

WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST TRAVEL FELLOWSHIP



A Report

by

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND YOUTH CRIME IN EASTERN EUROPE AND CHILE

Executive Summary

Introduction

My name is Trevor Philpott and I am a former Royal Marine Officer. Having retired from the Corps in August 1997, with the support of others I established a charity called C-FAR that provided effective programmes of rehabilitation and personal development for young adult persistent male offenders, all of which served to significantly reduce re-offending by those who undertook the training.

In February 2005 I was particularly fortunate to be awarded a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travel Fellowship. My *'Journey of a Lifetime'* gave me the opportunity to travel to 5 East European states and then Chile in South America. My objective was to briefly research how the socio economic developments within each country were impacting upon youth crime and to identify what each state was endeavouring to do to reduce re-offending. The countries I visited were Estonia (Tallinn), Hungary (Budapest), Ukraine (Kiev), Bulgaria (Sofia), Slovenia (Ljubljana) and Chile (Santiago).

Acknowledgements

Having never previously visited these countries, the experience is something that I will always remember. I am extremely grateful to the Trustees and staff of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for their tremendous support, advice and encouragement before my trip. I am also indebted to all those who so kindly responded to my numerous emails and requests for help in arranging my itinerary and for giving me so much of their valuable time during my visits. Without their support, interest and introductions, my trip would not have been possible.

I am also very grateful to my wife, Liz, and two colleagues, Theresa and Steve, for holding the fort during my 6-week absence.

Outline Itinerary

I began to plan my trip in December 2005. The selection of countries was intended to provide me with a blend of geographical spread, cultural diversity and economic and political change. In Europe it took me from the Baltic, through Central Eastern Europe, to the Balkans and finally west again to the Adriatic.

My reason for visiting Chile was two-fold. Firstly, I had always wanted to go there and secondly, following the fall of another authoritarian regime, albeit a military one, it too is in the throws of massive social, economic and political change. I therefore thought the contrast would be interesting.

My only initially points of contacts were two people, one in Hungary the other Bulgaria. From these and other approaches to British Embassies, the European Offender Employment Forum the International Centre for Prison Studies and other friends, my data base steadily grew.

In the end, I decided that early September to mid October 2006 would be the best period to undertake the trip. The weather was likely to be good and the people I wanted to meet would hopefully not be on holiday. As it turned out, it could not have been better. I used my rain coat twice and was fortunate to meet many different people in a range of Government and NGO appointments all of whom were dealing with various aspects of social change, youth crime or associated work.

Because my visits to each country were for an average of 5 days, it was not possible to undertake an in-depth study. I therefore decided to record my experiences in the form of a reflective diary, outlining my thoughts and understanding of what I believe is happening in each country, depicting an image that hopefully others might find of interest and a useful contribution to any personal travel plans or research. In this section of the report I have attempted to summarise my overall general impressions. More detailed information is contained in 5 separate Annexes dealing with each country.

Whilst there are numerous similarities between the countries, I stress that what I have tried to portray, including the Annexes, is but a 'snap shot' of the situation.

Health Warning – *Although I have attempted to confirm with those who supported me in each country that what I have written is factually correct, this was not possible in all cases. I therefore emphasise that this report is a record of my personal observations and understanding. Some detail may have been lost in the various levels of translation. If there are any inaccuracies, I apologise.*

Background

Over the last few decades each of the countries that I visited has been subjected to various regimes of prolonged dictatorship and centralised control. That said, throughout my travels in Europe I was often reminded that during most of that time the people would normally have been in some form of employment, education had been generally good and there had been a relatively strong sense of national loyalty, community and responsibility. In contrast, in Chile under Pinochet, fear and extreme violations of the human rights had been common place.

Since the fall of the previous regimes, each country has begun a journey of massive change and development, the wide ranging effects of which are now impacting upon and shaping each country's future, the lives of its people and the regions in which they co-exist. Whilst most of those changes are positive, for some, particularly ethnic minorities, the poor and elderly, change has been especially difficult.

Initial Impressions

My original perceptions and understanding of the various countries was limited. I had once briefly visited the former East Berlin in 1993 and Lima in Peru in 1973. In effect I was therefore looking at a blank canvass. Notwithstanding, in recognising and considering the changes that are arising I constantly tried to remind myself of what I knew to be wide ranging and diverse historical, cultural and social differences between and within each country. Throughout my travels I attempted to imagine what each country might have been like had previous regime change not taken place and how that might have impacted upon their respective regions and the wider world. I also tried to put myself in the place of the people, asking how it might have been enduring such experiences. The latter was really impossible to do and it was perhaps arrogant of me to think that I could. I particularly recall during my visit to Budapest the many buildings still badly marked by bullet holes from the attempted 1956 revolution. Similar thoughts arose when I visited Chile.

Throughout my European phase, I found the majority of people were very friendly, eager to speak English and to discuss their personal expectations and how their respective country was changing. Most were generally optimistic and enthusiastic, particularly the young, with high expectations as to the opportunities that they believed lay ahead. Those in the rural areas were more reticent.

In Chile, few people spoke English or had experience of Europeans. As a consequence they sometimes appeared somewhat remote. Language was perhaps not the only reason. I sensed there were other issues as well, not least of which is trust and a Latin America perspective. That said, the Chilean tourist authority is strongly promoting the idea of encouraging tourists from Europe and

elsewhere and Chile it is already a popular destination for Australians. Similarly, I heard a number of North Americans in discussion with local businessmen.

Until 1990 / 91, each country had in many ways existed in a state of prolonged and controlled isolation with limited meaningful change and development. Yet as I walked around the various capitals the depth of longer term history was clear to see. The architectural features were perhaps the most striking reminder. From the old and charming city of Tallinn with its medieval and renaissance streets and walls, through to the impressive mid and late 19th century buildings in Budapest, Ljubljana and Santiago, and the Soviet era in Kiev and Sofia; all told their own stories of culture, power and influence.



Budapest Opera House



Kiev's City Centre

What also struck me was the level of recent and current building construction, particularly in and around the capitals and other main urban areas. The speed in which new high-rise apartment blocks, glass fronted tower office buildings, hotels and highways are being built is impressive and very much in evidence. This was especially so in Kiev and Santiago – see separate annexes.

With the exception of the more elderly and those begging and sleeping rough, in the cities there appeared to be a vibrancy and sense of purpose. In contrast, in rural towns and villages I felt as though I was going backwards in time; little if anything has changed. Indeed, it was this latter image that perhaps I had anticipated prior to my departure from UK, hence my surprise at what I actually saw in the capitals. I particularly recall the rural areas of Estonia and Bulgaria. Compared to the urban centres, all seemed very quite and slow moving. Everybody knew everybody else and I was a stranger in town!

Throughout my trip it became clear that the populations in the capital cities and surrounding areas were rising rapidly, all of which is fuelling the need for more accommodation, general infrastructure, employment and services – roads, transport, schools, hospitals, shops, recreational areas, other services and police. As the process continues to draw in more people from rural areas, all

seeking yet more opportunities and money, urban economies are thriving whilst rural ones are declining.

Young people are moving to the bright lights and perceived fresh opportunities, leaving only the more elderly to continue working the small fields and allotments as they have done for generations before. Those adults and young people that remain are quite literally being left behind, all of which is serving to promote other community, social and economic pressures.

In North West Bulgaria I saw rural villages where small tables, loaded with jars of honey, yoghurt and cheese, were set up about 50 meters apart beside the road. The produce was generally being sold by elderly people. *With some business input there is probably scope for a profitable social enterprise company.*



Honey & Yoghurt on sale in Bulgaria's rural areas

As part of this economic migration the cost of accommodation in urban areas is rising rapidly. Yet average salaries are low, often as little as £400 per month. In Estonia, approximately £90 is paid back in tax. Even teachers and university lectures earn little more. This was a feature of most countries I visited.

The majority of people are compelled to rent housing with most of the net monthly salary going towards such costs. I struggled to understand how people were affording the life style they were living.

In some countries I was told that GDP is running at about 8%. Most shops were full of consumer goods that one might expect to see in Western Europe. Wherever I went, young people appeared particularly fashion conscious and I was left asking how they afforded it; not everything was particularly cheap. In Bulgaria it was suggested to me that the brightly lit shops with their array of electrical goods and clothing were actually fronts for money laundering.



Santiago Shopping Mall

In Santiago the people are very proud of their new, bright and open planned shopping centres or Malls. Selling every conceivable type of consumer item that one could wish for. The Malls include excellent dining areas, cafes and car parking facilities.

In contrast to the European countries, where I sensed a greater air of restraint, I was told that most middle class Chileans tend to live off credit and have associated debts well in excess of three times earnings; individuals suggested as much as ten times earnings. One of the consequences is an increase in the grey economy. Levels of crime and or migration are also rising. All are dilemmas that each country is attempting to grapple with.

In the UK there is constant and I believe healthy debate regarding issues such as what it is to be British and European. In the countries that I visited such debate is relatively new and for some the issues remain sensitive. In Estonia for example, most ethnic Russians have no official national identity; they are neither Estonian nor Russian. Even those minority Russians with Estonian nationality, their passport is apparently a different colour to ethnic Estonians. Of note, the majority of the Estonia's prison population are of Russian origin; *this is described in more detail in the first annex.*

Further south in central and southern Europe, the Roma population face similar difficulties, whilst in Chile the Bolivians and Peruvians appear to be forming the basis of a new minority underclass.

Wealth and Income Distribution

Those who had previously held positions of authority within the former regimes have undoubtedly benefited, some very considerably. It was suggested to me that individuals have effectively stolen assets that more rightly belong to the country and the people. Others, more dependent upon the state, have faced huge difficulties, particularly the poorly educated, minority groups, the long-term unemployed and the elderly with no savings. All has led to further increases in poverty and a degradation and shift of social attitudes and values. The issue of changing personal values and standards, education and 'respect' were often highlighted. Some went so far as to suggested that many people now find themselves focussing their efforts on personal survival and have little time or energy to help others. *'Before the revolution everybody could afford bread and sausage. Now, most can afford the bread, but not all can afford sausage'.*

Immediately post regime change, budding entrepreneurs apparently attempted to make quick gains. Unfortunately, many lacked the experience and understanding to develop their businesses and lost everything. Some are trying again, whilst others have stepped back and cautiously await new opportunities. Such is the inevitable process of transition and change.



The new blocks of flats in outer Kiev

The expansion of the consumer market and access to Western Europe and other parts of the world is clearly providing a powerful driving force, as are the significant construction, housing and other building projects that I have already mentioned. That said, the movement of people from rural areas into the cities and urban conurbations must be of concern, as indeed must the social implications of cramming more people into high rise tower block units of accommodation. In Kiev these new structures dominated the terrain to the east of the city.

In all the countries that I travelled to, only Slovenia appeared to have invested in its rural communities and infrastructure. In saying that, one has to recognise that Slovenia is one of the smallest states in Europe with a population of only 2 million people. It is also the one country that even before independence had been closest to Western Europe and had effectively begun the transition a number of years previously. The very nature of its economy and society is therefore more advanced.



Slovenia's Rural Community Life

In others, because of a lack of ownership and willingness to take responsibility, former rural based industrial buildings and complexes have closed and been left to decay; rural economies are dying.



Bulgaria's Industrial Past

For younger people and the next generation of business leaders the potential is seen as challenging yet exciting. The down side is that increased differentials in wealth and opportunities are expected to grow, all of which is regrettably likely to promote higher rates of crime, substance misuse, higher levels of poverty and social exclusion. Many officials agreed that higher rates of crime are anticipated.

This was particularly evident in Santiago where I was struck by what I saw as a city of extremes. Until 1990 / 91, each country had in many ways existed in a state of prolonged and controlled isolation with limited meaningful change and development. Yet as I walked around the various capitals the depth of longer

term history was clear to see. The architectural features were perhaps the most striking reminder. From the old and charming city of Tallinn with its medieval and renaissance streets and walls, through to the impressive mid and late 19th century buildings in Budapest, Ljubljana and Santiago, and the Soviet era in Kiev and Sofia; all told their own stories of culture, power and influence.

The wealthy middle and upper classes live in newly constructed luxury guarded apartment blocks, whilst on the outskirts of the city in the order of 200,000 people live in shelter type accommodation and shacks with no real shops and services nearby.



Approximately 25% of young people in these areas drop out of school at 15 years of age and 35% of homes have single parent mothers. A staggering 50% of children are borne out of wedlock. Although 70% of the people declare themselves as Catholics, only 20 % regularly attend mass.

Santiago's Middle / Upper Class Apartment Blocks

As a result of all this social depravation, unemployment here is about 20%, with cocaine, crack and alcohol being in high use, often leading to a continuing cycle of domestic violence and associated crime. Income distribution is one of the worst in Latin America where 2-3% of the wealthiest produces 20% of the GDP. Of note, the grey economy is worth 20% of GDP, further emphasising the increased levels of poverty.

The Justice Systems

Despite these disturbing realities, I was heartened to find that there is significant recognition that such issues must be addressed. In the European countries wealth distribution, youth crime and the reduction of re-offending rates are all high priorities. There appears to be a consistent theme promoting new policies and initiatives aimed at addressing unemployment, early intervention and alternative community based programmes to divert children away from the justice system and prison.

All the prisons that I visited were in need of considerable investment and provision. The majority were extremely basic and in some cases even primitive and indeed criminogenic. None were conducive to positive change. Of note, one senior official admitted to me that, despite having responsibilities associated with juvenile sentencing, they had never visited the country's male juvenile prison. Had they done so, as I did, one could only hope that they would quickly increase the resources so desperately needed, or better still demolish it. That said,

despite poor conditions of work and low salaries, most staffs appeared generally motivated and committed to helping the young prisoners. Slovenia's new adult prison is one of the most modern and efficient in Europe.

Interestingly, Ukraine is strongly promoting Restorative Justice as a key means of early intervention and diversion of young people from the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and believes that 90% of juvenile cases could be dealt with more effectively through RJ, with an emphasis upon parents and guardians taking more responsibility for their children.

Slovenia has developed two alternatives to custody for its young offenders, both of which focus upon learning and personal development.

Juvenile Alternative to Prison

Although not yet universal, I was encouraged to find that most associated agencies recognise the need for significant improvements in staff training and joined-up case management of offenders. With the exception of Hungary and Slovenia, such training and awareness is desperately needed. With the assistance of British seconded staff, Bulgaria is quickly introducing such provision; much of this work being based upon models developed by the Youth Justice Board and Prison and Probation Services of England and Wales.



In Chile the agenda is much further behind and punishment is still seen as the most appropriate method of addressing crime. Chile has one of the largest prison populations in the world. Were the police to be more effective in bringing prosecutions the situation would be unmanageable. Of note however, levels of violence are said to be amongst the lowest in Latin America. Everything of course is relative. Violent crime is still 4 times that of Western Europe.

Organised international crime is still widespread with drug trafficking featuring strongly. In addition, people trafficking, including children and young women is endemic and of major concern with many ending up in various forms of prostitution, abuse and servitude. In Europe the majority are from Roma populations and other poor ethnic minorities. Meetings in Ukraine and Bulgaria highlighted this very serious issue and are described in more detail in the respective annexes. In Chile it is the Bolivian's and Peruvian's that are being drawn into various levels of servitude, crime and prostitution.

NGOs and the Voluntary Sector

Interestingly, whilst volunteering by the different populations and communities is not yet viewed as a normal undertaking, the role of NGOs and voluntary organisations is growing. My hosts in Ukraine belonged to the Ukrainian Centre for Common Ground (UCCG), an inspiring organisation working diligently to promote change within the criminal justice system of Ukraine. In Slovenia, Stojan Zagorc is Director of Papilot. Stojan has consistently demonstrated the strength of the not for profit and voluntary sector working on projects that cover a range of social, health, care, employment and criminal justice needs. Similar work is undertaken in Bulgaria by the Institute of Social Activities and Practice and the Criminal Policy and Prevention Institute. In Chile, Paz Ciudadana (Peace of Citizens), has conducted research and advised Government departments on criminal justice policies. All organisations have gained increasing support and recognition from both Government Ministers and the wider public, both nationally and internationally.

Political Leadership

In attempting to deal with these many problems the new political elite are facing considerable challenges. People's expectations that politicians will deliver an improved quality of life are high. Whilst I sensed that political leaders and senior civil servants recognise and acknowledge this, implementation is proving to be a complex and difficult process.

The transition from a centralised bureaucratic and dictatorial system to one willing and able to delegate, accept responsibility, work in partnership and take risks is not common place. Whilst many officials that I spoke to expressed the need and desire for strategic planning, 'joined up' government and the engagement of the voluntary and private sectors, such concepts are new and not fully understood. Letting go and empowering others is an aspiration that will probably take a further generation to implement. That said, within the East European states I found there was considerable optimism, particularly regarding membership or association with the EU, all of which is anticipated to bring increased opportunities, trade, agreements and other developments. In Chile, there appears to be a mix of rapid expansion in some areas with poverty and stagnation in others; the level of private borrowing is probably the most disturbing immediate issue.

Notwithstanding the apparent official optimism for future EU membership, unfortunately I still met many from the general public who expressed deep rooted scepticism and concerns regarding the motivation and integrity of their political leaders, their personal agendas and levels of corruption within government apparatus. Some suggested that *'voting was a waste of time as all politicians were the same and really did not care about the people. They just wanted to hold onto power and collect more taxes'*. Whilst some of this perception probably

reflects the last few decades and lack of previous change, it is undoubtedly a trend that has increasingly been seen in North America and Western Europe countries as well. The perceived lack of transparency and faith in politics must be of growing concern to us all. Unless young people's confidence in the political system improves, the situation is likely to undermine future democratic process.

Conclusion

In this brief introduction I have attempted to skim the surface and wet the appetite of you the reader. In each country there is still much to be done. That said, much has already been achieved. Encouragingly, from my numerous meetings I sensed that there was a positive outlook and that all were keen to drive the process forward. In each country a range of new Government policies are being drafted and are due to be introduced soon.

I very much hope you are now sufficiently interested to read on and to dip into the various annexes where you will find more detailed information and a clearer insight into my findings.

Thank you for your interest.

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Annexes: -

A. Estonia (Tallinn)

B. Hungary (Budapest)

C. Ukraine (Kiev)

D. Bulgaria (Sofia)

E. Slovenia (Ljubljana)

F. Chile (Santiago)