

**January 31, 1958**

**Report of the Hungarian Ambassador in Cairo on the  
establishment of the United Arab Republic and the  
Syrian public opinion in 1958 (excepts)**

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**Summary:**

This report by the Hungarian ambassador in Cairo states that the Syrian people are wary toward President Nasser's creation of the United Arab Republic, fearing he will enforce a dictatorship, however the Syrian communist party is in full support of the union.

**Original Language:**

Hungarian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Strictly confidential!

Reactions to and the aftermath of the events

The events took the Syrian public totally unprepared. In the first few days the crowd, heated by nationalism, was cheering the idea of the union enthusiastically. However, it lasted only for a few days. Many of the people began to look at the likely political events from the point of view of their own personal fate. I tried to meet as many people I could and listen to many different views during these days. Low- and middle-ranking foreign affairs officials were extremely embittered, saying that that they would be the first to be dismissed. For example, the deputy head of the protocol department said that he would resign if he were to be transferred to Cairo.

Wholesale traders and businessmen are worried about the strict Egyptian economy and transfer the mobilizable part of their assets to Lebanon first and then to Swiss banks. It is characteristic that the exchange rate of dollar increased by 15 percent in a week. At the same time, they don't know, for example, how the currency problems and numerous other economic issues will be resolved. It must be noted that, in order to satisfy traders, the government said the economic issues would be settled only after several months and in a gradual way taking each of the particular problems one by one.

Manufacturers are worried about Egyptian competitor and the effects of cheap Egyptian labour. Landowners with huge areas of land a lot of villages are concerned by Nasser's land reform.

People living on wages and salaries think their situation is totally unsecure because they don't know how the difference between standard of living in the two countries will be dealt with, since at the moment it is much higher in Syrian than in Egypt.

In addition to the issues listed above, obviously several other political and sociological problems are being raised too. People are constantly concerned with the difference between the Syrian political system which is based on a wide range of democratic rights and the essentially dictatorial Egyptian system.

I have heard people saying that the Syrians kindly warned their Egyptian friends that Nasser should not introduce a political system that is based on a non-party united national front because the Syrian people would definitely regard anything like that as a dictatorial system and Nasser would lose the great reputation he currently has in Syria.

It can be seen now that many of Nasser's pictures are being removed from shop windows and while his pictures were received with a round of applause in movie theatre before, now people refrain from any expression of approval.

A few words must also be devoted to the position of the Syrian army regarding the union. However, I have to begin by saying that in this respect I have radically different, opposing information. According to one source, the entire staff supports the plan of the union. In view of the political situation in Syria - and the allegedly subversive activity of the socialist and populist party - they did not see any other way but to fully unite with Egypt.

According to another source, General Bizri got into a conflict with General Nfuri and Colonel Sarage, the followers of the federation who don't want the Syrian army to come under the command of Egyptian officers.

However, it is easy to see that the Syrian people do not support the plan of the union but would have endorsed a federation or confederation instead.

Situation of the Syrian Communist Party

In this report I have already dealt with the statement that reflects the official position of the Party. In this statement the Party makes it clear that the union of the Arab countries is a positive step. In this case the Syrian-Egyptian Union is built on sound bases ensuring the already existing democratic rights and definitely strengthening the anti-imperialist front.

Then Comrade Bakdash, the secretary-general of the Party said in his statement issued on 28 January: "There has never been a Communist party in the world which has dissolved itself. The Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party will not take this course either. We hope that the emerging union of Syrian and Egypt will preserve these already existing democratic rights." Comrade Bakdash's statement generated huge reaction. The statement published in Al Nour, the Party's official paper, was presented

in every paper regardless of their party allegiance and the people were talking about it all over the city. Ambassador Riad officially warned the government that the statement jeopardized the plan of the Egyptian-Syrian Union. However, the government did not take any administrative action against the Party.

When Foreign Minister Bitar presented the results of his talks regarding the Union and the decision of the government at the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament on 30 January, Comrade Bakdash stressed in his speech that Syria should preserve its democratic achievements within the Union too and should not be ungrateful to the Soviet Union for the huge support that they had provided that far.

To my knowledge the members of the Party were centrally ordered to begin a comprehensive propaganda campaign in order to explain to the people the dangers that the steps to dissolve political parties would mean. At the same time the Central Leadership took steps to ensure that the Party would not be taken unprepared if they were to be forced to go underground.