

July 25, 1989

**Report of the President of Hungary Rezso Nyers and
General Secretary Karoly Grosz on Talks with
Gorbachev in Moscow (excerpts)**

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Summary:

President of People's Republic of Hungary, Rezso Nyers, and General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, Karoly Grosz, report on their talks with Gorbachev in Moscow, 24-25 July, 1989. The excerpts contains economic reformer Nyers' assessment of the political situation in Hungary, and first among the factors that "can defeat the party," he lists "the past, if we let ourselves [be] smeared with it." The memory of the revolution of 1956 and its bloody repression by the Soviets was Banquo's ghost, destroying the legitimacy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, just as 1968 in Prague and 1981's martial law in Poland and all the other Communist "blank spots" of history came back in 1989 to crumble Communist ideology. For their part, the Communist reformers (including Gorbachev) did not quite know how to respond as events accelerated in 1989, except not to repeat 1956.

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**Negotiation between Mikhail S. Gorbachev and Rezso Nyers, President,
and Károly Grósz, General Secretary of the MSZMP, Moscow.**

Report to the MSZMP Political Executive Committee.

24-25 July 1989

Excerpt

Hungarian Socialist Workers Party TOP SECRET!

Central Committee Inf/1451/1989

REPORT

to the Political Executive Committee

Invited by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist party, comrades Rezso Nyers and Károly Grósz visited the Soviet Union on 24 and 25 July 1989. They took part in a two-hour negotiation with comrade Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. The Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party invited the delegates for dinner, with the participation of several Soviet leaders. Comrades Nyers and Grósz negotiated with leaders of the Soviet-Hungarian Friendship Society. Comrade Nyers met Soviet social scientists; comrade Grósz met leading officials of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

I.

Comrade Nyers described the situation of Hungary and the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. He said that the party is preparing for a working congress.ⁱ A decision has not been made on every issue yet but it is quite definite that internal issues of the party will be on the agenda. A set task of the congress is to render the unity of the party. Comrade Nyers pointed out that the party is already getting active, new platforms are being formed. The basic concept of the congress is democratic socialism, self-government, parliamentary democracy, and economic democracy. Comrade Nyers emphasized that property reform is considered the primary element of reforms. We wish to democratize public property, indeed making it available for the public. We are considering a new system that utilizes the available capital more efficiently. We are planning to increase the ratio of private capital in the economy, and the investment of foreign capital.

Comrade Nyers mentioned the experiences of parliamentary by-electionsⁱⁱ. He emphasized that one should not jump to immediate conclusions from the results. We consider the elections neither a success nor a complete failure. The present state of paralysis within the party, however, has become apparent. He referred to the fact that in one constituency the opposition united their forces in the campaign against the MSZMP,

but this is not expected to be a general tendency when it comes to the general elections. Comrade Nyers stressed that there are three factors that can defeat the party. First: the past, if we let ourselves get smeared with it. Second: the disintegration of the party. The third factor that can defeat us is the paralysis of party membership.

Talking about Hungary, comrade Gorbachev said that Hungarian events are followed with much interest in the Soviet Union. The leadership of the Soviet Communist Party refers to our policy with understanding. In the course of negotiations they understood our intention to find our way on the path of democratic socialism. At the same time, comrade Gorbachev posed several questions relating to the situation of Hungary and the policy of the MSZMP. Among other things, he inquired about our orientation in foreign policy, the role of private property and foreign capital, the experiences of by-elections, the goals of the party congress, and about the unity of the party. Comrade Gorbachev put special emphasis on the fact that Soviet leaders interpret the mass sympathy towards the MSZMP demonstrated at the funeral of János Kádárⁱⁱⁱ as an important political resource to rely upon.

[...]

IV.

In the course of the visit, several issues of the bilateral relationship were discussed. Negotiators mutually agreed that we should widen the scope of relations between the MSZMP and the CPSU, and increase the exchange of experiences. In this way the recently aggravated laxity that has been hindering the co-operation of Soviet and Hungarian party organizations can be effectively eradicated. Hungarian negotiators suggested that the CPSU and other Soviet social organizations begin collaborating with Hungarian democratic organizations and newly forming parties as well^{iv}.

The negotiations proved that it is our mutual intention to maintain the friendship of the Hungarian and Soviet nations, create a new basis for reinforcing the friendship movement, winning over the best professionals and the youth for the friendship of the two nations.

In the course of negotiations, Hungarian and Soviet leaders examined the most urgent issues regarding the stationing of Soviet troops in Hungary. Comrade Nyers reminded the negotiators that at the meeting between comrades Grósz and Gorbachev in Moscow in March, they agreed in principle that troops would continue to be withdrawn. At that time Soviet negotiators asked that this agreement not be publicized. This time comrade Nyers suggested that the March agreement be reinforced, the question of withdrawing Soviet troops further considered and publicized in one way or another. Speaking for the Soviet leadership, comrade Gorbachev agreed with the idea. His suggestion was that when dealing with the issue, one should start from what the Soviet press release says about the subject: "In the course of negotiations, the issue of Soviet troops stationed in Hungary was brought up, and the parties decided that steps will be made to further reduce the number of Soviet troops, in accordance with the European disarmament process and with

the continuation of the Vienna talks." Comrades Nyers and Grósz agreed with the suggestion.

In the course of negotiations we reaffirmed our mutual political intent to seek the possibility of establishing a new basis for Hungarian-Soviet economic co-operation. Comrade Nyers indicated that the Hungarian government is presently working on the new fiscal system, and possibly the propositions will be submitted this autumn.

The president of the MSZMP emphasized that the situation of Hungarian minorities in the Sub-Carpathian region is improving, which is of great importance for us in terms of internal and foreign affairs alike. Comrade Gorbachev indicated that they are determined to head in this direction.

Another subject was raised: many Hungarian soldiers died in action on the Soviet front or in POW camps in World War II. Hungarian public opinion is exerting pressure so that the memory of these victims is preserved in due fashion. Comrade Gorbachev emphasized that the Soviet Union is ready to co-operate in this field as well. They said that mass graves on battlefields are virtually impossible to find now. However, they are ready to specify those cemeteries where Hungarian prisoners of war were buried. They would preserve the tombs, memorial monuments could be installed, and Hungarian citizens could visit these sites. The same practice is working well with the Federal Republic of Germany.

[...]

ⁱ The 14th congress of the MSZMP was held on 6-10 October, 1989. During the congress the party dissolved itself and on 7 October a new party, the Hungarian Socialist Party was formed.

ⁱⁱ On 22 July, 1989 parliamentary by-elections were held in four constituencies but the first round brought a final result only in one of them, where the parties of the opposition formed a coalition and won. The second round of the elections was held on 5 August when candidates of the Hungarian Democratic Forum acquired two of the seats while in one constituency the election was void.

ⁱⁱⁱ The aging János Kádár, since the party conference in May, 1988 having the honorary title president of the party died on 6 July; his funeral was held on 14 July, 1989 with the participation of several tens of thousand people.

^{iv} It is more than interesting that just a few days after the return of the two MSZMP leaders from Moscow, on 27 July József Antall, representative of the Hungarian Democratic Forum made a proposal at the meeting of the Opposition Roundtable to invite the Soviet Ambassador in Budapest and inform him about the ideas of the opposition. This move strengthens the probability of secret communications having existed between

the MSZMP and some representatives of the opposition as it was commonly believed (but never proved) at the time.

[Source: *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottágának 1989. évi jegyzokönyvei*. [Minutes of the 1989 meetings of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Central Committee] Editors: Anna S. Kosztricz, János Lakos, Karola Vágyi, Mrs. Németh, László Soós, György T. Varga. *Magyar Országos Levéltár* [Hungarian National Archives], Bp. 1993, Vols. I-II]

(From *Political Transition in Hungary, 1989-1990; International Conference, June 12, 1999, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest; A Compendium of Declassified Documents and Chronology of Events*)

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