

## Memorandum of Conversation between M.S. Gorbachev and HSWP General Secretary Karoly Grosz

**Moscow, 23-24 March 1989**

*[On 22 March 1989, the parties and organizations of the emerging non-communist Hungarian opposition established a consultative forum, called the "Opposition Roundtable." Up to this point, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party had used the tactic of dealing separately with "alternative" organizations. Now the danger of having to negotiate with a unified opposition became increasingly likely. The Party's leadership also worried about an impending economic crisis possibly resulting in the destabilization of the political scene. These concerns were infused in Károly Grósz's presentation on the internal political situation.*

*Gorbachev's "dialectic" approach to the issue of how to evaluate 1956 is remarkable: while stressing that this must be decided by the Hungarian leadership alone by examining the facts, he declared that a recent thorough investigation of the past by the Soviet leadership had undoubtedly proven that what had happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was a counter-revolution. Similarly ambiguous were the warnings of the Soviet leader concerning the tolerable scope of the political transition in Hungary. He emphasized that "the limit [...] is the safekeeping of socialism and assurance of stability," however, he also clearly declared that "today we have to preclude the possibility of repeated foreign intervention into the internal affairs of socialist countries."*

*The timing of the conversation is also noteworthy from Gorbachev's perspective; it occurred on the eve of the legislative elections in the Soviet Union—the freest since the 1917 Revolution. The 26 March vote would elevate reformers (such as Yeltsin) and nationalists (especially in the Baltics) to a strong position to challenge the communist order, and Gorbachev may already have felt pressured by the impending balloting.]*

(EXCERPT)

HUNGARIAN SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE

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REPORT

for members of the Political Committee

[29 March 1989]

(...)

Comrade Grosz informed the negotiators about the Hungarian situation. He said that the events in Hungary have accelerated lately. Their direction is according to our intentions, while their pace is somewhat disconcerting. Comrade Grosz emphasized that we wish to retain political power and find a solution to our problems by political means, avoiding armed conflict.

We have a good chance for reaching our goals. People are afraid of a possible armed conflict. Workers, peasants and professionals want to work and live in peace and security, safeguarding their property. (...)

Another major concern is the history of the last thirty years. We have to face our past, hard and painful as it is, as the acting participants are still alive. On the other hand, by drawing the necessary conclusions, we might dishearten certain layers of our policy's active supporters from the Party. Lack of self-confidence is palpable enough in the Party anyway. (...)

Comrade Gorbachev agreed that the Western world does not want instability in Eastern Europe, including Hungary as well, because in the present situation it would be adverse to its interests. Nonetheless, it is quite apparent that they [the Western countries] intend to facilitate the realization and strengthening of a development that suits their own political ideas.

Comrade Gorbachev emphasized: "The estimation of the 1956 events is entirely up to you." You have to stand on a firm ground; you have to examine what really happened then and there. The Soviet leadership has recently analyzed the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia, and they continue to maintain that what happened there was a counter-revolution, with all the idiosyncratic traits of such an event. There were different periods within the Czechoslovak events, but the Dubcek regime was unable to prevent openly counter-revolutionary forces from gaining ground through them. (...)

Comrade Gorbachev emphasized that we clearly have to draw boundaries, thinking about others and ourselves at the same time. Democracy is much needed, and interests have to be harmonized. The limit, however, is the safekeeping of socialism and assurance of stability.

Comrade Grosz emphasized that when referring to 1956, we adhere to the original evaluation that the Party endorsed in December 1956. The process is described in three consecutive words: student protest, [people's] uprising, and counter-revolution.

Comrade Gorbachev agreed with the above. He emphasized that today we have to preclude the possibility of repeated foreign intervention into the internal affairs of socialist countries. (...)

*[Source: MOL M-KS-288-11/4458 o.e.. Translated by Csaba Farkas.]*