The Ukrainian Factor of the Prague Spring?

Petro Shelest and the Czechoslovak Year 1968 in the Light of Documents of the Ukrainian Security Service

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On 29 July 1968, Pyotr Grigorevich Grigorenko (Petro Hryhorevych Hryhorenko),[1] Major General of the Red Army of Ukrainian descent, a veteran of battles with Japan in Manchuria and of the Second World War, and one of the first Soviet dissidents, who was to become one of the co-founders of the Moscow Helsinki Group and the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, handed over a letter at the Czechoslovak Embassy in Moscow, which could be regarded – just like the better-known letter of Russian writer and political prisoner Anatoly Tichonovich Marchenko[2] – as a warning against an intervention of the Soviet army, albeit rather indirect. According to Grigorenko's own recollections, his letter, which probably did not make it to the

1 Names of publicly known personalities of Ukrainian descent are first presented in Russian transcription followed by the Ukrainian form (in brackets). The only exception is the main character of the article, Shelest, whose first name – because of the manifestly Ukrainian self-identification of its bearer – is transcribed as Petro (instead of the Russian form Pyotr). As to other Ukrainians mentioned in Soviet documents quoted herein, in respect of whom no detailed information is available, we have retained the original form of their names.

2 An open letter of Anatoly Marchenko to the world press in support of the Prague Spring. In: MARCHENKO, Anatoly: *Žij jako všichni* [Live like everybody]. Praha, Revolver Revue 1990, pp. 110–116. Also available online on the website of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/pamet-a-dejiny/rok68/dopis.pdf*.

Czechoslovak leadership at that time, read as follows: "I do not think true communists will interfere with your noble efforts, and I do not believe even more in a possible Soviet intervention. Brezhnev is a communist and, moreover, a soldier. He understands Czechoslovakia can thwart a Soviet invasion easily. All it takes is holding main roads from the German Democratic Republic, Poland and the USSR and defending airports. Hungary can be easily stopped by a threat of retaliatory measures. Brezhnev understands that all of this would mean a war which, given the circumstances, would be no less dangerous for the Soviet Union than it would be for Czechoslovakia."[3] Before visiting the Czechoslovak Embassy in Moscow, he allegedly told Alexei Evgrafovich Kosterin, a dissident and advocate of the Chechens, Ingush, and Crimean Tatars: "Brezhnev, although he is a blockhead, will not risk a war. All his hopes rely only on a moment of surprise. A war would be a lunatic act for him, in particular because the Czechoslovak army is the most capable armed force in Eastern Europe and Czechoslovak people, as we could see, unanimously support their government. Under the circumstances, such a military adventure may cost Brezhnev and his government their heads. Czechoslovakia's resistance may spark off anti-imperialist spin-off forces in the German Democratic Republic, Poland, and even the Soviet Union."[4]

The Ukrainian Factor

The General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid Iliych Brezhnev did not belong to those Soviet leaders who were in favour of the invasion, and the question why and on what grounds he finally decided for it remains a discussed topic even now, one of the open questions being what information he or Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, the then Chairman of the Committee for State Security (*Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti* – KGB) of the Soviet Union, had at their disposal. However, it is possible to describe the information available to the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Petro Yuchymovych Shelest. Together with his predecessor in the seat of the leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, Nikolai Viktorovich Podgorny (Mykola Viktorovych Pidhorny), he belonged to the strongest supporters of an armed intervention in Czechoslovakia. Shelest took part in all top-level Soviet meetings discussing the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and he himself was personally very involved. Moreover, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union tasked him with

3 The letter could not be found in Czech archives. I am quoting from my own translation of: GRIGORENKO, P. G.: *V podpole mozhno vstretit tol'ko krys…* New York, Detinec 1981. Also available online at: *http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/grigorenko/index.html*.

4 *Ibid.*

maintaining contacts with the so-called "healthy forces" in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and it was Shelest whom Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Vasil Biľak handed over the infamous letter of invitation in public toilettes in Bratislava on 3 August in the presence of a KGB officer.[5]

Shelest, the native (born in 1908) of the village of Andriyivka, off Kharkov, both parents of whom spoke Ukrainian, started working for a railway company at the age of 14. At 20, he was co-opted in the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and made his way up to the position of the First Secretary of the Communist Party in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which he held between 1963 and 1972. After his dismissal, he spent a short spell as Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (the Soviet government); in 1973, he was forced to resign to all positions he held. He then worked in the aviation industry outside Ukrainian territory and died in Moscow in 1997. A satisfactory biography dealing with Shelest's life has not yet been written, probably due to his political downfall although we know the diaries he was writing for two decades at the peak of his career.[6]

The purpose of the presented article is to examine the role of Petro Shelest in the formulation of the Soviet attitude towards Czechoslovakia using both his diary entries and documents of the Committee for State Security (KGB) of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which he was receiving while holding the position of the First Secretary of the Communist Party in Ukraine. Was the first man of Soviet Ukraine a supporter of an armed intervention against the Prague Spring from the very beginning, or did his opinion evolve? Was he influenced in any way by Secret Service reports? And how important was the situation in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic itself for the formation of the attitude of Shelest and the whole Soviet leadership?

In 2009, US Cold War historian Mark Kramer, who had already pointed out the role of the KGB, the Ukrainian factor, and the role of Petro Shelest himself earlier, claimed that members of the Politburo had been convinced of a threat to vital Soviet

5 See KRAMER, Mark (ed.): Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968, Part 1: New Evidence from the Diary of Petro Shelest. In: *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 10. – Washington, D. C., Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars 1998. Also available online at: *https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHPBulletin10_p6.pdf*. For the text of the letter of invitation in the Czech original and translated into Russian, see, for example: Zvací dopis v češtině: Text, který odstartoval krvavé události v srpnu 1968 [The letter of invitation in Czech: The text which sparked off the bloody events in August 1968]. In: *100+1 zahraničních zajímavostí* [online], 21 August 2018 [cit. 2019.11.01]. Available: *https://www.stoplusjednicka.cz/zvaci-dopis-v-cestine-text-ktery-odstartoval-krvave-udalosti-v-srpnu-1968*.

6 After falling out of favour, Shelest buried the unique diaries he had been maintaining from 1953 in the garden of his weekend cottage and processed the information contained therein with the assistance of historians only after Brezhnev's death. They were published only after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. SHELEST, Pyotr Efimovich: … *da ne sudimy budete: Dnevnikovye zapisi, vospominanija chlena Politburo KPSS.* Moskva, Edition 1995, p. 580.

interests by a combination of political, ideological and military concerns.[7] He also supplemented conclusions drawn by Grey Hodnett and Petro Potichny,[8] namely that there was an important link between the situation in Ukraine and events in Czechoslovakia, by stating that Soviet leaders had believed in it. In his opinion, Soviet power elites interpreted domestic political changes in Czechoslovakia as a major threat to the cohesion of the Eastern Bloc, and they were even more concerned with positive reflections of the Prague Spring among students in different regions of the Soviet Union. Insofar as relations with Czechoslovakia were concerned, the Politburo and the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union were, according to Kramer, not very dependent on lower-level Communist Party bodies and state organization, and information generally flowed from the top to the bottom.[9] What information, then, did the Politburo members use to make their decisions? As the supreme Ukrainian representative, Petro Shelest was in a unique position, if for nothing else, then for a common border between Ukraine and Czechoslovakia, intensive cross-border contacts between the two republics, and the Ukrainian minority living in eastern Slovakia.

So far, there have been only a few editions of documents from Russian archives that have briefly touched upon details of the Soviet decision-making process. However, they did not contain any key documents of the Committee for State Security. On the other hand, reports of officers of the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union, which only repeated Soviet stereotypes about the Prague Spring being an attempted counterrevolution supported by Western secret services, were published in a separate volume without any detailed analysis.[10] As Russian

7 KRAMER, Mark: The Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia: New Interpretations. In: *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 3. – Washington D.C., Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars 1993, p. 11. Also available online at: *https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHPBulletin3.pdf*. For operations of the KGB during the occupation, see ŽÁČEK, Pavel: KGB a srpen 1968: Role sovětských "poradců" při okupaci Československa [The KGB and August 1968: The role of Soviet "advisors" during the occupation of Czechoslovakia]. In: SVOBODA, Libor (ed.): *Solitér: Pocta historikovi Václavu Veberovi* [The solitaire: A tribute to historian Václav Veber]. Praha, Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů 2012, pp. 307–337.

8 KRAMER, Mark: The Kremlin, the Prague Spring, and the Brezhnev Doctrine, p. 37. In: archive.org [online], 01.09.2009 [cit. 2019.11.01]. Available at: *https://archive.org/stream/TheKremlinThePragueSpringandtheBrezhnevDoctrinebyMarkKramer2009-09-01*. Compare HODNETT, Grey – POTICHNY, Petro: *The Ukraine and the Czechoslovak Crisis.* (Occasional Paper, No. 6.) Canberra, Department of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University 1970.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 34.

10 ZDANOVICH, A. A. – LASHKUL, V. F. – MORUKOV, Yu. N. – TOTROV, Yu. Ch. (ed.): *Chekhoslovatskiye sobytiya 1968 goda glazami KGB i MVD SSSR: Sbornik dokumentov.* Moskva, Obyedinyonnaja redaktsiya Ministerstva vnutrennikh del Rossii 2010. See also KARNER, Stefan – TOMILINA, Natalja – TSCHUBARYAN, Alexander – BISCHOF, Günter – ISHCHENKO, Viktor – PROZUMENSHCHIKOV, Mikhail – RUGGENTHALER, Peter – TŮMA, Oldřich – WILKU, Manfred (ed.): *Prager Frühling: Das internationale Krisenjahr / Prazhskaya vesna: Mezhdunarodnyi krizis 1968 goda*, Vol. 2: *Dokumente /*

historian Vladimir Voronov wrote, there is no free access to documents pertaining to the year 1968 and Czechoslovakia and "the published documents do not cast any light on mechanisms of the formulation and approval of the decision to intervene; or on how information on which the approval of the decision to intervene by military force was based had been collected, analyzed and passed on to higher instances" (contrary to, for example, the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956).[11]

KGB Documents on Shelest's Desk

The archives of today's Ukrainian counterintelligence service (*Sluzhba bezpeky Ukrainy* – SBU) contain several dozens of available documents pertaining to the Prague Spring and early weeks of the occupation. These are reports sent to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic by the Ukrainian Committee for State Security (KGB), most of them signed by the chairman of the latter institution or exceptionally also by his deputy. Most of them also contain a note indicating that the information was read by the First Secretary of the Communist Party, and many of them were also submitted as a courtesy copy to the all-union headquarters of the Committee for State Security in Moscow. There are no records of tasking by the Communist Party and government; the instructions were probably given orally. Some of these documents, now available in the fund KGB Secretariat at the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Fund 16), were published by Mark Kramer in the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* on the basis of his research in the Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine (*Centralnyi derzhavnyi arkhiv gromadskych objednan' Ukrainy*), where documents of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic are stored. Other documents were published in 2010 on the website of the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR). Most of the published documents pertain to the post-invasion period, reflecting reactions of the Ukrainian people and sanctions imposed upon those who painted slogans, wrote leaflets, or merely expressed their disagreement with the sending of troops to Czechoslovakia orally.[12] However, the pre-occupation documents, which have not

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Dokumenty. Köln/R. – Weimar – Wien, Böhlau 2008. The first volume contains contributions by an international team of authors. For a Russian excerpt from the volume, which consists 115 documents, see CHUBARYAN, Alexandr – KARNER, Stefan – TOMILINA, Natalia (ed.): *"Prazhskaya vesna" i mezhdunarodnyi krizis 1968 goda: Dokumenty*. Moskva, Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiya" 2010.

11 VORONOV, Vladimir: Cherez polveka posle vtorzheniya. In: *Russkiy vopros* [online], 2018, No. 2 [cit. 2019.11.01]. Available at: *http://russkiivopros.com/?pag=one&id=759&kat=5&csl=85*.

12 KRAMER, Mark (ed.): Ukraine and the Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968, Part 2: New Evidence from the Ukrainian Archives. In: *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 14–15. Washington D. C., Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars 2003–2004, pp. 273–368. Also available

yet been used, are much more interesting from the viewpoint of the evaluation of the situation in Czechoslovakia and processes leading to a decision to resolve it by force. There are more than 70 of them in the Ukrainian archive and they provide both an insight into the KGB's thinking and give an idea of how the organization's members were operating. Although it is necessary to consider limitations arising from the nature of the documents produced by the secret service, and also from the fact that the KGB Headquarters in Moscow was undoubtedly paying greater attention to Czechoslovakia and that no operative files of the Ukrainian Committee for State Security are available, there is still a set of documents which can be used to reconstruct information which the secret service had on the situation in Czechoslovakia, how it evaluated developments in Czechoslovakia, and what Petro Shelest could learn from the documents.

Petro Shelest in the Decision-Making Process of the Soviet Politburo

As early as in the 1970s, Grey Hodnett and Petro Potichny noted the exceptional role of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic Petro Shelest, who, apart from Brezhnev, was the only Politburo member who had participated in all negotiations about the situation in Czechoslovakia with the latter country's representatives.[13] He behaved sharply and sometimes aggressively towards protagonists of the Prague Spring; during negotiations in Čierna nad Tisou on 30 July 1968, he even contemptuously called František Kriegel "a Galician Jew." However, Yuri Shapoval, a well-known Ukrainian historian, still claims that "there is no doubt that Shelest was never 'lobbying' for the aggressive act."[14] He nevertheless admits that Shelest had his share in the suppression of the Prague Spring.[15] Together with other Ukrainian historians, Shapoval emphasizes Shelest's effort for a greater cultural and economic autonomy of Ukraine demonstrated in his book *Ukraïno nasha Radians'ka* [Ukraine, Our Soviet Land] published in 1970. It

online at: *https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHPBulletin14-15_p3_1.pdf*. Publication of summary reports of the Ukrainian KGB on Czechoslovakia (1968–1969). In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. © ÚSTR 2008–2019 [cit. 2019.11.01]. Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/uvod/srpen-1968/dokumenty-kgb/*. See related articles: FAYZULIN, Jaroslav: Bagato ukrainciv vystupaly proty vvedennya radyanskih vijsk u Chekhoslovachchynu 1968 roku. In: *Zhurnal "Krajina,"* No. 434 (14 August 2018). Also available online at: *https://gazeta.ua/articles/history-journal/_bagato-ukrayinciv-vistupali-proti-vvedennya-radyanskih-vijsk-u-cehoslovachchinu-1968-roku/853535*; DMYTRUK, V. I.: Nezgodni: Podiy 1968 r. v Chekhoslovachchyni kriz pryzmu archivno-slidchykh sprav KDB URSR. In: TRON'KO, P. T. (ed.): *Istoria Ukrainy: Malovidomi imena, podiy, fakty.* Kyiv, Instytut istorii Ukrainy NAN Ukrajiny 2008, pp. 298–312. Also available online at: *http://politics.ellib.org.ua/pages-6282.html*.

13 HODNETT, G. – POTICHNYJ, P.: The Ukraine and the Czechoslovak Crisis, p. 81.

14 SHAPOVAL, Yuri: Petro Shelest: 100th anniversary of the birth of one of Ukraine's most spectacular political figures. In: *Den'/Day.Kyiv.ua* [online], 19 February 2008 [cit. 2019.11.01]. Available at: *https://day.kyiv.ua/en/article/culture/petro-shelest*.

15 See SHAPOVAL, Yuri: *Petro Shelest.* Kharkiv, Folio 2013, p. 64.

was actually this book which the Soviet leadership later used to criticize Shelest for his alleged ideological errors and idealization of Ukrainian history. Another reservation allegedly contributing to Shelest's downfall was his leniency towards the Ukrainian dissent[16]. Shelest nevertheless indicated a different reason in his memoirs, bitterly and repeatedly stating that "Brezhnev used the first opportunity to get rid of an undesirable witness and active participant in all Czechoslovak matters."[17]

However, Khrushchev's détente in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was indeed marked by an increased interest in Ukrainian culture, language, pre-Soviet history and Stalin's repressions, and Shelest, although criticized by many, initially supported these efforts. Samizdat and other dissident activities in Ukraine were also growing, as the security machine received instructions to intervene against the national movement only after Leonid Brezhnev had come to power. In the meantime, the nationalism-driven unrest, strengthened by a living memory of fights with the anti-communist and nationalist Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), had also affected members of the Communist Party. In 1965, first Ukrainian dissidents were arrested and sentenced to many years in prison, but informal cultural and dissident activities continued to grow stronger. In his March 1968 diary entry describing his meeting with Ukrainian poet and translator Dmytro Pavlychko,[18] Shelest noted: "I had a lengthy and serious conversation with him. I told him openly that he was wasting his talent and heading in the wrong direction, reprimanding him for doing so, and that he might be sorry for it, but it might be too late. He agreed with all my arguments and opinions. The conversation with D. Pavlychko indicated that I should meet and have a serious talk with the Secretary of the Union of Writers of Ukraine."[19]

While Shelest's concerns about the situation in Ukraine were growing, he also began to be heavily involved in analyses of events and developments in Czechoslovakia. In his eyes, the situation was obvious. The diary entry describing his stay in Prague between 21 and 25 February 1968, reads as follows: "The counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia is picking up strength. Celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the Czechoslovak revolution […] were peaceful, and even pro-active, at first sight. During the ceremonial meeting, A. Dubček delivered a fairly optimistic to pompous speech. […] The naivety of A. Dubček consisted in the fact that he had not been

16 However, when Shelest was holding his post, there were, on the other hand, repressions against the so-called 1960-ers. See KASYANOV, Georgi: *Nezgodni: Ukrainska inteligentsia v rusi oporu 1960–1980-ch rokiv.* Kyiv, Klio 2019.

17 SHELEST, P. Ye.: … *da ne sudimy budete*, p. 385.

18 Dmytro Vasylovych Pavlychko (born in 1929) came from western Ukraine, was imprisoned in 1945 and 1946 for suspected membership in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. After his release, he studied philology at the University of Lvov, and, having graduated, he was employed in the Ukrainian language magazine *Zhovten'*, and later in the Kiev Centre of Ukrainian Writers. In 1954, he joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. At the end of the 1980s, he was one of the co-founders of the People's Movement for Reconstruction (*Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy – Rukh*) and was later appointed the ambassador of independent Ukraine to Poland and Slovakia.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 297.

orienting himself too well and had not understood all political complexities and consequences. No one was openly opposing law and order yet. But the 'creeping counterrevolution' operating in secrecy was sparing no effort. Covert forces that had taken control of all mass media, various clubs, and associations were busy as well. There was a great attack against the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, security authorities, and the country's economic policy going on. It could be felt that the entire 'sequence of events' was controlled by the experienced hand of the CIA and secret services of the Federal Republic of Germany. Unfortunately, our intelligence services were not established there too well."[20]

The chapter dedicated to the year 1968 in Shelest's diaries is called *It was possible to do without the intervention of Czechoslovakia*. According to it, Shelest himself was prepared to use the Soviet army in Czechoslovakia upon request of Czechoslovak leaders, but Leonid Brezhnev's "confused actions brought the whole matter to the entry of Warsaw Treaty troops into Czechoslovakia without its government's knowledge, which meant, at the end of the day, serious international political losses for our country and the Communist Party."[21]

State Security Officers as a Major Source of Information

It is not clear whether Petro Shelest was criticizing the work of the all-union intelligence service, or the performance of the First Directorate of the Committee for State Security of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, whose information on Czechoslovakia was indeed meagre, in spite of the use of substantial intelligence assets.

The Ukrainian secret Police was tailing Czechoslovak citizens on the territory of Ukraine, checking mail to and from Czechoslovakia, and gleaning information from Ukrainian citizens travelling to Czechoslovakia, but the primary source of information sent to Petro Shelest and other Communist Party representatives were officers of the Czechoslovak State Security (StB), whom their Soviet counterparts trusted blindly. They disagreed with, and most of them were also afraid of, the Prague Spring. Reports sent to Ukrainian political leaders generally state that they were meeting KGB officers on their own initiative. Most of them contain diatribes against Minister of Interior Josef Pavel and against Czechoslovak media, information on attacks against members of the security apparatus, and warnings against a growing influence of "right-wing elements," Zionism, or "anti-Soviet propaganda." The writers' motivation was practically never considered by their Soviet colleagues, although by that time a discussion on malevolent acts of security forces during the 1950s had already started in Czechoslovakia, and the effort of their members to avoid potential sanctions or punishments should have been taken into account. During a meeting which took place in the border railway station of Čierna nad Tisou on 2 May 1968, unspecified representatives of "Czechoslovak State Security authorities" even asked the Soviet Union

20 *Ibid.*, p. 294.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 301.

to provide a refuge for them on its territory should "extremely grave circumstances" arise.[22] Similar information was also coming to the Soviet Union from the embassy in Prague. It was on the basis of this information that the Soviet Politburo ordered the ministries of defence and civil aviation, as late as on 24 August, to arrange immediate transportation of family members of State Security leaders from Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union to ensure their safety, as they were regarded threatened.[23] Instead of an asylum for their next of kin, however, most of them earned a career advance after the occupation of Czechoslovakia (short biographies of the most important of them are attached as footnotes).

On the other hand, the attention of the Ukrainian KGB probably did not much good to Czechoslovak Consul General in Kiev Josef Horák, who, according to a report of Ryabov and Muravkin,[24] train attendants on the Moscow – Prague train on 18 March 1968, got drunk and allegedly disparaged the victory of the Soviet ice hockey team at the Winter Olympics in Grenoble, threatening that the Czechs would beat the Soviets next year.[25] As early as on 22 March, the Ukrainian secret

22 Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 341/n dated 3 May 1968 (Amendment to report No. 337/n dated 1 May 1968): Meeting of officers of the Czechoslovak State Security and the KGB of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0016.pdf*. All translations of quotations from these documents used herein were done by the author.

23 VONDROVÁ Jitka – NAVRÁTIL, Jaromír: *Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize 1967–1970: Dokumenty ÚV KSSS 1966–1969* [The international context of the Czechoslovak crisis 1967–1970: Documents of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 1966–1969]. (Prameny k dějinám československé krize 1967–1970 [Sources on the history of the Czechoslovak Crisis 1967–1970], Vol. IV/4.) Praha – Brno, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR – Doplněk 2011, p. 235, Document 83 – Resolution of the 97th meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on agenda item 50: On satisfying the request of the Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia, Moscow, 24 August 1968.

24 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No.162/n dated 18 March 1968: Behaviour of the Czechoslovak consul general on the train. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0011.pdf*.

25 At the March 1969 Ice Hockey World Championship in Stockholm, the Czechoslovak team indeed beat their Soviet opponents, and even twice for that matter, although the Soviet Union ultimately won gold medals and Czechoslovakia finished third.

Josef Horák (born in 1923) attended a 10-year secondary school in Moscow; from September 1941, he worked in an electrical workshop in Prague-Vršovice. He was imprisoned during the war, then attended and graduated from the Communist Party school, and subsequently worked at the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in Pardubice. From 1 April 1960, he was the Head of the Secretariat of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and from July 1964 to the end of October 1968 the Consul General in Kiev. As of 28 February 1970, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs terminated his employment contract by an agreement in which, however, the standard clause expressing thanks for his work was omitted. (According to Josef Horák's personal file in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.)

police reported two personal meetings with Czechoslovak citizens to Petro Shelest. Rather uncharacteristically, it introduced them in a broader context as acting "[…] upon orders from Prague, the purpose of the meeting being to pass, via our channels, information of a calming nature to relevant authorities." The first person to contact KGB representatives on his own was Ján Majer, the State Security Chief in the East Slovakia region.[26] During the friendly meeting on the border on 20 March, he "repeatedly emphasized that leaders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia had intentionally resolved to start a broad discussion on existing problems in order to identify and do away with them." In his opinion, the opposition against President Antonín Novotný had been growing after the January meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and the departure of General Bohumír Lomský from the position of the minister of defence had been unavoidable. Changes in the security apparatus, abolition of censorship, and the federalization of the country were being prepared; however, Majer also repeatedly emphasized that Alexander Dubček, the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, was a great friend of the Soviet Union supporting an expansion of mutual cooperation in all areas.[27]

The other Czechoslovak informer of the Ukrainians was Martin Magdal, a representative of an unnamed forwarding enterprise. During two meetings with KGB representatives in Izmail and Odessa, he confirmed that Antonín Novotný would be removed from the president's office and that there would also be changes at the Ministry of Interior and the Office of the Attorney General; in his opinion, however, relations between the two countries and their Communist Parties were not to be

26 Ján Majer (born in 1923), a worker, participated in the Slovak National Uprising and later fought in the ranks of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps. He became a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in August 1946, held various positions in the National Security Corps and border guards. Between 1951 and 1953, he was the Chief of the Regional Public Security Directorate in Banská Bystrica. In 1954–1955, he studied in the Soviet Union, and then, until 1963, he held the post of the Deputy Chief (Operations) of the Main Public Security Directorate in Prague; until May 1967, he was the Chief of the National Security Corps Regional Directorate in Košice. In March 1968, he attended a seminar for NSC scientific research workers, and was appointed Deputy Minister of Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on 21 June 1968. He advanced to the position of First Deputy Minister of Interior in September 1968 and was the State Secretary of the Ministry of Interior from January 1969. In May 1970, he was expelled from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on the grounds of "serious political mistakes in August 1968" and released from duty. He unsuccessfully applied for out-of-court rehabilitation after 1989. (According to the personal file of Ján Majer deposited in the Security Services Archive.)

27 Report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 211/n dated 22 March 1968: Meeting of officers of the [Košice] Directorate of the Ministry of Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the KGB Directorate of the Trans-Carpathian Region. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0002.pdf*.

disturbed or adversely affected, and the same applied to Czechoslovakia's loyalty to socialism.[28]

Other information on developments in Czechoslovakia in Petro Shelest's fund is generally random and fragmentary. This is rather surprising, especially as regards the Ukrainian minority in the eastern part of Slovakia. On 9 April, the Committee for State Security informed Petro Shelest that an extended meeting of the Central Committee of the Cultural Union of Ukrainian Workers (*Kulturna spilka ukrainskikh trudyashchikh Chekhoslovakii*) had taken place in Prešov on 11 March, whose appeal addressing the Ukrainians-Rusyns living in Czechoslovakia was published in the Ukrainian-language newspaper *Nove Zhytya* (New life) and supported autonomy within Czechoslovakia for the Ukrainian minority.[29] Another report on the situation in the region of East Slovakia, dated 30 May, devoted just one page to the status of the Ukrainian minority, claiming that "it has worsened due to the so-called democratization" and that its members felt threatened by Slovak nationalism; to avoid discrimination, they claimed allegiance to the Slovak nation and opposed the introduction of the Ukrainian language in schools. At the same time, activities of the Cultural Union of Ukrainian Workers were struggling with many obstacles. This situation was, according to the KGB report, being made use of "Ukrainian nationalist elements to activate their operations."[30]

"Maintaining Socialism Is Possible Only with the Help of Soviet People"

Allegedly acting on his own initiative, Mr. Majer met representatives of the Ukrainian KGB again, on 17 April and 13 May 1968. During the first meeting, to which he was accompanied by Colonel Koval, he still claimed that developments following the most recent meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia had been positive and that "the number of uncontrolled radio, TV or press presentations is decreasing and there has been a substantial reduction of the number of demagogical speeches," with the "ongoing events being under the control of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia."[31]

28 *Ibid.*

29 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 263/n dated 9 April 1968: Discussion of the Ukrainian minority concerning the status of Ukrainians in Czechoslovakia. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0006.pdf*.

30 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 480/n dated 30 May 1968: General information on the political situation in the region of East Slovakia. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0036.pdf*.

31 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 320/n dated 24 April 1968: Meeting of officers of the [Košice] Directorate of the Ministry of Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the KGB

During the May meeting, he already spoke about "the activation of anti-socialist forces, demagogical and anarchistic elements," right-wing intelligentsia and Zionist elements controlling the media.[32]

Shelest was receiving warning reports from multiple East Slovak sources from mid-May 1968. Some of them were produced by Captain Široký, Commanding Officer of the State Security (StB) station in Čierna nad Tisou, who on 13 May allegedly stated, *inter alia*, that "the Czechoslovak people are sure that if the rule of socialism […] in the country was threatened, the Soviet people and their army would provide appropriate armed assistance to them."[33] It is true that he was pleased, early in June, that "the situation in the State Security forces has been visibly improving. Their structures are dissociating themselves from the MV [Ministry of Interior] system and organizing a committee under the government. The committee is headed by a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Comrade Shelkovich (*sic*), of Slovak nationality, participant in the Second World War, a wartime partisan[34] known for his objective and principled attitudes"; however, he also noted that "there has been a visible activation of Sudetenland Germans" who often visited Czechoslovak border regions. He also claimed there was an increased presence of members of US armed forces in western parts of the country.[35]

Captain Široký's opinion that "maintaining socialism in the current situation is possible only with the help of Soviet people" was supported by Ivan Haščák,[36]

Directorate of the Trans-Carpathian Region. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0013.pdf*.

32 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 402/n dated 16 May 1968: Meeting of officers of the [Košice] Directorate of the Ministry of Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the KGB Directorate of the Trans-Carpathian Region. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0025.pdf*.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Probably Viliam Šalgovič, who was at that time a member of the Central Control and Auditing Commission of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, maintaining close contacts with Soviet security forces, but he had never been a partisan.

35 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 522/n dated 12 June 1968: Meeting of officers of the [Košice] Directorate of the Ministry of Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the KGB Directorate of the Trans-Carpathian Region. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0046.pdf*.

36 Ján Haščák (born in 1923, of Ukrainian nationality and Orthodox religion); he joined the State Security in 1949, attended a one-year course for operatives in the Soviet Union in 1956, then was Deputy Chief of the Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior in Košice, in 1963 he was dismissed for health reasons. Until 1970 he was Deputy Chief of the Fourth Department of the State Security Regional Directorate in Košice, in 1973 he advanced to the position of Chief of the Fourth Department. In his biography written for the State Security in 1972, he mentioned that he had been concerned by anti-Soviet speeches

head of the Fourth Department of the State Security Regional Directorate of East Slovakia, in a letter dated 21 May and addressed to Deputy Chairman of the Ukrainian KGB Troyak.[37] At the same time, even more alarming reports were delivered to Kiev. The first one was written by Jozef Černický,[38] Senior Lieutenant serving at the State Security station in Čierna nad Tisou. It claimed that a 18 May rally in Prague had demanded "the end of friendship with the Soviet Union, toppling of the government of Dubček, Svoboda and Černík, and the departure from the Warsaw Treaty."[39] The second letter arrived to Shelest's desk directly from Prague. Addressed to Sergei Khlopkov, ex-advisor of Czechoslovak security forces, the chief of an unspecified department of the local State Security Headquarters Jindřich Beneš[40] was describing the situation in Czechoslovakia as "being even worse than before February 1948."[41]

According to available documents, the highest-placed informers of the Ukrainian KGB were Ondrej Dovina, State Security Chief in the East Slovak Region, and Ján Hanuliak, Dovina's deputy.[42] In a "special report" dated 4 April Petro Shelest was

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and appearances during the Prague Spring and that he had maintained written contacts with his Ukrainian counterparts. (According to the personal file of Ján Haščák deposited in the Security Services Archive.)

37 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No.175 dated 28 May 1968: Information provided by the State Security of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic for Deputy Chairman of the KGB of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0038.pdf*.

38 Jozef Černický (born in 1933) joined the State Security in 1956 and worked in various positions in the Department of Railway Transportation of the Ministry of Interior. In 1970, he was promoted to Deputy Chief of the State Security Department in Spišská Nová Ves, and he retired for health reasons in August 1979. (According to the personal file of Jozef Černický deposited in the Security Services Archive.)

39 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 434/n dated 21 May 1968: Information concerning events in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0031.pdf*.

40 Jindřich Beneš (born in 1926), a wartime partisan in the region of Třebíč, then a member of the National Security Corps. In August 1968, he was the Chief of the Sixth Department of the National Security Corps Regional Directorate in Prague, and he worked in the Secretariat of the Deputy Minister of Interior after the occupation. In 1984, he retired on his own request. (According to the personal file of Jindřich Beneš deposited in the Security Services Archive. In the Soviet document, he is referred to as Beneš Jindra.)

41 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 474/n dated 31 May 1968: Information about the situation in Czechoslovakia. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0040.pdf*.

42 For unclear reasons, the Ukrainian KGB referred to Dovina as Deputy Chief and to Hanuliak as Department Head.

notified that they had met with leaders of the KGB Directorate of the Trans-Carpathian Region upon their own request three days earlier, when Dovina had returned from a business trip to Prague.[43] According to the six-page document, Dovina was dividing participants in events in Czechoslovakia into three groups: the largest one, consisting of people "defending the socialist orientation in domestic policy, friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries." Just like other KGB informers from mid-May, Dovina characterized the second group as one comprising right-wing elements oriented to the West and striving for "a restoration of the bourgeois order." Remaining participants in the Prague Spring were, in Dovina's opinion, "demagogues, declassed and similar irresponsible elements with no clear political opinions." According to both Dovina and Hanuliak, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was struggling for the socialist orientation of the country with right-wingers. "All propaganda tools (newspapers, radio, TV) have come into uncontrolled use by their editors-in-chief. This is why even the *Rudé právo* daily, the newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, has been publishing articles the content of which contradicts the line of the Central Committee," they complained. Both State Security officers also criticized Polish and Hungarian media, accusing them of non-objective coverage of events in Czechoslovakia, and shared their other impressions and guesses, such as that Jozef Lenárt would no longer be the Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak

Ondrej Dovina (born in 1925) joined the National Security Corps in September 1948; in 1957, he attended a training course in operative work in Moscow, and then was appointed Deputy Chief i/c operations of the State Security Regional Directorate in Košice. Between May 1966 and January 1969, he was Chief of the State Security Regional Directorate in Košice, between February 1969 and April 1974 he was Chief of the Main State Security Directorate of the Slovak Socialist Republic. From July 1974 to April 1984 he was First Deputy Chief of the Main Directorate (Intelligence) of the Federal Ministry of Interior, then Senior Officer-Specialist of the First Department of the Organization and Operations Section of the National Security Corps Directorate of the capital city of Bratislava and the West Slovak Region. He retired in late July 1987 in the rank of colonel. (According to the personal file of Ondrej Dovina deposited in the Security Services Archive.)

Ján Hanuliak (1923–2000), joined the National Security Corps in 1946. He was monitoring the so-called eastern emigration (Ukrainian and Russian) in Košice in the 1950s. He served as Deputy Chief (1966–1969) and then until 1970 Chief of the State Security Regional Directorate in Košice. From 1970 he was Chief of the Fourth Directorate (Monitoring) of the Federal Ministry of Interior, from February 1971 he was Deputy, and between 1973 and 1979 he was First Deputy of the Federal Minister of Interior. Then until 1980, he worked as a personal consultant of the Federal Minister of Interior and until July 1982 as the representative of the Federal Ministry of Interior in the Soviet Union. (According to the personal file of Ján Hanuliak deposited in the Security Services Archive.)

43 Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 244/k dated 4 April 1968: A meeting of officers of the Czechoslovak State Security and the KGB Directorate of the Trans-Carpathian Region. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0003.pdf*. (Instead of using the proper version of the first names of the two officers, the report uses their incorrect initials – A. Dovina and I. Hanuliak.)

government, that the situation among students had been calmed down by speeches of Speaker of the National Assembly Josef Smrkovský, or that US troops had been massing along the border of the Federal Republic of Germany, with their Ukrainian colleagues. They also spoke about ethnic problems in Czechoslovakia, pointing out that the position of Slovaks was not always equal to that of the Czechs.

Accompanied by his subordinate, Captain Sijka, Lieutenant Colonel Hanuliak met with representatives of the Ukrainian KGB once again on 17 May.[44] Having discussed current issues of joint operations, Hanuliak informed his counterparts about improvements of the domestic political situation after the Communist Party had tightened its control over propaganda tools. He explained that the so-called democratization process had indeed garnered widespread support and that the new Minister of Interior Josef Pavel was suffering from sclerosis and thus was unable to work, but that Dubček's leadership had already realized, in his opinion, that events had been proceeding in an undesirable direction. Hanuliak praised the State Security, whose officers had supported appeals of their leaders to the government; however, he claimed that Public Security (police) officers were not strong enough and that some of them had resigned to their membership in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and joined the Czechoslovak Socialist Party. Hanuliak also notified his Ukrainian colleagues of a warning of the Polish Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*) against a Jewish threat. According to the report, Jews, such as František Kriegel (mistakenly referred to as Kreper), Chairman of the Central Committee of the National Front, were trying to get hold of leading positions in Czechoslovakia. Hanuliak himself opined that it had been Jews rather than State Security officers and Soviet advisors accused by the press, who had been leading the country at that time and initiated the political trial of the ex-Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Rudolf Slánský. Hanuliak found just one positive effect of the ongoing events; the unveiling of all enemies of socialism and the Soviet Union.

In the summer months, the situation got even worse in the eyes of the East Slovak State Security Directorate. Dovina warned that "if the existing situation among leaders of the Communist Party continues, the political situation may indeed deteriorate (the Communist Party Congress will take place in September), and it will not be possible to deal with enemy forces without direct help of the Soviet Union." He even demanded an immediate meeting to hand over the translation of the "Two Thousand Words" manifesto to the Ukrainian KGB just one day after its publication. He himself regarded the text anti-socialistic, anti-state, and counter-revolutionary. However, he also gave the KGB an evaluation of the manifesto by

44 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 419/n dated 19 May 1968: Meeting of officers of the East Slovak Directorate of the Ministry of Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the KGB Directorate of the Trans-Carpathian Region. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0029.pdf*.

Alois Indra, Secretary of the Central Committee, which the latter had addressed to the First Secretary of the East Slovak Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia. Dovina himself added that "assurances of Communist Party leaders that they control principal political *processes in the country do not match reality*."[45] On 1 July, the reports of the East Slovak State Security Directorate were delivered to Moscow and also made available to Petro Shelest.[46]

In August, Ján Hanuliak handed over additional documents to his Ukrainian KGB counterparts – an excerpt from an order of the Czechoslovak Minister of Interior the title of which was "Some measures to implement the first phase of the Action Programme of the Czechoslovak counterintelligence service." According to notes on the document, even that was passed on to the KGB Headquarters in Moscow.[47]

What Soviet Citizens Heard in Czechoslovakia

Compared to the information on Czechoslovakia provided by the State Security, which the Ukrainian KGB was passing on to Petro Shelest continuously and uncritically, it was making use of Soviet citizens to meet information needs of the Central Committee of Ukrainian Communist Party rather intermittently and more cautiously. Four reports produced by Soviet citizens in May 1968 only increased Petro Shelest's concerns. In early June, he noted in his diary that "a certain segment of young people, in particular students, and journalists are not orienting themselves too well in the complicated situation in Czechoslovakia and consequently, there are some unhealthy interpretations, such as that society needs 'unlimited democracy.' And very few people know what the 'unlimited democracy' is – that it can bring us to full-fledged anarchy."[48]

For example, Vassily Lyubchenko, a doctoral candidate of Kiev State University, who had been studying in Brno from 1967, evaluated the situation in Czechoslovakia

45 Highlighted in the original when the text was processed at Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

46 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 603/n dated 1 July 1968: Meeting of officers of the East Slovak Directorate of the Ministry of Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the KGB Directorate of the Trans-Carpathian Region. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0106.pdf*.

47 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 737/n dated 15 August 1968: Excerpt from the order of the Minister of Interior of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic "Some measures to implement the first phase of the Action Programme of the Czechoslovak counterintelligence service." In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0182.pdf*.

48 SHELEST, P. Ye: … *da ne sudimy budete*, p. 316.

as unstable while visiting Kiev for a short time.[49] The so-called free discussion was, in his opinion, overflowing into hostile and abusive attacks against the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, and intellectuals were calling for an independent domestic and foreign policy. According to Lyubchenko, students expected that free discussion and democratic reforms would slowly find their way also among Soviet students. And, moreover, nationalists from Prešov had allegedly begun a campaign demanding the return of Carpathian Ruthenia to Czechoslovakia.

In a summary report dated 16 May, officers of the Ukrainian KGB stated that "Soviet citizens now in Czechoslovakia on business trips, as members of organized tourist groups, or on private visits are vividly commenting on events taking place in the country."[50] In doing so, they often quoted unspecified persons without providing any context or details. They claimed people in Czechoslovakia were talking about the publication of works of Soviet dissidents Yuli Markovich Daniel and Andrei Donatovich Sinyavsky, appeals to rehabilitate Jozef Tiso and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk were spreading, while, on the other hand, Soviet flags were disappearing from houses, and restaurant workers were less and less willing to speak Russian. In another report, the hodgepodge was supplemented by a piece of information on a decomposition of the Czechoslovak People's Army allegedly caused by democratization provided to a holidaying Soviet citizen by Ladislav Prais, a retired major of the Czechoslovak air force and business director of the company Aero. The inconsistent document also reproduced statements of other Soviet citizens; they described, for example, a demonstration of students carrying "Away with the Russians!" banners in Pilsen; an alleged penetration of bourgeois representative to the government and trade unions; or a flood of West German tourists in Prague, who were expected to spread propaganda news about an occupation of Sudetenland by US troops.[51]

A somewhat more compact report dated 3 June described a meeting of a member of the State Dancing Troupe of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and Ladislav Pata, a former teacher and Communist Party official and at that time manager of a tourist camp off Chomutov, who had allegedly doubted the ability

49 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 401/n dated 15 May 1968: A story of Kiev State University student who left to study in Czechoslovakia in 1967. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0024.pdf*.

50 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 403/n dated 16 May 1968: Discussion of Soviet citizens who have visited Czechoslovakia on events taking place in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0018.pdf*.

51 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 413/n dated 16 May 1968: Reactions of Soviet citizens who visited Czechoslovakia to events taking place in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0027.pdf*.

of the government and Communist Party representatives to stabilize the situation in the country.[52] Members of the Ukrainian Secret Service also informed Communist Party leaders in Kiev that they had dispatched one of their operatives as "counterintelligence protection" of a group of tourists from Donetsk visiting the Days of Ukraine in Czechoslovakia in June 1968. No report on this trip is available. However, Petro Shelest had access to the information concerning the Ukrainian festival, and provably used it in his confrontative speech during negotiations with the Czechoslovak Communist Party delegation in Čierna nad Tisou at the end of July, "critically pointing at certain provocations of hostile nationalist and chauvinist elements." He also complained that "Ukrainian artists were not given an opportunity of direct contacts with Czechoslovak workers."[53]

What Czechoslovak Citizens Were Writing to Ukraine

The Ukrainian KGB was monitoring correspondence from Czechoslovakia from the beginning of April 1968. Both Petro Shelest and the KGB Headquarters in Moscow were acquainted with contents of several (unfortunately undated) letters. L. Kuliková from Bratislava wrote to her acquaintance in Kiev about the abolition of censorship, rehabilitations, and planned federalization of the country. Yuri (probably Juraj) Chára from Prague confessed to an unnamed secondary school student from Odessa that everyone wanted a free and socialist Czechoslovakia and asked her to tell all her fellow students that "if your troops come to Czechoslovakia, many students, and me first, will fight as guerillas against all who want to destroy our freedom."[54]

Quotations from another five letters contained a conspicuously high frequency of words such as "revolution" or "*coup d'état*." For example, an unidentified woman wrote to her relative in Donetsk: "At the moment, there is a political coup going on in our country. There has been a no-confidence motion against several ministers and the president. Meetings take place everywhere, sometimes until 2 am or

52 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 482/n dated 3 June 1968: Information about events in Czechoslovakia. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0037.pdf*.

53 VONDROVÁ Jitka – NAVRÁTIL, Jaromír: *Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize 1967–1970: Červenec–srpen 1968* [The international context of the Czechoslovak crisis 1967–1970: July – August 1968]. (Prameny k dějinám československé krize 1967–1970 [Sources on the history of the Czechoslovak crisis 1967–1970], Vol. IV/2.) Praha – Brno, Ústav soudobých dějin AV ČR – Doplněk 1996, p. 130, Document 121.14 – Minutes of the speech of P. Shelest during the fourth session, Čierna nad Tisou, 30 July 1968, Note b.

54 Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 261/n dated 9 April 1968: Findings on how Czechoslovak citizens perceive and comment on the ongoing events. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0004.pdf*.

longer. We are leaning towards the West, i.e. the United States, England, France, the Federal Republic of Germany and others, much more than towards the Soviet Union. For the time being, it is not the government, but students, the intelligentsia and many workers. Elections to municipal and regional councils and to the parliament will soon take place.[55] I think the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia will lose."[56] Only two days later, officers of the Ukrainian Secret Police reported another five letters from Czechoslovakia which allegedly repeated the motifs of *coup d'état*, revolution, and abolition of censorship; moreover, they also mentioned support to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.[57]

On 1 May, officers of the Ukrainian KGB passed texts of two letters from Czechoslovakia to addressees living in Carpathian Ruthenia to political leaders in Kiev. The first of them (written in the Ukrainian language) warned against risks of the abolition of censorship, "unclear" situation after the publication of the "Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia," activation of the Greek Catholic Church, and rehabilitations which were allegedly supposed to include people who "were actively helping the fascists."[58] The second letter appreciated that Leonid Brezhnev had not supported the former supreme representative of the Communist Party and the state, Antonín Novotný, and that freedom and basic principles of democracy had been restored.[59] In his letter sent from Prešov to Volhynia, however, the author, A. Šlepecký, complained that "progress and democracy often turn into adventurism and anarchy. […] We must never forget that we were liberated by the heroic Soviet army and hundreds of thousands of its sons rest in eternal sleep in our country. […] If the orientation indeed changes, then there will be a genuine civil war. We will have no other option but to cross the Carpathian Mountains."[60]

The next report about letters from Czechoslovakia was submitted as late as at the end of July. First, on 24 July 1968, officers of the Ukrainian State Security sent their political leaders the full text of an intercepted letter written in Russian

55 The elections to lower representative bodies (national committees at all levels) were planned for May 1968, those to the National Assembly and the Slovak National Assembly were to take place in November 1968. As a result of ongoing political events, the latter were postponed until November 1971.

56 *Ibid.*

57 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 278/n dated 11 April 1968: Reactions of citizens of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to ongoing events in the country. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0007.pdf*.

58 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 338/n dated 1 May 1968: Letters of Czechoslovak citizens to Ukraine. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0019.pdf*.

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Arhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrainy*, Kiev (*ASBU*), fund (f.) 16, *opis* (signature – sign.) 1, sprava (file – sl.) 972, document (doc.) 15, Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 371/n dated 10 May 1968.

by 98 employees of the Design and Engineering Bureau of Vítkovice Steel Works in Ostrava to their counterparts working in Azovstal, Zhdanov (now Mariupol). It rebutted disinformation of the Soviet press about the situation in Czechoslovakia and assured the recipients of the dedication to socialism and friendship with the Soviet Union.[61] One day later, a letter written by Jan Král from Valašské Meziříčí and addressed to A. Shilin, a resident of Kiev, followed the same route. Its author criticized Czech journalists and signatories of the "Two Thousand Words" manifesto, and expressed his concerns that "reactionary forces might do the same what they did in Hungary" in 1956.[62] On 26 July, there was another letter written by Václav Mikulka, a secondary school student from Jarošov, district Uherské Hradiště, sent to Ella Gras from Ivano-Frankovsk, who confessed that reading articles in the Soviet newspapers *Pravda*, *Literaturnaya gazeta* and *Izvestia* "almost made me weep when I saw how they are deceiving people."[63]

What Ukrainian Citizens Were Thinking about Czechoslovakia

During the Prague Spring, most KGB reports from the territory of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic were monitoring sentiments and opinions of its own population. The reports generally have an identical structure, starting with a statement that most citizens view the events in line with the Communist Party, but that there are also some negative exceptions. The latter are subsequently described, including the names and professions of the people involved. The selection of quotations showing the "people's opinion" and subsequently presented to Ukrainian political leaders, as well as the impression they gave, suggest expediency or even attempted manipulations. The reports contain neither any analyses of events and presented information, nor any conclusions or predictions of further developments.

On 18 April, for example, Petro Shelest received KGB information on positive reactions of Ukrainian citizens to the resolution of the April plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union titled "On current problems of the international situation and the struggle of the CPSU for the unity of the global communist movement." Allegedly, "unhealthy" opinions

61 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic dated 24 July 1968: An open letter of Czechoslovak workers addressed to the 'Azovstal' plant. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0172.pdf*.

62 *ASBU*, f. 16, sign. 1, sl. 974, doc. 234, Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 669/n dated 25 July 1968.

63 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 680/n dated 26 July 1968: A copy of a confiscated letter from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0174.pdf*.

about the work of the Central Committee's plenary meeting were voiced only by a "Jewish nationalist from Cherkassy," a housewife from the same city, an associate professor of the Civil Engineering Institute in Poltava (a member of the Communist Party), a lab worker of the Luhansk Mechanical Engineering Institute, and a group of firefighters of a furniture factory in Cherkassy. In their opinion, the meeting of the Central Committee was convened because of "anti-Soviet manifestations in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Some of them claimed the socialist camp was a mess and the plenary meeting was unlikely to be able to do something about it." The lab worker mentioned above, Oleg Kurash, allegedly told his colleagues that "Cuba and Yugoslavia have left the socialist camp because not everything is all right in the Soviet Union. This is why they are trying to build their own socialism, a national one […]. The events in Czechoslovakia and Poland could be expected, because none of them likes us and [they] can see how things look like in our country and they do not want their countries to look the same."[64] A few days later, officers of the Ukrainian Secret Service submitted yet another report on reactions to the April plenary meeting, in which they confirmed a prevalently positive reaction to Petro Shelest's speech – including his criticism of the development in Czechoslovakia, behind which he saw, *inter alia,* Zionists and Jewish nationalists. The report noted only six cases of disagreement.[65]

The level of attention which the Ukrainian secret police was giving to opinions of Ukrainian society at that time is illustrated by comments, often peculiar, which its members reported to their superiors. In the opinion of one secret police officer, for example, the main character of a play staged by the Kiev theatre for children *Devil's Mill* symbolized Ukraine; another thought that the dialogue of Beelzebub and his aide depicted a conversation between Antonín Novotný and Alexander Dubček – the aide suggested to Beelzebub that rank-and-file devils should have their horns and tails cut off because they get in the way of work and that the hell should be renamed.[66]

In mid-April, the Ukrainian KGB focused on Carpathian Ruthenia: "Most people in Carpathian Ruthenia view the situation in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic correctly and hope it will normalize as soon as possible." Out of eight opinions quoted, three criticized the appearance of Alexander Dubček at the latest meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Events in Czechoslovakia were interpreted as a manifestation of antagonism between Czechs and Slovaks. According to Mr. Golovatyuk, an employee of a machinery plant in Uzhhorod, "people in Czechoslovakia are doing the right thing to drive out their former rulers. Ours should be ousted as well, and new ones should be

64 *ASBU*, f. 16, sign. 1, sl. 971, doc. 177, Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 295/n dated 18 April 1968.

65 *Ibid.*, doc. 266, Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 314/n dated 27 April 1968.

66 *Ibid.*, doc. 176, Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 293/n dated 18 April 1968.

appointed." Other quoted reactions, for example, compared the direction followed by Czechoslovakia to the Hungarian events in 1956, or speculated about changes of Ukraine's western border. A driver of a forestry enterprise in Mukachevo thus allegedly stated that "many members of the Czechoslovak parliament and other officials are occupying themselves with the question how Transcarpathia could be returned to Czechoslovakia. The new government will consolidate its power and then the issue of Transcarpathia will emerge […]."[67]

Another six reports were composed along similar lines; four of them were written in May 1968 and concerned the conscription into the army and the departure of selected Soviet units to maneuvers in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Again, they contain many alleged quotations which lack any analytical assessment, but are sometimes provided with generalizing comments, such as: "Uniates and anti-Soviet elements approve events that are taking place in Czechoslovakia."[68] They also reiterate stereotypical statements about the West German threat and a potential military intervention to prevent the disintegration of the socialist camp. A certain Mr. Fedorov, a worker of the television factory in Lvov, thus allegedly stated that "the conscription into the army is necessary, as we must continuously strengthen defence capabilities of our country. The more so with the situation in Czechoslovakia being as unclear as it is. However, it borders on the Federal Republic of Germany and may easily fall prey to it. The conscription does have its reasons, both military and those related to the strengthening of the international position of the Soviet Union."[69] The same report writes that a certain Palashchuk, earlier tried and sentenced for nationalism, was heard to say among his acquaintances that "the Czechs are great guys," that they have won true freedom, and that Moscow would not be able to control them as before. Assuming that "the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Cuba have parted company with Russia for good," he predicted a future "domino effect." "This is excellent – socialist countries will be the first to go and the Ukrainian nation will someday follow the Czech example and say: the time has come for Ukraine to be independent. This will surely happen."[70]

Taking into account a report similar to those described above, but also his own experience, Petro Shelest informed, in mid-June, Leonid Brezhnev about "his impressions, about the mood of people in western regions" of Ukraine, which he was visiting at that time. "People here perceive the disturbing events in Czechoslovakia

67 *Ibid.*, doc. 153, Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 286/n dated 16 April 1968.

68 Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 378/n dated 11 May 1968: Information about reactions of people to ongoing exercises of troops and international events. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0034.pdf*.

69 *ASBU*, f. 16, sign. 1, sl. 972, doc. 16, Extraordinary report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 286/n dated 10 May 1968.

70 *Ibid.*

more sharply, they have been getting more information through their direct contacts with inhabitants of border regions. This is why they harbour a more realistic and truer view of all events that have been taking place in Czechoslovakia," he wrote in his diary.[71]

Another report of the Ukrainian secret police from late July contains one of just a few attempts to derive some more general conclusions from information learned "in the field." It claims that "an analysis of documents about reactions of people living in the republic to events in Czechoslovakia shows that an overwhelming majority of our people approve and fully support the policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. In their speeches and evaluations of the situation existing in Czechoslovakia, representatives of workers, farmers, the working intelligentsia emphasize that the absence of a strict Communist Party line, cosmopolitism, fawning over the bourgeois way of life, and "a too short memory – they have forgotten about the war" have resulted in a threat to the rule of socialism in Czechoslovakia. Compared to the previous months, in particular those preceding the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia,[72] the interest in events taking place in Czechoslovakia has somewhat decreased. […] It is emphasized that everything has been inspired and been taking place under the control of the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany."[73] The same document contained customary information to the effect that a Czechoslovak citizen, named Moshkovich, a lawyer by profession, stated, in an unspecified conversation with a Soviet citizen, that "the influence of Western countries is being felt, for which free access to Czechoslovakia across the western border is very important," or that employees of a paper mill in Rožňava stated during their June visit to Ukraine that "they have been dreaming that Soviet troops will remain in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic."[74]

71 SHELEST, P. Ye.: … *da ne sudimy budete*, p. 319.

72 It is difficult to determine which plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia the report refers to. Probably the most important meeting was the one which took place at the turn of March and April and which adopted the "Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia" and made some personal changes in the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The meeting at the turn of May and June decided, *inter alia,* that the 14th extraordinary congress of the Communist Party would take place in September. The last meeting of the Central Committee prior to the report's date took place on 8 July and reacted to the critical letter of leaders of Communist Parties of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic and Poland addressed to the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

73 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 649/n dated 17 July 1968: Reactions of people of the republic to events in Czechoslovakia. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0170.pdf*.

74 *Ibid.*

Before the meeting in Čierna nad Tisou, Petro Shelest received a summary report of the Ukrainian KGB dated 26 July, which notified him that an anonymous postcard addressed to the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and to Alexander Dubček had been confiscated at a post office in Dnepropetrovsk. It read as follows: "Dear Comrade Dubček, workers and the intelligentsia of the Soviet Union support you and the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on the day the criminal statement of Kremlin scoundrels,[75] who had sold the cause of socialism decades ago, is published. These rogues, such as Suslov and Brezhnev, are only afraid that their privileges might be taken away from them by a healthy hand of workers' criticism. You know it well yourself. I wish you every success, comrades. Petrov, a miner."[76]

Fear of Rehabilitations

The manner in which the Ukrainian KGB was informing Petro Shelest about events in Czechoslovakia prior to August 1968 reflect both animosity towards the Prague Spring and its representatives and a random choice of topics. It shows a more systematic interest only in rehabilitations of former political prisoners in Czechoslovakia.

Jan Minařík, the Chief of Border Guards of Bratislava Airport, told a KGB operative in late May that "some of them have taken hold of top positions in the government and the Communist Party. Commissions examining cases of violations of laws by various officials have been established all over the country." The rather confused report also contains information about a request of Pilsen workers to restore and renovate the statue of former President Masaryk and an assessment of Czechoslovak events as a counterrevolution by a Max Lenderle, a member of the Communist Party of Austria and owner of a shop in Vienna.[77]

The report prepared by the Ukrainian secret police in late July was specifically dedicated to Club 231, which had been established in the spring of 1968, as well as its "objectives and hostile activities." According to information it contained,

75 It was probably the so-called Warsaw letter dated 14 July 1968, addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, in which the supreme Communist Party representatives of five Warsaw Treaty countries (the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic and Poland) criticized Czechoslovak leaders for the loss of control over the situation and essentially presented an ultimatum demanding a rectification and suppression of "right-wing forces."

76 *ASBU*, f. 16, sign. 1, sl. 9724, doc. 278, Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 677/n dated 26 July 1968.

77 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 437/n dated 21 May 1968: Information about events in Czechoslovakia and rehabilitations of political prisoners. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0032.pdf*.

some former political prisoners had spoken out in favour of a violent overthrow of the existing political system and a restoration of "Masarykian democracy." Moreover, Club 231 was to enjoy support of the Minister of Interior himself, and the atmosphere of resistance against the policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was supposed to be fueled by press, radio, and TV.[78] The last report dedicated to Club 231 was a translation of a 16-page document provided by members of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior, which claimed that leaders of Club 231 consisted mostly of former agents of the US intelligence service.[79] It was sent on 19 August and records show that Petro Shelest read it on 20 August, by which time the occupation of Czechoslovakia had already begun.

"To Advance from Endless Talks to Concrete Actions"

We do not know the extent of the influence of the Ukrainian KGB on conclusions drawn by the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party in the summer of 1968. Even before mid-June, Petro Shelest made the following entry in his diary: "Based on submitted documents, information, letters, messages from abroad and my own analyses, I am coming to the conclusion that an unavoidable political catastrophe is unfolding in Czechoslovakia."[80] His contacts with the Ukrainian secret service were very intensive and also supported his connection with the "healthy forces" in Czechoslovakia. As early as in late March, its commander Vitaly Fedotovych Nikitchenko[81] and Chief Secretary of the Communist Party in the region of Transcarpathia Yuri Vasilevich Ilnitski (Yuri Vasylovych Ilnytsky) passed him a message of Vasil Biľak, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and Chief Secretary of the East Slovak Regional Committee of the

78 Information report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 688/n dated 29 July 1968: On hostile activities of members of the so-called "Club 231" (K-231) in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0181.pdf*.

79 Report for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 741/n dated 19 August 1968: Hostile activities of the so-called "Club 231" (K-231) in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/zpravy-kgb/0082.pdf*.

80 SHELEST, P. Ye.: … *da ne sudimy budete*, p. 318.

81 Colonel General Vitaly Fedotovich Nikitchenko (1908–1992) was the Chairman of the Committee for State Security of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic between 1954 and 1970 and then the Commander of the University of the Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union in Moscow until 1974; he continued to lecture there until his retirement in 1978. (See LYSYUK, Yuri – CHYSNIKOV, Volodymyr: Kerivnyky orhaniv derzhavnoi bezpeky radzhanskoi Ukrainy (1953–1991). In: Sluzhba bezpeky Ukrainy [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://web.archive.org/web/20071212210416/http://www.sbu.gov.ua/sbu/doccatalog/document?id=39284*.)

Communist Party of Slovakia Ján Koscelanský[82] asking for a meeting in Uzhhorod, which, as Shelest recalls in his memoirs, Brezhnev did not approve.[83] The meeting took place only on 24 and 25 May, and Biľak (himself a Rusyn) outlined to Shelest Dubček's incapability and unwillingness to deal with "right-wing elements" in the Communist Party and state structures, whose threats had allegedly driven many Communist Party officials and State Security officers to suicide.[84]

With the KGB's assistance Petro Shelest met with Vasil Biľak again on the night of 20 and 21 July at the Balaton Lake, Hungary. He also noted Biľak's words about "shock, fear, and even panic after the publication of the letter of five Warsaw Treaty countries,"[85] whereupon he urged him: "We need a letter from you, which would outline your request for assistance. We guarantee that neither the letter nor its authors will be published." The future top protagonist of the normalization allegedly answered: "If we are not strong enough, we will contact you with a request for help."[86]

From his position of the first man of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Shelest participated in organizational preparations of the Soviet delegation's trip to the meeting in Čierna nad Tisou on 29 July to 1 August 1968, including the accommodation of its members in railway carriages on the Soviet side of the border, to which they retired for the night and during breaks in the negotiations. According to his memoirs, he discussed specific measures, including "sanitary support, protection and catering" on the phone with the Chairman of the All-Union Committee for State Security Yuri Andropov on 25 July, with whom he also shared his opinion, namely that it was necessary to "advance from endless talks to concrete actions."[87] Even before the negotiations started, he, having studied the "mail," had made an entry to the effect that "the situation in Czechoslovakia is increasingly

82 At the time of the Prague Spring, Ján Koscelanský (1926– 2010) was the Chief Secretary of the East Slovak Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, from 1966 he was a member of the Central Committees of the Communist Party of Slovakia and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, between 1966 and 1968 he was a deputy of the National Assembly and then a deputy of the House of the People of the Federal Assembly. In 1971, however, he found himself on the "List of persons recommended for inclusion in the central register of representatives and exponents of right-wing elements" approved by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. (See Funkcionári KSČ a KSS [Officials of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Communist Party of Slovakia]. In: Ústav pamäti národa [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *https://www.upn.gov.sk/projekty/funkcionari-ksc-kss/vysledky-vyhladavania/?priezvisko=Koscelansk%C3%BD*; Seznam osob doporučených k zařazení do jednotné centrální evidence představitelů a exponentů pravice **ústředním** výborem KSČ [List of persons recommended for inclusion in the central register of representatives and exponents of right-wing elements]. In: Totalita.cz [online]. [Cit. 2019.11.01.] Available at: *http://www.totalita.cz/seznamy/exp_prav_smernice_seznam_01.pdf.*)

83 SHELEST, P. Ye.: … *da ne sudimy budete*, p. 307.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 310–313.

85 They refer again to the so-called Warsaw letter.

86 *Ibid.*, pp. 348–350.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 355.

more complex and dangerous, it is necessary to take more decisive measures, otherwise it will be too late, a lot of blood may be shed, and we will be the first to bear tremendous costs, including political ones."[88]

In his sharp speech in Čierna nad Tisou on 30 July, which provoked Alexander Dubček into leaving the room and subsequently protesting against its tone and content, Shelest complained about negative effects of Czechoslovak media on Ukrainian society: "Your TV shows, your radio programmes, your newspapers and magazines distributed into our regions closest to your borders make our people ask questions which are full of embarrassment."[89] He specifically mentioned "thousands, tens of thousands" copies of the "Two Thousand Words" proclamation sent to Ukraine, and he also stated that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia did not have matters under control, allowing Czechoslovak citizens to sign a petition against the "Warsaw letter" of the five member countries of the Warsaw Treaty. He was also concerned about alleged requirements for a revision of borders and return of Carpathian Ruthenia.[90]

For Petro Shelest, the main event of the subsequent meeting of supreme representatives of the Communist Parties of the six Soviet Bloc countries in Bratislava on 3 August was a secret meeting with Vasil Biľak, which he had been eagerly waiting for. It involved the hand-over of the notorious "letter of invitation" and Shelest's diary entry confirms the well-known course of the meeting: "In the evening, I finally met Biľak and we agreed that he would visit public toilets at 8 pm, that I would appear there at the same time, and he would then hand over the letter to me through our KGB officer Savchenko. And this was how it happened. We met 'by accident' in the toilets and Savchenko furtively passed me an envelope containing the long-awaited letter."[91]

The diary entry dated 16 August, when preparations for the invasion had already been in full swing, offers Shelest's justification of the fatal decision: "Czechoslovak leaders did not have any control over the situation in the country and in the Communist Party. The Bratislava declaration of the five parties is not being implemented, right-wing elements and social democrats have been using it to foment nationalism and anti-Sovietism. Everything is as tense as it could get. If we do not take extraordinary and the harshest possible measures now, a civil war may break out in Czechoslovakia and we will lose it as a socialist state, there will be an extraordinary situation in Europe which will pose a threat of major armed conflicts and perhaps even a war. The decision to take the extraordinary measures was not easy, but we had wasted everything and there is now no other solution

88 *Ibid.*

89 VONDROVÁ J. – NAVRÁTIL, J.: *Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize 1967–1970*, Vol. 2, p. 126, Document 121.14 – Minutes of the speech of P. Shelest during the fourth session, Čierna nad Tisou, 30 July 1968.

90 *Ibid.*, *p*. 128. Also see SHELEST, P.: … *da ne sudimy budete*, pp. 376–379.

91 SHELEST, P.: … *da ne sudimy budete*, p. 384.

or way out. We all understand that this step may bring a threat of political and military complications."[92]

Conclusion

The First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was obviously a supporter of a hardline approach towards the Prague Spring, and he was acting accordingly. Just like in cases of Władysław Gomułka or Walter Ulbricht, his primary motivation was fear of a "contagion" of the society in his own country. The abolition of censorship in Czechoslovakia was echoing extensively in the Soviet Union, and not just among the generation of so-called "Sixtiers" – writers and artists whose activities and influence were a great challenge for Communist Party leaders anyway, one of the reasons being that many of them were also communists. This was also one of the reasons why Petro Shelest was devoting much attention to mass media in Czechoslovakia, frequently stressing that the Communist Party did not control them.

The information provided to Shelest and other Ukrainian leaders, but also to the KGB Headquarters in Moscow, by the Ukrainian Committee for State Security during the months preceding the August occupation gave a substantially distorted picture of the situation. While it is true that the nature of operations of secret services is characterized by efforts to warn against potential risks and threats, Ukrainian KGB's reports contain various clichés, ideological rhetoric, inaccuracies, and downright nonsenses rather than relevant information and analyses of events unfolding in Czechoslovakia. Under the circumstances, the uncritical use of State Security officers, who were often acting out of fear and on their own account (and were probably violating laws in effect at that time and also their oath of enlistment) as one of principal sources of information might seem logical, but only contributed to distorted pictures of the situation which the chief of the Ukrainian Communist Party and other Soviet leaders were harbouring. They were thus getting an impression that "right-wing elements" were indeed winning in Czechoslovakia, that anti-Soviet propaganda was prevailing, that Czechoslovakia was making preparations to leave the Warsaw Treaty, that Western intelligence services were being strengthened, and that there was a threat of a repetition of Hungarian events in 1956 and a civil war. The assessment of Petr Grigorenko, mentioned at the beginning of the article, was much more accurate, its author being able to perceive, even without the mighty security machine, almost universal support the Prague Spring reform movement and its representatives were enjoying among the public.

It is still impossible to give an unequivocal answer to the question whether the Ukrainian factor played a specific role in the dramatic climax of the "Czechoslovak crisis" in the summer of 1968. However, based on the current state of knowledge,

92 *Ibid.*, p. 390.

it seems obvious that Petro Shelest as one of the prime movers was pushing the course of events towards a violent solution and that he had specific reasons for doing so, namely an intensive feeling of threatened stability of the regime in the part of the Soviet state which bordered Czechoslovakia.

This is an updated version of the article entitled Ukrajinský faktor pražského jara? Petro Šelest a československý rok 1968 ve světle dokumentů ukrajinské tajné bezpečnosti *that was published in* Soudobé dějiny*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2019), pp. 558–584.*

Translated by Jiří Mareš

Abstract

*Petro Shelest (1908–1997), the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was one of the strongest advocates of an armed invasion of Czechoslovakia among Soviet leaders in 1968. The Soviet leadership tasked him to maintain contacts with the so-called healthy forces in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia; in the beginning of August, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Vasil Biľak (1917–2014) secretly handed over to him the notorious "letter of invitation" in public lavatories in Bratislava. The author asks a fundamental question whether it is possible to identify a specific Ukrainian factor which stepped into the Prague Spring process and contributed to its tragic end. He attempts to capture Shelest's position in the decision-making process and describe information that Shelest was working with. To this end, he has made use of reports of the Committee for State Security (*Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti – KGB*) of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic on developments in Czechoslovakia and reactions thereto among Ukrainian citizens produced in the spring and summer of 1968, which were being sent to Shelest and other Ukrainian leaders. These documents have lately been made available in Ukrainian archives and partly published on the website of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. Their analysis brings the author to a conclusion that they were offering a considerably distorted picture of the situation. Instead of relevant information and analyses, they only present various clichés, ideological rhetoric, inaccuracies, or downright nonsenses. Their source were often members of the Czechoslovak State Security who were often motivated by worries about their own careers and existence and were acting on their own. The uncritical acceptance of the documents contributed to a situation in which in the leader of the Ukrainian Communists and other Soviet representatives were creating unrealistic pictures of the events taking place in Czechoslovakia, believing that anti-socialist forces were winning, anti-Soviet propaganda was prevailing, and Western intelligence agencies were strengthening their position in Czechoslovakia, and that there was a threat that*

the events that had taken place in Hungary in 1956 would repeat themselves again. As indicated by his published diary entries and other documents, Petro Shelest was using these allegations both in discussions inside his own party and during negotiations with Czechoslovak politicians. Just like in the case of the leaders of Polish and East German Communists, Władysław Gomułka and Walter Ulbricht, respectively, the principal reason why Shelest was promoting a solution of the Czechoslovak crisis by force was, in the author's opinion, his fear of "contagion" of his own society by events taking place in Czechoslovakia which the Ukraine shared a border with.

Keywords
Ukraine; Czechoslovakia; Prague Spring 1968; Petro Shelest; Soviet intervention; KGB