

August 13, 1971

**Memorandum of Conversation between Ambassador
Micunovic and Secretary Brezhnev held on August
10, 1971**

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Summary:

Veljko Mićunović reports on a heated conversation with Leonid Brezhnev about Soviet-Yugoslav relations.

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VERY URGENT

Concerning talks with Brezhnev from August 10 we are reporting the following:

The first part of the conversation was pretty uncomfortable and harder than you would conclude from a detailed report that we sent you, because of its length, by pilots of JAT [Yugoslav air company] on August 13. A bad atmosphere was imposed by Brezhnev who, immediately after we met, started criticizing Yugoslavia.

Besides our protest (and its publication in the press that especially enraged the Russians) Brezhnev did not name any other specific example of Yugoslavia's behavior to support his main thesis that Yugoslavia is the one that aggravates, as opposed to the USSR who is for better relations between us. When we, at least to some extent, clarified who are the Cominformists in the USSR and what do they do here and in our country, Brezhnev relinquished this example too, but he kept his main argument that Yugoslavia bears the responsibility for our poor relations.

My impression remains that this (the affair with the Cominformists) isn't the main or the real reason for Brezhnev's dissatisfaction and neurosis, but this was only of marginal importance although, in the context of other events that happened between us and the USSR in the last several months, this case is also very politically sensitive.

Apparently, Brezhnev is dissatisfied with the general results of the numerous actions and the policy of the USSR toward Yugoslavia, particularly those from April and later. The common characteristic of these actions (Brezhnev's telephone call to Tito on April 31 [sic!] during the meeting in the Brioni, request for Soviet military flights over Yugoslavia, the Russian estimates of the Yugoslav internal situation as very "critical," Brezhnev's request for Tito to come to the USSR for "vacation," etc.) is open USSR's pressure on Yugoslavia and our energetic resistance to that pressure. In my opinion, the Russians overestimated our internal difficulties and they thought that Yugoslavia is to a large extent weakened from inside and that it would not be in a position to behave in the way that it actually behaved, admitting [sic!][\[1\]](#) energetic resistance to Russia's attempt to meddle in our domestic affairs. If the Russians considered our internal situation this spring differently and in a more realistic way, I believe that they here would refrain from some largest moves and attempts of open interference in our internal affairs, such as Brezhnev's telephone call to the Brioni, etc. One should not forget that, during that occasion, the Politburo of the CC of the CPSS was summoned in the Kremlin, only "because of Yugoslavia," and that the Politburo, at the table, expected the results of this "telephone calling," which was confirmed to me by Brezhnev himself during our talk on August 10. Here, they acted in a similar way, more than once, in relation to Czechoslovakia in 1967-68.

During May and June, similar Russian behavior toward Yugoslavia went also in other directions. On that wave of open meddling in our internal affairs came the Cominformist appearance in Moscow who picked May 25, comrade Tito's birthday, for their action.

Yugoslavia's resistance on "all fronts" surprised the Soviet leadership and led to the failure of the Soviet program which was, apparently, giving the opposite results from those expected. Because a significant part of this broke out to the public, thanks to our resistance, Russian discontent was even bigger.

The second reason for Brezhnev's exaggeration in assessment of our relations as bad (in fact, relations are developing normally as before these Soviet attempts to meddle

in our affairs and our rejection of that) is in the foreign policy field, including there, on the one hand Yugoslavia's activity that is interfering with the policy of the USSR (Tepavac's trip to China, ever-improving relations between Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania that delineate some supposed separate group of socialist countries in Europe, comrade Tito's trip to the USA - not to continue any further). The Soviet leadership is very stricken by the latest developments in international affairs, first of all by large and sudden changes in China-USA relations, which would have far-reaching importance.

Yugoslavia is directly engaged and very present here too, therefore, in Moscow's view, our relations reflect also through this prism, which only complicates Yugoslavia-USSR relations further which are, even without this, complicated enough. Hence increased dissatisfaction, even neurosis which Brezhnev demonstrated during our talks on August 10.

Third, of particular interest for us is Brezhnev's attitude toward our internal development. I informed him about important things and very big changes for the better in regard to the political situation in Yugoslavia, about the policy of the LCY, about preparations for the second conference of the LCY, about changes at the top of the state structure. Then, about this year's record harvest in Yugoslavia, about the firm direction toward solving acute economic problems, etc. Brezhnev only listened to all of this. He did not have a single question, a single word to comment. I had an impression that Brezhnev did not like any of this and that he barely had the patience to listen to me. It was obvious that he, in fact, did not acknowledge anything that I said. That is why Brezhnev commented our internal situation in a way how they did in their contacts with me during the winter and spring when they estimated that our internal situation is critical and almost futile.

If one can make larger conclusions from only one conversation with Brezhnev (even if it lasted more than three hours as now was the case), my impression is that Brezhnev, i.e. the leadership of the USSR, still assess our internal situation as very weak; that they do not pay much attention to our reforms; that they underestimate our biggest decisions in that direction, starting with the meeting in the Brioni; that they will here stand by these views for a long time; and that they are going to wait for further development of events in Yugoslavia.

I personally believe that Brezhnev will come to Belgrade with the Soviet assessments of our domestic situation which were solidified before the Brioni meeting, i.e. when our internal condition was the hardest.

Fourth, my impression is that Brezhnev's dissatisfaction is caused in a large part by one particular reason. Here they expected that their steps toward Yugoslavia in the last months would lead to the stronger presence of the USSR in Yugoslavia. Thanks to our resistance it is again thrown light, publically, onto the real condition of Yugoslavia's and the USSR's policies and onto status of our relations. Because the result of this was unfavorable for the USSR and the Russian presence and influence in Yugoslavia were not strengthened but even suffered serious damage. Here they realize that, yet they remain at all current positions of their policy toward us, irrespective of the unsuccess of the policy that was even more unsuccessful as the Russians more insisted on it in the last several months.

During the entire conversation, Brezhnev was very ready to shift the blame onto Yugoslav side for the disputes that occurred again between us. He was particularly ready to especially harshly criticize our behavior in those cases in which we gave the strongest resistance to their pressure. Listening to Brezhnev, a person could ask did we really made a mistake, could have we or should have we act differently in some cases, would Brezhnev's attitude be more positive, i.e. would our relations with the USSR for a moment be better if we acted differently than we did when in the past few

months we faced again with USSR's open pressure and energetically resisted to that pressure.

In my opinion, Brezhnev's behavior in the best way proves that Yugoslavia, by resisting Soviet pressure, proceeded in the optimal possible manner. Not only in its own national interest, but also in the interest of better development of our relations with the USSR. If we acted differently, I personally believe, besides everything else negative for us, Brezhnev would reject to come and visit Yugoslavia next month, like he rejected that several times in the last two-three years. Although it could appear, from our memorandum of conversation with Brezhnev, that the most recent differences and conflicts between Yugoslavia and the USSR on bilateral and international field, represent unfavorable conditions for the upcoming meeting at the top between us, my opinion remains that demonstrated differences and conflicts in fact facilitated this meeting and that creates for us better outlooks for success of the talks with Brezhnev in September.

After Soviet failures in pressure policies on Yugoslavia, after for Russians unexpected developments of events and relations in the "big triangle," after sudden dangers for Soviet foreign policy interests in their relations with the Arabs (Sudan), perhaps here they would realize, sooner or later, that they have to revise, if not their general foreign policy, then at least their behavior toward certain important partners of the USSR, among whom is Yugoslavia. I don't believe that Brezhnev goes to Yugoslavia with these ideas. On the contrary, we should rather expect that Brezhnev would support all that what they attempted toward us for a long time, particularly during 1971. In my opinion, he will not only appear with that in Belgrade but will insist on that for a long time. This was Brezhnev's stance during the three-hour long conversation with me, two days ago.

The fact alone that Brezhnev accepted now to go to Belgrade shows that here exists other, opposing side that, in my opinion, points the main direction of Soviet policy in regards to us toward a certain improvement of Yugoslav-Soviet relations (toward which we should also strive). Although it appears that it would have been better if Brezhnev came to us earlier, before Soviet pressures and our resistance and clashes with the USSR that we had in May and June of 1971, or before the announcement about Nixon's trip to Beijing, et cetera, I think that is better for us that Brezhnev's visit comes after all of that, because everything that had happened created objective conditions for present Brezhnev's visit to Yugoslavia to be more successful than it would have been before these events, herein assessed as unfavorable.

Micunovic

[1] In the original text says "priznajući." It is probably a typo, and from the context of the sentence, one can assume that Micunovic probably meant "pružajući" [providing].