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EO 12958 3.3(b)(1)>25Yrs

Czechoslovakia: Party boss Dubcek has for the first time unequivocally associated himself with sweeping changes in Czechoslovakia.

In a major speech on 16 March, he endorsed the "democratization" process which had been set in motion after his election in January. He also implied that there are practical limits on how far this process will be allowed to proceed. He indicated, for example, that while the political system must remain Communist, it also must be responsive to the will of the people. He said that particular interest groups-- such as students and farmers-- must have an influential voice in decision making.

He unambiguously emphasized that Czechoslovakia will stand "firmly and unshakeably" loyal to its Communist allies and will work for international Communist unity. At the same time, however, he said that his regime will work to restore traditional relationships with the rest of the world as long as they do not conflict with its basic alliances.

Dubcek's speech identified him with far-reaching decisions made on 14- 15 March by the party's presidium. These decisions go a long way toward meeting the expectations of the rank-and-file party members and the population. Detailed information on the party central committee meetings that led to the ouster of former party boss Novotny will be made available to every party member. Personnel changes will be proposed at the central committee session in late March to make it possible for the party and government to "successfully realize and pursue the new policy." The National Assembly was urged to adopt a new election law, presumably one which would be more democratic than the single slate provided by the present law.

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The presidium accepted the assurances of the armed forces and police that they will faithfully serve the country in the spirit of the law, thus implying a retreat from past use of arbitrary power. The commission investigating the defection of Major General Sejna was charged with "drawing conclusions regardless of anyone," meaning that top party and government leaders, including President Novotny, probably will be implicated. The presidium responded to demands for the "rehabilitation" and compensation of some 40,000 people who had been unjustly treated in Stalinist times. The foreign policy stance it adopted was similar to the one elaborated by Dubcek and should be acceptable to Moscow.

At the same time that these developments were taking place in Prague, the Russians seemed to be making some contingency plans of their own.

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There is no evidence at this time, however, that the Soviets are moving any troops or that Moscow expects the Czechoslovak situation to deteriorate to an extent that would raise the question of intervention. [redacted]

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