium of the CzCP rejected the invitation to a new conference of the six parties that had met in Dresden. Therefore, the conference must be held without them.” The decision of the CzCP must have come as a surprise for Kádár, since it was Dubček himself who had, during his Budapest visit, “complained that ‘the five’ had been negotiating about them in their absence”.³⁰

27 Ibid.

28 Esti Krónika. June 28th1968. MTVA Archives. Program cript. Broadcast June 28th 1968. 19:00–19:25. Kossuth Rádió.

29 BÉKÉS, 2008.

30 Ibidem.



Thus, the planned conference took place in Warsaw on the 14th-15th July. It was only a brief item in the July 15th morning news. This is how they reported about the conference and its participants: *“In Warsaw, the conference, which started yesterday, will continue today, with the participation of the leaders of Hungary, the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria and Poland. Hungary is represented by János Kádár and Jenő Fock.”*³¹

The July 16th *Morning Chronicle* reported that the Hungarian delegation had returned home from Warsaw, and read out the text of the official announcement: *“At the Warsaw conference, the party and government leaders have discussed the interational situation and the current problems of the communist and workers’ movement. Among others, they have dealt with the situation in Vietnam and the Middle East, as well as with the activities of diversion with which the aggressive imperialist powers are seeking to undermine the socialist order in certain countries. The conference participants updated each other about the respective situation in their countries, exchanged information about the recent developments in the Czechoslovakian situation and sent a joint letter to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party.”*³²

It turns out from the speech that Brezhnev gave at the Warsaw meeting that *“it is not the final solution that we need to decide about”*. Thus, Kádár did have reason to believe that it was still worth striving for the *“political solution”* of the problem, *“even thought the chance for this is getting slighter and slighter”*.³³

Brezhnev’s second plan, the *“letter of warning”* that he raised the prospect of at the June 27th Moscow meeting, had been completed by July 18th. There was a detailed account of its content in the early morning news (*Hírek*) on July 18th. The letter was sent by the party and government leaders of Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, East Germany and the Soviet Union to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party. (The letter pinpointed the processes and events which made it evident, in their mind, that the reforms outlined by the Czechoslovakian party leaders could no longer be supported. Since this is a document of high importance, I am quoting it below almost in its entirety. S I.)

“We are deeply concerned by the development of events in your country. [...] The attack of the reactionary forces aided by imperialism, which is directed against your party and the foundation of Czechoslovakia’s social system, is threatening to divert your country from the socialist path. As a consequence, it is threatening the values of the entire socialist system.

Recently, our parties have proposed it to the Czechoslovakian party that they have a new, joint conference where they can exchange information about the situation in their countries, more specifically about the development of the events in Czechoslovakia. Sadly, the Czechoslovakian party — thus states the joint letter — chose not to attend this conference and not to take the opportunity to have a collective, comradely dialogue about the situation that has evolved. [...] The socialist countries have never intended and will never intend to interfere in affairs that are solely the internal affairs of the Czechoslovakian party and state, nor do they

31 Reggeli Krónika. July 15th 1968. MTVA Archives, Program script. Broadcast July 15th. 1968. 7:00–7:14. Kossuth Rádió.

32 Reggeli Krónika. July 16th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast July 16th 1968. 5:30–5:40. Kossuth Rádió.

33 BÉKÉS, 2008.



have any intention to violate the principles of independence and the respect of equality in the relationships between the communist parties and the socialist countries. They welcome all the positive aspects [of the changes] in Czechoslovakia but they will not approve of hostile forces diverting the country from the path of socialism and exposing Czechoslovakia to the risk of being broken away from the socialist community. This is no longer an internal affair; indeed, it is the affair of all communist and workers' parties and of all states that are bound by alliance, cooperation and friendship. At the cost of enormous sacrifices, our countries and our peoples have defeated Hitlerian fascism and have won their freedom and independence, together with the opportunity of taking the path of progress and socialism. Therefore, we will never tolerate the endangering of the historic achievements of socialism and will never allow imperialism to make a breach in the socialist system.

Undermining the leading role of the Communist Party is bound to lead to the elimination of socialist democracy and the socialist system. The fraternal parties responded to the resolutions brought by the January assembly of the Czechoslovakian party. They started out from the assumption that the Czechoslovakian party was in firm control of power, and would guide the whole process in accordance with the interest of socialism. Unfortunately, the events have since taken a different course. In Czechoslovakia, the anti-socialist, revisionist forces have taken control of the press, the radio and the television, and used these media for attacking the Communist Party and undermining the amicable relationships between the socialist countries. Despite the resolution of the CzCP CC — according to which the main danger is the threat of right wing and anti-communist forces — the intensifying attacks of the reactionary forces have not been countered." The letter declares that "the manifesto published under the title 'Two Thousand Words' is a grave threat" and is "the organizational, political program of the counter-revolution". "The revisionist, anti-socialist forces denigrate the entire activity of the Communist Party, and attack Czechoslovakia's foreign policy and its alliance and friendship with the other socialist countries. The situation that has evolved is, therefore, absolutely unacceptable for any socialist country." The letter points out that the "counter-revolutionary forces supported by the imperialist centers have launched a comprehensive attack against the socialist system" but "there seems to be no adequate resistance against this attack in the party and the popular power. [...] The party must re-take control of the mass media in order to use them in the interest of the working class and socialism. The party must tighten its lines, in accordance with the principles of Marxism-Leninism and with an undiminished adherence to the principle of democratic centralism, and must wage a war against those who assist the hostile forces with their activities." Finally, the letter concludes that "in Czechoslovakia, there exist forces capable of defending the socialist system and defeating the anti-socialist elements. The task today is to show up a clear perspective for these forces. They should be mobilized and given guidance to make them fight the counter-revolutionary forces and save and consolidate socialism in Czechoslovakia. And in a situation like this, the working class must do their utmost to have their voice heard. It is our firm belief that the Czechoslovakian Communist Party will take the necessary measures in full awareness of their responsibility, and that they will block the path of reactionary forces. In this struggle, they can count on the fraternal socialist parties' solidarity and assistance of all types."³⁴

³⁴ Hírek (News), July 18th 1968. MTVA Archives. K 615. Press archives. Box 481. Broadcast July 18th 1968. 5:00. Kossuth Rádió.



It was the July 21st morning news (*Hírek*) that informed the audience about the Czechoslovakian response to the Warsaw letter, quoting from the relevant materials of the Hungarian newspapers. In its weekly summary entitled “What happened in world politics?”, the daily *Népszabadság* gave, among others, the following evaluation of the Czechoslovakian developments: “The document — which was endorsed by the Czechoslovakian party committee session — does, in general, acknowledge the rightfulness of the concerns expressed by the five fraternal parties. Nevertheless, it does not agree with the statements of the Warsaw letter about the specific dangers threatening the socialist system, and is trying to underrate them.” In its column “Heti Világhíradó” (World News of the Week), the daily *Népszava* reports as follows: “although they do not question the negative aspects of the latest developments, the Czechoslovakian declarations reflect that they are not prepared to take any concrete measures to counter the right wing danger and ideological chaos. We, however, firmly believe — as it is expressed in the Warsaw letter — that with the support of the working class, the progressive forces and the solidarity of the fraternal countries, our Czechoslovakian comrades will eventually triumph in their fight for the consolidation of the positions of socialism.”³⁵

In its editorial, the Moscow daily *Pravda* analyzed the CzCP Presidium’s response statement. The summary of this analysis aired in the July 22nd news at noon, was more detailed than usual but added no commentaries to the text. As an introduction, they gave an account of “those details of the document endorsed by the assembly of the central committee of the Czechoslovakian communist party that acknowledge the existence of certain extremist tendencies, of which the remnants of the anti-socialist forces are trying to take advantage. The Czechoslovakian document also admits that the ‘2,000 Words’ manifesto is an incendiary call to anarchist actions and that in Czechoslovakia, the new members of the CzCP leadership, among others, are the targets of unfounded provocations. [...] The *Pravda* points out that the Czechoslovakian document evades the ideological issues that have been addressed in the letter of the fraternal parties, and does not concur with its evaluation of the dangers threatening the socialist system in Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, in its Saturday edition, the Czechoslovakian daily *Práce* suggests that it might prove to be desirable to reconsider the Czechoslovakian foreign policy. The article published in *Práce* states that Czechoslovakia is getting involved in a conflict with certain socialist countries, against its will. Although it is not a party document per se, it is certainly worrying that the paper can give room for such provocative views whereas the CzCP leadership keeps assuring the fraternal parties that they remain loyal to their duties.”³⁶

THE FINAL RESOLUTION: THE INVASION

In its July 29th program, the *Evening Chronicle* reported that another Soviet-Czechoslovakian meeting had taken place at Ágcsernyő, a small village situated on the Slovakian side of the River Tisza, in Czechoslovakia. They also enlisted the names of

35 *Hírek*. July 21st 1968. MTVA Archives. K 615. Press archives. Box 481. Broadcast July 21st 1968. 6:00. Kossuth Rádió.

36 *Hírek*. July 22nd 1968. MTVA Archives. K 615. Press archives. Box 481. Broadcast July 22nd 1968. 12:00. Kossuth Rádió.



the members of the two delegations. On the Soviet part, it was Brezhnev, N. Voronov, A. Kosigin, K. Mazurov, A. J. Pelse, N. Podgorníj, M. Suslov, A. Shelyepin and P. Shelest, all members of the Political Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, as well P. Demisev and P. M. Masherov, alternate members of the political committee, along with K.F. Katushev and B. Ponomarjov, secretaries of the Central Committee who were present. On the Czechoslovakian side, the participants were Dubček, František Barbírek, Vasil Bilak, Oldřich Černík, Kriegel, Piller, Rigo, Smrkovský, Špaček and Švestka, along with the alternate members of the presidium: Kapek, Josef Lenárt and Simon as well as Miloš Jakeš, chair of the Central Supervising Committee, Revision Committee. President of the Republic Svoboda also attended the meeting.³⁷

The Soviet-Czechoslovakian meeting, which was to be of critical importance, was followed with great attention not only by the TASS but also by the Western press and radio commentators. The *Evening Chronicle*, too, broadcast a summary of it on July 30. According to the protocol text of the TASS, the meeting at Ágcsernyő “was characterized by sincere, comradely spirit”. As to the commentary that summed up the western responses to the Czechoslovakian events, the account consisted of two parts. In the first part, the radio public was given “an analysis of the most important articles written for the readers in capitalist countries”, whereas in the second, they could hear some details from “the commentaries advising the Czech and Slovak people on how to go on with the movement of renewal”. The tone and topic selection of these latter writings is completely in line with the tactics pursued by the capitalist world regarding the Czechoslovakian events. “Since it is not in the nature of imperialism to launch an open attack, rather, it is by so-to-say peaceful means, i.e. by ideological diversion and intensive but subtle subversion that they are trying to shift the movement of renewal in Czechoslovakia to the right, the bourgeois papers employ great strategic discipline and a moderate tone but at the same time give extensive coverage to the issue, in order to divert the positive changes from their original direction.” According to the *Evening Chronicle*, the strongest position in this regard was taken by the *Franfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Indeed, they went as far as suggesting that “maintaining the autocracy of the party would be the violation of [the] people’s will. This is a clear reference to and encouragement of having the leading role of the Communist Party eliminated. But the paper goes even further: it advocates the elimination not only of the party but also of all other pillars of the socialist system.” The article also claims that the “people’s militia is a long outdated institution, and it is now becoming evident what a mistake it was not to have it disbanded before”.

As to the article published in *Die Welt*, the radio commentary states that “they give a less concrete but more a programmatic articulation of the direction that the Czechoslovakian processes should take. In their view, it is through economic and political competition with the western democracies that the Czechs and Slovaks should achieve their desirable goal: a social system of the Western type and the bourgeois restoration.”

The editor of the radio program also quoted from the American press, namely from the *Wall Street Journal*: “America should demonstrate whose side they are on, and they should support the efforts for a gradual bourgeois restoration.”

³⁷ Esti Krónika. July 29th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast July 29th 1968. 19:00–19:25. Kossuth Rádió.



West Germany, Czechoslovakia's neighboring country, views the situation in a similar way — goes on the editor. *“After all, there is no other way we can interpret the statement of the Sudeten German revanchists dreaming about seizing Czechoslovakian territories, who have declared that they support the freedom fight of the Czech and Slovak peoples by all possible means.”*³⁸

The report about the Ágcsernyő meeting was aired by the *Evening Chronicle* on August 1st. This was also restricted to the official protocol text: the meeting *“took place in an atmosphere of complete openness, sincerity and mutual understanding, and was aimed at finding the ways and means of further improving and strengthening the traditionally amicable relationships between the two parties and the two peoples based on the principles of Marxism- Leninism and proletarian internationalism”*.

The Chronicle closed its report with the statement that the meetings would continue in Bratislava on August 3rd, with the participation of the Bulgarian Communist Party, the Hungarian Socialist Party, the German Socialist Party, the United Workers' Party of Poland, the Soviet Communist Party and the Czechoslovakian Party.³⁹

On the evening of August 1st, President Svoboda gave a TV speech about the Ágcsernyő meeting, to be covered by the *Morning Chronicle* the following day. What they highlighted from the speech was the president's statement that *“the only way they can implement their program and the tasks they set for themselves is if Czechoslovakia remains a firm link in the chain of the socialist countries' community and if the country relies on the support and cooperation of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries [...]”*. Svoboda also said that *“the Soviet leaders have assured the Czechoslovak leaders that they are in support of the socialist program outlined in the party's action program and the government's manifesto”*. He added that their negotiations with the Soviet leaders *“have created the calm atmosphere necessary for the fulfillment of their socialist program”*.⁴⁰

From the archival sources, we know that once again, the Hungarian political leadership played an important mediating role in organizing the Ágcsernyő meeting as well as during the meeting itself. A major part of this was the secret meeting of Kádár and Dubček in Komárom, on July 13. *“Kádár felt that [...] he managed to scare Dubček and Černík, both of whom broke down in tears at the end of the meeting, realizing only then how far they had got.”* Therefore, Kádár was hoping that *“a last warning [by the Soviets] before the expulsion from the party would do the trick, and the comrades in Prague would eventually take the necessary administrative steps leading to the consolidation of the communist system”*.⁴¹

The Hungarian radio gave an account of the Bratislava conference in its late evening (10 pm) news on August 3rd. The meeting was characterized by *“sincere, comradely atmosphere”*. The leaders of the six parties discussed the most significant developments in the international political situation. They expressed, among others,

38 Esti Krónika. July 30th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast July 30th. 1968. 19:00–19:30. Kossuth Rádió.

39 Esti Krónika. August 1. 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast August 1st. 1968. 19:00–19:30. Kossuth Rádió.

40 Reggeli Krónika. Aug 2nd 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast on August 2nd 1968. 7:00–7:14. Kossuth Rádió.

41 BÉKÉS, 2008.



their “resolution to do their utmost for deepening the many-sided cooperation of their countries, relying on the principles of equality, sovereignty and national independence as well of mutual, fraternal assistance and solidarity”.⁴² It is apparent from the sentences above that the statement contained no more than the usual clichés, and failed to show any concrete solutions to the situation in Czechoslovakia, or to say anything new for the public.

In fact, at the Bratislava conference, Kádár was absolutely clear in explaining to Dubček the alternative that the CzCP was facing: it is either they themselves who will forcefully put an end to certain tendencies of the development, or the force will come from somewhere else.⁴³

There were two more events of importance that preceded the launching of the “fraternal assistance” on 20th August, as evidenced by archival sources. The first one: on August 15th. János Kádár paid a visit to Yalta on the invitation of Brezhnev. “By this time, the negotiations have been running in full awareness of an imminent order for the armed solution.” The second: Kádár’s “last attempt for mediation”, commissioned by Brezhnev in Yalta, “in the belief that the only one who can have any influence on Dubček is, besides the SCP, the Hungarian party”. The meeting took place in Komarno on 17th August, where Kádár came to the conclusion that “[...] it had become plainly clear that the Czechoslovak leaders were not aware of the fact that they were riding a train rushing towards a precipice, or if they were, they were just waiting for the approaching catastrophe, resigned to their fate, with no one having the strength to pull the emergency brake.”⁴⁴

Kádár’s words seemed to be confirmed by a speech that Dubček gave in the Avia car factory in Prague. The account was aired in the August 17th program of the *Evening Chronicle*. Dubček said that he did “not want to hide the fact that the internal development of the country had created certain difficulties. He pointed to the spontaneous actions that involved extremist excesses against the Communist construction work. [...] even the people’s militia are being vilified, despite the fact that their assemblies have explicitly committed themselves to the trend the country has pursued since January.” Therefore, it is all the more perplexing that the authors of these calls against the people’s militia act as though their demands to disband the militia were in fact supporting the work of the new party leadership. Dubček expressed his belief that in the present stage of affairs, the people’s militia “is the safeguard of the democratic process, and it is the responsibility of all good people to fight back any reckless actions, as such actions can have grave consequences and prove to be detrimental to the processes that have evolved since January.”⁴⁵

After this, the pace of events sped up. The first report about the invasion of Czechoslovakia appeared in the early morning News (*Hírek*), on 21st August. “The Hungarian Telegraph Agency MTI reports: the units of the Hungarian people’s army, which are stationed in Czechoslovakia as part of the allied forces with the purpose of providing fraternal

42 *Hírek*. August 3rd 1968. MTVA Archives K 615. Press archives. Box482. Broadcast August 3rd 1968. 22:00. Petőfi Rádió.

43 BÉKÉS, 2008.

44 *Ibidem*.

45 *Esti Krónika*. August 17th. 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast August 17th 1968. 19:00–19:25. Kossuth Rádió.

assistance and averting the danger of a counter-revolutionary turn of events in Czechoslovakia, have fulfilled their task, without meeting any resistance or suffering any human or material losses.”⁴⁶ (This report was repeated in every edition of the news.)

A more elaborate report was released in the 10 o'clock news program on 21st April. “On the request of the leading party and state figures of our neighbor, Czechoslovakia, the government of the Hungarian People’s Republic — together with other allied countries — provides assistance, including armed assistance, too, for the fraternal Czechoslovak people, in order to avert the danger of a counter-revolutionary turn created by both internal anti-socialist forces and external imperialist powers [...]. The situation that has evolved in Czechoslovakia is so grave that it threatens to destroy the socialist achievements as well as the law and order, endangering the vital interests of the socialist world system, the security of fraternal countries and the peace of all European peoples. In order to avert in time the imminent danger, and empowered by the request of the leading Czechoslovak party and state figures on one hand and by the resolution of the government of the Hungarian People’s Republic on the other, the units of our people’s army have entered the territory of Czechoslovakia as part of the allied troops. As soon as the imminent danger has ended and the legitimate Czechoslovak authorities have concluded that there is no longer need for the military presence of the allied military units, the troops will be instantaneously withdrawn from the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia. This resolution of the socialist countries’ governments is not directed against any of the states, nor does it violate the interests of other states, and it is in full accordance with the fraternal socialist countries’ treaty of alliance. It is the unity and solidarity of the fraternal socialist countries that confronts the sinful attempts of the enemy. Never shall we allow it for anyone to take hostage of any member of our socialist community.”⁴⁷ More information followed in the news.

On 21st August, the Soviet news agency TASS released an evening announcement about the developments in Czechoslovakia. On the following day, August 22nd, the Hungarian radio gave a summary of this Soviet interpretation in the *Morning Chronicle*: “The military units of the allied socialist forces which have moved into the territory of Czechoslovakia on the request of leading Czechoslovak party and government figures have performed their maneuvers without meeting any resistance. [Meanwhile,] the military units of the Chechoslovakian people’s army remained in their stations. Many Czechoslovak citizens have expressed their gratitude to the soldiers of the allied troops for having given timely assistance in their fight against the counter-revolutionary forces. [...] the subversive activities are the work of the same [allegedly] socialist elements who have, during the last few months, been constantly attacking the foundations of Czechoslovakian socialism and the friendship that links the Czechoslovak party and the Czechoslovak people to the Soviet Union and to the other socialist countries.” The TASS statement also found it important to mention that the military units of the allied countries “have no intention to interfere in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia”.⁴⁸ On 23rd August, the *Evening Chronicle* reported that

46 Hírek. August 21st 1968. MTVA Archives K 615. Press archives. Box 484. Broadcast August 21st 1968. 4:30. Kossuth Rádió.

47 Hírek. August 21. 1968. MTVA Archives K 615. Press archives. Box 484. Broadcast 21. August 1968. 10:00. Kossuth Rádió.

48 Reggeli Krónika. August 22. 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast August 22nd, 1968. 5:30–5:40. Kossuth Rádió.





a Czechoslovakian delegation, headed by President of Republic Soboda had arrived in Moscow.⁴⁹

In its August 26th program, the *Morning Chronicle* gave an account of the latest Czechoslovakian developments, indicating that the negotiations between the Czechoslovak delegation and the Soviet party and government leaders were continuing. After that, they read out the report of the TASS's special correspondent in Prague: *"The reactionary, anti-socialist forces are persisting in their intrigues, and are making every effort to hinder and block the process of getting the situation normalized. Therefore, they are carrying out numerous acts of provocation in various regions of Czechoslovakia, most notably in the capital. On the dawn of Sunday, there were shootings, and in several districts various weapons, machine guns and anti-tanks were discovered and confiscated. The soldiers of the allied forces had no choice but to hold up and check all cars with a foreign number plate as it turned out that the enemy forces were using such cars for transporting weapons. Several provocative attempts are being averted with the help of the population. On Saturday night, in Prague, some soldiers of the allied troops managed to prevent saboteurs from making the city's water supply system collapse. The citizens of Prague and of other cities who communicate with the soldiers of the allied troops can become increasingly assured that these fighters are there in Czechoslovakia because they want to help defend its socialist order and the achievements of its people. The new television broadcast center in Prague has been in operation for two days. In many places in the Czechoslovakian capital, the graffiti slandering the peoples of the socialist countries have been removed from the house walls, reports TASS's special correspondent in Prague."*⁵⁰

The Moscow correspondent of the East German news agency ADN (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst*) was informed by persons close to President Svoboda, who was pursuing negotiations in Moscow, that the Czechoslovak head of state instructed *"Foreign Minister Hájek, who is currently staying in New York, not to speak up at the session of the UN Security Council [...] as the Czechoslovakian developments should be discussed and [the problems] solved by the socialist countries among themselves"*. This news was aired in the August 26th program of the *Evening Chronicle*.⁵¹

In the Soviet capital, a statement was released about the Soviet-Czechoslovak negotiations in Moscow through August 23–26. According to the August 27th news, *"the negotiations were characterized by an open, comradely atmosphere. The parties have discussed the latest developments of the international situation as well as the newly evolved situation in Czechoslovakia and the events related to the temporary entry of the armed forces of the five socialist countries into the territory of Czechoslovakia"*. There was no further commentary, letting the listeners do the work of evaluating this piece of news.

The Soviet negotiating party started out from the resolution endorsed by the Czechoslovak party leadership in January and May, *"with the purpose of perfecting the methods of directing the society, improving socialist democracy and strengthening the so-*

49 Esti Krónika. August 23.1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast August 23rd 1968. 19:00–19:25. Kossuth Rádió.

50 Reggeli Krónika. August 26th, 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast August 26th 1968. 7:00–7:15. Kossuth Rádió.

51 Esti Krónika. August 26th, 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast August 26th 1968. 19.00–19.25. Kossuth Rádió.



cialist order on the basis of Marxist-Leninist principles". During the talks, the two parties came to an agreement on "the measures necessary for the soonest possible normalization of the Czechoslovakian situation". The Czechoslovak political leaders delineated the most important measures they wished to take to achieve this goal.

The Czechoslovak negotiating team "has declared their intention that the party and the bodies of the state will devote all their energy in every field to ensuring the efficiency of the measures that should serve the socialist power, the leading role of the working class and of the communist party, and the interests of improving and consolidating the amicable relationships with the Soviet Union and the peoples of the socialist community".

The Soviet leaders expressed "the unanimous intention of the peoples of the Soviet Union for the friendship and brotherhood with the peoples of socialist Czechoslovakia, confirming their eagerness for the sincerest and most wide-scale cooperation, on the basis of mutual respect, equality, territorial integrity, independence and social solidarity".

During the talks, the Soviet party reassured the Czechoslovakian leaders that the troops of the allied countries "will not interfere" in the internal affairs of the country. The two parties agreed on the conditions of withdrawing the troops, which "will take place in concert with the consolidation of the Czechoslovakian situation".

The Slovak party announced that "the commander-in-chief of the Czechoslovakian armed forces gave the appropriate orders for the troops to exercise no tolerance regarding any incidents and conflicts that could trigger a violation of peace and public order". The commander-in-chief of the armed forces was also instructed to "keep up contact with the commanders-in-chief of the allied troops".

At the end of the announcement, both parties agreed that "just like before, they will be firm in their response to militarist, revanchist and neo-Nazi forces, who attempt to revise the outcomes of the Second World War, and to defy the untouchability of the existing European borders". They also declared that "they will make good on all the obligations they have undertaken in their bi- and multilateral contracts with the other socialist countries, in order to strengthen the military power of the socialist community and increase the efficiency of the Warsaw Pact".⁵²

Finally, at the end of October, Kosigin and Černík signed the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty in Prague, as was reported in the October 17th program of the *Morning Chronicle*. The treaty "strengthens the close cooperation and friendship of the two peoples as well as of all peoples in the socialist community. Kosigin stated that according to the agreement, the greater part of the Soviet troops as well the troops of Hungaey, Poland, the GDR and Bulgaria will be gradually withdrawn from Czechoslovakia."⁵³

On 21st October, the early morning news confirmed that the Hungarian troops were indeed being withdrawn. "The Hungarian units stationed in Czechoslovakia organized a farewell meeting, as — according to the recently signed agreement — their gradual withdrawal is to commence in the near future. The commanders and officers of our troops will take their leave from the local leaders, who have worked successfully together with the Hungarian units in the last few weeks. During the festive event at Galánta, the local leaders

52 Hírek. August 27th. 1968. MTVA Archives. K 615.Press archives. Box 484. Broadcast August 27th 1968. 15:00. Kossuth Rádió.

53 Reggeli Krónika. October 17th 1968. MTVA Archives. Program script. Broadcast October 17th 1968. 7:00–7:14. Kossuth Rádió.



emphasized that the conduct and activity of the Hungarian people's army had greatly contributed to the process of consolidation."⁵⁴

After the withdrawal of the Hungarian troops, the Czechoslovakian situation remained to be the main topic of the Hungarian political and public life for several months — not in the least part in connection with the introduction of the “new economic reform”. In the radio, the editors kept avoiding any reference to the partial similarity between the “Prague spring” and the Hungarian process pointed out before. The silence was protecting the Hungarian reforms — from Moscow. And, as it later turned out, not without reason.

⁵⁴ Hírek. October 21st 1968. MTVA Archives. K 615. Press archives, Box 489. Broadcast October 21st 1968. 4:30. Kossuth Rádió.