

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Michal Kovac, President of the
Slovakia (U)

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.
The President
Madeleine Albright, U.S. Permanent
Representative to the United Nations
Daniel Fried, Senior Director for Central
and Eastern European Affairs NSC
(Notetaker)

Slovakia
Michal Kovac, President
Josef Sestak, Deputy Foreign Minister
Branislav Lichardus, Ambassador to U.S.
Pavel Demes, Presidential Foreign Policy
Advisor

DATE, TIME October 21, 1995, 12:30-12:50 p.m.
AND PLACE: National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library,
Library Room

The President: It's good to see you. (U)

President Kovac: Yesterday was the longest traveling day of my
life. We flew to New York, then to St. Louis and then to Cedar
Rapids. I arrived only at 1:00 a.m. (U)

The President: I'm amazed that you're awake. (U)

President Kovac: My wife woke me up at 4:30 this morning; she
was calling from New York. I need every hour of sleep I can get.
(U)

The President: I find I need even more sleep now that I am
President than when I was younger. (U)

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Let us begin. I'm glad to have the chance to visit with you. I have two or three things to bring up but I could listen first to what you have to say. (U)

President Kovac: Thank you, Mr. President, for attending the opening of the National Czech and Slovak Museum. I and the Slovak people appreciate the good relations between the United States and Slovakia. We appreciate your rich political dialogue and our partnership which, we hope, could grow to an actual alliance. (U)

Permit me to express some Slovak self congratulation with respect to Slovakia's achievements since attaining independence -- these achievements will please you as well. For example, our economy achieved excellent results last year and is likely to do so this year as well. This is the result of our choice of a democratic and free market economic transformation. We want to see our citizens understand that this transformation means something for them beyond frustration and austerity; that it will bring prosperity. I appreciate U.S. economic assistance to Slovakia, both technical assistance in economic reform and U.S. investment. There are 300 Americans in Slovakia offering us help in various fields and this too is greatly appreciated. (U)

Slovakia also has been successful in its efforts to improve relations with its neighbors and to stabilize Central Europe. Hungary and Slovakia signed an important bilateral agreement which will be submitted to Slovakia's Parliament in November for ratification. I believe this treaty shall be ratified. The difficult issue of the Gabčíkovo dam, currently being considered by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, will likely be settled out of court and thus an irritant in Slovak-Hungarian relations will be removed. (U)

By taking these steps, Slovakia is establishing good conditions for its integration with Europe and European institutions such as the EU and NATO. I greatly appreciate the historic decision of the United States to establish the Partnership for Peace. I remember your visit to Prague in January 1994 which was a major step forward in the establishment of security in Europe. Your policy and the activities of the Partnership for Peace have stimulated our security cooperation -- both between defense ministries and between our militaries themselves. We have examined the recent NATO Study on enlargement. As Minister Sestak has noted, Slovakia's reaction to this study is positive. The Slovak Government is aware of the importance of the Study and is prepared to undertake all the obligations necessary in order for NATO's enlargement to proceed.

Please accept my congratulations on the recent successful negotiations in Bosnia, led by Ambassador Holbrooke. We all know that building on progress achieved so far will be complex, but some decisive steps are already being made. The Government of Slovakia is aware that we need to contribute to a settlement and we are prepared to contribute with a peacekeeping unit. (S)

Deputy Minister Sestak: We can contribute a peacekeeping unit with respect to implementation of a peace settlement. (S)

President Kovac: We consider it important that we fulfill our international obligations. (S)

Let me also mention Slovakia's domestic political situation, particularly the certain tension that now exists. I would like to express my views on this issue. A certain crystallization is taking among the various political forces in the country. They are grouping themselves with respect to democratic values and with respect to their views of integration with the West and membership in the EU and NATO. (S)

It may be a good thing that this difficult process is taking place now; better now than in five years. There is no doubt that it will result in strengthened democracy and a state of law in Slovakia. We will fulfill the conditions needed to be a member of NATO. This children's disease we are going through -- our democratic growing pains -- will be overcome and the sooner the better for our future, including for our efforts to join NATO and the EU. (S)

The President: Thank you. First, let me thank you for being willing to participate in international efforts in Bosnia and in the Partnership for Peace. In Bosnia, we are working steadily in NATO about what we should do. The details must await a peace agreement, but already we know that we want the largest number of nations possible to participate. This would send a signal of stability throughout Europe. (S)

Regarding NATO's expansion, as you know, NATO has completed its report on why NATO should expand and how. We are now sharing that preliminary report with Partners and getting their comments. We should proceed toward enlargement deliberately and in an open fashion. (S)

As far as Russia is concerned, we believe that there is a way to work with them and with others about the enlargement of NATO. The speed of enlargement and the question of which nations will join the Alliance will depend on conditions in each country. We are impressed by Slovakia's progress, especially its economic progress and the establishment of civilian control of the

military. As you know, we have asked Congress for funds to support our military cooperation with Slovakia and we hope that these will be available. (X)

I am very pleased and impressed by Slovakia's efforts to improve relations with Hungary and other neighbors. This is very good for you and for Europe. (X)

I was interested in your summary of political developments in your country. We are aware of problems and reports suggesting that difficulties exist concerning the rule of law, freedom of the press, the intimidation of political figures by the police and other issues. These questions are of great concern in the United States. We never take sides in partisan political conflicts. Who wins and who loses political contests is none of our affair. But observing the democratic rules of the game is. Having strong relations with countries that recognize democracy and human rights is very important to us. (X)

President Kovac: I am aware of your views, as are all responsible forces and political parties in Slovakia. The current fights are tough and difficult, but they show that the democratic institutions established after 1989 are functioning after a fashion. I also am aware that these institutions cannot by themselves guarantee democracy. We need a democratic way of thinking, of acting, of behaving. That is, we need to adopt all the democratic principles internally, within ourselves. But all of us are still carrying elements of the old way of thinking and behaving. We must solve our problems by ourselves but we must solve them. (X)

We know that all decent countries, especially the United States, will help develop democracy in our country. We see your concern about Slovakia as a sign of your interest in Central Europe and in the whole post-communist world. Your concern about Slovakia also is a sign of your good will toward Slovakia; most Slovaks see it this way. So thank you for your concern and for your help. (X)

The President: Our concern is indeed a sign of our friendship. As a friend we want strong, close partnerships in Central Europe and such partnerships must be based on democracy. We need a long-term partnership with Central Europe to help stabilize conditions in that region and help the countries there avoid pitfalls. Again, our concern is a sign of our support for Slovakia. (X)

Deputy Minister Sestak: On behalf of the Government of Slovakia, let me thank you for your support, Mr. President. We are aware of certain concerns. At the same time, Slovakia has delivered,

in a very short period of time, elements of stability for Central Europe. We are an engine of support for the Central European Free Trade Area and CEFTA is greatly appreciated in Europe and by NATO. We are active in other ways as well in promoting security in Central Europe. Since you have met the President, it would be of great help and service to us if you would agree to meet with Prime Minister Meciar if you have the time. (U)

The President: Well, I'll see what I can do about that. Mr. President, thank you again for coming here; it was good to talk to you. (U)

President Kovac: Thank you, Mr. President. (U)

President Kovac then presented a gift to President Clinton. (U)

-- End of Conversation --