

16. Telegram: From the Embassy in Czechoslovakia to the Department of State

Prague, November 9, 1989, 1630Z

Confidential

Prague 07892; Priority

Subject: Czechoslovak Rumors of Senior Party Changes

1. Confidential—entire text.

2. Summary and comment. On the surface Czechoslovakia appears the “island of stability” that many CPCZ and state officials portray it as to Western diplomats and visitors. Aside from a widening circle of dissidents within the intellectual community, the population remains apathetic. Rumors are intensifying, however, that the Jakes regime has been more deeply shaken than it is ready to admit by the events occurring in what was its staunchest ideological ally in the region, the GDR. So shaken in fact that Jakes may have offered to resign at a recent Presidium session. The perception among some in the leadership is that, if it can happen in East Berlin, it is possible here, though perhaps with some time lag. This has produced a crisis of self-confidence and a readiness in more reform-minded persons, like Prime Minister Adamec, to push for economic reform. While this could produce leadership changes in the near term, as rumors discussed below suggest, we caution against expecting any real political reform resulting, since widespread popular pressure for it remains muted. End summary and comment.

3. The strongest evidence we have received to date of leadership concern and division over the events in East Germany came out of a November 8 cocktail reception hosted by the DCM for visiting EUR/EEY Deputy Director Hornblow. During the reception a senior GOC foreign policy analyst (the Acting Director of MFA International Relations Institute, Vladimir Cebis) volunteered to EmbOff’s that a secret Presidium session had been held earlier the same day to discuss events in East Germany.

4. At this meeting, according to Cebis, CPCZ General Secretary Jakes tendered his resignation. Jakes complained that he was not up to the job, was not receiving sufficient support from inside the Party and was widely unpopular in the country. He was particularly wounded by the negative reaction to an unauthorized tape of

a talk he gave in Western Bohemia earlier in the summer (Prague 6478)⁴³ which has been circulating freely in Prague. In the end, according to Cebis, Jakes's allies in the Presidium prevailed on him to stay on as General Secretary, at least until the May 1990 Party congress. Cebis implied that an additional incentive for doing so was that Jakes could at that time succeed Husak to the honorific position of President. But Cebis said he could not preclude Jakes again seeking to resign before then.

5. The main reason that the Presidium, according to Cebis, had rejected the Jakes resignation was the absence of any agreement on who a successor might be. In fact, the talk of a Jakes transition was a lively discussion topic at this reception as it has been around Prague recently (see Prague 7059). Among the candidates trotted out were Miroslav Stepan, the young Prague Party boss and Presidium member. Cebis, however, discounted Stepan's chances since, he said, he was widely "hated" at senior levels within the Party. Frantisek Pitra, the Czech Prime Minister, was also viewed as a potential compromise candidate who had few enemies. Cebis himself spoke of Bohumil Urban, the first deputy Prime Minister, as a potential dark horse. Urban is a young, new face who has the attraction of a modern, technocratic image. (Comment. His one disadvantage is that he now has no position in the senior Party leadership. End comment.)

6. Cebis and others at the reception repeated the story we had heard earlier of Prime Minister Adamec's offers to resign, apparently over his frustration at being prevented from carrying out real economic reform. (Comment: Adamec may suspect that a resignation "on principle" at this time would be such a blow to the regime's hardliners that the threat may have more of a chance of making them give in on reform than it did for his predecessor, Lubomir Strougal. End comment.)

7. In a separate conversation with a former advisor to Prime Minister Strougal we were told that dates for the next CPCZ plenum had been set for December 9–10. This contact, who did not raise or was not aware of the Jakes resignation, said that he expected the leadership would try and show forward movement, as it had in the past, by "throwing more dead wood overboard" at this plenum. He identified the "veryill" Presidium member and Federal Assembly Chairman Alois Indra as a likely candidate for retirement in December.

The paradox

8. But there is a paradox at work here. While the leadership may feel pressed to react to GDR developments, so far only by personnel changes, the popular Czechoslovak reaction has been different. It is our sense that the average man, distinct from dissident and intellectual circles, has become more, not less, cautious about change in the face of the GDR developments.

9. That reaction is easier to understand if one can appreciate the deeply risk-adverse psychology of the Czech people. In the face of change, they prefer to opt for what they know. Preference for the status quo is strengthened, particularly for the older generation, by a fear of German resurgence. More widely felt is a concern that their relative economic wellbeing could be sacrificed if they go the way of Hungary or Poland. Nor is it lost on the average citizen that Moscow is concerned over the pace of change (as evidenced by Shevardnadze's statements on 1968) and that Gorbachev himself may be in trouble. For the time being this may mute any real popular pressure for significant political change within the system. Without such pressure or wider generational change at the top, the CPCZ's present collection of hardliners will not undertake real political reform.

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76. Telegram: From the Embassy in Czechoslovakia to the Department of State

Prague, December 5, 1989, 1756Z*

Confidential

Prague 08513; Immediate

Subject: Civic Forum Reverses Policy and Will Participate in Elections

1. Confidential—entire text.

2. Summary. The Civic Forum, reacting with disappointment and anger to the composition of the new Government, has announced that it will endorse candidates in future elections. The announcement marks a reversal of policy for the Forum which before had stated it would not directly participate in elections. The Forum has also announced a general strike for December 11 to pressure changes in the composition of the Czechoslovak Government. Eleven Czech Republic ministers resigned on December 4, and Civic Forum representatives believe the new Czech Government is likely to include a majority of ministers who are not CPCZ members. In other developments, students are continuing their strike, efforts are being made to form an independent Labor Union from existing worker strike committees, and the Civic Forum has called for “compromised” members of the Federal Assembly to resign. End summary.

The Civic Forum to participate in elections

3. The Civic Forum, disappointed and angered by the composition of the new GOC (Prague 8445)²³, has responded by announcing that it will endorse candidates for as yet uncalled elections. The announcement came during a December 4 rally on Wenceslas Square attended by some 200,000 persons. The

announcement was a joint one with the Forum's Slovak counterpart, the Public Against Violence.

4. The announcement marks a radical change in the nature of the Civic Forum, which until Monday had resolutely claimed it had no intention of becoming a political party or directly engaging in electoral politics. Civic Forum sources told us that although disappointment over the composition of the new Government played a part in the Forum's decision, in fact pressure from the membership of the Forum had been growing for the Forum to present a clearer political profile. In particular, local chapters of the Forum have complained that the Forum was not displaying the type of leadership they believed needed to combat so-called "neo-Stalinist forces."

5. The Forum itself does not know by what process its list of endorsed candidates will be formed. The Forum has stated that it hopes to choose candidates from political structures which are already in existence (e.g., [Czechoslovak] Democratic Initiative) as well as candidates from political structures which might be formed. However, as we understand it, the candidates would be clearly identified as Civic Forum candidates. After the election, however, any candidates elected would be free to form themselves into whatever political factions or blocks they choose, and the Civic Forum would not try to impose any ironfisted party discipline.

6. The Forum has promised that it will cooperate with local chapters of the Forum and strike committees in choosing candidates. The Forum has stressed the importance of the media in the process and has stated that it is committed to giving everyone who is interested in the selection process an opportunity to express themselves, but Forum leaders frankly admit they do not yet know how they will structure the selection process.

7. The elections for which the Forum will be offering candidates have not been announced. Though individual members of the CPCZ Presidium have indicated free elections are in order, neither the GOC nor the CPCZ have officially committed themselves to free elections. Forum leaders nonetheless believe free elections are a foregone conclusion and that the only issue is when such elections are to be held. Forum leaders are demanding elections no later than July 1990, but also are opposed to "snap elections" for which the Forum and other opposition political forces would be unprepared.

8. Civic Forum sources tell us that Vaclav Havel opposed the Forum's entry into electoral politics. Among those cited as the most prominent advocates of the Forum's new policy are Jiri [Zden_k] Jicinsky and Petr Pithart. Jicinsky is a constitutional lawyer who lost his position in the post-1968 normalization process, and Pithart is an historian/political scientist who was an influential political adviser during the Prague Spring. (Note. We have also learned that Zdenek Mlynar has returned to Vienna, but do not know if he had any influence concerning the Civic Forum's change of policy. End note.)

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General strike called

9. To underscore its dissatisfaction with the new GOC "coalition" Government and to strengthen its hand in on-going negotiations with representatives of the Federal Government, Czech Government, and the National Front (see paras 10-16), the Civic Forum has called for another general strike on Monday, December 11. The strike will probably last no more than two hours, although exact times for the strike have not been set. Civic Forum sources emphasize that the strike again will be an act of political symbolism and is not intended to cause damage to the Czechoslovak economy.

Discussions with the GOC

10. Civic Forum representatives met with representatives of Prime Minister Adamec's Office on December 4 to discuss further "reconstruction" of the GOC. Those representing the Civic Forum included Vaclav Klaus, Michal Kocab, Martin Simecka, Sasa Vondra, Libor Maly, and Simon Panek. The GOC representatives were First Deputy Prime Minister Bohumil Urban, Oskar Krejci, and Marcel Jansen. Civic Forum representatives characterized the meeting as only being "preparatory," and stated that they were awaiting the return of Prime Minister Adamec from Moscow for the next substantive meeting.

11. The key issue at such a meeting, expected to be held later this week, will be changes in the present coalition Government. The Civic Forum is not pressing for wholesale changes of ministers, but does want changes in the Government's Presidium or so-called "inner cabinet" made up of Adamec and his First Deputy and Deputy Prime Ministers (seven individuals). The Civic Forum would be satisfied with an inner cabinet in which Communists make up only a minority. Under the Civic Forum proposal, the inner cabinet would be responsible for policy-making, and the remaining ministers would only implement policies

adopted by the inner cabinet. The Civic Forum apparently will propose some specific individuals to fill the inner cabinet positions.

12. The Civic Forum has created two new committees (“reconstruction” and “shadow cabinet”) to help it deal organizationally with the Federal Government. The reconstruction committee will suggest names of persons qualified for ministerial positions, while members of the “shadow cabinet” will be responsible for tracking the activities of their GOC counterparts. Vaclav Klaus heads the reconstruction committee and Valtr Komarek is expected to play a major role in the “shadow cabinet.”

13. Other topics to be raised during the meeting with Adamec include problems faced by émigrés wishing to return to Czechoslovakia, the rehabilitation of those unjustly treated during the period of normalization, printing facilities for the newspaper Lidove Noviny, and new laws concerning assembly and association. The Forum will again propose abolition of the People’s Militia, rather

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than just its transfer from Party to government control as has already reportedly been done.

Discussions with the Czech Government

14. Vaclav Havel and other representatives of the Civic Forum met Czech Government Premier Frantisek Pitra on Monday to discuss the composition of a new government of the Czech Socialist Republic. The meeting followed the announcement that 11 Czech Republic ministers had submitted their resignations to Pitra.

15. The Civic Forum representatives were upbeat concerning their discussions with Pitra. They refused to say whether they had suggested specific names of individuals to fill the now vacant ministerial positions, but did say they expected that probably a majority of the positions would be filled by persons who are not CPCZ members.

Discussions with the National Front

16. A Civic Forum delegation (Vaclav Benda, Petr Pithart, Martin Klima) also met with representatives of the Central Committee of the National Front on December 4. The Forum delegates were disappointed by the meeting. They

indicated that the National Front “is without a concept” and that its representatives were not prepared for the meeting, nor did they bring topics to the meeting for discussion.

Corruption and responsibility for 1968

17. The Civic Forum has asked that a commission be formed to examine the role of individual Czechoslovak officials in the 1968 invasion. The Forum would expect that such examination include legal, political, and moral elements. On the broader issue of possible corruption of public officials, the Civic Forum has not yet taken a stand nor made demands, although its press spokesman has said that the Forum expects that any official who violated criminal law during his tenure in office should be prosecuted.

Student strikes continue

18. Students have indicated that they will continue with their strike. They say that although the leading role of the CPCZ has been abolished in law, the composition of the new government indicates that the Party is in fact attempting to maintain its political monopoly, and as a consequence the students will remain on strike.

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19. Student representatives have also complained that some striking students outside Prague have been threatened with expulsion for their activities. First Deputy Premier Urban during his meeting with Civic Forum representatives indicated surprise at such developments and stated the GOC would take a position opposing such threats.

Free trade unions

20. Plans have also been announced for the formation of an independent labor union in Czechoslovakia. Those organizing the union will attempt to use the various strike committees already established as the union’s basic building blocks. In a related development, Czechoslovak Television featured an interview with the leader of a Communist Party cell in one factory who indicated that the cell’s members had decided to disband and urged other cells in workplaces to do the same.

Calls for resignations

21. The Civic Forum has called for the resignation from the Federal Assembly of all “compromised” individuals. Among those named by the Forum as compromised are Jan Fojtik, Marie Kabrhelova, Milos Jakes, Vasil Bilak, Zdenek Ceska, Alois Indra, Karel Hoffmann, Miroslav Stepan, Milan Vaclavik, and Jozef Lenart. There are also various campaigns in individual electoral districts to recall Assembly representatives.

22. Comment. The Civic Forum’s decision to enter into electoral politics should dramatically change the face of any government which might emerge after free elections. Prior to the Civic Forum announcement a number of new political parties had been formed (e.g., Obroda, Green Party, Social Democratic Party, [Czechoslovak] Democratic Initiative), but none seemed especially capable of capturing the following of a large portion of the population. Many observers were predicting that a coalition-type government would have to be formed in which no one political group would dominate. (A possible parallel to the situation in Czechoslovakia during the First Republic has been drawn.) However, the decision of the Civic Forum to sponsor candidates could mean a future government (assuming future free elections) dominated by Civic Forum representatives.

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