



21.08.1968

Invasion of Warsaw Pact troops, 20 – 21 August 1968

Although most citizens agreed with the democratisation process, an influential group led by Vasil' Bil'ak and Alois Indra considered the process a risk to socialism and sent warning signals to Moscow. The headquarters of the Communist Parties of the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic – at negotiations with representatives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and in letters – warned that the renewal process was unacceptable. The joint letter by the Communist Parties of the aforementioned five countries deriving from their Warsaw meeting on 15 July 1968 was the most important. According to this letter, the loss of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from the socialist camp was threatened, and this situation was not an internal matter for the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic but rather for all Warsaw Pact countries. Brezhnev accused Dubček of not being able to handle the situation or the creation of informal anti-communist civil organisations. Dubček promised to right the situation, but did not want to distract from the work that was promisingly developing. A large military exercise by 'friendly armies' of Warsaw pact troops in Czechoslovakia was a warning signal. The exercise was carried out from the end of June, with troops remaining in the country until the beginning of August 1968. The exercises were designed to create a basis for the permanent deployment of Soviet troops, whilst also demonstrating the military power of the country's neighbours, who disagreed with the renewal process. After negotiations in Čierna nad Tisou and Bratislava at the beginning of August 1968 it seemed that the matter had been solved. However, a declaration from the Bratislava negotiations indicated the future path: in addition to emphasising the independence of states, it also stated the protection of socialist benefits as a shared international duty of all socialist countries. The conservative group in the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia also decided to act by writing a letter in Russian to Brezhnev, requesting military intervention. On the night of 20 August 1968 operation 'Danube' started, the largest such operation in Europe since the end of the Second World War. Over 500,000 troops, 6,300 tanks, 2,000 artillery and 800 aircraft took part from five Warsaw Pact countries: the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, the Germany Democratic Republic and Bulgaria. The military hardware of the intervention troops was identified by a white strip. Surprised citizens awoke in the morning to the roar of tanks and military vehicles. They did not show their disapproval with armed resistance, as had been expected by occupational troops, but rather by demonstrations. They strove to explain to occupying soldiers that no counter revolution was underway in the country. However, only one side had military force in this war of nerves. In streets and squares in Slovak and Czech cities, 108 were killed of which twenty-nine were in Slovakia. Dubček with other members of the reform leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia were arrested by members of Soviet

..... security and state security forces and dispatched to the Soviet Union. The
..... extraordinary - Vysočany Congress of the Communist Party of the
..... Czechoslovakia was convened in Prague on 22 August 1968, which gave full
..... support for the Dubček leadership reforms and condemned the occupation. All
..... key state institutions stood against the occupation. Strong international solidarity
..... with the occupied country formed abroad. Radical protest was represented by
..... acts of self-immolation, the first of whom was Ryszard Siwiec in September 1969.
..... Others followed. In Romania Márton Moyses; in Hungary Sándor Bauer; in
..... Lithuania Romas Kalanta and Vytautas Vičiulis; in Ukraine Oleksa Hirnyk and
..... Vasil' Makuch; students Jan Palach, Jan Zajíc, Josef Hlavatý and Evžen Plocek in
..... Bohemia; and the conscripted soldier Michal Lefčík in Slovakia. Despite western
..... democratic states condemning the military intervention, they took no practical
..... steps. In this way the intervention confirmed the power division of Europe after
..... the Second World War. Czech and Slovak politicians negotiated in Moscow with
..... Soviet politicians and mostly agreed with the occupational troops remaining in
..... Czechoslovakia until the situation had normalised. Soviet intervention troops
..... remained in the state until 1991 - being deployed in thirty-three places and
..... numbering 150,000 strong. The arrival of intervention troops initiated the process
..... of normalisation in Czechoslovakia. All democratic achievements of the renewal
..... process were gradually removed. A time of compromise and fear of sanctions on
..... the government's side arose. It was also a period when courageous groups of
..... dissidents informed the world about basic rights and freedoms being breached in
..... the country. The 'hidden church' was most active in this relation in Slovakia,
..... which secretly ordained the bishops Chryzostom Korec, Silvester Krčméry and
..... Vladimír Jukl.



Translated from Slovak to English by Darren Chastney, proofread by Dr Ian Copestake



Prof. Mária Tonková, Prof. Róbert Letz, Prof. Anna Bocková



References: