# "Bulgaria and the World at the Dawn of 2012"
### Report of a Listening Post held in Sofia on 18th 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.

### Roles and experiences

- A lecturer, who is experiencing the resistance of her social environment against the new educational methods and the new relatedness with the knowledge (one based on the emotional links with her pupils) she is trying to establish.

- A grand mother — a new role which has surprised its role holder by providing her with the experience of witnessing a foreign kindergarden practice charming with its spontaneity, and freedom it provides its pupils and teachers alike. The surprise is fuelled by the sheer surprise she has registered in herself when meeting the foreign kindergarden and comparing the local Bulgarian with the foreign childrearing practice. "The new things are the same here and there. However we are reacting differently to the novelties."

- Of another lecturer who is seeing others' reluctance to renovate their professional practice as a particular sort of auto-censorship. The level of dependence from the superiors and the level of self-limitation, according to this particular member is so high that for her some basic aspects of human relations have not changed since the epoch of the totalitarian regime, the central planning economy and the ubiquitous lack of authentic social engagement.

- Of an economist, proud with the training she has just provided. The application of some directive methods of teaching proved to be appealing to many of the participants in the process.

- Of people trying to work as helping professionals who have discovered that their potential employers from the private sector are not interested in their own values but only from the sheer profit instead. The experience is about the "soulless and ruthless private owner". The freedom for practicing a helping profession is thus limited by this state of affairs. The dilemma experienced is between freedom and security.

- Of a young helping professional who has succeeded, albeit with a struggle, to apply her professional competence in a paid child care work for the last 2 years.

- Of a consumer – a role that is putting him in contact with the controversies between the individual moral, the consumerism and the moral of the corporations, organized around profit. A question whether consumers can resist the rampant profit making rises. What is 'a corporative social responsibility' and what does 'self-organization of consumers in defence against the power of the corporations' mean?

- Of a parent, who is concerned about her responsibility for the moral values of the younger generation seen as the natural generation of the progress and of the changes, whose pace looks faster than we would like it to be.

## Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. At this stage participants identified themes such as: the new and the old; learning and teaching; exchange and relations between the foreign and the our; the uniqueness of human experience and the necessity of its generalization; choices and freedom.

## 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.

In the beginning of the process the group worked with the relative contrast observed between the spontaneity, the clarity of the images and the trust quickly established in the pairs and the trios in the first phase of the Post and the abstractness of the concepts and experience convened in the larger group – a feeling of a kind of 'ready made', thoughts being shared.

This difference was interpreted as an expression of a possible difficulty during the transition between the private known and the social and foreign unknown. Probably this transition is being experienced as dangerous for the individual. Probably people live with a hidden assumption that the large group as a metaphor of the society cannot support the individual and her/his unique subjective story. When this is a personal experience it can create a internal conflict: 'As a person I am good one whereas as a group member I am a bad one?' Another recognizable expression of this dynamic is the experienced misuse and abuse of the concept 'team work' which is often used as a disguise of plain power relations. In order to cope with this we strive to reduce the unknown to the known paying the price of reduced learning and avoidance of change. The engagement with the large group is weak and this leads to a relative limited spread of social changes because of the poor identification with them.

Leadership is a popular social role heavily loaded with expectations to manage these tensions. It was present in the group through the images and the stories about both power relations (those giving orders and the obeying ones) and authority relations

(mentors, teachers, and various assistants in the processes of learning and change in general).

These speculations lead to a wave of activity in the group and of sharing of personal, subjective experiences of submissiveness, un-experience (shame, fear) in particular social roles as well as to the increase in the frequency of the spontaneous exchanges between participants. The necessity for establishing different relations with the authority was expressed by on member of the Post: "I've come here with the intent to change my head a little for a while."

The social reality which could correspond to the dynamics just described is that of an Institution (regime of faceless, anonymous governance, based on power and intolerant toward difference and renewal). Post-totalitarian Bulgaria has a long tradition of institutionalisation of the social life. We have strong reasons to assume that this social institutionalization has permeated the individual minds of many citizens. If this institutionalization resides as an implicit organizing principle of society at large and of the individual minds the probability for citizens to replicate this attitude in their everyday social lives is rather serious. This attitude towards reproducing institutionalization is in crisis in moments when we encounter relatively less authoritarian cultures and especially when we are trying to import and to establish element of such different cultures here — in Bulgaria.

The frustration provoked by the experienced (internal-and-external) restrictions over our personal capacity to assimilate change as well as from our unmet need for dependency from the authorities generates deeply ambivalent public figures. The external agents of the change and renewal are falling prey of this same ambivalence. Public authorities are thus objects of constant critique and through them — we are also victims of this criticism which leads to the feelings of guilt and loss.

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