

**"Bulgaria and the World
at the Dawn of 2009"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on 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, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives,' that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Although the main focus was on the economy, wide ranging and varied areas were discussed:

Of a neighbour in a new small block of flats. This is a new role. Its role holder is challenged by the experience of closeness, proximity and intrusion into her private space.

Of a Bulgarian citizen. The experience is that of frustration and anger provoked by the "inability to find a way to express my frustration publicly." Her frustration augments by the comparison this participant is making between Bulgarian public space and the experience she have had recently in the USA.

Of a public servant – provider of social services. This participant has recently taken the consumer's role and realized how badly he behaves towards many of the clients of his office: "I saw myself as if in a mirror." The resulting feelings are of shame and guilt. "I felt on the other side of the barricade – an almost crushing experience."

Of a citizen who is expressing his opinion. She feels indignation and revolt against the privileges some people enjoy – namely to have access to the public media from where they are free to defend openly, morally un-defendable opinions. The television resides in peoples private lives in a powerful manner and shapes their opinion over important social issues, especially of people without other sources of information and opinion-making.

Of a woman. Expressed doubt about whether "...my role of a woman is a social one and whether men don't have less social roles?"

Of citizen. Deprived of free choice (in the example given she felt deprived of a choice for a bus car in a situation of waiting on a bus stop queue.)

Of a public transport user, who has done nothing to inform that the device for electronic payment does not work properly. “The validator (the device) said: you're invalid!”

Of a mother and a citizen: “I am accumulating anger towards the power of different monopolies over myself...For example – I feel humiliated in my own femininity by the media.” Interested in human rights – “...my pre-teenage son got home wounded physically by a girl in his school. He said he didn't respond to the offence out of fear that the school teacher will expose him publicly and would criticize him.”

Out of the role of a driver – feeling of fatigue and aggression provoked by her feeling un-acknowledged and un-recognized as a participants in the public traffic and also – by the lack of space and tolerance amongst the people on the street. She explains this with the overcrowded city populated by many newcomers who come to live nearby and are aggressively trying to impose their aggressive culture and values over her. She compares this experience of intolerance with a journey to Slovenia, where she was surprised by the attention and care that people there expressed towards her pregnancy. “I find many and many facts around me that confirm the main thesis of a book I've recently read: ‘Yes, we are Europeans...but not quite yet.’ ” “[Unfortunately] here – in Bulgaria people pay respect to their close relatives only.”

In the role of a head of a public administration department. During a conversation with his senior officer (an older than him woman in her fifties) the latter tries to 'reassure' and 'encourage' him with: “Things will start to improve after you – the junior generation – take the power.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part Two, the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part One. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

1. Feelings of helplessness, grief, anger, and indignation dominate.
2. People strive to be good citizens.
3. The rule of law is regularly violated, as if the mere possibility to abide by the laws is being denied.
4. There is a problem with the narrowed personal, civil and sometimes - physical - space.
5. Ethics – what is that constant subject (agreement, contract) that must remain stable? There is a lack of agreement around what is good and bad, and a lack of universal (shared) values. The privileges that abolish rules are still reigning.
6. To what extent can we achieve predictability in our relationships and at the same time - to be spontaneous?
7. Many people travel to meet the new and the unknown and this corresponds to the need to break out symbiotic relationships with parental figures. Parents usually sent their children abroad with the message that 'here' the situation is helpless and un-resolvable thus denying any responsibility for the current social

environment and inflicting shame and guilt within many of the emigrants. As a consequence these separations are often loaded with guilt and unresolved anger. However mentors and authorities are needed but the social environment does not provide multitude of them.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis:

Working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, participants collectively identified the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at this time, and developed hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at this moment. Here we worked more with what might be called the 'psycho' or 'internal' world of participants.

We live in but we also co-create a relatively unfriendly social environment. The dominant experience is similar to a situation of disappointment from the authority. At the same time we are sadistic (envious and destructive) towards the small community and towards many of our peers.

Hypothesis:

A possible reason for this could be that an assumption exists in our culture according to which the 'parent' (the authority figure) is a social role, which does not allow the authority to learn from the experience of those he authorizes. In such circumstances the envy towards those who are better than us and towards the good in general remains un-metabolized and endangers the social bond. One possible strategy to cope with this is by looking for the status quo and to avoid change. In times of opened and opening frontiers this state of affairs can provoke tensions, conflicts, and frustrations.

Convener: Rumen Petrov