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Report on Fidel Castro's Visit to Bulgaria and Bulgarian-Cuban relations

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Summary:

The report details Bulgaria's preparations for a Cuban delegation and the visit itself. The author offers both praise and criticism of Cuban leadership. There has been positive progress in Cuba in recent years, yet underlying problems remain (e.g. the economy lacks planning). The Bulgarian government devised the visit as an opportunity to teach the Cuban delegation about building state socialism. The report includes an overview of the Cuban delegations visit. Discussions during the visit involved Cuban economic growth and barriers, China, Romania's non-interventionist policies, Nixon's 1972 visit to Moscow, and economic and scientific cooperation (particularly between Bulgaria and Cuba).

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Top secret!

INFORMATION

About the visit of the Cuban party-governmental delegation led by comrade Fidel Castro in Bulgaria

A Cuban party-governmental delegation led by comrade F. Castro was on a visit in our country in the period 17-26 May 1972. It returned the visit of our party-governmental delegation led by comrade T. Zhivkov that visited Cuba in July 1970.

The Politburo and personally comrade Zhivkov attached great importance to that first visit of a delegation of such a high rank led by comrade F. Castro.

The visit took place in a very favorable atmosphere, on one hand, because of the positive process which has been taking place in Cuba in the recent years, and because of the aspiration of the Cuban party and state leaders more and more definitely to stand on Marxist-Leninist positions and to cooperate more closely with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, and, on the other hand, because of the existing sympathies and the established good relations between the two countries, and especially because of the friendly relations between comrade T. Zhivkov and comrade F. Castro.

Our main goal was to reinforce and to quicken this positive process, which is taking place in Cuba now. That is why we took to the imminent task very seriously and responsibly. What made us do that?

First of all, the situation in Cuba, which Politburo and especially comrade T. Zhivkov know very well. Since comrade T. Zhivkov's visit to Cuba the positive process continues but the problems remain the same. The tempos of the economic development on the main indices and in the basic branches are very low- about 2-3% growth. And it seems that there is no real planning. It is said that it would be done but it is carried out slowly and it is not felt like something very important in the construction of socialism. Similar things can be pointed out about the leading role of the party, about the bodies of the proletarian dictatorship, about the material interest and others.

Before the visit of the delegation, we got hold of the information that some leading comrades in Cuba were hoping that we would exert influence on comrade F. Castro and that the visit would turn into a lesson to show him the positive experience of PR Bulgaria in the construction of socialism. Some Cubans who have been to Bulgaria told our specialists in Cuba - "show comrade F. Castro how you built socialism, we want such socialism in our country as well."

In view of all this we set the following particular tasks:

1. The Cuban comrades and especially comrade F. Castro [were] to be introduced to the methods of ruling the party and the state, to the role and the place of the party in the social system and, first of all, in the sphere of economics, and to the role of planning in the overall life of the country.
2. The leading role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the international communist and working-class movement [was] to be strengthened and reservations in this respect [were] to be overcome.
3. Our economic and scientific-technical cooperation to be improved and made more effective.

In defining the ways and the means for attaining the goals and the tasks which we have set before us we proceeded from the following additional considerations as well:

1. Not to insult their self-confidence and national dignity, to take into consideration comrade F. Castro's character and not to leave the impression that we are edifying them.
2. To let them understand that we acknowledge their big merits, their heroic deed, to let them feel our warmth, respect, and love personally towards comrade F. Castro as a leader of the Cuban revolution.
3. With the correct approach, to create an atmosphere of full confidence and brotherhood.

Proceeding from the presented considerations, the particular sites for the visit were carefully chosen. The program for the negotiations itself and the work of the two delegations was personally developed by comrade T. Zhivkov.

How did the visit of the Cuban delegation led by comrade F. Castro begin and go off?

On the very first day after the reception - 17 May, by request of comrade F. Castro, outside the approved program, there was a visit to the exhibition of new food products.

After the presentation in the exhibition, an animated discussion among the Cuban comrades, with the participation of comrade T. Zhivkov and especially comrade F. Castro, took place. Despite our efforts to explain to him that the commodities are available and are sold in the shops, he [comrade F. Castro] continued to ask who was distributing the candies, for example. We explained to him that from the industry, the commodities were directed to the network of shops and were available and sold to the people. The Cuban comrades displayed a great interest [in knowing] how much sugar and sugar products cost. It felt as if they wanted to clarify how much we gained from their sugar and [to find out] if its price was realistic. We gave them very thorough explanations. After that they apologized and said that they had no intention to discuss the price of sugar but they had asked simply for their own information. It was obvious that they came with some prejudices, and also that the mechanism of price-formation in a trade without rations was not clear for them. On the way back to the residence comrade Castro was interested in the structure of our export for the Soviet Union and the import and asked a lot of questions. It was evident that he would display a great interest, at that, on a broad range of issues, which was good.

Those were the feelings and the mood when the work of the two delegations began. At the meeting between the two delegations, at suggestion made by comrade F. Castro, comrade T. Zhivkov was the first to speak. An agreement was reached that the issues of the international situation be discussed at the meeting with Politburo. The statement of comrade T. Zhivkov evoked great interest. It was accompanied with a great deal of questions and it turned into a friendly talk.

[...]

In his statement comrade T. Zhivkov explained how the Central Committee ruled the party and the state, how the leading role of the party was implemented, and pointed out the difficulties and the weaknesses, which we had, quite openly and [in a] straightforward [manner]. Because of comrade F. Castro's questions, the statement of comrade T. Zhivkov was prolonged from one hour to two hours and a half.

Comrade Castro related in great detail about the hard [burden of the] capitalist legacy left to Cuba, about the country's poor natural resources, and about the difficulties provoked by the sabotage activities of the American imperialists, who forced them to keep a large army. Still, they have [achieved] success and they take measures for the further development of their economy.

Comrade Castro pointed out that the main production in Cuba's economy is the turnout of sugar. [...] He announced that they had set before themselves the task to obtain 10 million tons of sugar because they have no other resources in order to repay their debts but they had not reached that production [level]. Although nobody insisted on repayment, they think that it is not proper to go on in this way. "Comrade Zhivkov, I regret to meet you without fulfilling our obligation for the delivery of sugar which we promised you." In answer to that, comrade Zhivkov declared that the problem was clarified and that it was not us that posed it (later comrade Castro told comrade Zhivkov that the undelivered sugar would be compensated with 300 tons of nickel, which according to the Ministry of foreign trade, satisfies us).

[...]

As in the statement at the first meeting, at other occasions, too, comrade F. Castro emphasized that the development of their economy had to be assisted, so that the country would be saved from poverty. "Cuba receives economic assistance - declared comrade Castro, - but we cannot live on aid until the end of our lives."

[...]

After that comrade T. Zhivkov declared that he fully understood the economic difficulties and that he was willing to look for a common solution. Perhaps a special meeting of COMECON or something else is required - said he, - about which it is good to ask the Soviet comrades for advice. As far as Bulgaria is concerned, we will take on our part of the common task, no matter whether on a multilateral or bilateral basis. At the moment we are discussing and resolving a number of issues about our economic and scientific-technical cooperation and we are willing to expand it and to search new forms and spheres which can reveal additional resources for the economies of the two countries.

The visits to the separate sites and the meetings were dedicated to specific topics, which in our assessment showed the positive experience of Bulgaria and were of interest for the Cuban delegation and most of all to comrade Castro. Comrade Zhivkov guided all this directly and practically led those talks, or more precisely, seminars.

[...]

Comrade F. Castro accepted with great interest everything that was said, especially by comrade T. Zhivkov. However, it felt that these things were relatively new and to a certain extent foreign to him, and made a strong impression on him. It must be said that he took notes the entire time. After that we were asked on his behalf to give him the shorthand records, so that he can study the statement of comrade T. Zhivkov better.

[...]

At the meeting in the district committee of Russe, the topic of discussion was "The application of modern systems for comprehensive mechanization and automation of the production, the construction of automated systems for management of the production, and the introduction of electronic-calculating equipment in industry and agriculture."

[...]

Everything was accompanied with a lot of questions and great admiration on behalf of the Cuban comrades.

[...]

Comrade Castro was obviously extremely satisfied. At that time comrade [Carlos Rafael] Rodriguez told me that comrade Castro wanted to be allowed to send a Cuban group to Rouseff unofficially, so that they could study our experience, planning, development of models, management of production and so on.

The extent of the effect [these meetings had] on comrade F. Castro can be determined by the fact that [after] summarizing everything learned and seen, and [having] analyzed the results attained, he began to praise our achievements more and more persistently, emphasizing that no other [country] but Bulgaria would show best the advantages of the socialist agricultural system, [and] that the country would reach the top in this respect and it was very useful in the discussions and in the propaganda against the capitalist [model of] agriculture. As it is known from the press, comrade F. Castro regards the agrarian-industrial complexes as a big contribution in the development of the Marxist-Leninist theory for the socialist agriculture. In private conversations with us he spoke even more enthusiastically and fervently about our agricultural system and about the creative, Leninist approach of comrade T. Zhivkov.

Unquestionably, his views were getting broader and richer. The agrarian issues and the ways for developing socialist agriculture were becoming clearer to him.

[...]

Thus [we achieved] the goal of acquainting comrade F. Castro with PR Bulgaria's experience in building socialism, as well as with the life of our people and the country, along with its accomplishments in the spheres of culture, tourism, [and the military,] including the training of our armed forces. Those were 10 days of continuous hard work, first and foremost, on behalf of comrade T. Zhivkov.

Comrade Zhivkov seized every opportunity - in the airplane, in the car, at lunch or at dinner - to talk and to explain one problem or another. In informal atmosphere comrade Zhivkov explained to him [comrade F. Castro] that we regard Maoism as a teaching hostile to Leninism. Comrade F. Castro declared: "Yes, the ideas of Mao Zedong are [a] delusion for the masses." In the airplane from Ruse to Pleven comrade Zhivkov joked that soon he would go to Romania and probably would listen to a great deal of speeches for independence, noninterference, sovereignty and so on, "but I do not want to interfere in your domestic affairs" - concluded comrade Zhivkov. Comrade F. Castro was silent for a while and then answered: "Comrade Zhivkov, we are against the interference of the imperialists in our domestic affairs, but we support the idea that the socialist countries can and must interfere in the affairs of other socialist countries."

At the meeting with the Politburo comrade Zhivkov and comrade Castro made statements on international issues. Besides, comrade Castro considered some problems of the economic development and of the situation in Cuba, as well. I will not dwell on the statement because everybody heard it.

I will dwell only on the issue about the [May 1972] visit of [US President Richard M.] Nixon to Moscow. Comrade Castro expressed very clearly their critical attitude and their confusion. During the visit to our country, they expressed, in one way or another, their dissatisfaction with [Nixon's] visit [to Moscow], and [explained that] they could not understand it correctly. They were informed when Nixon was going to arrive in Moscow and [knew] how he would be welcomed. When comrade F. Castro

learned that there were no people in the streets to welcome Nixon, but there were the minimum most necessary by protocol courtesies, he started to clap his hands and to repeat: "This is good, this is good."

[...]

The work on the communiqué went off in a calm and business friendly atmosphere and in a spirit of frankness and willingness for concessions. Practically, our views on most of the issues were identical or similar.[...] There were differences of a more serious character only on some items.

The Cuban comrades suggested texts in which the role and the significance of the national-liberation movements were exaggerated. They held back from judgments about the difficulties in the international communist and working-class movement, they did not approve our text about the struggle against the deviations from Marxism-Leninism and they did not agree that the role of the communist parties in Latin America be emphasized. They strongly insisted that the war in Vietnam and the American government, and personally Nixon, be condemned with convincing phrases. This required long discussions of some formulations until we adopted a mutually acceptable version. Our group had to explain, at length and patiently, the positions of our country, from a principled standpoint, and [in the end] succeeded in convincing the Cuban comrades to adopt our views. Of course, we had to be aware of and to take into consideration their positions, as well. Essentially, the disputed texts were prepared on the basis of mutually acceptable formulations.

[...]

Our joint work on the communiqué once more confirms the conclusion that the Cuban comrades had indeed reassessed in a positive way a number of their former concepts, and now they stand much closer to our views. At the same time, it was evident that they had not yet shaken off completely some of their wrong positions. [...]

About the economic and scientific-technical cooperation

During comrade T. Zhivkov's visit to Cuba these issues were discussed in detail on a large scale with a view of creating a model for cooperation between the two socialist countries, employing all possibilities. At the moment, on this basis, a program for the directions and the prospects of this cooperation is being developed.

[...]

It was decided to study the possibilities for cooperation in the production of electric trucks and for the construction of a plant in Cuba for the production of starter and traction batteries on the basis of Cuban lead. In the future, the emerging joint markets for electrical trucks, motor trucks and batteries in some Latin American and other countries can be discussed, as well. An agreement was attained about the building of a repair plant for tractors and attached farm equipment in Cuba. And it was decided that the Bulgarian-Cuban scientific research project-constructor bureau for agricultural machines develop a plan about the production of system machines for comprehensive mechanization for basic agricultural crops in Cuba in order to render more effective assistance to Cuban agriculture.

[...]

It is deemed expedient to explore the possibility for assembling electronic calculators

and electronic calculating machines in Cuba. We accepted the motion to share our experience in the application of the electronic-calculating equipment in the organization and the management of agricultural-industrial complexes. We pointed out the big experience of our country in the sphere of non-ferrous metallurgy and we offered to develop our cooperation in the sphere of geological mining and in the delivery of equipment for mines, ore-dressing factories and metallurgic works for extraction of lead, zinc and copper. (In this sphere Cuba is engaged with Romania, from which it had received 20 million dollars credit.) We suggested also receiving a group of Cuban specialists, so that they can study our experience in the sphere of the planning of the national economy and of the development of the machine-building industry.

[...]

About the atmosphere, which contributed to achieving good results

The visit of comrade T. Zhivkov in Cuba in 1970 has left deep and lasting sentiments of confidence and friendship. The Cuban comrades highly appreciate the fact that the first visit of a leader of such a rank is from Bulgaria. And what is more important, it has had an extremely favorable effect on them in a number of ways. At the meeting with Politburo, they emphasized once again that it was not a coincidence that their first visit for now in a socialist country was in Bulgaria.

The visit in Sofia and everywhere else in the country was accompanied with great respect and love towards the Cuban revolution, towards the delegation and personally towards comrade F. Castro.

[...]

The meeting with former partisans from the "Chavdar" brigade,[1] which continued until after midnight, was also very well designed and organized. When comrade Zhivkov spoke about his wonderful impressions from Cuba, comrade Castro said: "Comrade Zhivkov, why are you speaking all the time about the visit in past tense. You have to speak about the future visits, as well. I would like to invite you to Cuba again."

[...]

On leaving Bulgaria, comrade [Flavio] Bravo (deputy Prime Minister) and comrade Naranjo (Minister of Food Industry) declared that they were very pleased with the visit and that they were convinced that it was the best one, which had left most wonderful impressions on them.

About some conclusions and suggestions

The bulk of work completed gave and will give its positive results. The set goal was achieved completely. Extremely useful work was done for our bilateral relations and for our common cause. We created very favorable preconditions for the meetings of the other brotherly socialist countries with the Cuban comrades and comrade F. Castro.

The basic thought that guided comrade T. Zhivkov in all this incessant work, efforts and labor, was our great desire to be useful to the Cuban Revolution, to the Cuban Communist Party and personally to comrade F. Castro in the building of a new society, [set] on a Leninist path. They [the Cuban comrades] perceived these intentions, in the most noble sense.

[...]

It is obvious that comrade Fidel Castro and the other comrades have walked a long revolutionary road. They are building a socialist society, they are guided by Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, to cooperate with our countries and first of all, with the USSR, and they are strongly opposed to imperialism.

Also, during their visit in our country they tried to make the most of it and to enrich and to strengthen their Marxist-Leninist views. Their attitude towards our country and our party shows an absolute approval of our policy and admiration for our successes, which comrade F. Castro expressed repeatedly.

[...]

In order to attain greater and more effective results on this stage, it is very important that our countries assist decisively the economic development of Cuba, which will play a positive role for its still closer rapprochement with the socialist community. In this respect, the suggestion of comrade T. Zhivkov for discussion of the problems of the economic development of Cuba at a special meeting of COMECON is very appropriate.

After the visit of comrade T. Zhivkov in Cuba, at his suggestion, a special program for the development of economic and scientific-technical cooperation between the two countries was developed and some measures are being implemented. It is necessary to start working comprehensively for the implementation of the program, and to this end, to look for and to reveal new resources.

[...]

[1] In April 1944 the partisan detachment "Chavdar" was reorganized into brigade. Todor Zhivkov was a CC BCP political representative at the brigade. During Zhivkov's rule, several of the brigade commanders received influential positions - Gen. Dobri Djurov became minister of defense (1962-1990), Dimiter Stanishev - CC BCP Secretary for International Relations (1977-1990), and Yordan Yotov - a Politburo member and CC BCP Secretary for Ideology (1984-1989).