REPORT OF THE
EASTERN EUROPE INFORMATION POOL
Number 4 - June 1985
Homosexuelle Initiative Wien
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INTRODUCTION

This year we are presenting the fourth report of the Eastern Europe Information Pool (EEIP). It includes articles about the situation of gays and lesbians in Poland, Rumania and Czechoslovakia as well as news from the GDR. You will also find a full report of the MAGNUS exhibition in Ljubljana in May 1985 with an interview with the organizers. The story of the book Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern: Zur Lage der Homosexuellen in Ost-Europa written by HOSI-Wien including excerpts from reviews in various newspapers and magazines rounds up this year's EEIP Report. For those who are being confronted with our work for the first time, a note of explanation: At the 3rd annual conference of the IGA in Turin, HOSI-Wien was delegated to write a report on the Eastern Europe Information Pool. It is the job of the EEIP to make contacts, collect and record information, and lend support to the gay and lesbian communities of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. As these countries do not belong to any one political or geographic group, they are collectively referred to as the EEIP countries or the East for the sake of brevity.

As reported last year, the "Ostreport" has become a permanent column in HOSI-Wien's magazine LAMBDA Nachrichten. This year has seen the continuation of this popular feature with articles and current information from the EEIP countries in German. These reports often make their way into other gay papers and magazines all over the world. We are happy to see a growing interest in the situation of our brothers and sisters in the East. One fine example was an article in Body Politic by John Stanley about Poland.

The EEIP bulletins with articles and short reports concerning gay and lesbian news in East and West have become even more popular. The bulletins are distributed in letter fashion throughout the EEIP countries. We get a lot of feedback which is almost always positive.

Another EEIP translation appeared this year in Polish. The book, Schule, as und? is being a big hit. It also seems imminent (knock on wood!) that Baldwin's Giovanni's Room will be officially published in Poland. The translation (by the EEIP) is available; only a few formalities have to be worked out. Marek from the EEIP was also able to put out a well researched report entitled Homosexual traits in Polish Literature which has been well received. It is unfortunately only available in Polish, at least for the time being.

THE EEIP BOOK

As reported earlier, the EEIP was approached at the end of 1983 by the German publishing company, Frühlings Erwachen, Hamburg concerning the possibility of publishing a book about the situation of gay men and lesbians in the EEIP countries. The book Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern: Zur Lage der Homosexuellen in Ost-Europa (Pink Love under the Red Star: The situation of Homosexuals in Eastern Europe) was published at the Frankfurt Book Fair under the title Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern: Zur Lage der Homosexuellen in Ost-Europa (Pink Love under the Red Star: The situation of Homosexuals in Eastern Europe). The book was received by the Frankfurt Book Fair at the beginning of October 1984 with an official presentation and discussion at the alternative book fair in Frankfurt on October 7, 1984.

Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern has received widespread acclaim both in and outside the German speaking countries. Reports and or reviews appeared in the following newspapers and magazines:

Literatur 80; FRO; Die Tagezeitung, West Berlin; Rosa Flieder, Nuremberg; Anderschume, Zurich; Qey Express, Hamburg; die linke, Vienna; Kellerjournal, Munich; Homologie, Amsterdam; Fritt-Fram, Oslo; Lovetann, Oslo; Rosa Bulletinen, Stockholm; Babilonia, Milano; Gai Pied Heddo, Paris; Lesbennacht, West Berlin; Das Bundespresse, Hamburg; GLF-Journal, Cologne; Homophonie, Paris; Siegessäule, West Berlin; Huk-Info, West Berlin; Rosa Rundschau, Kiel; Ost Europa Verkenningen, Amsterdam; Lambda Nachrichten, Vienna; Sek, Amsterdam.

A press conference was held in Vienna in October to introduce the book to the Austrian press. On December 10, 1985, a press conference and reading were held in Kiel on the occasion of the International Day of Human Rights. The Pink Book has been presented. Representatives of the EEIP made their way to Munich where they took part in the München Leuchten Vio Rosa, Lesbisch-Schwule Kulturwoche on April 29, 1985. A presentation evening for the book and the work of the EEIP was held at the Stadttemuseum. At the end of June, another presentation evening will be held in West Berlin.

The following is the press report that was issued when the book first appeared:

PRESS RELEASE - JUST PUBLISHED

ROSA LIEBE UNTERM ROTEN STERN

Zur Lage der Lebenden und Schwulen in Osteuropa (The Situation of Lesbians and Gay Men in Eastern Europe)

The book, ROSA LIEBE UNTERM ROTEN STERN, was published in October 1984 by Frühlings Erwachen, a subdivision of the publishing house, Libertäre Assoziation in Hamburg. It is the first book ever published about the situation of homosexuals in Eastern
Europe. It was written by the Auslandsgruppe (International Group) of the "Homosexuelle Initiative (HOSI) Wien" in Vienna, Austria which has been responsible since January 1982 for the Eastern Europe Information Pool (EEIP) of the International Gay Association, a worldwide association of gay and lesbian organizations. It is the task of the EEIP to establish and maintain contact, collect and distribute information, and lend support to the gay and lesbian communities in "EEIP countries". These are the Warsaw-Pact countries Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, and the Soviet Union, as well as the two nonaligned countries Albania and Yugoslavia.

The 144-page book contains detailed chapters about the general social situation of homosexual men and women in the above mentioned countries. Furthermore it presents the historical development of the legal position of homosexuality including the current status, as well as an exhaustive historical analysis concerning homosexuality in Russia/the Soviet Union in the past one hundred years. The status of the autochthonous sexology-research in the field of homosexuality, including elucidation of its coverage in the media as well as in the arts and culture is presented in separate chapters. Another section covers in detail the just-developing gay and lesbian movement in the GDR, USSR, and Yugoslavia. The book also contains an extensive list of newspaper articles pertaining to homosexuality in the EEIP countries as well as a detailed bibliography and source index. ROSA LIEBE UNTER ROTEM STERN is not only the first book to deal with this topic, it presents a standard work which contains all the important basic and many specific points of information about homosexuality and homosexuals in the EEIP countries. All together, this is an important contribution to enlarging our knowledge of the situation of homosexuals all over the world and to shedding some light on an up to now undocumented area.

Frühlings Erwachen 7, 144 pages, DM 13.80, ISBN 3-922611-86-9
Libertäre Assoziation, Ottensmer Hauptstraße 35, D-2000 Hamburg 50

The publication of ROSA LIEBE is one of many contributions to the 1984 International Year of Lesbian and Gay Action.

The following article appeared in the Siegessäule #2/85 under the heading "Rosa Liebe - nicht rot genug?" (Pink Love - not red enough?). It is a critical letter about the EEIP book from the "Schwule in der Kirche - Arbeitskreis Homosexuelle Selbsthilfe der ev. Bekenntnissgemeinde" (Gays in the Church Working Group for homosexual self-help of the Evangelical confession), Berlin/GDR. Speaker: Christian Pulz.

In the last edition of the Siegessäule we presented a short review of the book ROSA LIEBE unter rotem Stern, published by HOSI in Vienna.

In the meantime, a letter has reached us via the group "Homosexuelle und Kirche" from the East Berlin group "Schwule in der Kirche". Although the author of the letter does not criticize the contents of the book, we consider a discussion about the book so important that we are presenting the letter here:

Recently I got hold of the HOSI product ROSA LIEBE unter rotem Stern. The Homosexual Initiative Wien whose "Auslandsgruppe" is responsible for the publication, was according to its own description appointed the task of observing the situation of homosexuals and lesbians in the socialist countries.

My opinion: They missed their mark if they were trying to report about us in a proper and objective way. The first thing I noticed was the careless research, I mean the neglect of the Berlin group, for example, is portrayed incorrectly, both in respect to its founding as well as its current situation. No one here reported anything to the authors. Well, after reading the book I cannot blame any of your friends for being reserved. A distinct anti-communist prejudice stretches through almost all of the articles. Even some of the well-meant articles get caught up in the twilight of a political statement that cannot be accepted by us. For this reason publishers and authors of this and similar publications should first analyze their attitude towards "true socialism" in the countries of Eastern Europe. This would lead to an objective and therefore really responsible presentation of the situation here of lesbians and gay men which would do a great deal of good for our self-esteem. After all, it is just as easy to become an inaccurate observer; distortions in the sources reflect the result. I call that irresponsible which can mean a lot of harm to us all.

To put it plainly: We lesbians and gay men from the Church working groups of the GDR are basically endeavoring to win sympathy from our society and its socialistic order. Our fight to overcome the repression of homosexuals, which in a certain degree expresses itself here, cannot be underestimated in this sense. Concretely: All problems concerning us can only be solved in our context of government or not at all. Therefore we see no reason to air our internal debate in the West. You should consider that the lesbians and gay men in the GDR are concerned about their country for which they are responsible and in which they are trying to put an end to the century-old hatred of homosexuals which stems from a patriarchal and state of exploitation.

Anyone who would like to report objectively always welcome to visit our working groups. Anyone who is expecting to find anti-socialistic sensationalism is mistaken. That person should forget about even trying to look us up.

We hope that a feeling of solidarity with our situation is growing at least with the active lesbians and gay men in the FRG, Austria and other places, that will guard them from erroneous estimations.
And here is the letter of HOSI-Wien in response to the one above. It was also published in a shortened form in the Siegessaule, number 4/85.

Before we get to Christian Pulz's letter about our book, Rose Liebe unterm roten Stern, we would like to say that we do not consider it correct that you printed his letter without obtaining our comments. But it is not such a great tragedy: we know ourselves how important it is to publish current stories.

As punishment we are writing you a lengthy letter that we expect to be printed without cuts in the next edition of Siegessaule. We have known about Christian's comments for several weeks. We only found out a few days ago, however, that his letter was to be printed in the Siegessaule and in the HUK-Info. And suddenly, the latest edition of your magazine appeared on our doorstep.

We were of course outraged that Christian damned Rose Liebe unterm roten Stern as a slanderous anti-communist piece of garbage. Although we had expected such reactions, we can understand that Christian and other GDR activists want to disassociate themselves from our book. We hope and believe that they understand that we cannot remain idle in the wake of their comments. We hope as well that they will not perceive our reaction as a "battle cry". We do not view Christian's letter as an attack against us nor do we consider the Christian or the working groups in the GDR. It is not at all our intention to start a dispute that would in fact harm the movement the most.

We cannot understand, however, how Christian can flatly classify the whole book as a single piece of anti-communist prejudice. If you look at the section on the GDR, it is quite clearly stated that things have been much more progressive there than in the Plk or Austria, especially as concerns the legal situation after 1945. We pointed out in several places (pp. 9, 10, 12, 79, 115) that the criticism expressed would also apply to "western" countries. In several examples we showed that in many areas the situation in Austria is worse than in the GDR. Austria was hell for homosexuals in the years between 1942 and 1975. (Today in Rumania they live under similar circumstances: We cannot, unfortunately, do anything about it.) Just how traumatized the Austrian gays and lesbians still are from those decades can be illustrated by the fact that only six homosexual groups have been formed here, and already nine in the GDR. (Note: Since this article appeared, two more groups have been formed in the GDR bringing the total to eleven.) Gay and lesbian groups, by the way, are still forbidden in Austria (de jure) and with a prison sentence up to six months. Christians can be assured that if we had written a book about Austria or any other "western" country, we would not have treated the topic as gingerly; we would have been more aggressive with our criticism. Solidarity with and consideration for the homosexuals and gay & lesbian movement in the socialist countries cannot in our opinion be unconditional and indiscriminate. If one considers any kind of criticism of the GDR as anti-communist, then the movement in the GDR is unconditionally condemned. Only, we did not want to write an uncritical, wishy-washy, fairy-tale (there have already been enough songs written exalting the virtues of Honecker and Cesauessu). We would not have gone to so much trouble to write a book that indiscriminately praises all of the socialist countries.

Of course, the only alternative would have been to write a book at all. We feel that this would have been a bigger loss. By the way, we do not consider the GDR government to be so paranoid that they see anti-communist campaigns everywhere they look.

Since the GDR is interested in having a good reputation abroad, it is not bad when reports about its attitude towards homosexuals. Austria also wants a good reputation abroad, a fact that we shamelessly take advantage of, including contriving international protest campaigns. Nevertheless we are good patriots. Exactly because we have a love-hate relation to our little, sloppy, corrupt Republic, we want to make it for gay men and lesbians as liveable as possible. In our country too, the only way to solve the related problems is with/towards our form of government, it seems to us that people in the GDR are "prejudiced" in this aspect). Yes, we can already hear the objections: one cannot compare our situation and conditions with those in the GDR. Of course not in every respect. But as far as a good international reputation is concerned, some comparisons can be made. This should not sound like advice for the GDR movement. In Austria, however, we have often done things which, on a short-term basis, seemed to harm us, but proved to be good in the long run.

Our attitude towards "true socialism" is a very real one-balanced, pragmatic and non-dogmatic. Our view is clouded neither by blind pro nor by hateful anti-communism. If someone is offended by Gudrun's Trotskyist analysis of the Soviet Union (as you know, Trotskyism is considered worse than capitalism in the "true socialist" countries), we would like to say that the other authors, even if they did not share Gudrun's assessments, had nothing against including her article in the book. Our book also does not contain any anti-socialist sensationalism, because it does not contain any sensationalism at all. Admittedly, we often released information from Eastern Europe which if we printed would be "sensational". We do not publish the stories, however, because we find them disadvantageous and detrimental.

We do not deny the reproach concerning careless research work. In the masses of information that we receive that
cannot all be checked. mistakes in details can find their way into our work. Nevertheless, we consider our book comparatively well researched. If Christian can only find six lines concerning the Berlin working group in the 30 to 40 pages about the GDR which contain some inaccuracies, then we can be quite happy with ourselves.

We hope that our brothers and sisters in the GDR see our comments in the right light, that we have been able to clarify some things and clear up some misunderstandings. We also hope that this "discussion" will continue either in this newspaper or better through direct contact and will lead to a better mutual - as Christian puts it - "feeling of solidarity" for the situation, working and fighting methods of the "others". In any case, it would be a fatal blow if the "eastern" and "western" movements quarreled instead of devoting their time and energy to cooperative efforts.

With warm greetings of solidarity!

In the meantime, HOSI-Wien has received a letter from Christian Pulz and Karsten Friedel stressing their objections to our book but yet expressing their will to keep communication between the groups open.

Here are some excerpts from reviews of Rosa Liebe unter rot en Stern:

"...the unique, recently published work entitled Rosa Liebe unter rot en Stern. It is the first illuminating report about the situation of homosexual women and men in Eastern Europe."

die linke, Vienna

"Here there are pages filled with excerpts from penal codes and press quotes from the individual countries which show only one thing: There is hardly any difference in the oppression of homosexuals in Eastern and Western Europe."

Die Tageszeitung, West Berlin

"Anyone who is planning to travel to the East bloc should read this book."

Keilerjournal, Munich

"...data and reports have been collected...so as to present an extensive picture of the life of gay men and lesbians in the socialist countries...an acknowledgeable achievement by the authors!"

Gay Express, Hamburg

"...highly recommended!"

Anderschume, Zurich

Stern is a must for anyone who wants an objective picture of the situation of gays and lesbians in the East.

Rosa Flieder, Nürnberg

"This fall a book appeared that, because it was put out by a small, unknown publishing house, will most likely not receive the attention that it deserves. "On the whole, and this is an essential perception, they did not try to show that the situation of gays and lesbians in Eastern Europe is worse than that here, but except for some similarities, it is just a different one."

Literatur 80, FRG

POLAND

"The situation has returned to normal..." assures the hated government spokesman, Jerzy Urban. The state of Martial Law has been lifted, and the political opposition has withdrawn to the underground. Everyday life, however, has remained much the same as before: now as before, there are great difficulties in supplying basic foodstuffs, the black market and speculation flourish, and cultural life has dropped to a pathetically low level. The people responsible for this situation are those whose through their collaboration with the regime are hoping to improve their personal career chances.

After having dealt with the political opposition, the Polish police turned once again to other "duties". The relaxation of their harassment of homosexuals, which we reported about two years ago, was therefore not a general change of course, rather it resulted out of the necessity for the police to set priorities in their persecution of undesirables. The repression of gays in going on again today just as in the past.

Since the end of 1983, numerous ads under the heading "Contacts" appeared in the Warsaw monthly magazine RELAKS. A typical ad reads as follows: "Young, attractive man seeks sensitive male friend...photo requested...". Due to these ads, the magazine became quite popular and was one of the few publications in Poland that was immediately sold out (most of the other publications are boycotted and not bought because they print so much propaganda). It was soon a well known fact throughout the country that RELAKS was printing gay ads which of course led to protests. A letter from an angered "reader" appeared in the Spring of 1984 in the powerful weekly, POLITYKA - anonymous - of course - who demanded the immediate suspension of these perverse ads. Usually such "voices of the people" foretell bad news (before the government introduces drastically higher prices there are usually letters to the editor in the newspapers demanding higher prices so that goods will not sell out so quickly). And so the fate of the ads under "Contacts" was sealed after this letter to the editor. Not even a letter from the famous Polish artist, Szymon Kobyliński, helped. He pointed out that the liberal Polish law treat homosexuality and heterosexuality equally, and that this criticism was merely some narrow-minded discrimination. Then in July, RELAKS announced that
the heading "Contacta" would be dropped. The people's morality had once again scored a victory. We learned from well-informed sources in Warsaw that these moral crusaders reside at the Soviet Embassy. (In an official letter to the editor of the newspaper, HOŚI-Wien pointed out that discontinuing this column would force gays who were looking for personal contacts to search for such contacts in parks, public toilets, etc. HOŚI-Wien's request for an explanation for the decision to close down the column has remained unanswered as expected.)

But maybe it's better that way. When a homosexual was murdered in Gdańsk, the police found several hundred (!) letters in the victim's apartment which the man had received in answer to ads in RELAKS. All of the respondents were immediately brought in for questioning, their personal data, photos and fingerprints were taken and added to the militia's "Pink Files" which expanded considerably.

After police activity with the political opposition decreased, they suddenly remembered the gays. The police patrols in Warsaw's central train station, the largest and most popular cruising spot, were intensified. Not only are the toilets checked, but even men walking around the platforms and waiting rooms are checked for identification.

The current crisis in Poland not only promotes crime and prostitution but also scurrilous business practices. One year and old people at the bigger train stations are who are willing to rent out their apartments to "newly-found" gay couples while the children are at school. Not only the previously mentioned rising crime rate has become a phenomenon, but also the way it is which it is reported about in the newspapers. Criminal and court cases never used to find any special echo in the media. Nowadays, sensational reporting about murders has become the new strategy to make the boring, unpopular, and partially boycotted press more saleable. Here are a few typical examples: A Warsaw newspaper reported in February in detail about a male prostitute who murdered one of his customers. The magazine NPROST in Poznan sent a roving reporter to the funeral of a murdered homosexual in Bielsko-Biala. The result was a sensationalized tragedy-story, several pages long.

It is reported from Cracow that there are regular raids on cafes and saunas which are known as gay meeting places. A crew from the Polish Television even took the liberty of filming such a raid and broadcasting it under the title "Zadzrościec" (Jealousy or Greed) as a documentary about the difficult work that the police are doing in their fight against the antisocial elements in society. The program was so crude and exaggerated that it was too much even for many "normal people" who otherwise do not cultivate any special feelings for homosexuals.

In a reaction to the TV report, the newspaper, ECHO KRAKOMA, wrote that there were 3 to 4 thousand homosexuals in Cracow (population 500,000) or at least there were that many known to the police. They therefore admitted (not on purpose) that the police kept a "Pink List" on homosexuals.

There is, however, also some positive news from Poland. This is especially true about literature. The second book of the young Polish writer Grzegorz Musial, entitled "Chasy bizarer" (Fake Jewels) in which the author of "Stan piwny" (1982) expounds in a subtle, intellectual style on homosexuality in general and his own homosexuality in particular. Marian Pankowski's novel "Rudolf" was also published which shows bold homoerotic scenes and language. There have also been many translations of foreign works dealing with homosexuality, including Genet's "The Thief's Journal", Ginsberg's poetry, etc.

In November 1984, the second radio program in Warsaw dedicated several broadcasts in its late night series, "Intimate Discussions" to the subject homosexuality. Although the host of the series and the experts often had trouble formulating their views about homosexuality, the series in general was very positive. It was pointed out that trying to change homosexuals into heterosexuals was hopeless and pointless. The subject of AIDS was also touched upon. Long reports about AIDS can be found in an ever increasing number of newspaper articles. Even some local newspapers have published reports about this subject.

During the winter, the final class of the Warsaw Theater Academy performed "Zie zachowanie" (Ain't Misbehaving) in the Ateneum Theater. The gay song "I'm not a boy anymore, now I'm a girl" was received by the audience with much applause.

A marvelous science-fiction parody entitled "Seksmisja" (Sexmission) and directed by Juliusz Machulski is presently being shown in cinemas. Among other things, the first transvestite sequence in the history of Polish film was shown, and according to a malicious critic, rivers of semen. A much greater sensation, however, was the interview with the actor Jerzy Zelnik (in Kurier Polski of August 17, 1984) which discussed the first Polish film about homosexuality. Directed by Jerzy Domaradzki, it is adapted from short stories by the popular gay author Jaroslaw Ivanovszkievic entitled "Three Mills". "It's a psychological study of homosexual feelings," explains Zelnik to the journalist. "I can't remember this theme, which exists, being so thoroughly portrayed in Polish art. We are making great efforts to illustrate these feelings between men, as authentically as possible." In answer to a letter from HOŚI-Wien, the director of the film wrote that the movie is finished, passed by the censor, and is waiting for its premiere on Polish TV.

On September 22, 1984, a discussion about homosexuality was broadcast for the first time on Polish TV. Four social-scientists talked about all the pros and cons of homosexuality, a phenomenon which had been officially ignored up until now.

On January 22, 1985, Polish television broadcast for the first time (it was then repeated two more times) a program entitled "Milk's Eggs" about nudist beaches in Poland. The weekly magazine Polityka no 9/85 published some of the thousand of letters (mostly positive) from people who had seen the show. Here is an excerpt from one of them: "In the name of gay people from
Poznan, I protest most strongly against showing naked women... You are only denigrating young boys. If you really want to show the beauty of the human body, you should preferably show naked male bodies..." The editor's reply to this criticism for nude art was very sarcastic: "Obviously, if you cannot get fresh meat in the shops, people at least want to see it on the TV screen."

The Eastern Europe Information Pool (EEIP) has been putting together on a regular basis since last year information bulletins which are translated into Polish and sent to friends in Poland. When we started producing these bulletins which in a modest way substitute for a gay magazine, we never realized how successful they would become. Our EEIP-Bulletin, which is copied in Poland and distributed in the form of a chain-letter, is now read by several hundred thousand readers. We get many letters from these readers with information and newspaper articles, which we use as a base for all our publications. A small group of activists has formed from the others and met recently for the first time to discuss the possibilities and ways of forming a gay organization in Poland. The core of the group consists of young people (18-24) who make up for their lack of experience through energy, optimism and courage. A gay group cannot be officially founded in Poland because only organizations controlled by the government are allowed. They have therefore decided for the moment to work informally and discreetly - and we'll keep our fingers crossed for them!

By the way, if anyone is traveling to Poland, we recommend two new places: A nice gay nightclub "Na Trakcie" in Warsaw, Włókienki Pradowska Street 41 and a male striptease show at a night club "Rusalka" in Szczecin. The magazine Lambda 1/85 commented satirically about the latter as follows: "The stripper takes off his underpants and dances on the stage for several minutes. Not only the "weaker sex" applauds. It's no wonder. The dancer has that what we called before the war 'homosexappeal'."

Parts of this article first appeared in the 4/84 end 2/85 editions of LAMBDA Nachrichten, magazine of the Homosexuelle Initiative Wien. It was translated by Gay Solidarity Sydney and HOASI Wien and updated in May 1985 by Marek.

RUMANIA

Information from and about Rumania is very scarce. One of our co-workers traveled to the capital, Bucharest, and wrote a lengthy report which appeared in German in Lambda Nachrichten 1/85. The following is a shortened version including all of the major points.

The situation of gay men and lesbians in Rumania is quite dismal, almost tragic. Male and female homosexuality is forbidden even for consenting adults, and is punishable by a prison sentence of up to five years. Even attempting to engage in homosexual acts is illegal. This prohibition is also enforced and leads to a repression which is unique in all of Europe. Policemen are posted in public toilets as agents provocateurs, the way is paved for denunciations. Known gay men and lesbians are open to vexations of all kinds. There is social pressure in the direction of heterosexuality so great. This persecution of homosexuals naturally explains why practically no one dares to live openly as a gay or lesbian. Instead they live in fear, tightly locked in the closet.

My research work about Rumanian subculture began in Bucharest in the late evening. The public toilet was the only well-lit place at the train station. The cleaning lady sitting next to the first urinal kept a close eye on everything (no pun intended) and from time to time sold little pieces of toilet paper. It would have been better if she had been passing out gas masks and rubber boots. Cruising was pointless. The bar "Carul-cu Bere" (Stavropoleos Street 5) listed in the Spartacus Guide turned out to be a dirty little restaurant full of drunks (there was a beer hall with the same name). Several guests who were having trouble holding their alcohol were lying on the sidewalk of the small dark street next to the garbage heap. It smelt from the morning "third-hand" basar. Nobody paid any attention to the drunks not even the many police patrols. By the way, uniformed men seem to be the most popular form of dress on the streets. Another meeting place was supposed to be the swimming pool in the Lido Hotel. It was closed for restoration during my stay. The main street of Bucharest, Bulevard Magheru, has not been a cruising area for quite some time now. Instead, this is where illegal currency transactions take place.

The last stroke of coincidence and luck was meeting Ion. I do not quite remember how it happened. I suddenly saw him among the gray masses on a crowded street. His neat appearance, his rather unique sunglasses and the small handbag under his arm made him stand out against the others. For a long time both of us kept looking in the same store window and watching each other. Almost paralyzed with fear - I had been warned about provocateurs - I asked him some stupid question about the time or the street. It turned out that he spoke English and was actually quite nice. He also accepted my invitation to a cup of coffee in a bar close by. For a long time we talked about banal subjects such as Rumanian opera stars. Ion was made uncomfortable by the presence of other girls in uniform at a nearby table. He explained that contact with foreigner was frowned upon. Afterwards, Ion asked if I was not interested in other topics. I said yes, took a deep breath and asked him about the situation of Rumanian gay men and lesbians. My question did not surprise him - he only apologized for the fact that because of security reasons he would not give me his address and that we would not be able to see each other again. Here are some of the statements he made:

I have not had any contacts with other gays since I was denounced to the police by one of my friends. I was summoned to the police where I was requested to work as an
informer with the argument that I was a known homosexual. The only evidence that had was the fact that I was already 30 and still not married. When I refused to work as an informer, six men beat me up so badly that I could not go to work for a week. Of course I did not make an official protest. I told the doctor that I had been beaten up on the street. I have only heard about court cases against homosexuals because under these circumstances they are not reported about in the newspapers. I do not know whether any gays have been subjected to forced therapy. I consider it very probable, however.

My current life consists of my work and sitting home alone in front of the television. But I still do not feel secure. I keep waiting for someone to knock on the door: I am sure the police have not forgotten me. I know I am paranoid but I have already had some bad experience.

I sometimes read about the gay movement in Time Magazine which is a friend of me, is allowed to get foreign press, lends to me. I think it is great! Things are different here in Rumania. Everything is under the Party's control. The only man I am allowed to love and should love for that matter is the great "Conductor" Ceausescu. Why the police keep such a careful watch on homosexuals? I do not know. I was once told that several Rumanian dissidents were gay. Maybe that's why this group of people is persecuted so severely. There are many homosexuals in Rumania, maybe more than the Kinsey statistics dictate. Gay life, however, is often hidden. You only leave you alone if you work as an informer for them and immediately denounce the guy you slept with the night before. I cannot do something like that: that is why I live alone.

Please write somewhere about our hopeless situation here. Maybe some day things will get better.

I would also like to touch on two examples of Rumanian literature with homosexual traits. The first is a historical fantasy by the contemporary writer Eugen Barbu (born 1924) entitled "The Prince" (originally titled Principala, first published in 1969). It tells the story of the love of a Rumanian prince for a beautiful young man at court. The work is fiction but based on historical sources so that the novel can be classified as a document about the manners and mentality and the quasi-Transylvanian brutal attitude towards homosexuality. It also shows that homosexuality is only allowed in literature as a reflection of the decadence of the nobility.

The second example is a work by Matei Caragiale (1885-1936) from 1924 entitled "Remember". Marian Popa in his "History of Rumanian Literature" lists "Remember" as a "dramatic event", the traditional line of Wilde with his Dorian Gray... The main figure is Sir Aubrey de Vere who on a European level represents the degenerated nobility and lives a secret life." For me "Remember" is an example of stylistically written prose in a homoerotic setting, something seldom found in the literature of Eastern Europe. The story revolves around Caragiale's admiration of the beauty and fascination of Aubrey de Vere who Caragiale met during a visit to Berlin in 1905. The author was considered an outsider, snob, and embittered would-be martyr. I am sure that a closer look at his biography and two of his works "Saborul tatelor" and "Subpecetea tinei" (both unavailable) would lead to an elucidation of gay subculture at the turn of the century.

From the GDR we have learned that GDR citizens, who recently traveled to Rumania and talked to Rumanian gays, reported that the situation in Rumania has changed for the better. We are a bit sceptical, so we ask anyone who might be traveling to Rumania in the near future to try to contact some gays and tell us whether these reports about liberalization are true.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

What's new in Czechoslovakia? Not much has happened since our last report. The founding of an official gay group which Jan from Prague announced at the 1983 IOA Conference has not yet taken place. Of course, we are aware of the problems involved in starting such a group. Since Jan wants to found a legal organization, he is dependent on the approval of the responsible Ministry of the Interior. Activities that have been approved by the authorities would be classified as illegal activities against the State. Official approval of the group, however, would mean having to work together with the local police. And this is exactly what turns away so many people.

But Czech gays surely know best what kind of organization they should choose. It is also difficult to predict the reaction that the authorities will have when the written petition for approval for the founding of the organization is finally submitted.

For the time being there is only the subculture. And one attraction has been added to the list. A student in Brno has opened a gay disco in his parents' villa. Every first Saturday of the month, about 50 to 60 people get together there (address: U Richarda 29. Brno). We have heard the disco has a fantastic interior which was put together by Richard himself who is a student of electronics. The disco freaks must be considered as Richard's private quests which means that drinks cannot be sold. Everyone must bring his own drinks and food. We think it's a great idea!

AIDS has been the only reason for the Czech press to mention homosexuality. There have been many write-ups. This, however, can not be compared with the number of publications in Poland where even local newspapers report about AIDS. But not only the press has been concerned with this problem. Last year the Ministry of Health wrote a brochure about AIDS and distributed it to all doctors in the country. In several clinics there were also AIDS posters with the address of the responsible counseling center. In Slovakia, these activities are being coordinated by Dr.
Mayer in Bratislava. The first AIDS victim died there in March 1985. The health authorities have sent samples for histology tests to a clinic in Stockholm. There must be a lot going on at the health authorities because it is very seldom that clinics in the West are consulted. In Prague there is also a counseling center for homosexuals directed by Dr. Sipova at the Sexualny Ustav Fakulty Vasevocnoho Lekarstvi University Karlova.

THE GDR

The GDR author, Detlef Opitz, has been forbidden from entering Berlin (East). The GDR State Security Service (STASI) is "expecting" him to emigrate. Is the subject "Homosexuality" not desired in the GDR?

On March 13, 1985, the GDR writer and author of homosexual literature, Detlef Opitz, was forbidden by a Berlin (East) tribunal to enter the territory of Berlin (East) and adjacent districts for a period of four years. During the trial which lasted three hours, Opitz was accused of "not pursuing any activities that were of use to society". Furthermore, he was accused of "lack of discipline" and "disrespect for official measures" and that he threatened the "security and order of the State".

Opitz has been working on a study about the living conditions of homosexuals in the GDR. He has submitted a 150 page homosexual anthology, a collection of texts by gay and straight authors, to a GDR publishing house. He did this in vain because homosexuality is not a desired topic in the GDR.

COMMEMORATION CEREMONIES

The lesbian and gay movement in the GDR had planned to hold commemoration ceremonies on June 30, 1984 for homosexual victims of the former concentration camps in Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald. The plans met with disconcertment from the authorities. The leaders of the groups in Berlin, Leipzig and Halle as well as an involved person from Erfurt, where there is no group yet, were summoned by the authorities and questioned. As all of the persons were summoned simultaneously on June 26 and 27, it is probable that the summons was in response to "above". It has now become clear that the "higher-ups" cannot agree on how to deal with gay men, lesbians and the movement. As a matter of fact, it seems that by summoning only the leaders and not the responsible people within the church, that the authorities are trying to break up the special relationship between Church and the homosexual working groups. Such practices indicate that the authorities are trying to complicate things for the working groups and at the same time to stir up as little furor as possible.

In November 1984, the gay activist, Eduard Stapel, co-founder of the working groups in Leipzig and Magdeburg where he was employed by the gay and working as a curate, was refused by the responsible Church leadership to be ordained. They did, however, try to find another job for Eduard who will now become half parish helper, half employee of the Magdeburg "Staatsmission" for work with homosexuals.

Eduard has also been invited to hold a speech at a meeting of GDR sexologists in Leipzig on June 26, 1985. All contributions to the meeting will be printed and published.

Another very important activity will be the meeting of the "Evangelische Akademie" in Halle on September 28, 1985. Homosexuality will be one of the topics, and 500 people are expected to take part.

The activities of the gay working groups within the Protestant Church of the GDR have not only met with enthusiasm from the Church leaders. The articles in the Church newspaper about homosexuality showed that many believers and Church leaders are very negative about the ongoing discussion on the subject. Lately, negative articles have prevailed. This campaign from the conservative wing of the Church could only be stopped by an organized counter-campaign of the gay activists which consisted of sending many letters with positive opinions to the editor.
WORKING GROUPS IN THE GDR

In order to illustrate how the GDR working groups (Arbeitkreise) are organized and how some of their work functions, we include here the program of the discussion evenings held in one of the four Berlin (East) groups ("Schweine in der Kirche") in the spring and summer of 1985:

April 14: Our parents’ evening – bring your parents with! As special guest author, Waltraud Ahnert, mother of two gay sons. She will report about her experiences.

April 28: The Church and its homosexuals – Problems from the standpoint of the Church leadership. An evening with our Bishop, Dr. Gottfried Forek.

May 12: Literature and homosexuality – Thinking about a gay anthology. An evening with D. Opitz.

May 19: The task of integrating homosexuals. With Prof. Dr. Heinrich Pöck. Director of Theology at the Humboldt University, Berlin.

June 2: AIDS – A new hostage of the homosexuals? Discussion about the disease and its consequences.

June 23: Open evening – The working group and the public.


July 7: Not only Tizian and Picasso. The representation of love in the fine arts.

SPECIAL COMING EVENTS

April 13: Hiking in Potsdam

May 6: 7 p.m. Meditation on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the liberation from fascism.

Everyone is invited to join us in our specialized discussion groups:

The youth group meets every two weeks. The group is preparing for participation in the “Stadtjugendsonntag” in October.

The religion group is open to everyone.

Summer break: mid-July to the end of August. On September 1st we start again!

YUGOSLAVIA

MAGNUS 1985

The MAGNUS festival is this year dedicated to men and women – precisely as men and women. Why? We are returning the
You mentioned plans for the second edition of "Gayzine". Tell us about the magazine.

Our magazine is information from gays to gays about gays. The first edition appeared in March 1985. We would like to produce it five times a year. Besides in Ljubljana, it is also sold in Zagreb and Belgrade. You see, we are a cultural group sponsoring mostly cultural activities. In Yugoslavia at the moment, it is better to fight at the cultural level and not on the political level. We want to build up a strong group in Ljubljana first and then later go out into the other parts of Yugoslavia.

How effective have the MAGNUS activities been on both the gay and straight population?

The reactions from the gay population have in general been very good. It might be that our activities are too elitist. We feel, however, that it is better to loose a few supporters but do a good job at what we want to do instead of having to compromise with commercialism. We are activists who do not want to be pushed into a commercial gay ghetto. Once you have moved into this ghetto, it is much too difficult to get out of it. In our opinion, this commercial gay disco which has opened up in Ljubljana is a negative development for our gay community, especially taking into consideration that the owner is straight.

But how have straights reacted?

We have always had an open, public attitude towards our activities. We have posters up all over town and have had publicity on radio and in newspapers.

You have had no problems with the publicity?

No, surprisingly enough, none at all. You know our activities are not aggressive and are not directly political. We have encountered a lot of tolerance, although I do not like this word. The people accept the fact that SKUC, in general, does strange things, and they are now used to it. Since we are a part of SKUC, they are used to us, too. For example, we have many punks here in Ljubljana. Compared to them we are quite tame. Last year the gays and punks were mixed; this year the gay scene has gone its own way.

Please give us a self appraisal of your activities.

Of course, we could have done much more but it's basically a question of money. We don't have any paid staff. If we did, whole new possibilities would open for us and our work. We have been active for too short a time to really see any far reaching results and accomplishments. Maybe in two or three years. What we have accomplished is to make known our presence. The general public now knows what MAGNUS is. Another point is that we have been able to set a good approach for the development of our own gay culture. But it's not enough to say "We are here". We also have to work quite hard in our own gay scene.

Let's move to the international gay movement. How has your work been with organizations for other countries?

From the very beginning we have been involved in international activities. Gay culture is international culture.

You took part in the IGA European Regional Conference in Bologna. How was it? Was it an important event for you?

First of all, the conference was badly organized. It should have been done a bit differently, too. It's not enough to just discuss; a conference must also be supported by cultural activities. We were, however, able to establish contacts and make a show of gay solidarity.

What do you think about MAGNUS becoming a member of the IGA?

We are very interested in becoming a member. We see MAGNUS as part of the international gay movement. The exchange of information, the moral support and the learning experience are all very important to us.

What about twinning with HOSI-Wien?

Due to the good ties that we have with HOSI-Wien, this would be a great idea!
Dieses Buch erscheint als Beitrag zum INTERNATIONALEN LESBISCH-SCHWULEN AKTIONSAJAR

1984

Die Neuerscheinung ist das erste Buch, das die Problematik lesbischen und schwulen Lebens in Osteuropa aufgreift. Während über Homosexualität und ihre verschiedenen Aspekte im Westen eine Unzahl von Publikationen vorliegt, war die Situation von Lesben und Schwulen im Osten bisher ein weitgehend unbeschriebenes Blatt.


Aus dem Inhalt:
• Historische Entwicklung in den einzelnen Ländern und gesetzliche Lage (mit dem Wortlaut der geltenden strafgesetzlichen Bestimmungen) • Die allgemeingesellschaftliche Situation (Rolle von Religion und Kirche, Stand der Sexualwissenschaft, medizinisch-soziologische Untersuchungen, Darstellung in den Medien, schwule Subkultur in Osteuropa, Lesbenlager in der DDR und Ungarn . . .) • Homosexualität und kulturelles Leben (zum schwul-lesbischen Filmschaffen, Homoerotik in der polnischen Literatur, schwule Woche in Ljubljana . . .) • Reichhaltige Bibliographie (Bücher und Zeitschriften).


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Beiträge zur sozialen und sexuellen Befreiung

Frühlings Erwachen 7

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Zur Lage der Lesben und Schwulen in Osteuropa

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