

March 29, 1969

Report on Visit of Soviet Ambassador Stepan Chervenenko to Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry

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Summary:

Conversation between Soviet Ambassador Chervenenko and Czechoslovak State Secretary Václav Pleskot. They discuss the recent Ice Hockey World Championship and the anti-Soviet political protests which took place following Czechoslovakia's defeat of the Soviet Union. Tensions were high following the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and protesters in cities across Czechoslovakia attacked the offices of Aeroflot, the Soviet Army, and the Soviet embassy.

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On March 29, 1969, Ambassador of the Soviet Union Chervonenko visited State Secretary V[áclav] Pleskot upon his own request.

By way of opening, he stated that the purpose of his visit was to draw Comrade Pleskot's attention to events which had occurred in many places all over Czechoslovakia after the ice hockey match between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Soviet Union, and to ask him to inform the Federal Government about his visit. He also apologized for disturbing Comrade Pleskot on Saturday because of the urgency of the matter.

He noted that the Prime Minister of the Czech Socialist Republic, Comrade [Stanislav] Rázl, had called him in the morning to express his concerns and to apologize for the events. At about noon, he had also been visited by Deputy Prime Minister [Ladislav] Adamec and Minister of Interior [Josef] Grösser in the same matter, the purpose of the visit being to present the Czech Government's opinion regarding the events to the Ambassador.

Comrade Chervonenko then outlined the situation on the basis of information available to the Soviet Embassy. He added that his visit was to convey a preliminary notice the purpose of which was to draw the Czechoslovak Government's and Czechoslovak President's attention to the events and the indignation they had produced in the Soviet Union.

Yesterday, after the USSR - CSSR ice hockey match, political protests took place in many places all over Czechoslovakia. According to today's issue of the "Rudé právo" daily, they were attended by 100,000 people in Prague alone (and even more according to information available to the Soviet Embassy). The rioters were shouting anti-Soviet slogans. They raided the Aeroflot office on Wenceslas Square in Prague, destroyed its equipment and furnishings, threw all documents found there out on the street and set them afire. In Ústí nad Labem, some 5,000 protesters crashed into the office of the Soviet Army's representative, broke its windows and severed telephone lines. Three cars were destroyed. Similar events also occurred in Olomouc, Liberec, Děčín, Česká Lípa, Košice and other cities. In Hradec Králové, the crowd doused the memorial of Soviet soldiers with gasoline and set it afire. When the fire had burnt out, candles were lit in front of the memorial. In Bratislava, protesters attempted to break into the building of the Soviet general consulate, but were stopped by policemen. There are certain indications that the events were organized and coordinated. For example, trucks had been prepositioned in Prague's neighborhoods where students' dormitories are located to allow the protesters to be quickly transported to riot locations. When the riot on Wenceslas Square had ended, the protesters were instructed to move to the Soviet Embassy. Indeed, an unspecified crowd of people assembled at the embassy at around midnight, but policemen intervened against it in time.

Comrade Chervonenko further noted that, according to today's issue of the "Mladá fronta" daily, Comrade [Josef] Smrkovský appeared on Wenceslas Square at about 11PM to rejoice together with the protesters. It is possible that his presence there was accidental.

According to the "Rudé právo" daily, the events were a manifestation of people's enthusiasm. However, the "Rudé právo" daily failed to notice that the protesters carried banners in support of the People's Republic of China and daubed the same slogans on various buildings.

Comrade Chervonenko expressed his hope that the Czechoslovak Government would assess the events and take measures preventing their repetition. In Comrade Chervonenko's opinion, it would be necessary to have a representative of Czechoslovak authorities appear on TV, either today or tomorrow, to prevent a recurrence of the events after the closing of the Ice Hockey World Championship tomorrow.

Furthermore, Comrade Chervonenko requested that the Aeroflot office be guarded by members of the police. People strolling on Wenceslas Square can enter the office freely and foreign correspondents take photographs of the demolished premises. A police patrol comes to the office every now and then, but departs immediately.

In this respect, Comrade Chervonenko asked that the office be repaired and restored to its normal condition today or tomorrow. He emphasized that he estimated the

damage at about CSK 1 million. The shop-window glazing had already been broken during the events connected with the suicide of Jan Palach, but it had not been replaced yet, although the Soviet Embassy contacted the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately thereafter.

Comrade Pleskot thanked the ambassador for his information and stated that the events prompted disagreement and concerns on our part as well. Sporting events must not be abused for such lowly acts, the more so that the latter do not represent the opinion of Czech and Slovak people. Furthermore, Comrade Pleskot added that he understood concerns of the Soviet Ambassador and that he apologized for the abovementioned events on his own behalf as well as on behalf of the Czechoslovak Government. He promised to notify the government immediately. The damage will be compensated.

Comrade Minister [Ján] Marko is presently visiting the region of Orava, which is his constituency. Comrade [Oldřich] Černík is not in Prague as well. The State Secretary, however, promised to arrange that the government would be notified immediately.

Comrade Pleskot added that the damage caused to the Aeroflot office in connection with the suicide of Jan Palach was to be rectified by the National Committee of Prague and that he did not know the matter had not been resolved yet.

By way of conclusion, Comrade Chervonenko emphasized that the Soviet Embassy was aware of the necessity to differentiate between people of Czechoslovakia and certain elements attempting to exploit sporting enthusiasm for the purpose of furthering their despicable goals.

The meeting took from 13.10 to 13.45 PM.