May 11, 1966

Transcript of Conversation Between Emil Bodnaras, Leader of Government and Party Delegation Visiting the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and Zhou Enlai, Prime Minister of the State Council of the People's Republic of China

Citation:

"Transcript of Conversation Between Emil Bodnaras, Leader of Government and Party Delegation Visiting the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and Zhou Enlai, Prime Minister of the State Council of the People's Republic of China", May 11, 1966, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Document 12 in Romulus Ioan Budura, Politica independenţă a României şi relaţiile Româno-Chineze, 1954-1975: Documente, Bucharest, Arhivele Naţionale, 2008, pp. 270-294; ANR, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Secţia Relaţii Externe – China, dosar 71/1966, f. 2-46. Translated by Larry L. Watts
https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/122571

Summary:

This document is a transcript of the conversation between Emil Bodnaras, Leader of Government and Party Delegation Visiting the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Chinese leader, Zhou Enlai, in which they discuss their relations with various countries including the Soviet Union and France, and the Vietnam issue.

Original Language:

Romanian

Contents:

[…]

Cde. Emil Bodnăraş: Regarding the Soviet Union, we have had the most serious divergences on a wide range of issues. These issues are well known to you and you know that we have defended our point of view. We know that tendencies to promote the old orientations in our economic, political and military relations can appear, but we have not ceded to them. We have again met with similar tendencies very recently. Even with all that, we cultivate and develop our relations when we can. 68% of the total volume of our foreign trade is with the socialist countries, trade with the Soviet Union accounts for 40% of it. We are interested in having good relations with our powerful neighbor, the first socialist state in the world, despite the different perspectives that we have. Everywhere we meet with them we say "no" on those issues with which we disagree and we seek places where we can say "yes". If we find no such place, each goes back to their home and gets on with their business.

A Party and governmental delegation led by Comrade Ceauşescu, in which Comrades Maurer and Niculescu-Mizil also took part, visited Moscow last September [1965]. On that occasion there was a sincere exchange of opinion and we arrived at the common conclusion that, on the basis of the principles of relations between communists, the principles springing from Marxism-Leninism, on the basis of mutual respect, equality, and non-interference in domestic affairs, we can move ahead.

Likewise, we have participated in the work of the 23rd Congress of the CPSU [29 March-8 April 1966], where Comrade Ceauşescu spoke, explaining our party's opinion. But the speech of Kádár, which immediately followed that of Comrade Ceauşescu - and therefore could not have been coincidental - was not of a nature to shake us from our orientation or decision.[1] The keystone of proletarian internationalism is devotion to the principles of Marxism-Leninism, and the fact that we have differences with the leadership of the CPSU does not mean that we are adopting an anti-Soviet attitude. At least that is what we believe.

As you know, Brezhnev attended our Party's Congress. Yesterday, when I arrive here I received information from Bucharest that, as a result of an older arrangement, Brezhnev is now visiting Bucharest unofficially. It seems to me that he came with Rusakov, whom I do not know.

Cde. Paul Niculescu-Mizil: I believe he is the deputy head of section in the Central Committee.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: Rusakov knows the problems of China.

Cde. Emil Bodnăraş: Brezhnev will stay in Bucharest for three days. When you come to Bucharest you will find out what was discussed.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: Wherever he goes, he talks about us; and the same with us - everywhere we go we talk about them.

Cde. Emil Bodnăraş: Never be afraid when you are in Bucharest!

Cde. Li Xiannian: No.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: Suslov is also a great theoretician. Two years ago, when I went to Moscow with some small hopes, Suslov proved to be very obstinate in his views.

Cde. Emil Bodnăraş: We saluted your initiative, which was extraordinarily important. We regret that the Soviet comrades did not understand it. But you should know that there are those among them who regret that they did not understand. But let's not discuss this now; we will talk about it in Bucharest

At the CPSU Congress the Soviet side proposed to hold a meeting of representatives

of all the countries that make up the CMEA and the Warsaw Pact, in order to analyze whether it is possible to hold a broader meeting in the shortest time possible. Our delegation agreed to hold such a consultation there, on the spot, only to analyze how such a meeting could be organized. We have been long-proposing that the future meeting at the highest level should take place in Bucharest. On this occasion, we renewed our proposal. Now, a meeting is being organized along the lines of the CMEA and the Warsaw Pact, of all countries that participate in these organizations. In Moscow, all agreed that this meeting should take place in Bucharest between 1-10 July, with the participation of the general secretaries of the various party Central Committees, the presidents of the Councils of Ministers [prime ministers], and the ministers of foreign affairs and of the armed forces of the countries participating in the CMEA and Warsaw Pact.

We will discuss the details of these issues in Bucharest. There we will have time to analyze them. What I can say is that we are currently involved in a divergence regarding several fundamental problems, with the Soviet side as well as with the others, both along the line of the CMEA - although possibly less there - and, especially, along the line of the Warsaw Pact. Within the Pact we have met with an attempt to institute supra-state organs in order to achieve - as you may remember us discussing last year - someone's political and military control. Up until now we have said "no" on two occasions: at the meeting of deputy foreign affairs ministers and in the meeting of deputy ministers of the armed forces. Regarding this tendency to organize supra-state organs, political and military, we continue to say "no" and we will say "no" up to the very end. Only this time we'll say it in Bucharest.

Cde. Paul Niculescu-Mizil: No such supra-state organs will be created with Romania's participation.

Cde. Emil Bodnăraş: Neither within the CMEA nor within the Warsaw Pact.

Cde. Paul Niculescu-Mizil: Nor in any other domain either.

Cde. Emil Bodnăraş: Outside of these organizations, whoever wants to create such organs is free to do so on their own responsibility, but we will not permit this within the organisms of which we also are members. We will never agree to the institution of supra-state organs no matter where, and no matter along what lines.

Regarding our relations with other countries:

With France with have good relations. Comrade Maurer was in Paris last year, where he had an audience with De Gaulle. The French Minister of Agriculture, Pisani, visited us, and recently [French Foreign Minister] Couve de Murville did as well. We know their orientation, especially regarding NATO, their position regarding Vietnam, their affirmation of independence towards America. Their interest in having economic relations with us was observable. Likewise, we found that we had many common points with France, on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interest, which we cultivate, but without permitting the revival of old bourgeois French influences. ...

[...]

And now, if you'll permit me, I will address the Vietnamese issue.

The decision to go to Vietnam is an older one, as a result of the visits that the Vietnamese comrades have made with us, at the level of Politburo members and vice-presidents of the Council of Ministers [Deputy Prime Ministers]. Recently, three Vietnamese delegations visited us. We have not been in Vietnam since 1958. We wanted to go to Vietnam already since March, when the season was the most appropriate, and then we intended to visit China as well - you responded to us very amiably, within two days, but the Vietnamese comrades had difficulties and could not receive us. At the Congress in Moscow, comrade Ceausescu met with Le Duan, they took up the discussion again and established that we should go.

Why did we go to Vietnam? Certainly, in order to respond to their repeated visits, but that was not the main reason. Lately, there have been many delegations visiting Vietnam. Each one has expressed a different point of view, each wanted to support Vietnam in the manner it thought best.

We thought, however, that it is important that someone now go to Vietnam - I am speaking of a delegation of a Communist Party and a socialist state - to affirm with all gravity, without any equivocation, the justness of the orientation of the leadership of the Vietnamese Workers Party, of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam in the organization and conduct of the struggle against American imperialism, full solidarity with this orientation, with this struggle, and decisiveness in supporting up to the end, no matter how long the struggle takes, and no matter what happens along the way. We were convinced that this is the only just position. Their cause is righteous. The resolution of the problem cannot be good in two ways, but only in a single way: victory over the Americans, the ouster of the Americans from Vietnam.

What we saw fully confirmed the justness of such positions. In those five speeches which I had the occasion to give, during the entire course of the visit, we affirmed this conception as the leading line - the righteousness of the cause and the decisiveness with which the Vietnamese people fight; the fact that Vietnam is of the Vietnamese and that they must decide their own fate; that there can be no other solution for stopping this war except the departure of the Americans from Vietnam.

We had the joy of receiving a letter from the president of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, in which he expressed the positive appreciation of the National Liberation Front for this attitude.

Our visit was short, lasting five days. We only visited objectives in Hanoi: we saw an exposition, a museum, a factory, and a military air defense unit. Likewise, we had a very good meeting with the population of Hanoi.

We saw comrade Ho Chi Minh three times: the first time even on the evening of our arrival, when all of the Vietnamese leadership, the Politburo members, met with us at our residence; the second time we met with comrade Ho Chi Minh when he took part in the reception given by us; and the third time, before our departure, when we visited him at his home, where we spent some 4-5 hours together.

We had four working meetings with comrade Pham Van Dong, with comrade Nguyen Duy Trinh, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and Foreign Minister of Vietnam, with comrade Huang Van Hoan, and with other comrades. These meetings were held in a larger framework. We also had two meetings in a more restricted venue: on the Romanian side there was only myself and comrade Niculescu-Mizil, while on the side of the Vietnamese comrades were comrade Pham Van Dong and the foreign minister.

In these meetings, after each presented the situation of his country, we also had an exchange of opinions regarding the problems connected with the war in Vietnam.

This was the core of our entire activity.

We were very satisfied with these exchanges of opinion and we noted that there was not the slightest divergence or conflicting point of view between us regarding the problem of the war and its conduct. We had the firm sentiment that the leadership of Workers Party off Vietnam has good ties with the people, that it is a force with a high organizational and political capacity, that it has good ties with the National Liberation Front and with the struggle of the people in the south, that it is well-oriented, both in the conduct of the war as well as in perspective. It is a fully responsible leadership, which deserves congratulations. The leadership is calm, dignified - as are the entire Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese comrades struggle with many difficulties, but having the assistance of the socialist countries, the sympathy of all progressive forces in the world and, especially, basing itself on local forces, on the will to fight of the Vietnamese people, they are invincible. The question of whether the people will or will not be victorious in Vietnam, whether American imperialism will or will not be defeated, is not even asked - this is a problem requiring no discussion whatsoever. It is clear that American imperialism will be defeated. It is only a question of time.

The preoccupation of the Vietnamese comrades to further continue the war, but without extending it, is just. By obligating American imperialism to limit itself only to the fight with the Vietnamese people, the greatest advantages are realized, politically as well militarily. American policy becomes more and more odious before public

opinion among Americans in their own country and in the entire world.

The Americans are more and more isolated; they are sinking in the swamps, in the forests and in the unending jungles, in a war of the people that ensures that no one can ever know where the front is located. For the aggressors the front is the environment itself - it is in the air, and on the ground, and below the ground, and in the mountains, and on the water. This exhausts the American army from both the military and moral point of view, and makes it, for practical purposes, impossible to make full use of its large and heavy technical means. And that is good too.

We shared the serious preoccupation of the Vietnamese comrades regarding the evolution of the situation, in general and in the Asiatic space, of which Vietnam is one episode. In perspective, it appears that the Americans are interested in reviving Japanese imperialism, of mobilizing other forces, of drawing in as many other countries alongside it as possible, thus creating a front that will be capable of taking over the tasks which the Americans no longer can.

In this way, the war in Vietnam gains the character of a serious engagement, placing before us the problem of unity in developing the superior interests of socialism.

In short, we reviewed also the issues regarding the international situation, in general, the relations between socialist countries and the situation of the international communist movement. We did not note any differences of view on fundamental problems. The Vietnamese comrades also know the difficulties that we have had in the struggle against different tendencies. We consider that the preoccupation for the unity of the workers movement, for the unity of socialist countries is a cause that deserves all patience, all attention, and all efforts; efforts that are as insistent as they are relentless must be the decision to strike at imperialism wherever it can be struck, and against any tendency that could sustain it. That is clear.

I cannot anticipate what will be said in the conversations in Bucharest, but I only want to present to you aspects of some issues, that have arisen from our consultations with the Vietnamese comrades. From these consultations a unanimous conclusion appeared, both on the part of our delegation and on the part of the Party leadership in Vietnam, a conclusion that we consider of special importance, of vital importance, both for the direct interests of the conduct of the war in Vietnam and for the general interests connected with the struggle against American imperialism.

Vietnam receives assistance from all of the socialist countries. You accord them the most precious assistance. The Soviet Union gives them help, we do, [and] the other socialist countries of Europe give them help. This is very important.

Analyzing the value of our assistance, we have reached the following conclusion: in the current political moment and in perspective of what American imperialism has engaged to do, in this region, in Africa, in Latin America, and in Europe - where it seems they do not want to cede easily the positions of NATO, even with the risk of facing a serious divergence with France - in these general conditions it would be especially important from the point of view of political principle, but also indisputably practical, that the socialist countries that assist Vietnam, and which are thus engaged, should find an appropriate framework, an appropriate form in which to express the common solidarity of all socialist countries with the struggle in Vietnam, their common will to confront American imperialism, their common decisiveness to support this struggle up to the end and to undertake everything that such support requires. We are thinking of this under the circumstances in which as is known that between the communist parties of the socialist states there are a series of different points of view on a series of problems, but we consider that it is especially important that on the problem of the war in Vietnam - that as an expression of the confrontation between socialism and the most reactionary forces of capitalism, American imperialism - there should be no ambiguity or different points of view between the socialist countries. We consider of particular importance such a common manifestation of our solidarity.

Comrade Zhou Enlai, I ask you to understand what I have said as a completely preliminary presentation of some of the conclusions to which we have arrived from the exchange of opinions and which I have outlined for you with all sincerity and comradely responsibility.

The problem is very complex, it presents value both from the practical political point

of view, of the interests of Vietnam, as well as from that of the major interest of advancing the socialist revolution in the world. Hundreds of millions of eyes are looking at us, searching for a perspective, wanting to see before imperialism a firm, concrete barrier, made up of the principal forces that exist in today's world: the economic, political and military force of the socialist countries.

Regarding these measures, regarding the forms that they will take, it is certain that we will think further. We have not as yet succeeded to report home about the discussions we had, given that please understand that we cannot add more than we have already brought to your attention. We considered it our duty, however, to inform you at this time, about that which we consecrated these two special and restricted meetings. Our comrades here, who have not assisted in these meetings, are only now informed about these issues and I believe that they will know how to preserve the secret with all responsibility.

Soon you will come to Bucharest and I believe that we can have an exchange of opinions about this aspect of the problem that, without a doubt, will be in the center of our attention.

We await your visit with very much interest.

We would like to engage ourselves alongside our friends in helping to resolve the problems as best each of us can. And we can do more. You have proven this brilliantly through the entire history of the struggle carried out by the Chinese Communist Party, in all of the contributions that you have brought to the clarification of the great issues of the contemporary world, to the development of the revolutionary struggle. And we, as a smaller party, as a smaller country, we have made our contribution, as we understood it, but always with a clear conscience and with decisiveness. Not as a "son" party, but as a smaller party.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: But you are not a small party either.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: Nor a "nephew" or "grand-nephew" party.

We await your visit with great interest and, please believe me, everyone in Europe awaits it with at least the same amount and perhaps even greater interest.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: Each from his own perspective, with his own interests.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: Certainly.

Your visit is awaited with much interest. I do not want to anticipate the results - Marxist-Lenninist science does not hold with prophets - but faith in a just cause, in common goals, is a virtue of communists.

We concluded a joint communiqué with the Vietnamese comrades that does not contain anything spectacular; it affirms our friendship and solidarity, it expressed the point of view of the two communist parties regarding the issue of the war in Vietnam and, within the framework of general pronouncements, regarding fundamental contemporary issues. In a general form, it encompasses our positions with regard to the unity of the Communist and Worker's Movement, as well as the role of the socialist countries.

Within the framework of our meetings, I would like to renew, in the name of the delegation, our sentiments of esteem for the Chinese Communist Party, for its leadership. We think of comrade Mao Zedong, to whom we wish good health; to comrade Liu Shaoqi, who created a strong impression with us; to comrade Zhu De, and to comrades Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen and Kang Sheng.

Cde Zhou Enlai: You have a very good memory.

Cde. Paul Niculescu-Mizil: But we also have many friends.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: To you and the comrades who are here, Li Xiannian and Chen Yi,

we express all of our consideration.

You should know that my memory is not so good, but I cannot forget the men with whom I have had interesting meetings and discussions from which, always, I have taken away valuable lessons, even if the discussion on occasion was over a glass of wine or cup of tea. Friendship is built not only through resolutions, declarations and joint communiqués but also through the totality of our ties as men and as comrades-in-arms.

I thank you for your attention.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: In the first place, I thank you for your beautiful words. I will certainly transmit your greeting to the other comrades.

I would like to refer to your words at the beginning regarding our force. I must say that our force is still limited and we must continue to make efforts so that this force can bring a greater contribution for us, for the Chinese people and the cause of socialism, for the cause of world revolution, and for world peace.

In the second place, I must thank you for the information that was both complete and multilateral made by comrade Bodnaras. Although the time was short, nevertheless you have referred to almost all of the issues, under all of their aspects.

From our numerous contacts and meetings with the leadership of your party, the position of your party's leadership and of your government is very clear to us.

As comrade Bodnaras said, we will discuss these problems further in Bucharest. We agree that the problems which you have presented to us today in incomplete form will be discussed in more detail in Bucharest, as will all of the problems that interest us.

Last year, when I was in Romania, although during an unforgettable and sad occasion [the funeral of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej], we nevertheless used that occasion and had very important conversations with your leadership. Although a year has passed since then, our position has remained the same in all regards.

Certainly things have developed further, and within the framework of the conversations which we will have very many new problems will arise, concerning which we need to discuss. Given that, I will not take up too much time addressing them now.

At the conclusion of comrade Bodnaras' presentation, we heard with great joy of your position of support for the struggle of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism, for the salvation of Vietnam, and of your faith in the final victory of the Vietnamese people. Your appreciation that the struggle of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism, for the salvation of the fatherland, is tied to the development of world revolution is very just. But it is exactly this problem that contemporary revisionists regard things differently. They have told the Vietnamese comrades: "You will probably win this war but then, when the people will be called to celebrate the victory, you will have no one left to participate in the celebration. That means that others will win the victory and you will have disappeared." This is their most typical and most reactionary point of view. Thus, first of all, please transmit my words to comrade Ceausescu, to comrade Maurer, and to the other comrades in the leadership of the party and state. Did the Vietnamese tell you who has said this?

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: We know nothing about that.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: The Vietnamese comrades probably did not tell you this because they could not tell you, but it has been confirmed by all of their top leadership.[2]

Other, more complicated problems will be discussed in more detail in Bucharest, because in these years the relations between our parties and countries has become very close. These problems regard not only the relations between our parties, between our states, but are also connected with the development of the world revolution and, as such, we must discuss them together in all sincerity.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: We agree.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: Then I will stop here.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: I would like to add that we have communicated to our Vietnamese comrades that we would stop in Beijing and that we would give a short briefing regarding what was discussed, as well as what we observed in Vietnam. They know what I have said to you, and what I have communicated to you is in the common spirit of those discussions. In Bucharest we will discuss in greater detail.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: Will news of these conversations be published in a newspaper?

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: Only the fact that we met will be published.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: The content of the conversations should not be published.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: Only the fact that our delegation, returning from Vietnam, had a meeting with your leadership will be published.

Cde. Zhou Enlai: [A report] on the reception last night was published.

Cde. Emil Bodnaras: I think we can appreciate that the conversations developed in a friendly atmosphere, which characterizes the relations between our parties and peoples.

[…]

[1] Translator's note: This was the first time Janos Kádár delivered what became his "well-worn incantation" that "devotion to the USSR" was the "touchstone of internationalism." This then became a standard refrain of the Hungarian party. See e.g. Fritz Ermarth, "Komócsin's Article in Pravda - Excerpts & Comments," RFER, 21 September 1966, OSA, Box 33, Folder 3, Report 105, pp. 3-4. See also Kádár in Pravda, 17 September 1967.

[2] The Romanian transcript notes here that "in a later discussion Chen Yi told comrade Bodnaras that Shelepin told the Vietnamese the above."