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Tourism Diplomacy in Cold War Europe: Symbolic Gestures, Cultural Exchange and Human Rights

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The post-war boom in international travel made tourism a question for international diplomacy. Focusing on the growth of bilateral tourism agreements during the Cold War, this article shows how the meaning of tourism was negotiated by and between governments on either side of the East–West divide. While previous research on tourism in the Cold War has focused on the threat tourist traffic posed to national security in socialist states, the present study also considers the dilemmas it presented to liberal democracies. The article analyses the intersections of tourism with issues of foreign trade, cultural exchange and human contacts, which shaped the contestations over tourism throughout the Cold War.

In 1965, a confidential report by the Danish Foreign Service analysed the 'almost epidemic spread of cultural agreements' in international relations.[1] The report estimated that worldwide there were between 350 and 400 active bilateral agreements at the time, most of which had been signed since 1950. Denmark had hitherto been reluctant to enter into such agreements due to their largely symbolic nature. More often than not, according to the report, cultural agreements were non-committing and used to disguise otherwise unproductive negotiations. For some parties, though, especially newly independent states, their symbolism and underlying principle of reciprocity was the main appeal. The authors of the report saw little value in participating in such symbolic gestures, which they believed violated a 'liberal line of thought that cultural contacts could unfold without state direction'.[2] Behind this principled critique lurked the imperative of a foreign service to prioritise its finite resources. In the increasingly interconnected and technologically complex modern world, areas such as communication, health, labour, policing, taxes and transport were now encompassed by diplomatic relations.[3] As the Danish report shows, though, not all aspects of human activity were deemed fit for state intervention. A related area the Danish government hesitated to incorporate into its diplomatic agenda for largely the same reasons was tourism. Conversely, socialist Bulgaria, where most economic and social activities were under centrally planned state control, tenaciously pursued diplomatic agreements in both culture and tourism. Yet, while cultural agreements had a symbolic appeal to the party leadership, tourism treaties – especially with Western countries – were treasured for their anticipated economic contribution.

[1] Danish National Archives (DNA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UM), Gruppeordnede sager 41.C.143/Bilag. Memorandum on bilateral cultural agreements, 3 Aug. 1965.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

This article sheds light on the contestations in and between European foreign services as they faced the ambiguous and often entangled subjects of culture and tourism after the Second World War. Using analyses of bilateral tourism treaty negotiations and discussions of tourism in international organisations, the article unpacks the multiple meanings ascribed to and the objectives pursued through tourism diplomacy. It shows that the post-war international tourist traffic was a protean subject of foreign policy, viewed variously as an entirely private enterprise, an important export industry, a tool of cultural diplomacy and a vehicle for the support of human rights. A sizeable literature exists on the historical uses of tourism for foreign policy ends, mostly as a form of public diplomacy aimed to generate sympathy for a country abroad.[4] What this article offers, however, is a close analysis not merely of tourism as foreign policy, but of the complicated process of defining tourism's place in official relations between states during the Cold War. To this end, we define tourism diplomacy as official state-to-state contacts concerning matters expressly subsumed by the historical actors under the category of tourism. This narrow definition provides an analytical purchase missing from the existing literature that allows us to distinguish between official international relations specifically concerning tourism and the broader cultural diplomacy agendas involving tourism and tourists as informal actors.[5]

We present the argument that as tourism policy became enmeshed in a nexus of culture, economy and human rights, its purpose and scope proved negotiable – not just between East and West, but just as much inside Western administrations. The role of culture as a symbolic and increasingly strategic battleground in the Cold War has been well documented, and more recent studies have also highlighted tourism's contribution to the transnational circulation of people, ideas and goods between the two blocs.[6] However, much of the literature on East–West tourism in the Cold War has focused on the challenges and opportunities Western tourists presented to the communist regimes, while the deliberations and agency of Western governmental and non-governmental actors have rarely been considered.[7] Moving beyond the schematic conflict between international tourism and national security under communism, this article presents an interactional history of tourism in post-war international relations. The bilateral negotiations about tourism between East and West provide a view beneath the high-level diplomacy of the Cold War, where business interests eclipsed irreconcilable

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[4] Elisabeth Piller, *Selling Weimar: German Public Diplomacy and the United States, 1918–1933* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2021); Eric Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish: Tourism and National Identity since the Irish Civil War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009); Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Neal M. Rosendorf, *Franco Sells Spain to America: Hollywood, Tourism and Public Relations as Postwar Spanish Soft Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[5] On tourism and public diplomacy, see William Glenn Gray et al., 'H-Diplo Roundtable on Elisabeth Piller, *Selling Weimar: German Public Diplomacy and the United States, 1918–1933* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2021)', ed. Diane Labrosse, *H-Diplo* 23, no. 37 (9 May 2022), https://hdiplo.org/to/RT23-37, last accessed 24 Apr. 2024; Shelley Baranowski et al., 'Discussion: Tourism and Diplomacy', *Journal of Tourism History* 11, no. 1 (2019). On informal diplomacy, see Giles Scott-Smith, 'Opening up Political Space: Informal Diplomacy, East-West Exchanges, and the Helsinki Process', in Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen, eds., *Beyond the Divide: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe* (New York: Berghahn, 2015).

[6] Patryk Babiracki and Kenyon Zimmer, eds., *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s–1960s* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014); Mikkonen and Koivunen, eds., *Beyond the Divide*; Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack, eds., *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences across the Iron Curtain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

[7] Kristen Ghodsee, *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism, and Postsocialism on the Black Sea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Igor Tchoukarine, 'Yugoslavia's Open-Door Policy and Global Tourism in the 1950s and 1960s', *East European Politics & Societies* 29, no. 1 (2015); Bechmann Pedersen and Noack, *Tourism and Travel*; Adelina Stefan, 'Unpacking Tourism in the Cold War: International Tourism and Commercialism in Socialist Romania, 1960s–1980s', *Contemporary European History* 32, no. 3 (2023). Research focusing on Western tourism policy and international relations has mostly centred on US tourism to France, Spain, and Latin America. Endy, *Cold War Holidays*; Rosendorf, *Franco Sells Spain*; Dennis Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). A notable exception is the comparative study by Adelina Stefan, *Vacationing in Dictatorships: International Tourism in Socialist Romania and Franco's Spain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

ideological differences, and thus constitute an excellent, yet hitherto overlooked, object of study for understanding the dynamics of tourism in foreign policy.

Based on research in several national and international archives, this study focuses on the lengthy negotiations of a bilateral tourism agreement between Bulgaria and Denmark. Because tourism was a novel subject and generally considered low politics, the scope for manoeuvre of the two smaller powers was large.[8] In the Eastern bloc, Bulgaria, heavily committed to developing an international tourism industry, was the most active negotiator of bilateral tourism treaties with countries outside its bloc. In the West, Denmark was sceptical of tourism's relevance in international relations, but eager to promote human contacts between East and West. As smaller powers, Bulgaria and Denmark were nevertheless attuned to the policies of their larger allies, and their national archives thus serve as prisms to broader developments in international relations. Bulgaria's frequent overtures repeatedly prompted Denmark to consider its position and review the tourism policies of other countries. The protracted tourism treaty negotiations generated rich paper trails documenting the changing principles undergirding tourism diplomacy. Focusing on the negotiations between two states on either side of the Cold War divide thus has the methodological advantage of providing insights into the conflicting views and shifting priorities of the two governments, their allies, and international forums where the meaning of tourism was debated. These forums included the Tourism Committee under the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), NATO's East–West contacts group, and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). By following the definitional contestations over tourism at bilateral talks, multilateral arenas, and national administrations, the article provides a richly textured history of tourism and international relations after the Second World War.

Founded on a multi-archival and multi-lingual approach, the article offers three important contributions. First, it links the question of tourism in international relations to new research on the concept of culture and cultural agreements in twentieth-century foreign policy.[9] It shows how tourism was first negotiated bilaterally within a framework of cultural relations before it increasingly emerged as a foreign policy topic in its own right, although an ambiguous and contested one. It traces this process to its culmination in 1975, when, after much wrangling, the European governments agreed to recognise tourism as a vital economic activity and a vehicle for human contacts in the Helsinki Final Act. Second, the article uses the Bulgarian–Danish case to explore the emergence of tourism diplomacy and the range of functions attributed to bilateral tourist treaties, and so presents an alternative to the inward-looking 'splendid isolation' in which the Cold War histories of small states has often been written.[10] Instead, the study probes the potential for manoeuvre and highlights the scope for policy variations, which again points to the relevance of studying 'unusual' cases in international history.[11] Finally, by opening up the nationally contained histories of tourism in Eastern Europe and shedding light on the negotiations by and between European governments, the article challenges

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[8] On the agency of smaller powers, see Laurien Crump and Susanna Erlandsson, eds., *Margins for Manoeuvre in Cold War Europe: The Influence of Smaller Powers* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

[9] On cultural agreements in international relations, see Benjamin G. Martin and Elisabeth Marie Piller, 'Cultural Diplomacy and Europe's Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: Introduction', *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 2 (2021); Benjamin G. Martin, 'The Rise of the Cultural Treaty: Diplomatic Agreements and the International Politics of Culture in the Age of Three Worlds', *The International History Review* 44, no. 6 (2022); Benjamin G. Martin, 'The Birth of the Cultural Treaty in Europe's Age of Crisis', *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 2 (2021). On cultural diplomacy in the Cold War, see Nigel Gould-Davies, 'The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy', *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 2 (2003); Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, eds., *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Berghahn, 2010); Simo Mikkonen and Pekka Suutari, eds., *Music, Art and Diplomacy: East–West Cultural Interactions and the Cold War* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2016).

[10] Thorsten B. Olesen, 'Under the National Paradigm: Cold War Studies and Cold War Politics in Post-Cold War Norden', *Cold War History* 8, no. 2 (2008); Rasmus Mariager, 'Danish Cold War Historiography', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 20, no. 4 (2019).

[11] Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Crump and Erlandsson, eds., *Margins for Manoeuvre*; Theodora K. Dragostinova,

the narrative that tourism was only a problem for 'them', the security-obsessed communist regimes seeking to develop profitable tourism sectors within their planned economies. Instead, the article shows how tourism presented dilemmas for administrations on either side of the ideological divide. The East European regimes were wary of foreign influence, yet attracted by hard currency earnings and the symbolic prestige brought by inbound tourists and bilateral agreements. Western governments sought to support East–West trade and human contacts, but they were also keen on protecting the trade balance and acknowledging liberal principles of non-interference in civil society. Taken together, these three points amount to an interwoven history of tourism in international relations in the crucial post-war decades when foreign travel grew exponentially and emerged as one of the world's largest businesses.

Bilateral Tourism Agreements in International Relations

The steady growth in international travel in the late nineteenth century advanced the understanding of tourism as a phenomenon with economic reverberations beyond local communities. Pioneering studies of tourism's impact on the balance of payments first appeared in Austria and Switzerland before the First World War, and fuelled government efforts to gather better data and to support pro-motion abroad.[12] State-sponsored tourist organisations were set up in a number of European coun-tries before the First World War to coordinate such campaigns and hopefully attract more visitors.[13] European governments also began to realise the broader implications of tourism for international relations. In 1905, for example, Spain set up the National Commission for the Promotion of Tourism specifically to combat foreign perceptions of the country as being backwards, and after the First World War, the French National Tourism Office assisted the government's efforts to attract financial and political support from the United States.[14] This utilisation of tourism for public dip-lomacy purposes blurred the boundary between tourism as foreign trade and tourism as cultural exchange.

The interwar years saw a push for bilateral accords to facilitate intellectual intercourse among nations. In the 1930s, Italy pioneered formal bilateral treaties on culture, which were subject to high-level ratification and covered a range of matters including the exchange of music, film and literature. The Italo-Hungarian cultural treaty of 1935 went further by committing the signatories to encouraging their citizens to visit one another's countries, thereby elevating the promotion of tourism to a matter of bilateral relations.[15] The primary goal of Italy's overtures to Hungary, however, was to isolate Yugoslavia from its neighbour. Traffic between Italy and Hungary was modest, but symbolic displays of cordial relations could hopefully keep Hungary from becoming too friendly with Yugoslavia, with which Italy had strained diplomatic relations.[16] In other cases, though, Italy negotiated bilateral solu-tions to specific problems faced by the tourist industry. Several agreements were made with Austria

The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).
[12] Boris Vukonić, 'An Outline of the History of Tourism Theory: Source Material (for Future Research)', in Cathy H. C. Hsu and William C. Gartner, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Tourism Research* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 7–8; Andrea Penz, *Inseln Der Seligen: Fremdenverkehr in Österreich und Irland von 1900 bis 1938* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 86–92; Paul Bernecker, 'Probleme Der Fremdenverkehrsorganisation', *Tourist Review* 17, no. 4 (1962).
[13] Taina Syrjämaa, *Visitez l'Italie: Italian State Tourist Propaganda Abroad 1919–1943: Administrative Structure and Practical Realization* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 1997), 38–9.
[14] Eric Storm, 'A More Spanish Spain: The Influence of Tourism on the National Image', in Javier Moreno-Luzón and Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, eds., *Metaphors of Spain: Representations of Spanish National Identity in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn, 2017); William R. Keylor, '"How They Advertised France": The French Propaganda Campaign in the United States during the Breakup of the Franco-American Entente, 1918–1923', *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 3 (1993); Elisabeth Piller, 'Managing Imponderables: The Rise of US Tourism and the Transformation of German Diplomacy, 1890–1933', *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 1 (2020).
[15] Martin, 'The Birth of the Cultural Treaty', 304–9.
[16] Syrjämaa, *Visitez l'Italie*, 247; Igor Tchoukarine, 'The Contested Adriatic Sea: The Adriatic Guard and Identity Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia', *Austrian History Yearbook* 42 (2011).

and Germany between 1932 and 1934 to grant their citizens access to Italian hotel coupons as a means to overcome the countries' strict currency export regulations.[17] Tourism was thus a flexible diplomatic matter that could be negotiated to overcome concrete export obstacles as well as for purely symbolic reasons. In general, the subject label was rarely applied to bilateral negotiations about matters of state sovereignty such as visa suspension agreements or aviation rights.[18] It was reserved instead for a variety of more technical and less sensitive issues such as import duty exemption for 'tourist propaganda' (advertisements for a state rather than a commercial actor), the compilation of tourist statistics and road traffic (since tourism was also used as a synonym for touring).[19] The League of Nations occasionally touched on issues relating to tourism, and several semi-official organisations were founded in the interwar years to improve international collaboration on tourism. Bilateral treaties about the subject nevertheless remained few, because protectionist interwar governments generally regarded international tourism as an economic zero-sum game.[20]

After the Second World War, tourism was assigned an important role in the US foreign policy towards Europe. Included in the European Recovery Programme was a pledge to 'facilitate and encourage . . . the promotion and development of travel by citizens of the United States to and within the participating countries'.[21] The multilateral OEEC, created to implement the Marshall Plan, thus established a Tourist Trade Working Group, which soon became a permanent Tourism Committee. OEEC's intergovernmental Tourism Committee collaborated closely with the European Travel Commission (ETC), the European chapter of the global International Union of Official Travel Organisations. The ETC identified problems and provided technical expertise, while the Tourism Committee recommended solutions to their governments.[22] The obstacles to tourism tackled by the OEEC were often bureaucratic, for example relating to frontier formalities, tourist taxation, and the staggering of holidays. Although the Tourism Committee also pursued more abstract, idealistic objectives such as the promotion of youth tourism and social tourism, technocratic matters nevertheless dominated its agenda.[23] For the OEEC, tourism policy was first and foremost designed to improve the European economies, and the mode of cooperation was multilateral.

While the transatlantic impetus was crucial for the initial post-war collaboration on tourism in Europe, the dynamics shaping tourism as foreign policy changed after Stalin's death, when Eastern Europe appeared on the global travel map and the Eastern bloc joined the international forums for tourism policy-making. In the 1950s the European socialist states liberalised their visa regimes for incoming Westerners and formally extended their welcome from official delegations to regular tourists. Such decisions were presented as a gesture of goodwill in pursuit of peaceful coexistence and widely received as an indicator of improved East–West relations. Although the initial East–West tourist traffic was diminutive and largely symbolic, the rapidly growing tourism industries in Western Europe and North America nevertheless demonstrated that international tourism constituted a potential revenue stream for the socialist states too.[24]

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17 Syrjämaa, *Visitez l'Italie*, 247–8.
18 On aviation negotiations, see Karl Lorentz Kleve, 'Making Iron Curtain Overflights Legal: Soviet–Scandinavian Aviation Negotiations in the Early Cold War', in Bechmann Pedersen and Noack, eds., *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War*.
19 'The Need of International Collaboration in Favour of Tourism: Achieved by the Union Internationale des Organes Officiels de Propagande Touristique: Result of Twelve Years Work 1925–1937' (Amsterdam: L'Union Internationale des Organes Officiels de Propagande Touristique, 1937). On touring and bilateral treaties, see Frank Schipper, *Driving Europe: Building Europe on Roads in the Twentieth Century* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008), 148–53.
20 Sune Bechmann Pedersen, 'A Passport to Peace? Modern Tourism and Internationalist Idealism', *European Review* 28, no. 3 (2020).
21 Foreign Assistance Act of 1948, sec. 177 (b). https://www.marshallfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Foreign_Assistance_Act_of_1948.pdf.
22 Frank Schipper, Igor Tchoukarine, and Sune Bechmann Pedersen, *The History of the European Travel Commission, 1948–2018* (Brussels: The European Travel Commission, 2018), 21–3.
23 On youth tourism, see Richard Ivan Jobs, *Backpack Ambassadors: How Youth Travel Integrated Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
24 Sune Bechmann Pedersen, 'Eastbound Tourism in the Cold War: The History of the Swedish Communist Travel Agency Folkturist', *Journal of Tourism History* 10, no. 2 (2018).

This enlargement of the tourism scale is reflected in the World Treaty Index (WTI), the most comprehensive database of bilateral and multilateral treaties in the world, which contains just eighteen bilateral tourism treaties for the period of 1947–62. In 1963, however, the UN organised a Conference on International Travel and Tourism that emphasised the value of intergovernmental agreements and called for 'bilateral economic, financial and technical co-operation in the field of tourism', particularly between 'developed' and 'developing' countries.[25] The call was heeded. There was a dramatic rise in the number of tourism treaties similar to that of cultural agreements identified by the Danish Foreign Service. WTI has no fewer than 185 treaties concluded in the sixteen years following the UN conference with twenty-three signed in 1975 alone, the peak year for tourism treaties.[26] In the 1960s and 1970s, many developing and newly independent countries were parties to bilateral tourism agreements, yet the most active countries were state socialist. By 1989, the East European states had concluded a total of 148 treaties, with only twenty-nine of them signed with fraternal regimes in Europe. The global top ten list of countries with most tourism treaties included Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Romania (in that order). Bulgaria, in particular, stood out as one of the most prolific negotiators, with twenty-seven tourism treaties registered in the WTI, second only to Spain's thirty-seven.[27] What drove Bulgaria's negotiations? How did Western counterparts interpret the functions of the tourism treaties in East–West relations, and what practical consequences did the agreements have? To answer these questions, it is necessary to consider the role of the tourism sector under state socialism.

The Bulgarian State Meets the Scandinavian Holiday Market

For socialist Bulgaria, a country without significant natural resources or profitable export industries, international tourism opened up important economic possibilities.[28] Beginning in the late 1950s when East–West trade picked up speed, Bulgaria's export strategy thus came to rely increasingly on tourism products tailored specifically to foreign clients. The country was quick to tap in to the expanding market for sun-and-sea mass tourism, investing in new hotel complexes, camping sites and restaurants along the Black Sea coast. The new resorts first catered to citizens of fraternal states, but their ambition from the outset was to attract a substantial share of tourists from the West.[29]

In the fight for hard currency clients, Bulgaria looked up to and sought to emulate the development of Mediterranean destinations. Its immediate competitors were Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, while Romania, its geopolitical ally in the region, proved less of a problem due to the slow liberalisation of its international tourism.[30] Indeed the comprehensive reports and long-term plans of the Bulgarian

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[25] UN E/CONF 47/18. United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism, *Recommendations on International Travel and Tourism*, 18.

[26] http://db.lib.washington.edu/wti/wtdb.htm, last accessed 3 Mar. 2023. On the history of the database, see Glenda J. Pearson, 'Rohn's World Treaty Index: Its Past and Future', *International Journal of Legal Information* 29 (2001): 543; Paul Poast, Michael James Bommarito, and Daniel Martin Katz, 'The Electronic World Treaty Index: Collecting the Population of International Agreements in the 20th Century', *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2010), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2652760, last accessed 3 Mar. 2023. The database includes treaties not registered with the UN, culled from a variety of national registers. Vol. 1 of the print edition lists these sources. Peter H. Rohn, *World Treaty Index*, 2nd ed., 5 vols (Buffalo, NY: W.S. Hein, 1997).

[27] On Spain's bilateral tourism diplomacy, see Sasha D. Pack, *Tourism and Dictatorship: Europe's Peaceful Invasion of Franco's Spain* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 43–56.

[28] This argument is developed by one of the authors in Elitza Stanoeva, 'Balancing between Socialist Internationalism and Economic Internationalisation: Bulgaria's Economic Contacts with the EEC', in *European Socialist Regimes' Fateful Engagement with the West: National Strategies in the Long 1970s*, eds. Angela Romano and Frederico Romero (London: Routledge, 2021), 160–61.

[29] For a brief history of Bulgaria's international tourism in the post-war period, see Elitza Stanoeva, 'Exporting Holidays, Importing Hard-Currency: Bulgarian International Tourism on the Scandinavian Market in the 1960s and 1970s', in Bechmann Pedersen and Noack, eds., *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War*, 26–8.

[30] Dragoş Petrescu, 'Closely Watched Tourism: The Securitate as Warden of Transnational Encounters, 1967–9', *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 2 (2015); Stefan, *Vacationing in Dictatorships*.

tourism administration placed all the national achievements and potential future gains within the overall market development of the Balkan region. The rising tourist attractiveness of the neighbouring countries prompted not only competitiveness on the Bulgarian side but also cross-border initiatives, despite the different or even adversarial geopolitical alliances of the states that collaborated.[31] According to internal reports of the Bulgarian tourism administration, by 1969, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria together accounted for 6.3 per cent of the traffic and 5.9 per cent of the profits in Europe-bound tourism.[32] While Yugoslavia was far ahead both in numbers of incoming tourists and revenues, by 1967 Bulgaria surpassed both Greece and Turkey by share of visitors to the region, though Greece's earnings remained double Bulgaria's.[33]

The successful development of Bulgaria's tourism strategy was possible in the 1960s because Western governments welcomed the opening of the Eastern bloc to their tourists as a sign of thawing East–West relations. In the new climate of peaceful coexistence, commercial travel agencies embraced the opportunities to expand their destination portfolios and launched collaborations with the official tourism organisations in the Eastern bloc. These were still the early days of the postwar boom in mass tourism, when successful contracts and inflows of tourists were measured not in millions but in the thousands, so every new partnership counted as an important contribution. On the Eastern side, long-term deals with commercial tour operators were prioritised because they could guarantee an inflow of visitors that was easy to forecast. In contrast, unorganised tourism by individuals was harder to reconcile with a planned economy and national security concerns, so the socialist tourism administrations were less accommodating towards private holidaymakers. The travel industry, however, is notoriously exposed to the vagaries of the economy. Opening to Western tourism meant that Bulgaria's coastal destinations entered a volatile international market for sun-and-sea holidays. The difficulties this entailed are aptly illustrated by Bulgaria's struggles in the Scandinavian holiday market.

Scandinavian holidaymakers were among the first to be courted as part of socialist Bulgaria's tourism policy following the successful negotiations of intergovernmental agreements on aviation and trade with Sweden and Denmark in 1958–9.[34] The bilateral framework was thus already in place when Balkantourist, the state tourism agency, initiated its first contacts with Scandinavian partners.[35] Initially, Balkantourist did not have the institutional prerogative to reach out directly to foreign partners. Its early contacts with the Scandinavian tourism business were all mediated by envoys and agencies with no special expertise or interest in tourism, which left the tour operators in charge of re-tailoring Balkantourist's offer into conventional sun-and-sea package deals.[36] The relationship with the Scandinavian travel companies was thus from the onset tainted by frustration on the part of the Bulgarian tourism administration, which considered its local partners to be impostors marketing Bulgaria to their clientele, 'knowing neither our country nor the conditions and opportunities for tourism and vacationing here'.[37] Excluded from the business talks with their foreign contractors, Balkantourist's management felt sidelined on its own turf.

In the early 1960s, Balkantourist finally received permission to operate its own affiliates abroad under the umbrella of the newly established governmental branch for tourism (soon upgraded to

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[31] TsDA, f. 1230, op. 1, a.e. 54, l. 76.

[32] Ibid., l. 8.

[33] Ibid., l. 85–6.

[34] For details on the trade treaty and its outcomes, see Elitza Stanoeva, 'Squeezed between External Trade Barriers and Internal Economic Problems: Bulgaria's Trade with Denmark in the 1970s', *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 27, no. 3 (2020).

[35] On the institutional history of the Bulgarian tourism sector, see Maya Ivanova, *Turizam Pod Nadzor: Balkanturist – Nachaloto Na Mezhdunarodniya i Masoviya Turizam v Balgariya* (Sofia: Ciela, 2018); Stanoeva, 'Exporting Holidays'.

[36] Elitza Stanoeva, 'The Imperative of Opening to the West and the Impact of the 1968 Crisis: Bulgaria's Cooperation with Denmark and West Germany in the 1960s', in Crump and Erlandsson, eds., *Margins for Manoeuvre in Cold War Europe*, 113.

[37] Bulgarian Central State Archives (TsDA), f. 310 (State Economic Enterprise Balkantourist), op.2, a.e.262, l.36, Report by Petar Ignatov, Director of Balkantourist (no date).

the Committee on Tourism or CT), and Copenhagen was among its first foreign offices. Since the opening of this base in 1964, Balkantourist used it strategically to build business partnerships across the region. The number of Scandinavian tour groups in Bulgaria slowly picked up, most of them facilitated by contracts with the large regional tour operators (primarily Jørgensens and Stjernerejser, the Danish branch of the Scandinavian Startour Corporation).[38] These companies helped to popularise Bulgaria as a tourist destination for Scandinavians, which instilled the Bulgarian administration with optimism: 'In Denmark as well as in the other Scandinavian countries, the political situation is favourable . . . to advertise the tourist sites of our country. The press, radio and television are kindly disposed to us and [we do not face] any serious obstacles'.[39] The Swedish chargé d'affaires confirmed the Bulgarian impression of a favourable Scandinavian political climate by meeting twice with the head of the state tourism authority in 1964.[40] Bulgarian enthusiasm resulted in a treaty for visa-free travel with Denmark which was signed in September 1967 – the International Tourist Year – and immediately inspired a governmental resolution to abolish visas for all the other Nordic states on similar terms.[41]

Yet the partnerships with the Scandinavian tour operators carried many challenges and often fell apart for a variety of reasons. At the Western end, the holiday market's razor-thin profit margins resulted in frequent bankruptcies, which hurt Balkantourist's partners in Scandinavia. At the Eastern end, the heavy bureaucratic apparatus supervising international tourism within the central planning system of socialist Bulgaria often hampered business communication between the two countries.[42] From the outset, Balkantourist had been sceptical about the hefty commissions and independent pricing required by Scandinavian partners in exchange for their solid reputation and access to a steady clientele of holidaymakers. So in 1969, when the inflow substantially decreased in the aftermath of the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia a year earlier, Balkantourist failed to keep its end of the bargain and started to sell holidays directly. This caused Stjernerejser – at the time suffering from severe liquidity problems – to accuse the Bulgarians of unfair competition by undercutting their prices, and it severed all relations in April 1969, with the loss of more than 3,000 bookings for the coming summer.[43]

While Bulgaria's tourism administration did all it could to compensate for this loss by finding new partners in the region, its dissatisfaction with this form of tourist provision grew. Balkantourist's volatile business relations in the Scandinavian market were at odds with the operation of a socialist tourism administration bound by an economic plan and inflexible targets. While fraternal regimes could basically trade tourists as material goods between themselves, Western markets proved much harder to navigate. As the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted in response to a Polish proposal for a bilateral tourism agreement in 1971, 'the flow of tourists is something that at least the Swedish side can hardly regulate through agreements'.[44] Prompted by enquiries from Scandinavian companies, since the 1960s Bulgaria had considered steadier solutions such as direct foreign investment and joint management of resort facilities. All such talks, however, had been stranded on the scores of legal and

[38] TsDA, f.259 (Ministry of Foreign Trade), op.45, a.e.239, l.59, Report on the establishment of transborder company in Denmark with the participation of Balkantourist, 27 Mar. 1983. On Stjernerejser, see Carina Gråbacke, *När Folket Tog Semester: Studier Av Reso 1937–77* (Lund: Sekel, 2008), 189–91.

[39] TsDA, f.1B (Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party), op.81A (Section of Foreign Policy and International Relations – Western Europe), a.e.337, l.12, Information on the development of Bulgaria's tourism relations with Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries, 13 Nov. 1967.

[40] Swedish National Archive (SNA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UD), I.7.Eb. Letters by Sture Johansson, Bucharest, to the MFA 1 Apr. and 7 June 1964.

[41] TsDA, f.136 (Council of Ministers), op.45, a.e.360, Resolution 379, 30 Aug. 1967, on concluding treaty for abolishing visas between Bulgaria and Denmark; TsDA, f.136, op.44, a.e.361, Ordinance 215, 31 Oct. 1967, on concluding treaties for abolishing visas with the Nordic countries.

[42] For details of the back and forth of these partnerships, see Stanoeva, 'Exporting Holidays'.

[43] TsDA, f.1477, op.25, a.e.897, l.2–4, Letter from the Bulgarian embassy in Copenhagen to the MFA and CT, 10 May 1969.

[44] SNA, UD, IN.7.Ep, Letter from the Bureau of Information, MFA, to the Ministry of Trade, 28 July 1971.

administrative complications, first and foremost the strict requirement of Bulgarian state ownership.[45] In the early 1970s, the Bulgarian tourism administration began exploring alternatives to the sun-and-sea market and identified medical tourism to 'balneological' resorts as a potentially lucrative market in Scandinavia, along with tours for special interest groups such as farmers, students, teachers and trade unionists. And along with these ideas for niche travel, the Bulgarians began to imagine how an intergovernmental treaty with Denmark could help realise their ambitions.

From Business Partnerships to an Intergovernmental Treaty

The prospect of an agreement with Denmark arose in 1972, by which time Bulgaria had already concluded more than twenty tourism agreements with its fraternal countries, neighbouring Greece and Turkey, more distant NATO members (France, Italy and Belgium), neutral Austria, and far-flung friendly nations such as Cuba, Syria and Sudan. The economic planners hoped that bilateral diplomacy could ensure a growing number of foreign visitors. But even when tourism agreements did not necessarily help Bulgaria meet its incoming tourist targets, they still represented the kind of political achievement regularly pursued by economic planners parallel to their economic objectives. As such, the successful negotiation of a tourism agreement marked a valuable symbolic contribution to the country's political economy, improving Bulgaria's diplomatic standing.

Some of the agreements were brief, indicating nothing more than shared goodwill to expand friendly relations in the sphere of tourism. The agreement with Belgium signed in 1972 serves as a good example of such purely symbolic gestures. Its preamble proclaimed a 'common interest to establish close and lasting co-operation in the field of tourism' followed by standard clauses such as encouraging the growth of tourist exchange; closer cooperation between the respective tourism organisations; the dissemination of promotional materials and information; the simplification of border formalities; and educational, technical and economic cooperation related to tourism.[46] The formulations, however, were so broad that the agreement did not bind its signatories to any real-world commitments. Rather, it suffered from all the ills of the cultural treaties identified in the Danish report cited above.

In other treaties, though, the basic articles were elaborated on to concretise a variety of reciprocal travel improvements. For instance, Bulgaria's treaty with Hungary in 1969 went into great detail in its commitment to improve transportation, 'providing an adequate number of sleeping cars, couchette cars and dining cars and special tourist and express trains; increasing the number of flights by scheduled airlines and chartered aircraft; establishing year-round and seasonal bus services'.[47] Instead of sticking to the usual phrase 'group and individual tourist travel', the treaty also accentuated the needs of unorganised travellers, specifically motorists for whom a 'network of petrol stations, service stations and repair shops along the main highways' should be developed.

Some agreements covered the exchange of staff for training purposes and surveys on foreign markets. Others considered financial issues, referring to the bilateral balance of payments, rights to maintain tourist bureaus in the other country, taxation, flight routes and their operation by national airlines, establishment of mixed commissions in the area of tourism, and even joint programmes for third countries' nationals. Exceptional clauses usually reflected specific interests of the other contracting side. In the case of East Germany, which signed a treaty with Bulgaria in 1970 prior to its diplomatic recognition outside the Soviet bloc, there was a special commitment to mutual assistance in matters of

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[45] TsDA, f.1477, op.25, a.e.2666, l.1–3, Letter by the Committee on Tourism to the Committee's representative in Stockholm, 26 Mar. 1969; TsDA, f.1477, op.27, a.e.1107, l.44–5, Notes on the draft program for economic, industrial and scientific-technical cooperation between Bulgaria and Denmark, 18 Feb. 1971.

[46] Belgium and Bulgaria, Agreement concerning co-operation in the field of tourism (signed 28 Oct. 1971), United Nations Treaty Series (UNTS), vol. 850, no. 12174. https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20850/volume-850-I-12174-Other.pdf, last accessed 15 May 2023.

[47] Bulgaria and Hungary, Agreement concerning co-operation in the field of tourism (signed 22 Jan. 1969), UNTS, 755, 10837. https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20755/volume-755-I-10837-Other.pdf, last accessed 15 May 2023.

membership of international tourism organisations.[48] In the case of Romania, whose travel policy was more restrictive, the bilateral treaty specified that the 'volume of tourist exchanges shall be fixed by annual contracts'.[49] An agreement with France contained a clause on minimising the penalties for traffic offenses committed by nationals of one country on the territory of the other – seemingly a response to complaints by French motorists touring Bulgaria.[50]

A major difference between treaties with fraternal regimes and treaties with non-socialist countries was their length. The former often had more articles or greater detail without necessarily affecting the scope or intensity of the potential cooperation. The preambles of treaties with Western countries were also pragmatically limited to the pursuit of common interests and a desire to develop friendly relations, while the preambles of treaties with fraternal regimes highlighted their shared political project. Ultimately, the key differences in the content of agreements did not stem from the geopolitical orientation of the respective co-signatory but from its vested interest in developing some kind of tourism cooperation with Bulgaria – be it cultural, educational, economic or technical. Some non-socialist countries were clearly attracted by the possibilities to develop tourist resorts on Bulgarian territory, to export technical know-how and entire tourist facilities or simply to rectify the balance of payments; others saw in such treaties the benefits of cultural promotion, symbolic bridge-building and rapprochement.

Not all of Bulgaria's tourism negotiations resulted in a ratified treaty, and the stranded negotiations offer important insights into the instrumentalisation of tourism on either side of the Cold War divide. Scandinavia was a prioritised region in the Bulgarian strategy for international tourism, but none of the Scandinavian countries ever accepted Bulgaria's proposals for a tourism agreement. Denmark and Sweden in particular were wooed by the combined efforts of Bulgaria's diplomatic corps, tourism administration and foreign-economic services. The overtures concentrated on two factors. First, the high standard of living and the social welfare system placed Scandinavian citizens among the visitors with the highest holiday spending. Second, a series of unsuccessful business partnerships with Scandinavian tour operators forced the Bulgarian tourism administration to consider alternative approaches and thus placed interstate agreements for cooperation in tourism on their agenda.

The Anatomy of a Failed Tourism Treaty and the Question of Tourism as Culture

In 1973, Bulgaria became the first East European country to express a desire for an agreement about the exchange of tourists with Denmark. The question was brought up during the visit to Bulgaria of the Danish Trade Minister, but was never followed up by the Danish side.[51] The next year, the Bulgarian government again expressed a strong interest in increasing the tourist traffic between the two countries during the first ever bilateral consultations held by deputy ministers and other officials from their respective foreign services. At this meeting in Sofia, the Bulgarian delegation submitted a draft treaty to their counterparts and the Bulgarians itemised the treaty for signing by the end of the year.[52]

Seemingly unbeknownst to the Bulgarians, however, the proposal found no support on the Danish side. The idea of stimulating a tourist exchange was welcomed in Copenhagen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but when consulted, the Ministry of Trade firmly rejected the proposal in the autumn

[48] Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic, Agreement concerning co-operation in the field of tourism (signed 27 June 1970), UNTS 807, 11516. https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20807/volume-807-I-11516-Other.pdf, last accessed 15 May 2023.

[49] Bulgaria and Romania, Agreement concerning co-operation in the field of tourism (signed 15 June 1967), UNTS, 634, 9051. https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20634/volume-634-I-9051-Other.pdf, last accessed 15 May 2023.

[50] France and Bulgaria, Agreement concerning co-operation in the field of tourism (signed 14 May 1971), UNTS, 798, 11384. https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20798/volume-798-I-11384-Other.pdf, last accessed 15 May 2023.

[51] TsDA, f.1477, op.28, a.e.4717, l.12–3, Letter from the Committee on Tourism to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 Mar. 1972. DNA UM 90.D.39, Memorandum from P.I to PK.II and H.II, 1 July 1974.

[52] TsDA, f.1B, op.81A, a.e.338, l.6–7, Information regarding the consultations between MFAs of Bulgaria and Denmark, 18–21 June 1974.

of 1974. Denmark had no such agreements with any other country, and the Ministry of Trade saw no need for one. The state subsidised the promotion of *inbound* tourism via the semi-official national tourism organisation, but it had no interest in promoting *outbound* tourism. Visa requirements between the two states had already been abolished, currency exchange was not a problem and inclusive tours to Bulgaria were offered by various travel agents. All told, there was no reason to establish a new precedent that would result in nothing more than pointless paperwork.[53] Without further discussion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepted these arguments and the Bulgarian draft was mothballed.[54]

Denmark thus rejected the idea of tourism agreements in 1974 based solely on an economic calculus. Yet the framing of international tourism as a matter only of trade relations was not self-evident. The Danish *chargé d'affaires* in Hungary wrote two incisive analyses on the economic and cultural impacts of Western tourism in the country in 1973–4, one of which was also recommended to Stockholm by the Swedish ambassador. These observations, however, appear to have been ignored in the Danish decision-making process.[55] Tourism had also been considered within the scope of East–West cultural exchange for years before Bulgaria submitted its draft agreement. To understand the ambiguity that would characterise future talks about tourism in the Helsinki process and between Denmark and the Eastern bloc, it is thus necessary to take a step back and consider the history of uncertainty concerning tourism's function in cultural contacts in the Cold War.

As the confidential report quoted in the introduction shows, the Danish foreign service principally opposed the state direction of cultural contacts as well as treaties serving only symbolic purposes. Denmark was not alone in holding this view even if it had come under pressure when the report was drafted in 1965. The Netherlands and Sweden had been early opponents of cultural treaties and the latter rejected Soviet overtures in 1958, maintaining that bilateral agreements violated the principle of freely developing cultural exchanges between countries.[56] Both countries delegated cultural diplomacy to semi-official institutes, yet in the Dutch case, the policy area was restructured already in 1959 explicitly because it was a means to improve relations with the East European states.[57] Sweden, by contrast, maintained its delegation of cultural relations to non-governmental organisations well into the 1970s, at which point it was the only European country, barring Switzerland, which had refused to negotiate a single cultural treaty.[58] By 1965, the Danish Foreign Service had weighed the principle of non-interference in international cultural exchange against the political interest in promoting 'international understanding and tolerance' between East and West and decided in favour of the latter. The principle of non-interference made sense in relation to other liberal democracies, but the centralised control of foreign contacts in the Eastern bloc presupposed a negotiated framework to facilitate cultural exchange of any kind, the report concluded.[59] This analysis was shared by the majority of Denmark's Western allies, who considered cultural agreements a necessary means of fostering human connections across a divided continent.[60] For these reasons, Denmark had signed a

[53] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Memorandum from the Ministry of Trade to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 Oct. 1974.

[54] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Memorandum from M.2 to P.I, 30 Oct. 1974; memorandum from M.2 to H.2 on potential Danish–Bulgarian agreement on tourist exchange, 14 Apr. 1975.

[55] DNA, UM 90.Ungarn.10. Memoranda by Sven Kuchler Poulsen to the MFA, 9 May 1973 and 25 Feb. 1974. SNA, UD IN.7.Eu. Letter by Ambassador Sigge Lilliehöök to the MFA, 24 May 1973.

[56] Andreas Åkerlund, 'The Impact of Foreign Policy on Educational Exchange: The Swedish State Scholarship Programme 1938–1990', *Paedagogica Historica* 50, no. 3 (2014): 401.

[57] Y. C. L. M. Van Dongen and A. P. Schmid, *Buitenlands Cultureel Beleid: Een Terreinverkenning* (The Hague: Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 1987), 20–21, https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/34237/1/439171.pdf, last accessed 24 Apr. 2024.

[58] SNA, UD, IN.12.A. Memorandum on cultural agreements, 6 May 1975. In practice, though, Sweden did maintain state-funded bilateral exchange programmes for academics negotiated by the semi-official Swedish Institute. Andreas Åkerlund, 'For Goodwill, Aid and Economic Growth: The Funding of Academic Exchange Through the Swedish Institute, 1945–2010', *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 2, no. 1 (2015): 124–5.

[59] DNA, UM 41.C.143/Bilag. Memorandum on bilateral cultural agreements. 3 Aug. 1965.

[60] Marianne Rostgaard, 'Dansk Kulturdiplomati over for Østblokken ca. 1960–1972', *Historisk Tidskrift* 2011, no. 2 (2011): 488–9.

cultural agreement with Bulgaria in 1969 as a small gesture of goodwill after the invasion of Czechoslovakia had severely damaged bilateral cooperation.[61]

What about tourism? Squaring cultural agreements with the principle of non-intervention in civil affairs was hard enough and the question of tourist traffic further accentuated the dilemma. Anna Fett has shown how many in the US State Department harboured concerns about President Eisenhower's programme encouraging private citizens to encounter and foster mutual understanding with foreign peoples. According to Fett, one state official reacted with deep scepticism to the programme, noting that 'any highly-published launching of the person-to-person programme would be harmful to the spirit of spontaneity to such unofficial contact'.[62] The US State Department had expressly sought to increase private tourist traffic between East and West since the Geneva summit in 1955, and in January 1958 a symbolic step in this direction was taken when the Soviet–American agreement in the cultural, technical and education fields included a brief clause on 'the development of tourism' as a particular form of cultural contact.[63] Subsequent cultural agreements between NATO members and Eastern bloc countries occasionally included statements about the promotion of tourism. This was also the case with the Bulgarian–Danish cultural treaty which contained a provision to 'encourage exchange in the area of sports and tourism' (Article 14).[64] Based on this clause, tourism also featured in every consecutive two-year plan for cultural and scientific exchange between Bulgaria and Denmark, though there were never any detailed guidelines other than the vague assurance that it would 'encourage relations between the sports and tourist organizations in the two countries'.[65] In the 1950s and 1960s, tourism thus appears to have come under an expansive definition of cultural exchange, although its inclusion had few practical implications.

To better grasp the link between culture and tourism in foreign policy during this period it is instructive to zoom in on a multilateral forum where the matter was repeatedly brought up. In the 1950s, NATO began to reconsider its raison d'être and expanded its scope to include questions of 'soft power' and East–West mobility.[66] The topic first began to feature on the NATO agenda around 1952 when a Working Group on Social and Cultural Co-operation was established to promote the circulation of information and individuals among the member states.[67] Seemingly uncontroversial, this encouragement of mobility inside the alliance was then extended after the Geneva summit to the promotion of contacts between East and West – ordinary leisure tourism included.[68] With the spread of cultural agreements across the Cold War divide from the second half of the 1950s onwards – some of which specifically included the promotion of tourism – the topic became a mainstay on the margins of discussions around cultural exchange programmes. When in 1957 the Committee on Information and Cultural Relations circulated a questionnaire on official and semi-official East–West exchanges, three

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[61] Stanoeva, 'The Imperative of Opening', 119.

[62] Quoted in Anna Fett, 'US People-to-People Programs: Cold War Cultural Diplomacy to Conflict Resolution', *Diplomatic History* 45, no. 4 (2021): 726.

[63] Department of State Bulletin, 17 Feb. 1958, 246.

[64] TsDA, f.1B, op.81A, a.e.344, l.5, Cultural Treaty between the Bulgarian government and the Danish government (endorsed on 29 May 1969).

[65] TsDA, f.1B, op.81A, a.e.344, l.15, Plan for cultural and scientific exchange between Bulgaria and Denmark for 1970–1971; l.22, Plan for cultural and scientific exchange between Bulgaria and Denmark for 1972–1973; l.46, Plan for cultural and scientific exchange between Bulgaria and Denmark for the period 1/04/1976–31/03/1978; l.63, Plan for exchange in science, education and culture between Bulgaria and Denmark for the period 1/04/1982–31/03/1985; l.83, Plan for exchange in science, education and culture between the Bulgarian government and the Danish government for the period 1/04/1985–31/03/1988.

[66] Giles Scott-Smith, 'Not a NATO Responsibility? Psychological Warfare, the Berlin Crisis, and the Formation of Interdoc', in Andreas Wenger, Christian Nuenlist and Anna Locher, eds., *Transforming NATO in the Cold War: Challenges beyond Deterrence in the 1960s* (London: Routledge, 2007); Linda Risso, *Propaganda and Intelligence in the Cold War: The NATO Information Service* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

[67] NATO online archive, AC/31-D/3. Working Group on Social and Cultural Co-Operation, Findings and Recommendations of the Committee on the Atlantic Community, 17 Nov. 1952. https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/9/6/9650/AC_31-D_3_ENG.pdf, last accessed 12 May 2023.

[68] NATO online archive, AC/52-D/168. Committee on Information and Cultural Relations, Contacts between the Atlantic Community and the Soviet Bloc, 13 Apr. 1956.

members – West Germany, Luxembourg and Norway – felt prompted to report on visits of Soviet tourist groups and Soviet statements concerning tourist traffic.[69] The sporadic inclusion of tourism in the responses is symptomatic of its unclear status halfway between official cultural exchange and unofficial individual mobility. The NATO members expressly sought to combat the Soviet 'delegation technique' that shielded individuals in tourist groups from building relations with locals on either side of the Cold War divide.[70] At the same time, the awareness remained that eastbound private tourist traffic could hardly be accelerated by government decree.

The unresolved question of tourism's place in East–West exchanges continued to surface in NATO's monitoring of cultural agreements throughout the 1960s. The annual meetings of the East–West Contacts Working Group – established in 1960 as an informal forum for information-sharing and the discussion of practical problems concerning cultural exchange – show how the question of tourism partially overlapped with cultural matters: it was touched upon occasionally but never systematically explored. From a technical viewpoint, there was in fact no difference between cultural exchange and tourist traffic according to the definition of a 'tourist' recommended by the UN Rome conference on tourism in 1963. This definition conflated leisure ('recreation, holiday, health, study, religion and sport') with 'business, family, mission, meeting', terming it all tourism as long as the visit lasted at least twenty-four hours.[71] With such an all-encompassing definition, virtually any journey abroad qualified as tourism, including activities regulated by cultural agreements. NATO sources nevertheless show that Western foreign services often operated with a narrower definition of tourism closer to the general understanding that it was leisure travel, and thus a private affair that the state should not seek to regulate. In some years, the working group's annual reports accounted for incoming tourists from the Eastern bloc as a separate category, hinting that these were private leisure travellers on tourist visas rather than participants in state-sponsored cultural exchanges. Yet the number of tourists from the Eastern bloc to the West in the 1960s was so small and the vetting by their home country so thorough that this form of contact was deemed a paltry contribution to the cultural bridge-building project.[72] The number of outbound tourists to the Eastern bloc was assumed to be much bigger, but the annual reports generally failed to provide precise figures. Denmark reported in 1964 that 'separate statistical data are not available about tourist visits' and the US report in 1970 expressly did not cover tourism.[73] In fact, the report admitted that 'data for US visits to the USSR and Eastern Europe are necessarily incomplete since private American citizens traveling abroad are not obligated to inform the Department of State of their plans'.[74] Instead, the report included an estimate by Intourist, the Soviet state tourist agency, that 50,000 Americans had visited the country in 1970, 'most of them as tourists'.[75] It thus appears that NATO's East–West Contacts Working Group was disinclined to consider the travel patterns of their compatriots to be part of the group's remit. Bilateral cultural agreements may have been a necessary evil ensuring exchanges between East and West, but systematically including individual leisure travel under this domain was a step too far; tourism was not quite culture.

The working group nevertheless did consider the overall developments in the East European tourism industry as a proxy for the intensity of cultural contacts. A US report on East–West educational and cultural exchanges in 1970 noted that 'most of the Eastern European states and the USSR continued to woo the tourist trade energetically' and that 'tourism from the West to communist countries

[69] NATO online archive, AC/52-D/271.
[70] NATO online archive, AC/52-D/168. Committee on Information and Cultural Relations, Contacts between the Atlantic Community and the Soviet Bloc, 13 Apr. 1956.
[71] UN E/CONF. 47/18, 5.
[72] See for instance the extensive minutes of the 1964 meeting in Suffern, New York. DNA, UM 41.C.143/bilag, 11 May 1964.
[73] DNA, UM 41.C.143. Memorandum, 'Danish Cultural and other Exchanges with the Eastern Bloc', Apr. 1964, 11.
[74] DNA, UM 41.C.143.b. Department of State, Bureau of European Affairs, Report no. 32, 'Exchanges with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe 1970', 1.
[75] Ibid., 11.

generally increased in 1970 from the 1969 post-Czechoslovakia low'.[76] It also observed how 'Bulgaria continued to push its tourist business', with a 19 per cent increase in foreign visits and 44 per cent of all tourists coming from non-communist countries.[77] Thus even if some NATO members, Denmark among them, were uncomfortable with the idea of private tourist traffic as a matter for deliberations within a cultural agreements framework, the relevance of tourism for 'human contacts' became increasingly apparent in the 1970s. This connection between tourism and the West's détente approach of 'people first' eventually prompted the Danish MFA to reconsider its negative view of bilateral tourism agreements.

The CSCE Process and Tourism as Human Contacts

Denmark's first rejection of Bulgaria's proposed tourism agreement in the autumn of 1974 came as tourism was being negotiated at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The subject's ambiguous nature as a matter of both economic development and the human right to leave one's country caused some initial disagreement.[78] The Eastern bloc wanted to discuss joint infrastructure projects; the West sought to raise questions of the freedom to travel between East and West.[79] The subject was eventually split in two with the primarily economic aspects of 'promotion of tourism' negotiated as the so-called Second Basket (concerning economic, scientific and technological co-operation), while questions of tourism and individual mobility were negotiated as the Third Basket, which covered the commitments to improve human contacts and cultural exchange.

The Second Basket provisions on tourism were completed in December 1974, with the Southern European countries most vested in the tourism economy taking a particularly active role, Bulgaria among them.[80] The thorniest questions were the opening of Eastern Europe to private travel agencies and citizens' access to foreign currency and required travel documents. Other aspects were more straightforward. The Final Act specifically listed tourist infrastructure, professional conferences, and the exchange of students and experts as areas for future cooperation, bilaterally and multilaterally. This commitment to bilateral cooperation in the field of tourism would soon be pointed out by Eastern delegations when Denmark hesitated to engage in such talks.

The sections in the Third Basket about tourism, discussed under the heading 'Co-operation in Humanitarian and Other Fields', proved far harder to negotiate. Western governments sought to promote human contacts and freer movement, while the Soviets were deeply sceptical of any clauses that violated the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. Negotiations were deadlocked for months, but in May 1975 a breakthrough was finally reached. The Third Basket of the Final Act had two provisions directly connecting tourism to human contacts: the declared intention to 'ease regulations concerning movement of citizens from the other participating States in their territory, with due regard to security requirements' and the intention 'gradually to lower, where necessary, the fees for visas and official travel documents'. Furthermore, the Third Basket included a provision overlapping with the Second Basket on the intention to promote the development of tourism, simplify the necessary formalities and consider 'bilaterally possible ways to increase information relating to travel to other countries and to the reception and service of tourists'.[81] As Angela Romano concludes in her analysis of tourism in the framework of the CSCE, the Final Act did not liberalise East–West travel overnight,

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[76] DAN, UM 41.C.143.a/bilag. RSES-34, 30 Aug. 1971. Quotes p. 3 and p. ii.

[77] Ibid., 9.

[78] For a general history of Helsinki and human rights, see Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[79] DNA, UM 90.B.62. Memorandum by the head of the Danish CSCE-delegation, ambassador Skjold G. Mellbin, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 Nov. 1973.

[80] Angela Romano, 'Concluding Remarks: Tourism across a Porous Curtain', in Bechmann Pedersen and Noack, eds., *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War*, 194–5.

[81] *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe Final Act*, Helsinki 1975. https://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act, last accessed 3 Mar. 2023. Quote in Co-operation in Humanitarian and Other Fields, Human Contacts, (e) Improvement of Conditions for Tourism on an Individual or Collective Basis.

but it confirmed the status of tourism as a matter of international relations.[82] It also motivated the Eastern bloc to intensify its requests for bilateral tourism agreements with the West.

East–West Tourism between Human Contacts and Economic Interests

In anticipation of renewed East European initiatives in the field of tourism, the interministerial CSCE follow-up committee led by the chief negotiator, Ambassador Skjold G. Mellbin, reviewed Denmark's position and concluded that the Ministry of Trade opposed such agreements, yet 'if, however, it is considered politically desirable that an agreement was concluded with the Soviet Union, it could be said to be a cheap gesture'.[83] The Market Department under the MFA reached identical conclusions in a separate review, indicating that the economic arguments of the Ministry of Trade no longer went unopposed.[84] Mellbin nevertheless saw no need for cheap gestures, and unless an agreement contained evident benefits for Denmark 'he saw no point in concluding them'.[85] The primary framing of tourism as a question of foreign trade thus remained intact despite the acknowledged symbolic value of entering agreements.

An occasion to more thoroughly revisit the desirability of a tourism treaty arose six months later when the Soviet embassy submitted a draft agreement to the Danish Tourist Board ahead of Intourist deputy director Viktor Boychenko's visit to Copenhagen in August 1976. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs chose to remain silent, but as preparation for the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's visit to Denmark later that year, the Danish embassy in Moscow proposed tourism as a suitable area for a bilateral agreement. France had reached one with the Soviet Union the previous year, and apart from its provisions on consulates, that text appeared uncontroversial.[86] The recommendation was welcomed by the Political Department, P.I, under the MFA, which harboured a 'general desire for a more active policy towards the eastern countries'.[87] The Market Department remained sceptical, though, and after consultations with the Ministry of Trade and the Tourist Board it once again stressed that an agreement would be have to be politically motivated to compensate for the absence of 'concrete Danish interests'.[88]

For reasons unknown, the Soviets never brought up the question of tourism during Gromyko's visit, nor did they pursue the matter in subsequent years. Bulgaria, however, returned with a new proposal for a tourism agreement in November 1976 expressly invoking the spirit of Helsinki.[89] By then, Bulgaria had already concluded twenty-five agreements about cooperation in the field of tourism with both socialist and non-socialist states, and Sofia was keen on reaching a deal with Denmark this time.[90] The Danish diplomats acknowledged that the agreement was a matter of prestige for the Bulgarians, 'presumably to feel accepted as an equal partner', which explained the relatively uncontroversial draft.[91] The submitted text articulated the parties' willingness to develop tourism between the two

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[82] Romano, 'Concluding Remarks', 197.

[83] DNA, UM 90.B.62. Memorandum by the CSCE following-up committee copied to P.I and M.II, 23 Jan. 1976.

[84] DNA, UM 90.D.43. Memorandum by M.II to the CSCE following-up committee, 2 Feb. 1976.

[85] DNA, UM 90.B.62. Minutes of meeting by the CSCE following-up committee, 17 Feb. 1976, 10.

[86] DNA, UM 90.D.43. Letter by Second Secretary in Moscow, Per Poulsen-Hansen, to P.I, 9 Sept. 1976.

[87] DNA, UM 90.D.43. Memorandum by M.II on potential Danish–Soviet tourism agreement, 17 Sept. 1976.

[88] DNA, UM 90.D.43. Memorandum by M.II on Gromyko's visit and a potential tourism agreement, 21 Sept. 1976. The question of consulates was sensitive as Denmark did not want Eastern bloc representations on Greenland. Nikolaj Petersen, *Dansk Udenrigspolitiks Historie 6: Europæisk og Globalt Engagement: 1973–2003*, 1st ed. (Copenhagen: Danmarks Nationalleksikon, 2004), 161.

[89] DNA, UM, 90.D.39. Draft agreement, Nov. 1976.

[90] TsDA, f.1244 (COMECON), op.1, a.e.8142, l.37, Report by Minister of Domestic Trade and Services on intergovernmental treaty for cooperation in tourism between Bulgaria and Denmark; Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria (AMVnR), op.32, a.e.1209, l.12–4, Draft agreement for cooperation in the field of tourism between Denmark and Bulgaria sent by the Committee on Recreation and Tourism to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26 Sept. 1976; AMVnR, op.33, a.e.1125, l.6–8, Report by Georgi Karamanev, Minister of Domestic Trade and Services, 20 July 1976.

[91] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Minutes, M.II meeting about Danish–Bulgarian tourism agreement, 12 Apr. 1977.

nations through, for example, closer cooperation between the national tourism organisations, exchanges of relevant data and expertise, the promotion of each other's tourist sites, and visits of journalists and tourist exhibitions. The Danish administration's reception of the proposal mirrored that of the Soviet proposal. The MFA's Political Department stressed the West's commitment to promoting human contacts, recognised international tourism as a contribution in this direction, and thus welcomed the Bulgarian proposal.[92] The Ministry of Trade repeated its position of October 1974 that Denmark had no economic interests in any tourism agreement.[93] This time, however, the negotiations took an unexpected turn when news came from Sofia that the Foreign Trade Minister Ivan Nedev planned to offer hotel construction concessions to Danish companies during his upcoming trip to Copenhagen in January 1977.[94] The prospects of lucrative contracts immediately overrode all the MFA's political concerns, and from then on the Danish side sought to trade a tourism agreement for substantial Danish participation in the hotel projects.[95] This bargaining strategy quickly proved a dead end, though, as the Bulgarians had neither the intention nor the prerogative to hand out contracts unconditionally.[96] The Danish side nevertheless refused to take no for an answer and continued to pursue preferential treatment in future meetings with the Bulgarians.[97]

Fake news from Sofia promising profitable hotel contracts for Danish companies was thus ultimately enough to trump the political pursuit of a largely symbolic agreement promoting human contacts between East and West. Curiously, this decisive reordering of priorities on the Danish side came at the point when the MFA's Market Department's position was beginning to soften and potentially align with the Political Department in seeking to overcome the veto by the Ministry of Trade. The conflict between the economic logic guiding the Ministry of Trade and the political logic dominant in foreign affairs continued to play out in the monitoring of Denmark's contribution to the Helsinki process.

Denmark had been a key negotiator of the Third Basket and worked hard to find practical solutions to promote human contacts between East and West in the follow-up work after 1975.[98] In 1979 the interministerial committee formed to implement the CSCE decisions, now led by Ambassador Bent Haakonsen, encouraged the Ministry of Trade to review the question of tourism agreements 'from a CSCE point of view' – a clear hint that Haakonsen sought to reframe tourism as a matter of human contacts. He then tasked the MFA Market Department with setting up a meeting of legal, trade and political representatives from all the relevant sections of the MFA since 'it should be possible to negotiate a design of the agreements that satisfied the concerns of the Ministry of Trade'.[99] The Ministry of Trade nevertheless refused to budge, and when the Minister of Foreign Affairs Henning Christophersen then failed to sway his Liberal Party (*Venstre*) colleague Arne Christiansen in the Ministry of Trade in a direct confrontation in the late summer of 1979, the matter was finally put to rest.[100] Denmark's official line from then on was to approach tourism narrowly as a matter of foreign trade.

In April 1980, Bulgarian envoys concluded after yet another discussion of a tourism treaty with their Danish counterparts that an agreement was of no interest to the Danish government. Their Scandinavian counterpart was 'interested in developing tourism in Denmark, which was a domestic issue [whereas] the vacation of Danish citizens abroad was a personal matter and a domain of tourist firms'.[101] Two years later, the Bulgarian embassy in Copenhagen finally advised against any further

[92] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Memorandum from P.I to M.II on Danish–Bulgarian tourism agreement, 16 Dec. 1976.
[93] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Letter from Ministry of Trade to M.II, 26 Nov. 1976.
[94] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Embassy telegram no. 7 from Bucharest to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 Jan. 1977.
[95] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Memorandum by M.II on potential Danish–Bulgarian tourism agreement, 21 Jan. 1977.
[96] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Memorandum by P.I, 4 Mar. 1977.
[97] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Memorandum by P.I on the visit of the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, 8 Nov. 1977.
[98] Petersen, *Dansk Udenrigspolitiks Historie 6*, 148–49.
[99] DNA, UM 90.D.39. Minutes of CSCE following-up committee meeting by P.I copied to M.II, 9 July 1979.
[100] DNA, UM 90.D.46. Memoranda by M.II, 10 Sept. and 23 Oct. 1980.
[101] TsDA, a.e.1B, op.81A, a.e.338, l.34. Information regarding the consultations between the MFAs of PR Bulgaria and Kingdom of Denmark, May 1980.

attempts at winning Danish approval for a treaty. Instead, they argued, tourist flows had to be expanded on the basis of stable contractual cooperation with the large tour companies.[102] The envisioned diplomatic solution to the fluctuating number of Danish tourists was thus ultimately discarded in favour of the commercial solution that the Danish diplomats had advocated all along: direct negotiations between Balkantourist and private travel companies.

Recent research on the rise of the cultural treaty has pointed to culture's contested status as a subject of post-war international politics.[103] This article has documented how tourism followed a similar trajectory as an ambiguous subject of international relations after the Second World War. Newly independent states embraced tourism agreements as a symbol of their sovereignty. COMECON members regulated their mutual tourist flows and confirmed their fraternal relations. Liberal states like Denmark, Sweden and the United States remained wary of interfering with what they perceived as a domain for individual citizens and private companies. The views held by states about tourism agreements thus generally aligned with their views of cultural treaties. To reach that position, though, required contestation and deliberation. The existing literature on East–West tourism mostly frames it as a dilemma for the Eastern bloc countries, which sought to increase the hard currency earnings from Western tourism, while curtailing the risks it posed to national security. Yet as this article has shown, tourism linked questions of foreign trade, cultural exchange and human rights in ways that posed dilemmas to the West too. While some Western governments negotiated bilateral tourism agreements, Denmark consistently refused to do so. This sceptical position was continuously challenged throughout the 1970s as ambassadors, ministers and departments wrangled over the question. Looking beyond the Eastern bloc, it is evident that tourism was a flexible subject whose meaning was negotiable on either side of the East–West divide. To be sure, the liberal democracies never considered the question of individual travel between the blocs to be a matter of existential magnitude like the security branches of the communist regimes did. Nevertheless, international tourism – long considered an economic zero-sum game – required Western administrations to weigh the value of promoting human contacts against the negative impact on their balance of payments incurred by increased tourism to communist countries. And even if the number of eastbound tourists remained too low to have any significant impact on Western currency reserves, the symbolic act of extending diplomatic negotiations to include international tourism remained controversial. It was one thing to support tourism for the purposes of public diplomacy; it was another to make it a subject of intergovernmental treaties. Tourism diplomacy thus continued to sit uneasily at the intersection of symbolic gestures, cultural exchange, human rights and foreign trade, and it remained a contested subject in international relations throughout the Cold War.

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[102] TsDA, f.1B, op.81A, a.e.337, 103–4, Information about the political, economic and cultural relations between Bulgaria and Denmark (no date).

[103] Martin, 'The Rise of the Cultural Treaty'.