

August 29, 1963

Hungarian Embassy in Sofia, Report on Bulgarian-Cuban Relations

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Summary:

Hungarian Ambassador to Bulgaria Karoly Prath summarizes developments on Bulgarian-Cuban relations gathered from Hungarian-Bulgarian diplomatic contacts. Bulgarian-Cuban relations were not adversely effected by the Cuban Missile Crisis. The relationship is dominated by economic development (e.g. the expansion of trade, specialist exchanges, Bulgarian loans to Cuba, the root causes of Cuba's economic difficulties). Prath also discusses Bulgarian concerns over the influence of China on Cuba.

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The Embassy of the Hungarian people's Republic[1]
TOP SECRET!

No. 408/t.s./ 1963. Sofia, 29 August 1963
Official: Gy. Horn, secretary of III dep.
Subject: Bulgarian-Cuban relations
Written: in six copies Ref. No. 001254/1/1963
five copies to the Ministry
one copy to the Embassy

In connection with the instruction of the Center of the above number of reference, we have proceeded [to meet with officials] in the [Bulgarian] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, we had a meeting with the first employee of the Cuban Embassy to Sofia, and on the basis of the conversations and our experiences, we would like to report the following on the Bulgarian-Cuban relations and the Bulgarian comrades' opinion of Cuba:

There has not been an essential change in the relations between Bulgaria and Cuba since the Caribbean [i.e., Cuban missile] crisis of last year. The Bulgarian comrades emphasized that the political, economic, and cultural relations between the two countries have been developing steadily and continuously for the past two years. At the time of the mentioned crisis Bulgaria's sympathy toward Cuba only grew stronger, at that time in Sofia violent anti-American demonstrations took place, declaring solidarity with Cuba. On two or three occasions the demonstrations were of such size that the competent Bulgarian party and government officials had to interfere to prevent the [tension] from escalating. This must be mentioned because later, through the Bulgarian specialists traveling to Cuba, quite a large number of the population was informed about the economic difficulties that caused problems in the supply of the [Cuban] population with goods and asked the competent Bulgarian officials - in letters and at meetings - to alleviate the mentioned problems by sending food.

Concerning relations between the two countries, the economic relations, which are expanding year by year, are most important.

In the past two years, trade relations have increased to a large extent, and according to the latest agreement, signed on 3 July 1963, in 1963 each party will have a 2.3 million dollar trade. Bulgaria's basic import articles are: sugar, molasses, canned fruit, iron, and copper concentrates, the country's exports are: agricultural machines, machine tools, electric running blocks, transformers, medicine, canned food, deep-frozen poultry, and seeds. During the last talks, the main problems were the price of the sugar and the supply of some important Bulgarian articles on credit. According to the agreement signed in July, Bulgaria will give a 1.5 million dollar loan to Cuba at 2% interest, the amortization of which will take place through Cuban goods between 1967 and 1978. According to the previous loans and the agreements just signed, Bulgaria has undertaken to supply complete plants and to build factories for Cuba, so in 1962 they started to build two cold-stores, a transformer factory, a cog-wheel factory, seven ice plants, and a carbide factory. In connection with the building work and the transfer of technical-scientific experience, there are now 172 Bulgarian specialists in Cuba. Apart from this, the Bulgarian Komsomol has sent 70 young plant cultivators to Cuba to convey their experience in vegetable growing. Bulgaria contributes to the training of Cuban experts too, within the framework of which 132 Cuban skilled workers are trained now in Bulgaria and 18 Cuban students study at Bulgarian universities.

It is a problem in the economic relations between the two countries that the quality of the supplied Bulgarian goods does not always correspond to the [agreed upon]

requirements, and the Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade R. Leon, visiting Bulgaria recently, also complained about it. The minister told the Bulgarian leaders that the Cuban workers had gotten used to high quality [goods] and he considered it a question of politics that no poor quality goods should come from socialist Bulgaria to Cuba, because this would undermine the prestige of socialist countries. The minister and the Cuban Embassy have asked the competent Bulgarian officials several times to discuss the question of supplying some articles of food and important machines on credit. Here they mentioned that they badly needed accumulators, various agricultural machines, but they could not pay for them at present. They asked the Bulgarian foreign trade officials to do more intensive market research in Cuba to find such new articles that could be supplied to Bulgaria in exchange for the requested products.

Evaluating the present Cuban economic situation, the Bulgarian comrades said that they did not think the Cuban economic leaders were completely right in seeing the causes of the economic difficulties only in the earlier dependence on America and the present blockade. They do not want to realize that they have made mistakes in [their] economic policy, and because of the lack of well-trained experts, they have an idealistic approach concerning a lot of questions. They think that the countries of the socialist camp should help Cuba more as there is a danger of increase in Western, but mainly Chinese influence concerning the difficulties. Their foreign mission in Havana received such a task as to study the Cuban internal economic situation in greater depth, to look for possibilities of helping Cuba's national economy in correspondence with Bulgaria's potential.

Concerning the Cuban internal political situation, the Bulgarian comrades said they thought Fidel Castro's visit to the Soviet Union had been a crucial event after the crisis. During Fidel Castro's visit, it was most important that he emphasized the need for unity in the international communist and workers' movement. According to the Bulgarian comrades' evaluation, as a result of the visit the Soviet-Cuban alliance has become consolidated to a large extent, and they think that it was the first time that Fidel Castro had talked so clearly about the rightness of the Soviet Union's approach to solving the crisis. They think the Cuban leaders greatly appreciate the declaration of the Soviet leaders, mainly Khrushchev[']s [statement], that the Soviet Union would provide armed support for Cuba in case of any danger of aggression. Finally, they consider the visit successful because it greatly contributed to the Cuban leaders' forming a correct opinion in the argument with the Chinese Communist Party.

The Bulgarian comrades said that, although they did not doubt that the great majority of the Cuban leaders represented the correct position in the argument with the Chinese, they found it curious that the Chinese embassy to Havana spread anti-Soviet propaganda freely and the Cubans did not protest against it at all. Furthermore, in their opinion, the Cuban middle and low cadres have not decided about these questions and [were] mainly influenced by the opinions about how to solve the crisis and by Chinese propaganda; these people are strongly attracted to Chinese views.

Cultural relations between Cuba and Bulgaria follow the cultural work plan signed by the two countries on 15 June 1963; the relations between the different organizations are significant too. In the coming period, they are not planning any relevant changes in the relations between the two countries or exchanges of delegations. It is worth mentioning that the new Bulgarian ambassador, Atanas Kalbov, was assigned the task to try to establish the widest mass relations in Cuba. As a special task he was instructed to watch the activity of the Chinese in Cuba. For him in his work Comrade János Beck, the Hungarian ambassador to Havana, was set as an example, whom the Bulgarian comrades considered one of the most popular diplomats in Cuba, with whom the Cuban leaders had a closer and more friendly relationship than with the Soviet ambassador to Havana [Aleksandr Alekseyev].

Ambassador

[Károly PRÁTH]

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Budapest

[1] Ed. note: For additional translations of Hungarian documents on Cuba and the missile crisis, see the compilation of such materials elsewhere in the Digital Archive Cuban Missile Crisis and Cuban Foreign Relations collections.