

Record of Conversation between Representatives of the Opposition Roundtable and Boris Stukalin, Soviet Ambassador in Budapest

18 August 1989

[At their meeting on 27 July, the representatives of the Opposition Roundtable (ORT) decided—at the initiative of Jozsef Antall—to widen the scope of the ORT's negotiating partners and initiate meetings with the chairmen and the secretaries of the parliamentary committees, Deputy Prime Minister Peter Meggyesi and Soviet Ambassador in Budapest, Boris Stukalin.

Fidesz Press, the organ of the Young Democrats, gave the following account of the meeting and of Viktor Orban's presentation (the AYD leader who had given a speech at Imre Nagy's reburial in June and who in 1998 would become Hungary's prime minister) calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary: "Since 1956 we have known that the Soviet ambassador in Budapest plays a key role in Moscow's assessment of the situation in Hungary, yet at the meeting no really important issues were discussed, it was rather of exploratory character. The different organizations presented their position tactfully, giving broad outlines only, taking the liberty to deal with foreign policy only cautiously. The atmosphere became hot, however, when one of the Fidesz representatives took the floor: the Soviet side 'eyed the game,' the famous political opponent for several minutes. Nevertheless, they listened with poker face to Orban who stated that he was pessimistic concerning the National Roundtable talks because the HSWP had renewed itself only in words, remaining uncompromising on concrete issue (workers militia, Party organs at working places, the property of the Party)."]

(EXCERPT: Speech by Viktor Orban, Representative of the Alliance of Young Democrats [AYD])

(...)

Viktor Orban: Allow me to add just a few remarks to the question of what we think about the possibility of the negotiations eventually ending with success. We believe that the very opportunity of meeting you here today precipitates the prospect of making a successful agreement with the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Our organization, inasmuch as it is primarily comprised of young people, considers it a particular privilege to have the chance of meeting representatives of Soviet diplomatic bodies. We intend to utilize this opportunity, which has never been granted to us before, to hand over a memorandum next week that informs representatives of the Soviet Union about the political ideas of the Alliance of Young Democrats.

Certainly you are familiar with the fact that the issue of revealing the so-called historical white spots is just as important in Hungary as it is in the Soviet Union. Questions and views concerning our past and relations with the Soviet Union, or rather their sudden change, concerns our generation most of all. This is due to the fact that not long ago we were taught exactly the opposite of what even the Soviet Union has lately—and repeatedly—expressed in this respect.

Perhaps this experience explains the skepticism of our generation when it comes to the possible outcome of the negotiations, as compared to the attitude of the previous speakers. Consequently, our generation—that is we, who represent our organization at the Roundtable in the negotiations with the [Hungarian Socialist Workers] Party—we are of the opinion that one should only look at the facts when assessing the intentions of the Party and the political prospects. That is why we observe with considerable apprehension that the Party... the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party has made hardly any progress on the most important concrete issues.

Let me mention a few examples. Naturally, similarly to the previous speakers, I speak with the hope that this opinion will change over time. I must note, however, that the Party, among other things, has not yet made any concessions on the issue of ending party organizations at workplaces. Neither has the HSWP conceded on the question of abolishing the workers' militia that all representatives at the Roundtable consider unconstitutional. No progress was made to guarantee that the political monopoly of the Party in the army and the police force is eliminated once and for all, so that politics and state service are separated within the armed forces. The Opposition Roundtable made specific suggestions on the issue, which have all been rejected so far. I appeal to you: what else could people of my generation and members of my organization think other than that the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party aims at preserving these armed corps and armed forces, the last resort of power in Eastern Europe, intact and unaffected by the opposition. We, Young Democrats, are much worried about this intent. For according to our political assessment, the main issue is not the elections here; we are quite optimistic about the elections. We consider the recent by-elections as a public opinion poll of some sort, on the basis of which we expect an overwhelming victory by the opposition. The question for us Young Democrats, though, is rather what will happen afterwards? What will happen if the HSWP, which, in our estimation and according to the analysis of the recent results, will lose the general elections, still retains authority over all the armed forces, and is the only one to have political bodies at workplaces.

Consequently, we believe that the question of stability, the stability of the transition, and the solution of that issue is in the hands of the HSWP. Should the Party act according to their purportedly democratic conviction on the questions I have raised, the period of transition after the elections will not suffer from instability whatsoever. The ultimate cause of our pessimism is that the HSWP has shown no sign during the last month of heading in that direction.

Thank you.

Boris Stukalin: May I ask you about something that you mentioned in your speech: the memorandum that you wish to present to us next week? What is it about, what are the main issues that it is concerned with?

Viktor Orban: We think that the Alliance of Young Democrats has often been branded by the Hungarian press as an anti-Soviet organization. We had the opportunity to express our opinion on the issue, and we repeatedly stated that we do not consider ourselves anti-Soviet but that we have principled views. We have never encouraged aggression towards the Soviet Union, never incited people to any kind of rebellion against the Soviet people, [and] never invited anyone to infringe on the rights of the

Soviet state. We think that this opportunity—sitting at the negotiating table with a representative of the Soviet diplomatic corps—gives us the chance of informing you in an articulate written memorandum about our principled opinions on all these issues—which basically determine the general and foreign policy of the Alliance of Young Democrats. In the memorandum we wish to state our standing and suggestions in terms of what changes we think necessary in Hungarian foreign policy.

Let me point out, though, that this is strictly our opinion, bearing in mind that the Opposition Roundtable never intended to form an unanimous consensus in issues of foreign policy, therefore the organizations around this table represent a considerably wide range of [ideas about] foreign policy. Some of them hold opinions that are closer to yours, while others have views that diverge much further—ours is probably among the latter. Nonetheless, we strongly hope that these issues will be clarified in the memorandum. 32
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[Source: Fekete Doboz Archivuma, Budapest, EKA-NKA Gyojtemeny (Archive of the Black Box Video Studio, Opposition Roundtable—National Roundtable Collection), Casette 27-28. Translated by Csaba Farkas.]