

October 23, 1956
**Working Notes from the Session of the CPSU CC
Presidium on 23 October 1956**

Citation:

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Summary:

The Presidium is updated on events unfolding in Budapest. Khrushchev favors deploying troops to quell the uprising. Mikoyan, alone in his dissent, advocates political measures followed by troops if necessary. Nagy's capacity to control the situation is discussed, Presidium members assert the incongruities with Poland, and Khrushchev dispatches Mikoyan and Suslov to Budapest.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

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Those Taking Part: Bulganin, Kaganovich, Mikoyan, Molotov, Pervukhin, Saburov, Khrushchev, Suslov, Brezhnev, Zhukov, Furtseva, Shepilov

On the Situation in Budapest and Overall
in Hungary (1)
(Cdes. Zhukov, Bulganin, Khrushchev)

Information of Cde. Zhukov.

A demonstration by 100 thous. in Budapest The radio station is on fire.(2)
In Debrecen the obkom [provincial party committee—trans.] and MVD [Ministry of Internal Affairs—trans.] buildings were occupied.

Cde. Khrushchev speaks in favor of sending troops to Budapest.(3)

Cde. Bulganin believes Cde. Khrushchev's proposal to send troops is justified.

Cde. Mikoyan: Without Nagy they can't get control of the movement, and it's also cheaper for us. Expresses doubt about the sending of troops. What are we losing? The Hungarians themselves will restore order on their own. We should try political measures, and only then send troops.

Cde. Molotov—With Nagy left on his own, Hungary is coming apart. Favors the sending of troops.

Cde. Kaganovich—The government is being overthrown. There's no comparison with Poland. Favors the sending of troops.

Cde. Pervukhin—Troops must be sent.

Cde. Zhukov—There is indeed a difference with Poland. Troops must be sent. One of the members of the CC Presidium should travel there. Martial law should be declared in the country, and a curfew introduced.

Cde. Suslov—The situation in Poland is different. Troops must be sent.

Cde. Saburov—Troops must be sent to uphold order.

Cde. Shepilov—Favors the sending of troops

Cde. Kirichenko—Favors the sending of troops. Cdes. Malinin and Serov should be dispatched to Budapest.

Cde. Khrushchev—We should recruit Nagy for political action. But until then we shouldn't make a chairman of the government. Cdes. Mikoyan and Suslov are to fly to Budapest.(4)

Translator's Notes

1 The formal protocol for this session (Protocol No. 48) did not list the Hungarian question among the twelve other matters considered here. The most likely reason is that Mikoyan was opposed to the use of Soviet troops in Hungary, preferring instead to rely on political mediation (see below). The Presidium therefore had to adopt its decision without unanimity, an unprecedented step for such an important matter. As a result, no decree on this issue was included as an extract in the formal protocol.

2 In fact, the radio station was not on fire, but heavy smoke from several nearby cars that had been set alight had created the impression that the building, too, was burning. Zhukov's reference to the storming of the radio building indicates that this CPSU Presidium meeting must have taken place shortly after 10 p.m. Moscow time. The storming of the building was sparked mainly by the broadcast of a hardline speech by Erno Gero at precisely 10 p.m. Moscow time (8 p.m. Budapest time). It is clear that the CPSU Presidium meeting was over by around 11 p.m. (Moscow time), when orders were transmitted by Zhukov for the mobilization of five Soviet divisions. See "TsK KPSS," memorandum from Zhukov and Marshal Vasilii Sokolovskii, chief of the Soviet General Staff, to the CPSU Presidium, 24 October 1956 (Strictly Secret—Special Dossier), in AVPRF, F. 3, Op. 64, D. 484, Ll. 85-87. Hence, the meeting must have been held between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. It is remarkable that, for a session convened at such short notice, so many Presidium members were able to attend. Although a meeting had already been scheduled to discuss other matters, it was abruptly moved up to take account of the situation in Hungary.

3 Khrushchev is referring here to the requests for military intervention he had received from Erno Gero. The request came initially via Yurii Andropov (who transmitted Gero's appeal to Moscow and followed up with an emergency phone call) and then was repeated during a phone call that Khrushchev placed to Gero. A written appeal from then-prime minister Andras Hegedus, supposedly delivered on the night of 23-24 October 1956, was transmitted by Andropov in a ciphered telegram on 28 October. See "Shifrtelogramma" (Strictly Secret—Urgent), 28 October 1956, in AVPRF, F. 059a, Op. 4, P. 6, D. 5, L. 12.

4 Mikoyan, Suslov, Malinin, and Serov arrived somewhat late in Budapest because inclement weather forced Mikoyan's and Suslov's plane to be diverted to an airport 90 kilometers north of the capital. A Soviet armored personnel carrier, accompanied by tanks, brought the four into Budapest, where they promptly began sending reports back to Moscow. See "Shifrtelogramma" from Mikoyan and Suslov to the CPSU Presidium, 24 October 1956 (Strictly Secret), in AVPRF, F. 059a, Op. 4, P. 6, D. 5, Ll. 1-7. A retrospective account of Mikoyan's and Suslov's arrival in Budapest, by Vladimir Kryuchkov, who was a senior aide to Andropov in 1956 and who later followed in Andropov's footsteps at the KGB, claims that Mikoyan's and Suslov's plane was diverted northward because it came under fire and was struck by a machine gun. Kryuchkov also asserts that Mikoyan and the others had to walk for more than two hours to reach the embassy. See Vladimir Kryuchkov, *Lichnoe delo*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Olimp, 1996), vol. 1, p. 58. There is no evidence whatsoever to back up Kryuchkov's assertions. On the contrary, Mikoyan's and Suslov's contemporaneous report seems far more reliable than Kryuchkov's tendentious memoir.