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Report from Etre Sándor, 'Discussion with Comrade Sebestyén. Comrade Sebestyén's assessment of the situation.'

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Summary:

A report by Etre Sandor on North Korea's internal and external policies, the Korean reunification issue, and Hungarian-North Korean relations.

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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Regional Division IV

Korean Branch

Etre Sándor

TOP SECRET!

Produced in 4 copies for:

- Comrade Marjai
- Comrade Barity
- Pyongyang
- Department □□ □□

Record

Subject: Discussion with Comrade Sebestyén. Comrade Sebestyén's assessment of the situation.

Before travelling back to his station, we had a meeting on September 8 with Comrade Sebestyén Jenő, our country's ambassador in Pyongyang. Comrades Sebestény, Dr. Taraba, and Etre were present at this meeting. (Comrade Kádár László could not attend the meeting due to his tending to the Mongolian economic government delegation.)

In the first half of the discussion, Comrade Sebestyén gave a brief report, without going into every detail, regarding the Korean situation according to the points below.

He said that the basic goal of the DPRK's policies had not changed; the Korean comrades are continuing to build socialism. In parallel, they are treating every other goal as subject to the cause of reunification, and prioritizing their national interests over common interests.

As known, the Korean (DPRK) governing policy is fully permeated by a cult of personality. Besides this known fact, the Korean comrades would like to have this personality cult acknowledged internationally too. They are putting words of glorification of the Kim Il Sung cult into foreigners' mouths, and they wish to make it internationally presentable with various subtle, but in many cases rough, methods.

There are no changes in the basic goals of their internal policy. Nowadays the Korean comrades need to turn to socialist countries and ask for economic help partly due to their economic difficulties and partly due to other reasons. They are preparing for future reunification with various important measures: paying more attention to increasing the standard of living, building more houses, announced partial amnesty, sending tourists to European socialist countries, etc.

Looking at the reunification policy, the strategy of the Korean comrades is more flexible and effective than before.

According to our (the Soviet Union and countries that have a strong collaboration with it) assessment, the main characteristics of Korean (DPRK) politics are the followings:

- Continuing the centrist and maneuvering political governing;

- Maintaining good relations with all of the socialist countries;
- They would like to win the support of the Soviet Union, China, and even Hungary for their policies;
- The Korean-Chinese relations that were damaged in the middle of the 1960s have been normalized and raised to the old level.

The current Chinese leadership is taking advantage of the aforementioned politics of the Korean comrades; their goal is to bring the DPRK under their influence and use them against the Soviet Union. The Chinese are sending high ranking delegations to the DPRK, and they are also hosting the Korean delegations at a similarly high level. (For example the Korean table tennis team was received by Zhou Enlai.)

It seems that the DPRK shifted its allegiances to China; they are closer to it than to the Soviet Union or Hungary, but we should not take this as an absolute. Kim Il Sung cannot fully join China's side. (The words of Kim Il Sung, which he greeted Comrade Sebestyén with at his reception after he received his letter of commission are memorable: it has to be taken into account that many different political orientations exist inside the Korean leadership, one can find Soviet and Chinese orientations as well.)

The first steps on the road of reunification were the Red Cross negotiations. What were the prefaces that led to the possibility of the negotiations between the Red Cross organizations of North and South Korea?

- It was a turning point that China admitted that there is no revolutionary situation in South Korea. (The Chinese leaked this assessment on purpose last year.) China receded from its former idea of liberating South Korea.
- Important international changes have played a role too. For example changes in the American-Chinese and Japanese-Chinese relations as well.
- The situation has also changed in South Korea. China is more important for the USA than South Korea. The South Korean leadership had to admit this as well.
- The gradually developing North Korean-Japanese relations negatively affected the relationship between Japan and South Korea.

Taking all these into account the DPRK:

- worked out a more flexible policy towards South Korea and Japan; it did not bind resolving their relations to preconditions;
- employed more flexible tactics towards the UN as well. (It made effort to gain more support from the so called third world countries, etc.)

In order to realize the goal of reunification, in the beginning and the summer of 1972 the DPRK sent various delegations to socialist countries and countries that are in diplomatic relations with it; consulted the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (with Comrade Kapitsa); first secretaries or secretary generals of some European countries were invited to Pyongyang; and many signs are pointing towards the direction that Kim Il Sung will sooner or later travel abroad for political visits.

The DPRK has significant economic difficulties, it is known that the standard of living of its citizens are below the given potential. This is also the reason why the DPRK will request economic assistance from the socialist countries, thus from Hungary as well. According to Soviet experience, the Korean comrades interpret economic, scientific-technical consultative intergovernmental committees quite uniquely. The Korean side is emphasizing the consultative aspect of these committees whenever they are about the responsibilities of the DPRK, but they are pressing for decisions whenever the DPRK asks something from the partner countries. The Koreans usually ask for loans by circumventing the government and propose their need at a lower level. They are reluctant to sign documents asking for loan and usually present their needs only by words.

Interparty relations are at the known low level. Comrade Kim Il Sung told the Soviet comrades around the beginning of the year that the Korean-Soviet interparty relations might soon be improved. (It is up to the results of Comrade Katushev's visit to Pyongyang as well.) We also have to make every effort to "bombard" the Korean comrades with our constant suggestions, advocate the strengthening of our interparty relations. A practice like this could provide useful for the cadres in the Worker's Party of Korea who agree with our opinions.

In conclusion, we have to continue our active influencing policies towards the DPRK. Only with active policies like this can we counterbalance, as much as possible, the Chinese influence, and draw the Korean comrades closer to us. We have to understand this in Hungary as well. It is an observed fact that many Hungarian comrades judge the DPRK in extremes. One of the extremes is: only noticing the good, and exhibiting an "embracing" attitude towards the DPRK; whereas the other extreme immediately judges a Korean action that was unfavorable towards us as a clear allegiance shift to China. Understanding the factual politics of the DPRK is especially important in preparing the Hungarian delegations travelling there. We have to continue our usual method; we have to send high ranking delegations who are "well-versed in politics". We have to send leaders and delegations who:

- can influence the Koreans;
- can properly exchange views about the life and norms of the party;
- can explain the significance and need for the anti-imperialist fight;
- can adequately illustrate the socialist countries' and the socialist world order's place and role in today's world;
- argue reasonably for the significance of our joint fight for unity;
- can paint a picture of the so called third world countries' place and role in the world;
- can properly describe the balance of power, etc. present in international organizations, and the UN.

It is advisable and necessary to have discussions with the Korean comrades. Unfortunately the socialist countries do not hold adequate consultations on the Korean issue. We should not wait for life to force us to initiate discussions, it is better to start them as early as possible. The lack of discussions is apparent for Comrade Sebestyén in Pyongyang as well, he experiences it firsthand. We should concentrate on significant and sensitive issues to find some channel for discussions.

Regarding our bilateral relations, Comrade Sebestyén stressed that he experienced a

halt after the visit of Comrade Losonczi Pál in 1971. He expressed this opinion earlier by saying that "the Hungarian party put brakes on further developing the relations". At the same time, we have to admit that improving relations is not an easy task either. Besides political contact, there is barely any professional interest about the DPRK. There are professional interests only from the Korean side. The Korean initiatives are actions prepared with a clear purpose. We have to keep all these in mind when searching for opportunities, have to send delegations with appropriate ranks and members. Although with different goals, but the Chinese and the Romanians are basically working very purposefully in regards to the DPRK.

Let us consider it our task to maintain the results we achieved up until now, and further develop the Hungarian-Korean collaboration wherever possible. We should also discuss our ideas with our friends for developing relations.

Other issues

- The work of the embassy regarding South Korea has improved, it is not yet good, but it cannot be promised that the requirements will be completely satisfied either. (Here we mean the processing of classified bulletins about South Korea above all.) Completely solving this issue has personnel conditions.

- Comrade Sebestyén asked that the yearly relational plans should be consulted even more thoroughly between the Embassy and the Regional Division in the future. He asked us to provide information, if possible early in the year, on delegations travelling to the DPRK, and on our possibilities. Knowing this, the Embassy could prompt the Koreans for the acceptance of the invitations.

- The delegations travelling to the DPRK should be prepared better. He knows that the Regional Division is not at fault for this-continued Comrade Sebestyén-but it should somehow be arranged to inform the travelling delegations about the Korean situation in all cases.

- As he brought it up to Comrades Marjai and Perjési before, more messages should be forwarded through the Embassy in the future. Many concrete cases have showed that the Korean embassy in Budapest "misinforms" its center. Therefore it is practical to solve some issues through our embassy in Pyongyang.

- An agreement with Comrade Gódor in Budapest could not be achieved concerning the case of the Embassy's employees travelling to Beijing. Comrade Sebestyén asks for a favorable decisions regarding the case of these travels. It should be taken into account when reaching a decision that workers of some neighboring countries wish to travel to Beijing occasionally to acquire public necessity products. It would not be useful if we confused the Beijing travel case of the Hungarian specialist working in Mongolia with the travel of the Embassy's employees.

- Finally, Comrade Sebestyén mentioned some material conditions about the operation of the Embassy. He had already discussed these issues with the relevant office in charge at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He mentioned as an example that the Economic Main Division does not issue things that have been approved in the budget, for example air conditioners, radios, magnetophones, etc.

Comrade Sebestyén informed us that he asked the leadership of the Ministry and received concessions in relation to his health. (Short rest after lunch, occasionally declining evening activities.)

Due to the lack of time, we did not manage to discuss in detail the ideas Comrade

Sebestyén brought up, but we have exchanged words about these during our previous meetings. In my brief answer I pointed out that I agree with his review of the Korean policies. I asked him to review the Center's and the Embassy's documents that were created during his absence after his return, as he will find many new factors that motivate the Korean situation. About his assessment of our bilateral relations, I mentioned that I had not experienced a "halt", but there are indeed areas of collaboration that have fallen behind or even regressed. The fault for this however mainly lies with the Korean side. Assessing the number of delegations (especially every half a year) alone is not enough to determine the quality of our relations.

I told him that in the future we will conduct more work through them, as much as possible. The main problem is that the office also learns about the actions of some Hungarian partner organizations in relation to Korea through "its friendly connections". I mentioned that we sent fewer delegations during this year's spring and summer, because we took personal conditions into account (for example Comrade Sebestyén's health, Comrade Gerajski's vacation, etc.)

I asked them to present the suggestions for improving relations always exactly and well-explained. Only in this case can we commit ourselves to a suggestion. I promised that in the future I will try to send information faster about the travel of the delegations, as long as we have received this information ourselves, and there is approval of it. Naturally, we cannot take any positions on when and what kind of delegations will be able to travel to the DPRK.

Lastly I asked Comrade Sebestyén that after returning, he and Comrade Taraba should answer better and more precisely to letters containing central orders and instructions. We want to be up to date on the measures the Embassy takes, and what the reason is for the lack of answer: whether the Koreans did not host our diplomats, or perhaps the forgetfulness of the embassy's colleagues.

I wished good luck and especially good health to Comrade Sebestyén and all his colleagues.

Note: Due to lack of time, Comrade Sebestyén could not review our handwritten notes, therefore I agreed with him that he will send his possible significant remarks about this record by return of post.

Budapest, 1972 September 28.

[Handwritten note]: I sent Comrade Barity's copy to Comrade Puja.
October 2.