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May 22, 1968
Memorandum to CPSU Politburo on Western District Border Controls

Citation:

"Memorandum to CPSU Politburo on Western District Border Controls", May 22, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Spr. 65, Ll. 20-22. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113084

Summary:

P. Shelest reports to the CPSU Politburo on the admission of subversive materials through the Western District border controls, and the lax state of those border controls.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Top SecretCPSU CC POLITBUROImperialist intelligence services and foreign anti-Soviet centers have recently been strengthening their ideological subversion and stepping up their efforts to smuggle politically harmful literature into the USSR across our republic's western border. By way of comparison: In 1964 the border-control checkpoints in the Western border district seized 1,500 books, pamphlets, and journals of an anti-Soviet, nationalist, and religious nature, whereas in 1966-67 and the first three months of 1968 they have seized 74,317 pieces of this literature as well as many religious objects. 174Ideologically pernicious literature has been confiscated from foreigners who are coming into our country from the capitalist states, especially from the USA, the FRG, and France. Such literature also has been confiscated from numerous citizens of the socialist countries as well as a significant number of Soviet citizens who have been traveling abroad. To smuggle in this anti-Soviet literature, they have been adopting a number of devious techniques, including the use of secret compartments in suitcases, handbags, and specially equipped vehicles. 175 The deterioration and enervation of the work of customs organs and border guards at control-points in recent years have made it possible to bring ideologically pernicious literature into the USSR and abroad with impunity. At present, for example, the inspection of freight trains occurs only on one side, and a system has been introduced that enables all passengers, including tourists, to ride across the border with only selective inspections carried out at the discretion of customs officials and border guard troops. In many instances, tourist trains and buses do not get inspected at all. These openings are being exploited by the intelligence services and propaganda centers of the adversary.In recent years the movement of people and transport vehicles across the border has sharply increased. In the period from 1964 to 1967 alone, permission for people to cross the border in the Western border district increased by one-and-a-half times, and the stream of vehicles grew by more than 20 percent. During that same period the number of officials at the border-control checkpoints was reduced because of organizational restructuring, which prevented them from carrying out their duties satisfactorily. 176 Because of the significant reduction in the number of officers who were assigned to border-control checkpoints, the duties of control officers were replaced by control-sergeants. 177 This development substantially lowered the quality of work at the border-control checkpoints. Moreover, with the transition to a two-year term of service and the lowering of the conscription age to 18, the sergeant-controllers now have even less opportunity to acquire the experience and skills required to carry out the functions of controllers. 178 For this reason, an urgent necessity has arisen at the border-control checkpoints to bring in border-controllers who know foreign languages.It is also impossible to regard as acceptable the current situation in which the registration and reporting of citizens from socialist countries who pass through border-control checkpoints into the USSR on official business, and the registration and reporting of tourists on single-entry visas who are entering on the basis of invitations and telegrams or in transit, are not carried out with necessary oversight by the border guards, state security organs, and police. As a result, individuals in these categories who arrive in the USSR have the opportunity to move about the whole territory of our country without hindrance or, in general, to remain in the Soviet Union for as long as they wish. Without a doubt, this situation can be exploited by intelligence services of the adversary to infiltrate their agents into our territory.The growing complications that recent international events have posed for the operational situation, and the growing efforts by imperialist intelligence services to exploit legal and illegal channels to infiltrate the USSR with the aim of conducting disruptive activity and carrying out ideological subversion, have also created difficulty for the KGB organs in the border oblasts as a result of the inadequate numbers of operational personnel and officers. 179 To improve border control, strengthen counterintelligence work, and prevent hostile elements and politically harmful literature from being sent into the USSR, the UkrCP Central Committee requests that the CPSU CC Politburo consider increasing the number of personnel at border-control checkpoints in the Western border district by 1,500 and the number of operational agents in KGB organs in the Volyns'k, Transcarpathian, Ivano-Frankivs'k, L'viv, and Chernivtsi oblasts by 200.We also believe it would be worthwhile to instruct the Committee on State Security under the USSR Council of Ministers, the USSR Ministry of Public Order, and the USSR Ministry of Foreign Trade to review the existing procedures for inspections of people and vehicles at the border and to enforce stricter control over foreign citizens who arrive on the territory of the USSR.SECRETARY, CP

OF UKRAINEP. SHELEST22 May 1968No. 1/34174 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For additional data, see the previous document and “TsK KP Ukrainy: tov. Drozdenko V. I.,” Ll. 28-39 (cited above). Here, as in other documents, Shelest cited only statistics that cast a particularly bad light on the spillover from Czechoslovakia.175 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For accounts of individuals who used these various methods of smuggling literature into the Soviet Union, see “TsK KP Ukrainy: tov. Drozdenko V. I.,” esp. Ll. 31-34. See also “Tsentral'nomu Komitetu Komunistychnoi Partii Ukrainy,” Memorandum No. 112-2/10s (Secret), from F. Horyn, head of the Chop station customs inspectorate, I. Mushka, inspectorate at the Chop station customs inspectorate, and H. Timoshenko, inspector at the Chop station customs inspectorate, 6 March 1968, in TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Srp. 64, Ll. 13-15. 176 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The numbers provided here imply that a sharp tightening of the inspection system would have caused crippling delays in border traffic. Before 1968, such delays would undoubtedly have seemed excessively burdensome, but the deepening crisis with Czechoslovakia in 1968 was generating pressure for a crackdown at border posts, no matter what the effect on cross-border traffic.177 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In the Soviet military and security forces, the divide between commissioned and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) was enormous – much wider than in most Western countries. In the U.S. and other Western armed forces, large contingents of well-trained, professional NCOs (sergeants and corporals) have long been a staple. There was no direct equivalent in the Soviet army. Soviet NCOs were enlisted men who underwent up to six months of additional training before being assigned as petty and warrant officers. The Soviet NCOs often experienced abuse at the hands of mid-level and senior officers, and they, in turn, frequently mistreated and exploited the conscripts under their command.178 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Shelest is referring here to the Soviet Union's new regulations for military service adopted in 1967. The new Law on Universal Military Service, which applied to conscripts for the security services and customs service as well as the regular army, reduced the period of service from three years to two and lowered the age of conscription from 19 to 18. See Army-General S. M. Shtemenko, Novyi zakon i voinskaya sluzhba (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1968). The shortening of the term of conscription was attributable to the steady expansion of the conscription pool (the number of 19-year-old males had risen to nearly 2 million by 1967). The lowering of the draft age was designed to bring young men into the army right after they had completed their secondary schooling (normally at age 18), rather than leaving a year in between.179 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: See also Chebrikov et al., eds., Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti, pp. 512-557.