

**RUSSIA – A LOOK AT THE PAST AND PRESENT OF SOCIAL TOURISM**

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*This is the first time when the readers of “Social Tourism International” Magazine have a chance to be acquainted with the views in regard to social tourism in Russia expressed by Alexander Kolmakov, the new member of BITS Board and the First Vice-rector of Russian International Academy for Tourism. Alexander Kolmakov started his activities under the Soviet Union in the ranks of youth movement and for a long time he held the post of the First Deputy Chairman in “Sputnik” Bureau for International Youth Tourism. At the same time he is the Vice President of “The Central Council for Tourism and Recreation”.*

Very often when dealing with Russia, it is rather difficult to appraise the present day development while neglecting the history (even the recent one from the historical point of view). I think one can hardly find any other country of the contemporary world which would experience such a dramatic upheaval with drastic changes in the state structure and economic bases of the society that took place within the exclusively short period of time. Russia has actually endured the ideological revolution and radical changes in social relations and moral standards.

This profound process is far from the accomplishment and the formation of new statehood in Russia will continue many years ahead along the way of complicated and sometimes painful search for the own mode of development corresponding to the principles of civilized world community.

The ideological fundamentals of social structure of the vanished Soviet Union were based on the slogans of freedom, equality and social justice inherited from the previous generations of humanists. The soundness and attractiveness of these slogans was so effective that even in spite of the progressing deformation of the regime and deviations from the proclaimed goals, the gains of Soviet citizens in social sphere were the subject of their pride. This could be attributed to the right to work, to have rest and leisure, the right to housing, health protection, medical and retirement care, the right to protection of motherhood and childhood. All those included the access to cultural, historical, natural and other monuments of the motherland heritage through tourism opportunities.

Without any idealization of the real situation (*not without reason the vanished type of social system was given the name of administrative-and-command system*) the Soviet people enjoyed considerable opportunities for socially based full value rest and leisure.

Let me remind you that 1936 is considered to be generally recognized stake in the formation of social tourism due to the fact that it was the year of adoption of the Law on paid leaves in many countries but such law had been adopted in the Soviet Russia already in 1918.

I would like to adduce some official data from 1988<sup>1</sup> in this regard: “... total number of people who enjoyed medical treatment and recreation (in sanatoria and recreation establishments – A.K.) amounted to 69 million, and 42 million of them participated in tourism activities”. Those results had been achieved basically thanks to the efforts of trade unions, youth organisations and their specialized subdivisions.

And what is happening now, some 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, during which period the new Constitution has been adopted and the sovereign Russian Federation has been established?

The revolution performed in our country (this is the proper term for the events of those past years) razed the previous state regime to the ground and the liberal strategy of development chosen by the new state leaders has radically changed the total economic structure of the country.

Shock therapy, privatisation, demonopolisation and corporatisation have transformed the country's image beyond recognition. The role of trade unions and their financial opportunities abated significantly.

In the sphere of tourism the three “monopolist pillars” – “Intourist” State Agency, “Central Council for Tourism and Excursions” and “Sputnik” Youth Agency – were substituted by more than 15,000 private tourist agencies the bulk of which are small-size establishments.

Federal Law “On the Fundamentals of Tourism Activity in Russian Federation” adopted in 1998 outlined the support and development of domestic, incoming, social and sport tourisms as the priority trends of the state control over the tourism activities.

But, in fact, the organisation of outgoing tours has become the dominating trend of tourist business and the mass social tourism has acquired the form of cheap recreation tours abroad (basically to Turkey and Egypt).

The adopted statistical methodology does not allow for the classification of people going abroad according to their social status or income level that is why I have to cite the official data of the Federal Service for state statistics according to which the number of Russian citizens who left the country for tourism purpose in 2003 was 4,615,000. For comparison, the number of foreign citizens who visited Russia as tourists in the same year reached the figure of 2,779,000.

In 2002 the sanatorium-and-resort institutions and recreation establishments provided services for 9,035,000 people and 5,839,000 children in children's sanitation establishments.

Today it is rather difficult to obtain trustworthy data which would reflect the real situation in the field of tourism because the issues of domestic tourism development have been transferred under the competence of local and regional authorities and all the respective data are not accounted in the federal statistics.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: *Big Soviet Encyclopedia Year-book*

Nowadays the Social Insurance Fund plays the main role in the sphere of social tourism in Russia. In 2004 about 6 million children enjoyed free recreation in different establishments at the expense of state financial resources. The same was provided for more than one million of disabled people and people assigned for cure accomplishment after the hospital treatment (2005).

Lately one could see a certain turn towards more attention of the State to tourism issues. It was manifested by the sitting of the Presidium of Russian Federation State Council presided by V. V. Putin, the President of Russian Federation. It was the first time for the last years that the development issues of sanatorium-and-resort complex of Russia were discussed during such a sitting and the ideas of social responsibility of business circles were expressed.

During numerous conferences, meetings and other events, Russian International Academy for Tourism made and is still making the demand to adopt the new Federal Programme for the development of tourism in Russia and the new law "On Tourism and Tourism Industry", and finally to set up the Coordination Council for Tourism under the authority of the President of Russia.

Previously the Academy initiated and prepared the draft of the Federal law "On Social Tourism" and participated in the elaboration of the draft law "On Recreation Leave Cheques". Unfortunately the political battles prevented the official completion of these initiatives which are undoubtedly necessary for the society but our Academy keeps on the attempts to impel the official bodies to return back to the consideration of these issues.

### **What are the prospects?**

Antisocial liberalist "tsunami" caused the serious damage to the practice of social tourism and undermined its material basis. Nevertheless, while considering social tourism as the community demand arising during the period of definite state system maturity, formation of trade unions and the platform of working people's demands we are sure that in the close future the phenomenon of social tourism will revive in our country. Today All-Russia National Tourist Society (ANTS) established by Russian International Academy for Tourism (RIAT) performs the role of public mouthpiece for the ideas of social tourism.

In August 1982 during the World Conference of the World Tourism Organization held in Acapulco (Mexico) the following was stated: "The right to rest as the natural consequence of the right to work is to be established as the basic human right to be happy... The state responsibility cannot be limited by mere recognition of this right but should lead to the creation of corresponding practical conditions for the effective access to the leaves for all who have this right".

In our Academy we strive for bringing these words not only to our students but we want these words to be heard by those who are at the helm of Russian tourism, social sphere and the whole of Russian economy.