

**"Bulgaria and the World
at the Dawn of 2007"
Report of a Listening Post
held on Friday 12th January**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles. This part was concerned with what might be called 'the stuff of people's everyday lives' that related to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Social Roles and Experiences

Out of the role of a traveler in the public transport - watching how other travelers when witnessing someone in trouble first retreat and then rush towards the person in need as if someone is watching them and they are waiting for some praise: *"It is not as in the American society - they breath as they help...I have a friend here - nobody encourages her, her relatives consider her a nonentity...10 Americans here would be enough for..."* The un-formal participations become formal ones...Memories about memberships that have not brought freedom...*"I am a freelancer."* Some people wont to "push themselves back" from some organizations...Events dedicated to Cuba, new kind of public language about Cuba ...*"I have found some "adherents"...people willing to work in the society's periphery...not to be in the Centre"...Can we avoid the trauma of the un-freedom from the past life in the new formal organizations and memberships?"*

"I have realized how poor is the spectrum of the professional roles in our country... Still from the time of the socialism there are relatively few distinct professions... A professional identity is seldom declared publicly..." Pride and joy when reading the title of "psychologist" after her own name as unique amongst the list of staff positions in an University...

The Virtual Space - a new social space...

Why in the dawn of 2007? In Bulgaria we are accustomed to speak about the "on the eve of"...*"I have several jobs...I belong to several different social companies/networks with no contacts with each other...I have also a family sort of anonymous belonging to... as if you can disappear in every moment..."*

Out of the role of a divorced woman and a mother: *"...the social policy of the State limits the number of activities I can enroll my daughter in. A female friend has been looked with a "bad eye" because she had 2 official male partners and a lover yet she felt comfortable in that situation... A leading female politician who has divorced left a husband with a first name Kamen (stone) and married a man called Svetlin (light)..."*

"My social roles break apart...this is almost as a kind of a "rule" to follow - you can not transfer yourself from one role to another... For a long time I had assumed the social role of a person who is not interested in the "social"...I do not possess the instruments for this, I have not the social "attitude"... people do not feel part of the society..."

Out of the role of a traveler in the country side - cultural shock out of the experience of receiving help from many people on the road...*"I thought Bulgarians do not help."*

Strong fatigue: *"...during the transitional period I have been working for a special mission - the social work as a profession: professional association, director of a master program and many other roles...Today I feel these extremely restricting...I want very much to reconsider my participation in the community...to see new people...people less affected by the transition period...Now with the joining European Union I think I can have a rest..."*

"I feel exhausted too - being a school teacher in the country side, researcher... in the province things are even worse: when trying to organize school teachers in an association I have been asked: But what is your "racket" out of all this stuff? The club failed, we failed to make some policy... and I decided not to try to organize people together forever...Policy making! I would write on this subject..."

"Let's do a network of the anonymous volunteers!"...The preservation of the environment and the tourist industry over-construction...the danger of blowing out the small communities we are entering today with our new projects...

As if within the individual citizen there are conflicting cultures?

Out of the role of an ordinary Bulgarian citizen...some losing of faith...

As if there are already more foreigners in Bulgaria?...

Sitting between a bus driver listening to a kitch folk music and a couple of Italians...whose conversation although un-intelligible she felt as a shelter against the aggressive pervasiveness of the folk...

"It is not fare not to take into account my own local experience up to now!"

Out of the role of a mother - pleased by the fact that her 10 years old daughter is learning French by speaking with French children at the same age via videoconference internet link.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

1. Personal identity: as a single individual and as an EU member... and this individual's attempts to change society.
2. Belonging... whether you belong to something. Insecurity and the problem of achieving balance between the social roles.
3. Tiredness from the period of social changes.
4. What does our social engagement bring to us?
5. Making generalizations in an attempt to alleviate some anxiety and to create some image.
6. The process of "entering" the EU and the wish to define one's own identity.
7. Power versus ethics...Racket...
8. The big "Mission" and the small "missions"...

9. The value system - what does it mean to be a "good person"?
10. The new EU membership - a process of an enlargement of the wider frame and the abolishment of some of the old roles...appearance of new roles...
11. Is the professionalism acknowledged?
12. The difference - how is it communicated and what tension does it create when present?
13. ...I miss something important...
14. The change do happen and overtakes us...
15. Shame - through the eyes of the foreigner I can see more holes on the roads and ugliness of the panel buildings... Sometimes even the act of helping is imbued with shame... lack of authenticity...

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis:

For many Bulgarian citizens at the dawn of 2007 the most important event is the country's joining of European Union. This event is accepted with a plethora of feelings: bewilderment; fatigue out of the efforts, relief and strong joy; shame out of the picture the foreigners are seeing; mourning over the opportunities lost because of the period of one's life without freedom and its heritage in the form of the attitudes towards dependency and the today's "escapes from freedom".

The lack of a common history that can unite is painful, so as the lack of a unifying language that can organise the past in harmony with the present. This organization is not happening and part of the citizens live under the conditions of separate, disjointed realities in tension between each other: center vs. periphery; town versus village; past versus present; "Europe" versus "Bulgaria"; private versus public etc.

Some of the citizens prefer to build up and to belong to several disconnected social networks and are attracted by anonymous social participation.

Hypothesis

What "foreigners" are seeing is the same that we are seeing, but avoid to acknowledge it because a considerable part of us feels as a foreigner in the world we are inhabiting. The figure of the foreigner always evokes inequality, shame, vulnerability. The "foreigner" is dependent upon the "local" system of power (as the power of the Institution/s for example) from which he/she is excluded by default. We feel as foreigners in the field of the Political, of publicity, of the civil - where social change is happening and the citizen is its author.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis

Social experience of part of the citizen is marked by anonymity, shame, feeling of in-authenticity, looking for shelter within the "foreign" against the aggressiveness and unattractiveness of the "native". The private and the public are still in painful opposition and defense against each other. There is a lack of a feeling of belonging because as "before" today many individuals have experienced a genuine choice. In this situation the question "How can I use the freedom?" arises.

Hypothesis

The lack of a feeling of recognition and acknowledgment contributes for the failure of a reliable language to be created with which a trustful picture of the world can be made. As a result the world looks as experientially split apart on various disconnected "parts". The "public" and the "private" deny each other the due recognition and thus provoke shame, corruption and mistrust. The lack of feeling of belonging makes the choices we have made and which are the precondition for commitment, authorship and freedom meaningless. Thus we become "co-authors" of a sort of culture within which we navigate amongst abstractions and big ideas, failing to manage the reality of the "small things".

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis:

"Entering" the EU or "joining" the EU?

Hypothesis:

Entering the EU is a single act, attractive with its speed and un-reflexivity. The act of joining is a slower one. It generates much more questions about our identity, about the nature of the entity we are joining about the nature of the "third" that has to be born out of the union between the two parts. Thus "joining" would bring forth the necessity to manage ourselves in our new roles with far more knowledge and experience.

Under conditions of shame and lack of language the capacity for collective reasoning is poor. Thus the "joining" promises some pain and citizens would prefer the quicker way (without a distinct process and ritual and without curiosity). The rationale behind is an avoidance of the collective reflection and of collective generation of hypothesis as a means to it.

Convener: Rumen Petrov