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The Political Processes in the European Socialist Countries and the Proposals for Our Practical Steps Considering the Situation Which Has Arisen in Them

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Summary:

"The Political Processes in the European Socialist Countries and the Proposals for Our Practical Steps Considering the Situation Which Has Arisen in Them" – an evaluation by the Soviet Union of changes in the Eastern European countries and measures that need to be taken in order to maintain ties with these countries

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[MEMORANDUM OF THE SOVIET MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS]

The socialist community is experiencing the most difficult period in its development in the entire postwar period. An extremely complex situation has arisen in Eastern Europe. We are talking about the fate of socialism in a number of countries of this region, the future of the Warsaw Pact, [and] the fundamental interests of the Soviet Union.

The serious difficulties which the European socialist countries have encountered are chiefly connected with a crisis of the administrative command model of socialism. This model has entered into obvious contradiction with the requirements of the development of society, has become a brake on the path of socio-economic and scientific-technical progress, and has created a real threat of a growing gap [otstaivaniye] between the socialist world and the West.

Cardinal political and economic changes have become an objective necessity in all the European socialist countries. However, the awareness of this necessity, the notions of the character and rates of change, [and] the approaches to the theory and practice of socialist construction at the present stage are far from [being] the same.

In some countries?Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia? the leadership is carrying out political and economic reforms extremely decisively, in others?Romania, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria ? [the leadership] actually remains a follower of the administrative command system.

Without question, the course of perestroika, in the Soviet Union is exercising and will exercise a decisive influence on the character of the processes in socialist countries. Our perestroika can either become a catalyst of the ongoing processes of renewal or, in case of slippage, [can] strengthen doubts in socialism as an effective social and political system.

The surmounting of a negative legacy and the renewal of socialism are occurring with difficulty and conflict. The ruling parties of a majority of countries have delayed carrying out reforms and several of them have lost confidence in the public and now are losing control over the course of events. This chiefly concerns Poland and Hungary.

The population associates existing problems and failures mainly with oversights and obvious distortions [deformatsii] in the policy of the ruling parties on which all the responsibility for the resulting crisis situation lies. All this has led to a fall of their authority among the population, including the working class. The situation in several ruling parties is aggravated by factional struggle [and] a split in the leadership.

In these conditions opposition forces have sharply stepped up their activity: ?Solidarity? in Poland, ?Democratic Forum? and other groups in Hungary, the ?Chartists? in Czechoslovakia, etc. Social Democratic, Christian Democratic, and nationalist parties are forming. Opposition forces enjoy support in [a] broad [social] strata, including the working class. The opposition is striving to weaken the influence of the ruling parties in all spheres of social and political life and acquire access to power. The question of power in such countries such as Poland and Hungary is coming to the surface all the more.

The ruling parties have been forced into concessions and compromises to preserve the socialist system and their influence in society, resorting to a policy of national accord, and starting on the path of recognizing political and labor union pluralism. This is most characteristic of the Polish United Workers' Party and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Political reality has put before them the need for cooperation

with the opposition [and] drawing [the opposition] into participation in the functioning of government and public institutions. There is no little share of risk in the implementation of the measures by [our] friends.

A tendency toward political pluralism in the European socialist countries is being displayed everywhere and, judging from everything, will become more and more dominant. This will lead to a multi-party system (not obligatory on a coalition basis) [and] the "free play" of political forces. Having received access to parliamentary and government bodies, the opposition can completely or partially drive the ruling communist and workers' parties from power. All this is a real prospect, even today, for several European socialist countries. Considering that forces hostile to socialism have stepped up their activity, this process could have serious political consequences.

In countries where authoritarian methods of leadership are being retained (Romania, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria) the ruling parties are experiencing growing difficulties in resolving social economic, political, and ideological problems. Hidden dissatisfaction with their policy is intensifying [and it] could be displayed at any moment, but here and there it is already being displayed in the creation of alternative associations, in demonstrations, and strikes. In response, the authorities are intensifying their repressive measures [and] using harsher methods of regulating public political life. Such a practice provokes even more dissatisfaction in society, and a sharper negative reaction abroad. It comes into contradiction with the general tendency in the world community toward democratization and with the principles and provisions of the final documents of the all-European Conference [CSCE] and the Vienna meeting.

It ought to be supposed that [there is a] process of transition in these countries to democratization [and] a genuine renewal of socialism, but this is in the final account unavoidable, will occur more painfully, and be accompanied by deep political and social convulsions.

Perestroika has brought real changes to the character of our relations with the socialist countries. In practice we have switched to the principles of equal rights and mutual responsibility in cooperation [and] to a considerable degree have removed the stratification [nasloeniye] of the past. Nevertheless, many problems remain undecided, especially in the sphere of economic cooperation, the development of a modern concept of socialism, [and] the development of relations between people. Moreover, new frictions have arisen in several areas. We have been confronted with facts when the leadership of Romania, the German Democratic Republic, [and] Czechoslovakia are trying to block the spread of the ideas of perestroika in their countries, resorting, in particular, to prohibitive measures. Sometimes unconsidered publications in our mass media serve as an excuse for this. This introduces a certain tension in our bilateral relations.

The problem of "white spots" has acquired a special bitterness in the history of our bilateral relations with a number of socialist countries. Among them are the questions connected with the Soviet-German Pact of 1939, the "Katyn Affair," the events of 1956 in Hungary, the 1968 crisis in Czechoslovakia, etc. The delay in the work of evaluating these events from positions of new thinking is causing irritation in certain circles of the socialist countries, and in certain strata of the population [this] gives rise to mistrust in our policy of glasnost. Aggravated national territorial problems have brought serious discord into the relationships among the socialist countries in recent years. This is the case in regard to Hungary and Romania, Romania and the USSR, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, Poland and the German Democratic Republic, etc.

As a whole, a growth of nationalism in all East European countries, and a strengthening of centrifugal tendencies in their policies has been observed.

The situation of affairs in the Warsaw Pact is developing in complex ways. Our policy for genuinely equal relations within the alliance, the development of the initiative of each member state, [and] the approval of the practice of co-creation in the development and advancement of large foreign policy initiatives has doubtless had some positive effect.

The further development of collective, democratic principles in the activity of the alliance is being hindered by the obstructionist position of the Romanian leadership, which has obviously taken a course of dismantling the existing organs of political and military cooperation within the Warsaw Pact framework. The allies are all the more prominently [rel'yefneye] displaying an attempt to get more from the Warsaw Pact, mainly from the USSR (a guarantee of security, political information), than they contribute to it, [and] to display independence to the detriment of common interests [and] mutual responsibility. They are dissatisfied with the remaining inequality in the military mechanism of the Warsaw Pact leadership, which is practically a Soviet military headquarters with an especially formal presence in it of other countries. Some allied countries (Hungary and Czechoslovakia) are openly finding burdensome the Soviet troops on their territory and display an interest in the quickest possible reduction of their strength.

At the same time, it seems improbable that in the foreseeable future any of the allied countries will raise the question of leaving the Warsaw Pact. We have to deal with the attempt of individual countries, especially Romania and Hungary, to give their participation in the Warsaw Pact a formal character, [and to] avoid coordinated actions which could limit their freedom of maneuver in international affairs.

The US and their allies in NATO are right now placing reliance on an evolutionary path to change the social structure in the European socialist countries [and] a peaceful transition from socialism to bourgeois regimes, using a differentiated approach to each of them. Proceeding from this goal [ustanovka], judging from everything, the Western powers do not want confrontations with us on account of Eastern Europe. In the case of a worsening crisis situation in individual countries they [the Western powers] will most likely display restraint and not intervene in their [Eastern European countries] internal affairs, especially militarily, counting on their patience being rewarded with time.

Recently, both in the West and in the socialist countries, predictions have all the more been spread about a transformation of the existing regimes in Eastern Europe into ?post-capitalist societies? and their ?Finlandization.?

The extremely serious domestic political situation in a number of European socialist countries, [and] the deeply thought-out, long-range policy of the Western states regarding our allies and the socialist community as a whole require from us the greatest attention to the processes occurring in the fraternal countries, to the problems of our cooperation with them, [and] to the prospects for the development of world socialism. In doing so, [we] ought to keep in mind that recently [our] friends could have received the impression that, in conditions of an intense dialogue between the USSR and the US [and] the growth of our attention to global and regional international problems, [our] relations with socialist countries have become secondary for us.

1. In the conditions which have arisen the growth in practice of our attention to relations with the socialist countries [and] an approach to them as a genuinely high-priority main thrust of Soviet foreign policy have special significance.

The most important problem at this stage is not to permit the erosion of socialism in Eastern Europe [and to] keep all the countries of this region on the socialist path of development.

2. In as much as at the present time our influence on the development of the European socialist countries with the aid of economic and scientific technical levers is limited, [we] need to strengthen the emphasis on work with friends in the political and ideological sphere [and] substantially increase comradely attention to the leaders of the fraternal countries. In the present situation even the simple exchange of opinions and experience with the leadership of friends has a significance of no small importance in resolving the problems confronting us. Meetings at the level of general secretaries and CC secretaries, heads of government, ministers, [and] leaders of public organizations are a matter of primary importance. It is necessary to simplify the procedure of these meetings, to give them a more business-like, working character.

The time has come to hold a conference of leaders of fraternal parties in a narrow circle with the object of discussing the urgent problems of socialist construction and increasing the effectiveness of cooperation within the framework of the socialist community.

3. Work to prepare new treaties on friendship, cooperation, and mutual aid between the USSR and a number of allied states in connection with the expiration of current [treaties] would acquire great significance for the further development of relations with the European socialist countries in the spirit of equality, partnership, trust, [and] mutual responsibility. [The treaties] should reflect the new principles of relations between socialist countries [and] the available experience in rebuilding their cooperation, excluding conditions not appropriate for the present character of the mutual relations of socialist countries.

4. [We should] proceed from [the] fact that the use of forceful methods on our part in relations with socialist countries and especially the use of military force is completely excluded, even in the most extreme situation (except cases of external aggression against our allies). Military intervention not only would not prevent, but would worsen the social and political crisis, cause mass outbreaks of protest even as far as armed resistance and lead in the final account to the opposite effect, the reinforcement of anti-Sovietism. It would seriously undermine the authority of the Soviet Union in the foreign policy field, worsen our relations with leading Western powers and even with other countries, [and] would lead to the isolation of the Soviet Union in the international arena.

At the same time, considering the present complex situation in the European socialist countries, we ought to keep our limited military presence in Eastern Europe as a stabilizing factor and maintain uncertainty as regards the possible role of our troops in a critical domestic political situation.

5. In connection with the ambiguous perception of Soviet perestroika by the leadership of the European socialist countries, our attitude toward those of them who have a restrained attitude toward the reforms in the USSR (the German Democratic Republic, Romania, [and] partially Czechoslovakia [and] Bulgaria) should be distinguished by self-restraint and calm.

Considering that the creation of new models of socialism is an objective process, in our relations with fraternal countries [we] ought to avoid any kind of attitude of exhortation [nazidatel'nost'] regarding various models, attempts at hanging labels, and more broadly share experience in the area of the theory and practice of socialism. The main thing should be mutual understanding with friends so that reforms be carried out on a socialist basis.

[If] the situation worsens in one or another socialist country, we ought to refrain if possible from giving public support to repressive actions of authorities which contradict international norms in the field of human rights.

6. Inasmuch as in a number of socialist countries there could be created state structures based on a coalition system of power with the participation and significant influence of the opposition, it is advisable now to make it [our] business to establish

contacts with reemerging political parties, organizations, and associations, including trade unions acting in a constitutional framework.

7. Closing the remaining so-called "white spots" in the history of our relations with several of these countries would help in increasing trust in the USSR and other socialist countries. This especially concerns Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. [We] ought to accelerate the study of our position on such acute questions as the "Katyn Affair", the events of 1956 in Hungary, [and] the 1968 crisis in Czechoslovakia in the light of new political thinking.

In this connection it is required that a political decision be made to open access to the appropriate archival materials.

8. In contrast to the majority of countries of the world participants. Strikes have become more prolonged [and] community, substantial restrictions continue to be maintained in the socialist community in the area of contacts between people [and] private trips of citizens. In the political area this does not serve our interests [and] has an adverse effect on the development of trade and economic, scientific, cultural, athletic, and other ties. At the present time, the question of the maximum removal of restrictions on trips of citizens of socialist countries to the USSR and of Soviet citizens to these countries and the creation of corresponding facilities for this has become unavoidable.

9. An important goal should be the preservation of the military-political alliance of European socialist states—the Warsaw Pact.

In accordance with the proposals advanced by us to improve the mechanism of cooperation within the framework of the Warsaw Pact, it is necessary to follow a line of maximum politicization of the activity of the alliance, democratization of the forms of its operation, an increase of the contribution and interest of each of the member states. This would be aided by an atmosphere of a genuine comradely, free, and unstructured exchange of opinions at meetings of the PCC [Political Consultative Committee], KMID [Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs], and KMO [Committee of Ministers of Defense] (in doing so, it is not obligatory [that] they come to a consensus at any price on all questions—each state has the right to preserve its freedom of action, explaining and justifying its position to the other allies); obligatory rotation [of officials] in all bodies and structures of the Warsaw Pact; and the simultaneous increase in the effectiveness of its mechanism—the creation of a permanent political working body, giving the General Secretary of the PCC the role of coordinator within the framework of the alliance. [We] ought to simplify the procedure for preparing and holding conferences and meetings of Warsaw Pact bodies [and] try to ensure continuous working contact of the allied states.

10. All the more pressing has become the problem of establishing a close coordination of the actions of allied socialist states with respect to the East European policy of the US and its partners in NATO and working out coordinated strategy and tactics in this direction.

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[Source: Donation of Professor Jacques Levesque; copy on file at the National Security Archive. Translated by Vladislav Zubok and Gary Goldberg.]

14 In the political dictionary this term mostly signifies the return of our neighboring states to the bosom of capitalist development while preserving special, friendly relations with the Soviet Union which would guarantee the security of its borders. Such an understanding of the notion "Finlandization" overlooks two significant

aspects in the relations between the USSR and Finland. First, they are built on neutrality of our northern neighbor who does not join any military bloc; second, the Finnish communist party by definition cannot come to power and carry out a revolutionary coup, which guarantees the stability of the [Finnish] social-political structure. Since the countries of Eastern Europe will hardly raise the issue of leaving the Warsaw Pact in the near future and the ruling parties, given even their rapid weakening, will retain for a while some social base, the term of "Finlandization" can be used here only with very significant reservations.