

March 24, 1945

**Record of Conversation Between V. M. Molotov and
President of Czechoslovakia E. Beneš**

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Summary:

Molotov and President Beneš discuss the transfer of control of Trans-Carpathian Ukraine to the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia's need for economic assistance.

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Russian

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From the Record of Conversation Between V. M. Molotov and E. Benes Regarding the Future Territorial Association of the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine and the Need to Provide Economic Assistance to Czechoslovakia

Moscow

March 24, 1945

SECRET

PRESENT: Zorin - USSR Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia Masarik, and Ambassador of Czechoslovakia to the USSR Firlinger

The conversation began at 16:00.

Comrade MOLOTOV says that he would like to discuss the issue of the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine. The Soviet government has to decide what they can say to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR at this time and on this issue after the repeated statements by Benes regarding the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine.[1] They would like to receive something more definite from the President. After 1939, Benes took a certain position on this issue, and in his last letter to Marshal Stalin he cited the statement which he made to Maisky in September 1939. After that, he repeatedly made statements on that issue in conversations with Bogomolov, and also in Moscow, in conversation with Marshal Stalin and Molotov.[2]

After reading the text of the information from comrade Maisky about his conversation with Benes in September 1938,[3] comrade Molotov asks whether this record corresponds to what Benes actually told comrade Maisky, noting along the way that, of course, the question about the Soviet form of government, which was raised in that conversation, is no longer under discussion.

Benes says that he cannot say for sure whether this record fully corresponds to the statement, which he made, because he left all his notes in London. He could confirm that he always said that at some point the Czechoslovak and the Soviet government would agree that this territory should belong to Ukraine, and that the question is only about the procedure of how this territory would be transferred to the Soviet Union.

Comrade MOLOTOV notes that we understand that we do not have to resolve this issue today, but from the official point of view, we would like Benes to make some statement to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and then the Soviet government could express its satisfaction with that statement. Comrade Molotov emphasizes that this is what we propose, if Benes agrees with this.

Benes states that in his letter to Marshal Stalin, he only made some clarifications of his repeated statements on the issue of the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine.

Comrade MOLOTOV notes that in the letter to Marshal Stalin, Benes made two comments[4] and that now he has to be more specific about them.

Benes asks what he should write in the statement, which comrade Molotov is talking about.

MOLOTOV notes that in his opinion it is desirable that this statement, like the statement of 1939, would mention the desirability of common with the USSR borders, and that the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine should join the Ukrainian USSR.

Benes asks Molotov to suggest an acceptable formula.

MOLOTOV says that Benes is capable of formulating it perfectly himself, especially because this is not a new issue for him, and he repeatedly formulated his positions.

MASARIK asks whether this statement would be published.

MOLOTOV says that of course not, and this issue requires clarification only between us.

Benes states that his point of view would be identical with the point of view of all political parties of Czechoslovakia on this issue. He is sure of this, and when he returns to Prague he would formulate this decision and would support it. He would only like to have the consent of the Soviet government that the borders that separate Slovakia and Trans-Carpathian Ukraine would remain the borders between the USSR and Czechoslovakia after the Carpathian Ukraine joins the Soviet Union.

Comrade MOLOTOV says that undoubtedly the border will remain where it is now between Slovakia and the Carpathian Ukraine.

FIRLINGER explains that when Benes speaks about the parliament that would have to approve the resolution on this question, he speaks about the National Committee, which will be convened immediately after all of the Czechoslovakia is liberated.

Benes emphasizes that this issue, however, should be resolved only between the USSR and Czechoslovakia.

Comrade MOLOTOV supports this, and emphasizes the importance of this formulation of the issue.

Benes says that the transfer of the Carpathian Ukraine to the USSR is important for two reasons for Czechoslovakia: first of all, the USSR will become a neighbor of Hungary, and secondly, the USSR will extend beyond the Carpathian Mountains.

Comrade MOLOTOV confirms that the Germans will be undoubtedly more quiet in such a situation, and especially the Hungarians. Then comrade Molotov explains that when in September 1944 Horti's representatives came to Moscow, the latter stated in his letter that he allegedly did not know about comrade Molotov's statement,[5] in which he said that the Soviet Union did not threaten Hungary. And to prove that position, we even agreed to postpone our advance into Hungary, so that Horti would have time to pull his troops back to Budapest. Of course, now, if the USSR had a border with Hungary, then undoubtedly the Hungarians would be very quiet.

Benes stresses additionally that establishing a common border is important for Czechoslovakia from the point of view of security, and also from the point of view of resolving the ethnic issue in Czechoslovakia.

Comrade MOLOTOV confirms that if there is such a decision on this issue, it would also calm down the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, and would create confidence both for the USSR and for Czechoslovakia.

Benes asks, in which form should they make a statement.

Comrade MOLOTOV says that they had in mind that there should be a letter

addressed to comrade Stalin, to which he would reply on behalf of the Soviet government. Comrade MOLOTOV asks whether they should sign some agreement on this issue.

Benes and FIRLINGER say that it would be better to do it in a form of a letter. Benes promises to prepare such a letter.

Then Benes says that he had a similar discussion with his generals on the issue of further development of the Czechoslovak army, they had full agreement on this issue and he would like to pass a final document to comrade Stalin, in which they would list everything that they need to equip the Czechoslovak army, and to reorganize it on the basis, which comrade Stalin described in the conversation with him.

Comrade MOLOTOV says that it could be done.

Then Benes says that the Slovak People's Rada,[6] which, according to some, is considered a sick child of Czechoslovakia, asked him to ask the Soviet government to help clean Slovakia of the Hungarians, who came to the Slovak territory after its occupation by the Hungarian troops as soon as possible.

Benes cites the Armistice Agreement with Hungary, one of paragraphs of which says that Hungary must immediately withdraw its administration and those people who came to Slovakia after the Munich agreement.

Comrade MOLOTOV asks how many people is he talking about.

Benes responds that there are approximately 10 to 15 thousand people, especially in Kositsa.

Comrade MOLOTOV inquires whether those are urban or country residents.

Benes responds that those are urban residents. He adds that it would be advisable to give instructions to Generals Petrov and Malinovsky regarding decreasing the number of Hungarians in Slovakia.

Comrade MOLOTOV promises to find out what can be done on this issue. Finally, Benes says that he would like to create some sort of a permanent organ at the Embassy in Moscow, which would monitor the day-to-day situation with economic assistance to the liberated territory of Czechoslovakia.

FIRLINGER notes that some questions has been so far resolved by the Front Headquarters, however, some of the questions should probably be decided in Moscow.

Comrade MOLOTOV says that when it is clear what kind of assistance is going to be provided, then we can decide who and in what fashion should solve these questions.

Benes says that in the next several days he will make a detailed list of everything that the liberated part of Czechoslovakia needs, and stresses that the Czechoslovak government does not want to get this assistance as a grant, but would like to make an agreement about credits for a number of materials so that it could pay for everything that would be provided in the future ...[7]

At this point the conversation ended at 16:40.

Recorded by V. Zorin

[1] He refers to a series of E. Benes's statements to the effect that he, trying to ensure that Czechoslovakia has a common border with the Soviet Union, is ready to agree to the incorporation of the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine into the USSR. He spoke about it in September 1939 with I. M. Maisky, in October 1941 with the USSR Ambassador to the Allied governments in London A. E. Bogomolov, "I am not giving the Trans-Carpathian Russia to either Hungarians or Poles. I will give it to you." In July 1944, he emphasized once again that he would not oppose incorporation of this area into the USSR. (Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, Fond 07, Finding aid 5. n. 50. File 198, pp. 1-3).

[2] He refers to negotiations in December 1943. during which Benes had conversations with I. Stalin (December 12. 1943), V. M. Molotov (December 14 and 16. 1943). with I. Stalin and V. Molotov (December 18. 1943).

[3] As in the original, Should be: 1939

[4] In his letter from January 29, 1945, E. Benes noted that he had not changed his position formulated by him in September 1939 in his conversation with I. M. Maisky, and was "not going to change it in the future." He also believed that the issue of the Trans-Carpathian Ukraine would not become a subject of any discussions or interference of other powers. "We would like to come to an eventual peace conference having this question already finally settled in the spirit of full friendship with you." (See: Documents and Materials on the History of Soviet-Czechoslovak Relations. Moscow, 1983, v. 4, Book 2, pp. 287-288)

[5] See Document#14

[6] As in the original. He refers to the Slovak National Council-the highest legislative and executive organ of Slovakia. It was established in September 1943 for leadership of the Resistance Movement. It comprised two political parties-the Communist and the Democratic. It became a legislative organ during the Slovak national uprising.

[7] The part on the USSR delegation's participation in the San Francisco conference for preparing the UN Charter was omitted.