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CS -- ONE-SIDED TRAVEL AGREEMENT WITH THE GDR

Munich, 19 January 1972 (EERA/Czechoslovak Unit) --

A communiqué issued at the conclusion of the visit of a top-level GDR party and state delegation to Czechoslovakia on 11 and 12 November 1971 included the following passage: "The two delegations have agreed on measures designed to facilitate and improve passenger and goods traffic across the border of the two states. From the beginning of 1972 travel will be greatly simplified on the basis of visaless travel" (Rude Pravo, 13 November 1971).

This result of the talks between Honecker and Stoph on one side and Husak and Strougal on the other raised hopes that travel between the two countries would be simplified even more than it was in 1967, when the entry-visa requirement was abolished by both countries (see Rude Pravo, 15 July 1967). Under the 1967 agreement, however, either a passport or an identification card with an exit permit from the country concerned still had to be presented to border authorities.

On 13 January 1972 the Press Office of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the GDR announced that neither passports nor visas would henceforth be needed by East German citizens traveling to the CSSR. Since a similar arrangement had been in effect since 1 January 1972 between the GDR and Poland (see Polish Situation Report/2, Radio Free Europe Research /EERA/, 14 January 1972, Item 2), it was generally assumed that the CSSR-GDR agreement would also be reciprocal.

The first doubts were aroused when Radio Bratislava (16 January 1972) reported that under the treaty, which had come into effect on the previous day, East German citizens were able to cross the border after having simply presented their identification cards. The Slovak station did not mention Czechoslovak citizens in this context, and Radio Prague has so far ignored the innovation altogether.

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A confirmation of the one-sided nature of the agreement was supplied by the party daily Rude Pravo (17 January 1972). Under the heading "With Identity Cards for Czech Beer," the paper published a brief Ceteka release to the effect that, on the basis of the Czechoslovak-GDR treaty which came into effect on 15 January 1972, GDR citizens would be able to cross the frontier to Czechoslovakia upon presentation of their identity cards. Hitherto, the paper added, they had to request a travel document for each trip to Czechoslovakia. Again, there was no mention of reciprocity in this context.

Some details of the standing regulations were supplied by the Stuttgarter Zeitung (18 January 1972). Under a Prague dateline the paper's correspondent Hans Peter Riese reported that "for the time being" this relaxation applied only to citizens of the GDR. Inhabitants of the CSSR must, as before, either produce a valid passport or apply for endorsement of their identity cards (i.e., exit permits).

Details on travel in the opposite direction were supplied by the SED daily Neues Deutschland (14 January 1972). According to that paper, GDR citizens traveling to the CSSR need present only an identity card. Neither passports nor Czechoslovak entry visas are required as of January 15, and the Genehmigungsverfahren (a permit issued by the East German Volkspolizei) has also been abolished. East German travelers to Czechoslovakia only have to produce a certificate attesting to the purchase of Czechoslovak currency (Kcs) in the GDR. Travelers may go to the CSSR by air from the Berlin-Schoenefeld airport, by rail via Bad Brambach and Bad Schandau, or by road via Schoenberg, Zinnwald, Schmilka, Seifhennersdorf, and the newly opened crossing point at Oberwiesenthal.

Commenting on the purpose of the agreement, the above-mentioned issue of Neues Deutschland stated that the relaxing of travel regulations was designed to deepen the friendship between the nations of the GDR and the CSSR by enabling them to get to know one another better. However, the sentiments of the Czechoslovak populace toward GDR citizens, never very friendly and since the August 1968 invasion often openly hostile, will hardly warm up as a result of this discriminatory treatment.

On the one hand, the Czechoslovak regime claims that the consistent process of "consolidation" has restored the country's firm links with and standing in the "socialist" community. On the other, this inequitable practice, especially with regard to East Germany, fosters the impression that Czechoslovak citizens are still considered second-class members of the socialist system. This feeling will perhaps be most keenly felt in the northwestern regions of Bohemia bordering on the GDR.

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