

Annex IV
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Speech by the Head of the Czechoslovak Delegation, Alexander Dubček, at the Meeting
of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Treaty in Sofia on March 6, 1968

Dear Comrades,

Our meeting is expected to take a stand regarding a very serious matter that is of vital importance not only for the socialist countries, but also for the people of all nations. This is why the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic agreed with the proposal to convene a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee, so that we could also discuss, in addition to other urgent issues, our position with respect to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which is currently being prepared.

We also agreed to a preparatory meeting of Deputy Foreign Ministers, hoping that it could make a major contribution toward clarifying and harmonizing our positions, so that we could reach an agreement in principle here in Sofia and be able to present a unanimous standpoint, as all members of the Warsaw Treaty, calling for the speedy approval and acceptance of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Unfortunately, Deputy Foreign Ministers meeting in Berlin failed to achieve any progress on this issue. Six of the Warsaw Treaty members, including the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, fully support the draft treaty submitted by the Soviet Union and the United States to the Eighteen-Nation [Disarmament] Committee. However, the Socialist Republic of Romania harbors certain reservations, both material and tactical, regarding the issue at hand and further steps to be taken, about which the Romanian comrades have also notified us here in Sofia.

Dear Comrades,

I listened with attention to Comrade Ceaușescu's speech, which he delivered a while ago and in which he explained to us once again in detail the position of the Socialist Republic of Romania with regard to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

I do not want to argue and deal with some of the proposals of our Romanian comrades in detail, but permit me a short comment regarding a proposed change in Article VI of the draft nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which, in the opinion of the Romanian comrades,

should stipulate specific commitments by the nuclear powers with regard to nuclear disarmament. For the sake of accuracy, I will quote the proposal as stated in the speech of Comrade Ceaușescu: “The signatories possessing nuclear weapons hereby undertake to adopt specific measures to stop the production of nuclear weapons and to reduce and dispose of stocks of nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles in the shortest time possible.”

Comrades, I believe I am telling you nothing new when I say that similar proposals aimed at the liquidation of nuclear weapons were presented by the Soviet Union a long time ago and that all socialist countries, including ours, have strived for their inclusion when pushing for a treaty on universal and complete disarmament. The proposals are, in themselves, fair and correct, but having held lengthy negotiations on these issues, we know that the United States and its allies are not yet willing to accept them. I mention this because we must always bear in mind that the acceptance of any proposal requires the consent of the parties involved in the negotiations. As the United States has not hitherto agreed to the issues that the Romanian comrades propose to include in the treaty – and we know very well that their position has not changed – its [the United States’] persistent resistance may wreck the treaty. Such a scenario would not benefit or be in the interest of socialist countries.

The fact that some capitalist states, especially the Federal Republic of Germany, have sufficient industrial and technological capabilities to produce nuclear weapons, must make us not only concerned but also determined to take decisive steps to prevent such dangerous developments.

This is why the conclusion of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty as soon as possible is in our interests, and we should avoid doing anything that could shatter our efforts. We should reach agreement here that we will speak as one for the immediate signing of the treaty, that we will sign it and, after it is accepted, we will promote together further nuclear disarmament proposals. Any further delays in concluding the nuclear non-proliferation treaty will be disadvantageous for us.

The Romanian comrades emphasize they want the treaty to be as good as possible, so that it can guarantee the interests of the socialist countries in the best way possible. They say they want to wring the maximum concessions from the imperialist powers and force them into taking further effective steps in the field of disarmament, particularly with respect to nuclear weapons. They claim they want to accommodate the opinions of some other countries, especially the neutral and non-aligned ones, which want the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to be signed by as many states as possible. We do not want to underestimate or downplay these problems. They are real problems; they must be taken

into account and dealt with appropriately. However, we cherish the interests of the socialist community no less; we do care about our security and that of our friends. We also want a good treaty with as many signatories as possible.

If we now agree with the submitted draft of the treaty and strive for its approval and signature without any further procrastination, it is not because we believe it is a model of perfection in which nothing can be improved, or because we will give up in the future struggle for disarmament. It is because we believe that, under the circumstances and given the present international situation, the draft that has been submitted represents the maximum that can be achieved, now that all options have been considered in the tedious negotiations of the Eighteen-Nation [Disarmament] Committee, in which we took an active part. Nothing would be easier than to take a red pencil and start editing various clauses of the treaty. However, of what use would the improved document be to us, if the representatives of the countries undertaking to abide by it did not confirm and endorse it? It is a well-known fact that the draft must be approved by at least a two-thirds majority of the UN General Assembly and ratified by a minimum of 40 countries, including the United States, to become a valid document.

All of us know that the threat of nuclear war could be eliminated once and for all by a universal and complete nuclear disarmament and a liquidation of all the means needed to wage it. However, this goal is not within reach, and it will probably have to be approached step by step. One of the steps is the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The treaty naturally does not eliminate the danger of a nuclear war, but it reduces it substantially.

It is a well-known fact that the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons could soon increase to include the Federal Republic of Germany, which is of particular concern to us because the forces of militarism and revanchism are becoming increasingly active, and we are also witnessing there a dangerous rise in neo-Nazism. If the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is to be effective with regard to the Federal Republic of Germany, it must be signed as soon as possible – in this year in any case – because the pace at which the Federal Republic of Germany has been building and developing its nuclear industry raises concerns that West Germany could very soon start producing its own nuclear weapons.

Time is becoming a crucial factor here, and any further procrastination could make the treaty irrelevant. The increasing number of nuclear countries would have most the serious consequences, both for the international situation and for the future perspective for negotiations on universal and complete disarmament.

We must now answer the essential question: is it better to have, under the circumstances, a treaty which is “imperfect,” or no treaty at all? In other words: should we choose “nothing,” if we cannot achieve “everything”?

A realistic assessment of our options and especially our conviction favoring the earliest possible conclusion of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty prompt a clear answer to the question as to whether we should vote for the present draft: yes, we declare our support for it, and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic will sign the treaty.

The issue of ensuring the security of non-nuclear states is, without doubt, a serious one. It is a well-known fact that all efforts attempting to incorporate security guarantees for non-nuclear states have so far met with the resolute opposition of the United States. Now there may be a solution outside the framework of the treaty, and we firmly hope that the proposed arrangement will satisfy all the countries concerned. We believe that an appropriate resolution of the Security Council, supported by special statements or affirmations from the nuclear states, may sufficiently guarantee that the countries renouncing nuclear weapons by signing the treaty will be provided with an adequate enough guarantee against the danger of a nuclear attack on the basis of the UN Charter. After all, as far as we are concerned, Soviet nuclear might provides a sufficient enough security guarantee.

We all know how much time and effort was necessary to find a satisfactory solution to the arms control issue – for a long time one of the hardest obstacles on the road to the treaty. As arms control is invariably a very sensitive issue, and even more so whenever nuclear weapons are involved, it was necessary to proceed in a way that did not allow the Western powers to give an advantage to some of their non-nuclear NATO partners and that retained the principle of universal control. We believe the solution as proposed in the current draft of the treaty is our success, as it meets our requirement regarding the IAEA’s¹ role in the implementation of controls. Given that the existing formulation of the control clause is acceptable for the major groups of states involved in the negotiations on the draft treaty and is balanced, I think it would be unrealistic to demand any new and substantive changes now, which could bring us back to the initial disputes regarding the principles and forms of control and endanger the treaty’s conclusion.

Dear Comrades,

¹ International Atomic Energy Agency.

I would like to reiterate our conviction that acceptance of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty will have a positive effect on the international situation and will be perceived as a contribution of the socialist states to international peace and the security of all nations and, last but not least, also as a contribution to our effort to develop a collective security system in Europe. I am not sure how, at this stage, an accusation against the socialist states that they have torpedoed the treaty and made its signature impossible would be received.

We should proceed in a way that will not result in our wasting the positive circumstances favoring the conclusion of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and will permit compliance with the planned date of its discussion by the United Nations.

I trust that we will responsibly consider our further steps jointly, take into account all the relevant consequences, and reach a mutual and very much needed agreement. By way of conclusion, I would like to express, on behalf of the Czechoslovak delegation, our thanks to our Bulgarian comrades for hosting the meeting in Sofia, for the good organization and friendly hospitality that they have extended to us here.

[Translation by Jiří Mareš]