

From the diary of
I.P. ABOIMOV 23 December 1989

**Record of conversation with the Ambassador
of the SFRY [Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia]
in the USSR, MILAN VERES
22 December 1989**

I received M. Veres on his request.

He referred to the instruction of the Union Secretariat on Foreign Affairs of the SFRY and shared the available information on the events in Romania, corroborated by the General Consulate of the SFRY in Timisoara and by numerous Yugoslav citizens who returned from the SRR. He also reported on the Yugoslav evaluations of the developments in Romania.

The beginning of the dramatic development could be traced to the events of 15-16 December in Timisoara where a large group of people protested against the action of the authorities with regard to the priest L. Tokes. This process grew into a huge demonstration of the population of the city against the existing order. According to the estimates of officials of the General Consulate of the SFRY, there were up to 100,000 people, including workers, university and school students, who participated in the demonstration. Protest actions took place also in Arad, Brasov and Cluj. Large contingents of militia and military were used against demonstrators in Timisoara. According to the Yugoslavs, during those clashes several hundred people died, and according to some unchecked data the number of casualties exceeded 2,000. In the downtown area shops, restaurants, cafes were destroyed, many streetcars and automobiles were also burnt down. Timisoara is surrounded by troops, but protest actions continue in the city. Workers seized factories and are threatening to blow them up if the authorities do not satisfy the people's demands. Officials of the General Consulate of the SFRY, the Ambassador remarked, noticed that a number of soldiers and militiamen expressed their sympathies with demonstrators. There were also slogans "The Army will not shoot at students and school children."

The Yugoslav-Romanian border is practically sealed; its defenses are fortified by troops along its whole length, including check-points. So far the Romanian side authorized only the passing of people with diplomatic and other service passports. The Ambassador informed us that the Yugoslavs had evacuated members of the families of officials of their General Consulate. He disavowed reports of a number of Western news agencies that participants of the demonstration [in Timisoara] found refuge on the territory of the Yugoslav compound, whose premises allegedly were penetrated by Romanian militia.

According to Yugoslav estimates, stressed M. Veres, the main reason for disorders in Timisoara and their spread subsequently around a number of other cities, including the capital of the SRR, is rooted in profound popular dissatisfaction with the economic situation in the country accumulated over [many] years, with low living standards, the lack of basic food and consumer goods, and with the unwillingness of the leadership to undertake at least some measures to democratize the political system.

The Ambassador pointed out that the Yugoslav public is very concerned about the situation in the neighboring country. The mass media of the SFRY are informing the population in detail about the events, including many reports about reactions abroad. On 19 December the Union Executive Vece [executive branch of the Yugoslav state] came out with an appropriate declaration, expressing profound concern and regret with regard to casualties during the crack-down on the demonstrations. On 20 December the Presidium of the CC CPY [Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia] denounced the actions of the Romanian authorities and laid political responsibility at the door of the leadership of the RCP [Romanian Communist Party]. It declared a temporary suspension of all contacts with the RCP and repealed an earlier invitation [to the RCP] to send a delegation to the 14th Congress of the CPY (January 1990). All public organizations of Yugoslavia, as well as both chambers of the Skupcina [parliament] made sharp protests. Late on 21 December the Presidium of the SFRY adopted a resolution denouncing reprisals against the demonstrators, that led to a large loss of human life.

M. Veres stressed that of particular cause for concern in Belgrade is the situation with Yugoslav ethnic minorities in the SRR. He said that the SFRY supports a peaceful resolution of the situation in Romania and is against any foreign interference into Romanian affairs....

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[Source: *Diplomaticheskii vestnik*, no. 21/22, November 1994, pp. 74-79. Translated by Vladislav Zubok.]