

March 21, 1945
**Record of V. M. Molotov's Conversation with
President of Czechoslovakia E. Beneš**

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Summary:

Molotov and President Beneš discussed the post-war borders of Czechoslovakia, the relocation of the Hungarian and German populations, and the economic situation in the country.

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Record of the V. M. Molotov's Conversation with E. Benes on the Issues of Post-War Borders of Czechoslovakia, Relocation of the Hungarian and German Population, and on the Economic Situation in the Country

Moscow

March 21, 1945

SECRET

A. Ya. Vyshinsky, V. A. Zorin, Ya. Masarik, and Zd. Firlinger were present at the conversation.

Benes says that he would like to present his views on the following questions in connection with the list of questions that he has sent earlier:

I. The question of borders

Benes reminds the audience that he and the entire Czechoslovak government always formulated their views on this issue with one formula: the pre-Munich borders. He persuaded the British to formulate their position to this formula in writing, the British were undecided for a long time, although already on August 2, 1942, they stated that they did not recognize the Munich agreement, and would not abide by it during the demarcation of the borders. Three days before Benes's departure, the British made a written statement of their position regarding the pre-Munich borders, which was a step forward. They wrote that when Germany capitulates they would agree to transfer the control of the territory within the pre-Munich borders to the Czechoslovak government. Benes insisted on setting a date determining those borders, as it was done in the armistice agreement with Hungary[1]. The British agreed to recognize the borders of Czechoslovakia as they were on December 31, 1947. They would like to propose their formula for border recognition for the discussion at the European Consultative Commission [ACC][2] in London. Benes promises to send us the text of the British statement on this issue.

MOLOTOV asks whether Benes makes any claims to any territory beyond the borders of 1947.

Benes responds that he has some claims in the area bordering Germany, but he does not elaborate on this issue. Benes expresses his hope that the Soviet government would support Czechoslovakia during the discussion of this issue at the ECC.

II. Transfer of the German and the Hungarian population from Czechoslovakia

Benes says that he discussed this sensitive question with the British about a year-year a half ago. The British agreed that the transfer of the German population from Czechoslovakia was necessary. The military cabinet officially stated that it was in favor of the expulsion of the Germans, but that statement was made orally, and the British are vacillating about making this statement in writing[3]. The British concerns come down to the fact that: (a) it involves not only Czechoslovakia, but also Poland, and overall, this issue involves transferring 7 or 8 millions of Germans; (b) it is not clear where would the Germans from Czechoslovakia and Poland go, because four occupation zones were determined for Germany, and it is not clear in which zone the relocated Germans could be settled.

Benes thinks that it is impossible to resolve the Polish question and the internal question of Czechoslovakia without the transfer, because that would lead to civil war in Czechoslovakia. The British informed him that they were waiting for the opinion of

the Soviet government on this issue and that they did not consider it a simple issue.

MOLOTOV asks, why do the British not want to formulate a definite opinion now.

Benes says that the British would like to get the opinion of the Soviet government, and maybe even an agreement between the USSR and Czechoslovakia on this issue. An informal discussion of this issue was taken up at the ECC in London, from which it was clear that the Americans would not be against the relocation of the Germans. Benes asks comrade Molotov about his opinion on this issue.

MOLOTOV says that in principle the position of the Soviet government on the proposal to relocate the Germans is positive, but now we need to put the issue in practical terms--how many Germans should be relocated, and how should they be relocated, and he would like to hear Benes's suggestions on this issue.

Benes says that he would be able to formulate a practical program of relocation. He believes that they would have to relocate no less than 2 million Germans, and apparently up to 800 thousand of them would remain in Czechoslovakia. All the German bourgeoisie and intelligentsia would apparently leave. The workers would stay, and they would be settled among the Czech population. Now there are approximately up to 4 million Germans and 600 thousand Hungarians in Czechoslovakia; up to 400 thousand Hungarians should be relocated. Experience shows that almost all the Germans leave with the arrival of the Red Army. Benes informs the audience that he has already given a memorandum on this issue to the British and to comrade Gusev.

FIRLINGER emphasizes that during the negotiations with the Germans comrade Molotov gave Czechoslovakia his substantial support on this issue.

MOLOTOV notes that apparently his support was [insufficient], because he "failed" with his proposals[4]

Benes notes that the British played with Czechoslovakia on this issue, and in particular, during the negotiations with Hungary in Moscow, they informed the Czechs that they sent instructions to Kerr to support the Czechoslovaks and their proposals, whereas in reality such instructions were never sent.

III. Carpathian Ukraine

Benes stresses that he would like to be ultimately sincere on this issue. During the last 20 years, he never considered the issue of the Carpathian Ukraine to be finally resolved. In 1918, Czechoslovakia did not request the Carpathian Ukraine. The Americans, who recommended to conduct a plebiscite, proposed it to Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Russia in 1918 did not receive the Eastern Galicia, and therefore, Hungary could move up having received the Carpathian Ukraine, and therefore, Czechoslovakia thought that it had to include the Carpathian Ukraine in Czechoslovakia; at the same time, it wanted to preserve its relations with Rumania and looked into the future to the perspective of moving closer to the USSR. Czechoslovakia saw itself only as a trustee in its governing of the Carpathian Ukraine, and had to accept the control of the League of Nations. In this situation, it all meant that the issue was not finally settled. After that territory was liberated by the Red Army, separate incidents[5] took place there, and it was agreed between Benes and comrade Stalin that: (a) this issue would be settled on friendly terms between Czechoslovakia and the USSR, and (b) that they would choose a certain moment when the issue of the Czechoslovak borders would be settled in order to resolve that issue. Benes believes that this issue should be discussed by the Czechoslovak parliament, when he, Benes, will already be in Prague. There is no doubt that the

Czechoslovak people will resolve this issue as Benes proposes. For Czechoslovakia, from the economic point of view, the Carpathian Ukraine always played a passive role. Czechoslovakia invested significant capital to develop the economy of the Carpathian Ukraine, but it used the fruit of those investments very little. The Czechs, according to Benes, are the most rational people, they want to conclude an agreement on how to transfer the Carpathian Ukraine to the Soviet Union, but before such an agreement is made, it is very important to decide, how the border of the Carpathian Ukraine would be determined, because the Ukrainians also live in the Czechoslovak territory. In Benes's opinion, the issue of the Ukrainians in the Slovak territory could be resolved by relocating them, and by exchanging the population with the Carpathian Ukraine, where some Slovaks live. Benes asks comrade Molotov, how he sees such a resolution of this issue.

MOLOTOV states that there are no real issues involved, and that they could agree on the exchange of the population.

Benes adds that at the final settlement of this issue, they should also resolve the issue of investments.

MOLOTOV says that hopefully we will also find rational people here, and we will be able to resolve all these issues on friendly terms.

IV. Economic situation in the liberated territory

First of all, Benes says that there is some confusion on the issue of war trophies, and asks to specify our understanding of that issue. Czechoslovakia and the USSR are allies and, therefore, it is only natural that the issue of war trophies should be resolved amiably. First of all, there is the issue of real estate, which should probably not be considered as military trophies. There are some cases where factories that were abandoned by the Germans or the Hungarians were taken over by the Soviet military authorities that considered them as war trophies. Meanwhile, the Czechoslovak government is planning to nationalize such factories.

MOLOTOV notes that the Germans have built new factories and plants[6] in Czechoslovakia.

Benes says that that is true, but still it requires some clarification.

MOLOTOV agrees that that issue should be looked at in concrete detail, and also says that there is a large number of German industrial enterprises in the territory, which was transferred to Poland, and the USSR agreed with the Poles that part of those enterprises would be transferred to the Soviet Union for the reconstruction of the economy for military needs. If the Germans built new enterprises and brought the necessary equipment, then that equipment could be used in the USSR. Comrade Molotov asks whether Benes sees such a possibility in Czechoslovakia.

Benes responds indefinitely -- that they should look at this issue.

MOLOTOV says that we consider Czechoslovakia as our ally, and we are not making claims to the Czechoslovak property, however, the laws of war require that those things that were captured as a result of combat, those things that were acquired with the blood of the soldiers are considered military trophies, and those who expel the enemy from the captured territory have the right to control the property captured in combat. It is natural that the allied army could and have to share what they capture, but the right to control, the property still belongs to those, who expelled the enemy. Further on, comrade Molotov informs Benes that initially there was some tension on

this issue in Yugoslavia, but now everything has been settled.

FIRLINGER inquires whether there was any agreement with the Yugoslavs on this issue.

MOLOTOV says that there was no written agreement, but there was an understanding.

Benes asks to formulate a Soviet formula of the Soviet understanding of war trophies in the Czechoslovak territory and states that he hopes to reach an agreement with the Soviet government on this issue. Then Benes says that they should also resolve the issue of currency, taking into account the fact that there is the Slovak crown and the protectorate crown that it used in the territory of Czechoslovakia, which, as the Slovaks think, have different value. In this connection, the Slovaks would like the Czechoslovak money which are issued in the Slovak territory to differ in their appearance from the money which is issued in the territory of the Czech Republic and Moravia.

MOLOTOV says that it is unclear to the Soviet government what proposals the Czechoslovak government made regarding currency, and asks to present those proposals in writing.

Benes promises to do that.

Then MOLOTOV says that now they should return to the agreement of March 28, 1943 on the financial issues, because that agreement does not correspond with the new conditions that developed as a result of the prolonged stay of the Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. That agreement should be reconsidered, and paragraph # 3 should be excluded altogether, because in the final calculations, they would never be able to take into account all the blood spilled by the Soviet soldiers in the fight to liberate the Czechoslovak territory.

Benes and FIRLINGER agree that they should prepare a new agreement that would take into account the new situation.

V. The issue of [paying] reparations to Hungary

Benes expresses his gratitude to the Soviet government for its support during the negotiations with Hungary, and says that the Czechoslovak government would like to conclude an agreement that the Czechoslovak reparations quote would equal 50 million dollars.

MOLOTOV says that the Yugoslavs were not completely satisfied by what they would receive from Hungary[7], and therefore he recommends to talk with the Yugoslav government on this issue.

VI. Transportation

Further Benes says that they should agree on certain assistance that the Soviet Union would provide for the population of the liberated territory for some time, and emphasizes that the Czechoslovak government does not see this assistance as unilateral, but would like to agree on mutual assistance, because if Bohemia remains untouched after the war is over, then Czechoslovakia would be able to pay back for all the assistance that the Soviet Union provides very quickly, but now Slovakia does not have any transportation. The government has no transportation. Besides, there

are Czechoslovak ships on Danube that are now located in Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

MOLOTOV says that in the conditions of armistice with Romania, it is clearly stated that the ships of the United Nations are used by the Allied Control Commission until the end of the war, but it is possible to agree that part of those ships would be transferred to the Czechoslovak government.

VYSHINSKY explains that some of the ships do not show up in the plans of the Allied Control Commission and, therefore, those ships remain vacant.

Benes says that from the West, Czechoslovakia could be reached only through Romania, and in this connection, the Czechoslovak government would like to send its representative to Galats to organize the reception of the shipments. The first ship would bring a number of trucks that they would be able to transport to Czechoslovakia.

MOLOTOV believes that these practical questions could be solved and asks for practical proposals.

Benes promises to do it

VII. Further organization of the Czechoslovak Army

Benes says that during his conversation with Marshal Stalin, the question of the expansion of the Czechoslovak Army was considered settled, and currently they are undertaking substantial work in this direction. In this connection, a question emerges about close contacts with Moscow and London. Probably, they should organize radio communications between the government, Moscow and London. Also, transportation for the government and military organs is needed. They need several planes to maintain the communications.

MOLOTOV says that they need, however, to take into account the military situation, and the fact that the government will be in the rear of the Red Army. They would like to see wishes and proposals of the Czechoslovak government on all the issues, so that they could consider them in detail.

Benes hands him a note with the list of requests of the Czechoslovak government. (Attached)[8]

VIII. Relations between the USSR, Poland and Czechoslovakia

Benes says that when the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty was signed, they reserved the opportunity for Poland to join it, but he thinks that now it is probably not the right time to raise this issue.

MOLOTOV says that if the reorganization of the Polish government is delayed, then this question might become very timely.

Benes expresses his hope that their relations with Poland will be better than before, and thinks that when the USSR finds it expedient to raise the question of Poland joining the treaty, the Czech government will support that proposal.

IX. Further policy of the USSR and Czechoslovakia toward Germany

Benes says that in his conversation with Churchill, the latter spoke in favor of dividing Germany into Southern (with the incorporation of Austria), Western and a separate smaller Prussia.

MOLOTOV says that the question of dividing Germany has been raised repeatedly, but it is not resolved yet. Currently everybody supports this idea and is very serious about Germany, but there is no plan yet.

Benes is afraid that after the Germans are defeated, people would feel sympathy toward them and they would find some organizational means to express it.

MOLOTOV says that the idea of an unconditional capitulation -- is not our idea. Nonetheless, we supported it, and we will consistently abide by it. The Poles should receive the German territory up to Oder and Neiss.

Benes says that if he was making decisions for the Poles, he would not take the German territory to Oder, because the issue is not how much they can get, but how much they can hold. Now we need a common Slavic policy. Benes is against adding Austria to Bavaria, and is happy that the USSR is on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains, and that it will become a neighbor of Hungary. In 10-15 years, the West could turn against the Soviet Union and they should be prepared for that.

MOLOTOV agrees that they should be sober and not just dream about the future peace. If there is closer cooperation between the Slavic peoples, the security in the East will be improved.

Benes believes that in San Francisco[9] the issues will revolve around the great powers, and that the small countries are interested in the absence of contradictions between the great powers, because when the great powers argue with each other, little countries suffer more than when there is peace and agreement between the great powers.

MOLOTOV says that if the great powers want to make honest agreements, the USSR would be in favor of it; policy of compromise is beneficial for small powers also; if we see that our partners do not want to reach agreements, then we will be cautious. We have a great desire to concentrate on our internal affairs. We are more sincere advocates of peace than anybody else is. If our partners have enough will to try for a stable peace, they will find loyal allies in us.

Benes believes that, soberly thinking, Czechoslovakia should follow the Soviet Union's line.

MOLOTOV says, "Now even without waiting for France?"

Benes agrees with that. He believes that they should work out a Slavic policy, so that the Germans would not be able to threaten them again.

X. Further financing of the Czechoslovak payments in the territory of the USSR

Benes states that the Czechoslovak government would need a certain sum of money for administrative expenses and for the embassy. The Czechoslovak government has already received a loan from the British government for 6 million pounds, from Canada - for 15 million dollars, and the United States has also prepared a loan for a certain sum of dollars. The Czechoslovak government would like, if possible, to conclude a more extensive credit agreement with the Soviet Union, including both

deliveries of goods and the monetary credit. Benes stresses that the Czech government would like to make an agreement on the basis of reciprocity, because when Czechoslovakia is liberated, it would be able to pay the Soviet Union back.

MOLOTOV thinks that they will be able to reach an agreement--a one-year trade agreement modeled on the agreements with Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

To MOLOTOV's question, whether the British mood regarding long peace and cooperation with the USSR serious, Benes responds that Churchill is undoubtedly in favor of that, but it is hard to say what will happen after Churchill.

At this point, the conversation, which lasted two and a half hours, ended.

Recorded by V. Zorin

[1] See communique 2 for Document #42.

[2] The European Consultative Commission (ECC) -- the permanent organ of the main members of the anti-Hitler coalition. It was created in 1943 by a decision of the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers of the USSR, USA and Great Britain. It worked in London until September 1945.

[3] This Benes's information was confirmed on April 11, 1945. British Ambassador to the USSR A. Clark Kerr sent a letter to V. M. Molotov, in which he expressed an extreme concern of his government regarding E. Benes's intention to make a public statement about the transfer of the German minority out of Czechoslovakia after his return to Prague. "President Benes was told that it was absolutely necessary that he did not make such a statement without consulting the main allies beforehand, because ultimately, they bear the responsibility for resolving the German issue..." At the same time, in the conversation with Benes, the British side repeatedly emphasized that "an agreement on this issue between the Soviet, British, and American governments has not been reached yet." "My government, --Kerr wrote to Molotov-- wishes very much that President Benes does not undertake any radical and premature actions which could aggravate the problems which our governments would have to consider in regard to Germany ... " (Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation, Fond 3, Finding aid 66, File 725, p. 5)

[4] The Soviet side saw the proposal to relocate the Hungarian minority out of Czechoslovakia positively, but believed that it was a subject of the peace treaty, and therefore, did not insist on including it into the text of the Armistice Agreement with Hungary (Foreign Policy archive of the Russian Federation, Fond 07, Finding aid 10. II. 15. File 195, p. 2)

[5] He refers to, in particular, a conflict between a representative of the Czechoslovak government, Minister of the London government, F. Nemets, who arrived in the Transcarpathian region on October 27, 1944, and the Soviet military authorities, which appealed to the population with a request to voluntarily join the Red Army. A question emerged as to which army should the male population of the Transcarpathian Ukraine join. The Czechoslovak side saw such actions of the Soviet military authorities as a violation of the Agreement of May 8, 1944. The Soviet side defended its position arguing that the above mentioned Agreement did not define the functions of a government's representative.

[6] Altogether, there were 18,350 industrial enterprises in the territory of the protectorate. Approximately 1000 of them were moved there from Germany to avoid the bombings of the Western allies.

[7] In conversation with V. M. Molotov. Marshal Tito's representative A. Hebrang informed him that Yugoslavia would present Hungary with claims for 620 million dollars. The Soviet side believed that the armistice conditions include the requirement for reparation of part of damage, and that it should be carried out without irreparable damage to the economy of the paying side (Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, Fond 07, Finding aid 10. n. 15. File 195, p. 3).

[8] The attachment is missing from the file

[9] He refers to the United Nations