

# RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

## EAST EUROPE

*This material was prepared for the use of the editors and policy staff of Radio Free Europe.*

BULGARIA/7

19 February 1970

### INTERNATIONAL TOURISM -- A MATTER OF CONCERN TO THE BULGARIAN REGIME

Summary: This paper reviews the results of a research project carried out among the service personnel at two major Bulgarian coastal resorts. The purpose of the inquiry was to establish the nature of and reasons for "negative" phenomena within the vacation complexes. The notorious "bourgeois influence" brought into the country by the ever-growing number of Western tourists was again blamed, but it was also admitted that many of these negative phenomena are due to weak points and shortcomings in present-day Bulgarian society. Of particular interest is the admission that "bourgeois ideology" infiltrates the country not only through Western visitors, but also through holiday-makers from Communist Central European nations, such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany.

\* \* \*

One of the features that has characterized Bulgaria's all-round development during the past decade is the successful effort of the Bulgarian regime to promote the country as a Mecca for foreign tourists. Although the regime was again late, compared to other East European nations, in embarking on the road of "international" tourism (for most Bulgarians this notion is still no more than a one-way street), the country has experienced a real tourist "boom," which brought the number of foreign visitors from 200,602 in 1960 to 2,131,000 in 1969.(1)

- (1) It should be noted that these figures include both holiday-makers and travelers in transit, whose number is believed to be considerable.

Huge capital investments in the tourist industry, relatively low prices by Western standards, and -- not least -- pleasant natural conditions are among the factors that have contributed to the considerable expansion of tourism achieved over the past decade.

Bearing in mind the well-known nervousness of the Bulgarian regime about any sort of ideological "danger," it was to be expected that the tourist move, undertaken principally because of the country's need for hard currency, would create problems for the authorities, due to the increased influence of Westerners on a sizable section of the Bulgarian population. In order to counteract this development, the regime tried to discourage contacts between foreigners in general, and Western visitors in particular, and the local people. The measures taken to this end have ranged from well-orchestrated annual warnings, delivered in the form of press articles on the eve of each tourist season,(2) to the imposition of strict legal and administrative punishments on all sorts of "violators." On the whole, the policy of the Bulgarian regime with regard to the development of international tourism has been a cocktail of willingness and determination to go ahead with a project so profitable from an economic point of view, and clearly expressed efforts to counteract the "evils" of the increased "bourgeois influence" alleged to have been spreading in Bulgaria with the expansion of the tourist industry.

#### A Sociological Survey

To get a clearer picture of the impact of the ever-growing number of Western holiday-makers on the Bulgarian populace, a sociological research project was initiated in 1967 by the Party, administrative, and Komsomol leadership within the Balkan-tourist state tourist agency in the Druzhba and Golden Sands coastal resorts near Varna. The project was carried out on the basis of conversations, interviews, observation (primarily of the influence exerted by foreigners), evaluation of documents supplied by public organizations, administrative managements, and police departments, and an anonymous opinion poll taken among 900 members of the 4,000-strong service personnel at the above two resorts. The results and conclusions of the project appeared in the September-October 1969 issue of the recently launched bimonthly publication of the Sociological Institute at the Bulgarian Academy

- (2) For more information, see Michael Costello, "Bulgaria Prepares for the Tourist Season," Bulgarian Background Report/5, Radio Free Europe Research, 11 March 1968.

of Sciences, Problems of Sociology. (3) The article was entitled "Negative Phenomena in Our Resorts," and was signed by Mois Semov, a well-known specialist in sociological matters and a participant in the 1967 research project.

In a sort of general introduction, Semov stated that along with positive features, the project had revealed a large number of negative, amoral, and even criminal activities at the Druzhba and Golden Sands resorts. Among the most typical of these he listed greed, profiteering, larceny, currency violations, national nihilism (demonstrated primarily by a scornful attitude toward Bulgarian holiday-makers), admiration for what is foreign, the cult of hard currency, and loose morals.

Semov argued that the very existence of, not to mention the increase in, anti-social acts is directly related to the increased number of both holiday-makers and service personnel; he pointed out quite correctly, however, that the increased number of such persons was only a precondition for the increase in anti-social acts. According to the survey, in the 1961-1966 period the number of vacationers increased by 116 per cent, but larceny and currency violations increased during the same period by 236 per cent.

One of the reasons for the existence of these negative phenomena, according to Semov, is again the notorious "bourgeois influence" which results from the daily contacts of the service personnel with guests from the West. Complaining that these contacts do not always remain within the framework of business, the author emphasized the fact that those who have a command of foreign languages frequently discuss political and ethical subjects with Western holiday-makers.

Apparently realizing that conversations on such subjects have nothing to do with larceny and currency violations, Semov let the cat out of the bag by making the following statement:

It is the opinion of many people that negative influence is due primarily to the fact that Western holiday-makers often give clear evidence that they enjoy a higher standard of living. The very fact that [these visitors] (a large number of whom are working people) spend their vacations in resorts that are relatively expensive for us, have good clothes, have in most cases more money at their disposal, makes propaganda

- 
- (3) This publication was started at the beginning of 1969, but it is only recently that the first five issues have become available here.

for the higher standard of living in the major capitalist countries. This cannot fail to introduce elements of doubt among some people, to stir up feelings of admiration for what is foreign and toadying to foreigners. What is more, there are hotel managers who demand that their service personnel take better care of Western holiday-makers because of their hard currency. Such a cult of foreigners cannot stimulate patriotic feelings.

In discussing the infiltration of "bourgeois ideology" Semov made an interesting admission, to the effect that Bulgarian service personnel are adversely influenced by Western ideological concepts and morality not only through their contacts with Westerners, but also through contacts with "holiday-makers from Central European socialist nations, such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the GDR" /emphasis added/. In view of this statement, and if the conclusions of the project are seriously taken into consideration, it may be expected that contacts between Bulgarians and "socialist" holiday-makers will also be discouraged, along with contacts with "capitalist" visitors.

It is to the credit of the author, however, that he did not exaggerate the extent of the influence exerted by foreign visitors, and that he was bold enough to state that "bourgeois influence ... is not the main reason for the existence of moral lapses, as some people think," indicating that the presence of foreigners is rather a precondition for certain undesirable phenomena, -- such as currency violations, national nihilism, underestimation of socialism and overestimation of capitalism -- and not the cause of them. "Bourgeois influence," argued Semov, "cannot be the cause of larceny, double-dealing, speculation, greed, profiteering, the attitude toward labor, bureaucracy, machinations, drunkenness, and many other moral vices." And he made the daring admission that "such negative phenomena are conditioned both by characteristics in the development of human consciousness and behavior and by some elements in the socialist basis and suprastructure of our society" /emphasis added/.

In an effort to pinpoint these negative elements in "socialist" reality Semov pointed to several "economic and supra-structural factors that hinder Communist education of service personnel and foster negative phenomena." One such socioeconomic factor, valid for Bulgarian society as a whole, is "insufficient production, and the consequent insufficient material security and low remuneration of labor." Semov explained that this was the reason why the financial policy of the Balkantourist state agency, designed to get more profit out of the foreign visitors, becomes the personal policy of the members of the service personnel. In this particular case, however, the greed for money in general



is transformed into greed for hard currency and, as Semov put it, these tendencies are encouraged by some aspects of Bulgaria's economic policy as carried out by Balkantourist. In this connection it was emphasized that the Corecom(4) stores at the resorts and the nature of the goods offered in them (for the most part unavailable on the regular domestic market) "actually serve the cult of the dollar, the DM, etc." Semov revealed that these stores did not fulfill the purpose for which they were set up, since more than 80 per cent of all purchases are made by Bulgarians, Poles, Czechoslovaks, and other "socialist" visitors, who apparently obtain their hard currency through "illegal" methods. What is more, the author sees a direct relationship between the existence of these stores and the increase in larceny involving hard currency; while in 1960 only eight instances of this kind of larceny were reported, in 1964, the year the stores went into operation, the number of thefts reached 28, and in 1966 it was 53. Summing up, Semov stated:

We think this state of affairs is related to the desire of a lot of people to get hold of hard currency in order to obtain imported goods from the Corecom stores. The very fact that one can buy high-quality goods with hard currency inevitably engenders the idea that it is a good thing, hence an admiration for it. Here we see one inevitable negative result of Bulgaria's embarking on the road of international tourism. And this result will be with us until we catch up with and surpass the capitalist nations, until our money becomes of equal, or greater, value than the present hard currency.

Also interesting are Semov's admissions about the discrimination against Bulgarian holiday-makers displayed by service personnel at the sea-side resorts,(5) inasmuch as this is common knowledge among the population but is rarely reported in official sources. Semov timidly complained that the situation of the Bulgarian holiday-maker is frequently determined not by "socialist" but by "bourgeois" principles. The attitude

- 
- (4) Corecom is a trading enterprise which deals in virtually everything, including Western goods, against hard currency. The enterprise has branches in the major Bulgarian cities, as well as at the resorts of Druzhba, Golden Sands, and Sunny Beach.
- (5) And not only there. The writer of this paper was once advised by a waitress in a Sofia café that if he wanted a cup of Nescafé, a novelty in Bulgaria several years ago, he should order it in English or French. Someone had ordered that Nescafé was to be served only to foreigners.

of hotel and restaurant managers and service personnel toward a Bulgarian depends not on the value of his "labor for society," but on the money at his disposal. If he is fashionably dressed, says Semov, and has a lot of money, then people are very polite to him, but if his pocket is not so full he gets little attention. At one point in his article Semov said that the proportion between foreign and Bulgarian holiday-makers was 3:1 in 1966(6) -- yet another sign of the general discrimination against local people.

#### What Should be Done?

Semov took it upon himself to propose several measures, based on conclusions drawn from the research project, designed to limit the influence of that complex of reasons for the existence of negative phenomena. Making an over-all evaluation of the situation, he admitted that a large number of the existing "moral vices" among people at the sea-side resorts could not be eliminated simply because they were "objective, unavoidable, and connected with our social reality," emphasizing again that some of these are "elements of socialist social relations, and owe their existence to the insufficiently high level of development of social production and the insufficient maturity of socialist social relations." So far as trade, money, and hard currency are concerned, the author stated that to abandon them would mean an end to the activities of Balkantourist and the entire policy of making Bulgaria a tourist site for foreigners, although, as Semov put it, this would also eliminate "the bourgeois influence penetrating through foreign holiday-makers."

To find a way to break out of this hard-currency-ideological vicious circle, Semov suggested a "limitation on negative phenomena" which should take several directions. One of these would be to improve the standard of living of service personnel through various fringe benefits, in order to "close the gap between their way of life and that of the foreign vacationers." As an example of this gap Semov related that in the summer of 1967 members of the service personnel could be seen taking their lunch, which consisted only of bread and cheese,

- 
- (6) In 1961 there were a total of 57,000 foreigners and 34,000 Bulgarians in Druzhba and Golden Sands, and in 1966 the corresponding figures were 143,000 and 54,000. It is interesting that while the number of foreign visitors in the two resorts went up by 250 per cent during the 1961-1966 period, the corresponding increase in Bulgarians was only about 63 per cent.

on the grounds in front of fashionable restaurants filled with foreigners. The author added that eventually the management of Balkantourist had taken appropriate measures (it is to be hoped that the management not only moved the lunch-site, but also changed menu of its personnel).

Another suggestion made by Semov is related to the power of money in general and hard currency in particular, which should be decreased by making high-quality Western goods available for Bulgarian currency. To illustrate his point, Semov quoted a Bulgarian who, when a Corecom store refused to accept leva in payment for a purchase he wished to make, had stated with indignation: "I am paid by the state in leva, not in dollars." In this context Semov voiced the opinion that the Corecom stores in the Druzhba and Golden Sands resorts should be closed down.

While some of Semov's evaluations and suggestions are remarkably objective and open-minded (notably his reluctance to blame "bourgeois influence" for everything, as is usually done in the Party-controlled press), his suggestions concerning the need to fight and neutralize "bourgeois ideological influence" nevertheless bear the trade-mark of official dogma. He urged more intensive ideological indoctrination of service personnel, in order to "immunize it against the decomposing influence of imperialist ideological diversion and the outbursts of contemporary anti-Communism." He even argued that this indoctrination should compensate for the losses of Bulgarians due to "the above-mentioned objective socio-economic factors in our society." In this connection, the Party and Komsomol leaderships of Balkantourist in Varna were given credit for having organized a number of teaching circles for "Communist education," while a considerable number of managers were said to have passed a month-long course in Marxist-Leninist ethics.(7)

Equally unconvincing and superficial is Semov's half-hearted admission that the imposition of compulsory measures

---

(7) According to materials available in this office, the Party leadership in Varna distributes lectures (stamped "For Business Use Only"), prepared more objectively and less marked by propaganda, among Party people, who deliver them to "those concerned." It is presumed that the latter category also includes the managerial and service personnel of the sea-side resorts.

and punishments cannot be discontinued at this particular moment. It is the criterion for imposing one punishment or another that really counts here, and it is this criterion that is so frequently confused in Bulgaria, whose leading group is characterized by an enormous lack of confidence and consequently constant nervousness over all sorts of real or imaginary ideological "dangers."

R.T.

(Bulgarian Unit)