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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

CONTACTS BETWEEN ITALY AND THE SOVIET BLOC COUNTRIES
DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 1956

Memorandum by the Italian Delegation

Pursuant to the decision taken by the Committee on Information and Cultural Relations on 28th March last, a few comments and items of information on contacts between Italy and the Soviet bloc countries during the first six months of 1956 are given herewith. At Annex A to this memorandum is a list of the main contacts between Italy and these countries in the fields of culture, sport, tourism, etc. during this period.

2. It should be pointed out that, generally speaking, the events referred to were of minor importance and without any appreciable repercussions either in Italy or within the Soviet bloc. It cannot be denied, however, that the propaganda so freely resorted to by the Communist countries in the course of these contacts has been attended with some measure of success in Italy, particularly in middle-class intellectual circles, which have been led to compare their own position with that of the corresponding Communist class.

The Italian public showed greater interest in the sporting events than in the cultural, technical and touristic contacts, which passed almost unnoticed by the general public.

Participation by the Soviet bloc countries in the Milan Fair and other trade exhibitions did no more than confirm the current opinion that Western techniques and standards of living were far superior to those of the Soviet bloc countries.

3. It is not easy to assess the reactions of public opinion in the Soviet bloc countries, but both the Communist authorities and individuals certainly displayed an interest tinged with cordiality which, in some cases, went as far as enthusiasm. Such demonstrations, however, are generally staged by the propaganda organization, a fact which our visitors to Communist countries would do well to remember.

4. It is noteworthy that in the matter of cultural, touristic and other exchanges, the initiative is almost always taken by the Communists. The latter, moreover, are able effectively to control the development and the outcome of such exchanges, and this makes it all the more necessary for the free countries to keep a careful watch on them.

Palais de Chaillot,
Paris, XVIIe.

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PROGRAMME OF EVENTS WHICH TOOK PLACE
DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 1956

CULTURAL CONTACTS

With the Soviet Union

Films: An exchange of documentary films took place last February: the USSR received the documentary on the Mayors' Congress in Florence and received the Soviet documentary "Madonna Sistina" in exchange.

Lectures: In April, Prof. Tolstov, the archaeologist, visited Rome to give a series of lectures at the invitation of the Institute for the Middle and Far East. That month, Ambassador Bogomolov spoke in Milan on Education in the USSR, at the invitation of the Cultural Association "La Consulta".

Visits of Delegations: At the end of March, ten Italian professors of the "Fronte della Scuola" visited Soviet schools and cultural institutes, at the invitation of the Soviets.

A doctor and an antiquary visited Russia to conduct studies there.

A group of 11 Italian intellectuals, selected by the Associazione Italia-URSS, is later to visit the USSR at the invitation of the Science Academy of Moscow.

With Bulgaria

Theatre: An Italian singer went to Sophia in March to give performances there. A company of Bulgarian dancers and choirs recently set out on a tour of Italy.

Medicine: An exchange of medical periodicals is being arranged.

Exhibitions: Last March, the "Comitato per l'Amicizia e le relazioni culturali con l'Estero" organized in Sophia an exhibition of Italian books in collaboration with "l'Associazione Italiana Amici della Bulgaria". This exhibition was officially inaugurated by our Delegation.

With Rumania:

Exhibitions: The Rumanian Institute for external cultural relations organized an exhibition of views of

the principal Italian towns on the premises of the Bucharest architects' club. The exhibition was unrelated to any action by our Delegation.

With Hungary

Italian Cultural Institute: The Italian Cultural Institute in Budapest (the only Institute of its kind which has been allowed to remain open in the Iron Curtain countries) is continuing its activities although on a reduced scale. The Italian language courses held there are attended by about a hundred students.

Theatre and Music: The Maestro, Molinari Pradelli went to Bucharest to direct a number of concerts.

Exhibitions: An exhibition of Hungarian folklore was organized in February by the Hungarian Legation on the premises of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome.

Lectures: Prof. Lukasi was invited to give a few literature lectures in Italy.

With Czechoslovakia

Lectures: At the invitation of the cultural association "La Consulta", a lecture on "The Peaceful Development of the new Czechoslovakia" was given in Rome by Czechoslovak Minister Josef Jura on 28th April.

With Poland

Delegation visit: A delegation of officials of the "Ente Centrale per la Cinematografia Polacca" is soon to visit Italy to study developments in cinema techniques. Several Italian intellectuals have been invited to Warsaw to take part in centenary ceremonies for the writer Adam Mickiewicz.

With the German Democratic Republic

Concerts: The Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra made a tour of Northern Italy in May.

With the Chinese Peoples' Republic

Delegation visits: A delegation of six women, led by M. Li Te Chuan, Vice President of the Chinese Women's Federation, arrived in Italy in March and visited the principal towns and cities. The visit had been organized by "l'Unione Donne Italiane" (UDI).

A second Chinese Delegation, led by Mr. Hou Te Pang, President of the Chemistry Section of the Chinese Academy, and composed of 11 persons including a parliamentary representative and several technicians, economists and artists, arrived in Italy on 16th April at the invitation of the "Centro Studi" for the development of economic and cultural relations with China, whose President is M. Parri.

Sporting events: Both the USSR and the Peoples' Democracies (Bulgaria, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Poland) participated in the Winter Olympics at Cortina d'Ampezzo.

A Bulgarian team took part in the volley ball match which was held in Parma.

Hungary participated in the Ninth Junior Football League matches and also competed for the Santelli Fencing Cup in Naples. Italy took part in an international gymnastic contest and a fencing match in Budapest.

Italian representatives participated in the extraordinary Assembly of the International Cup for Central Europe (Prague, February 1956).

The Italian national rugby team met the national Czechoslovak team in Prague on 29th April.

An Italian fencing team participated in an international fencing tournament in Warsaw in March.

Three Polish delegates took part in a meeting of the Executive Committee of the "Associazione Internazionale Amatori Boxe".

Technical Exchanges

Soviet Union

Mr. Lichalchev and Mr. Beliaev, representatives of the "Ministry for the USSR radio industry" came to Italy in April to visit industrial plant and to negotiate with certain electronics firms, including Philips.

Rumania:

During the second half of February and the first half of March, a group of Rumanian cellulose technicians and officials from the Ministry of Industry of that country visited several Italian cellulose factories: the paper mills belonging to the Foggia State printing works, the Burgo paper mills at Turin, the "Vita Mayer" at Cairate Lonate and the "Cellulosa d'Italia" at Chiete. One of the delegation was also able to pay a very brief visit to the cork industries in Sardinia and purchased 400 tons on behalf of the Rumanian Government.

Participation in Italian International Fairs

Verona Fair (11th - 19th March)

All the Iron Curtain countries were invited. The following participated:

DIA, with a Trade Information Office;
A Soviet delegation of observers;
A Bulgarian delegation of observers.

Milan Fair (12th - 27th April)

All the Iron Curtain countries were invited: The following participated:

USSR - Rumania - Czechoslovakia;
DIA - with a Trade Information Office.

Padua Fair (29th May - 13th June)

All the Iron Curtain countries were invited: The following have accepted:

USSR.
Hungary - Bulgaria and Poland who are to participate with Trade Information Offices.
Czechoslovak national concerns will participate individually.

Trieste Fair (24th June - 8th July)

Invited: Hungary and Czechoslovakia.
Accepted so far: Hungary.

Exhibition of local handicrafts (Florence, 28th April - 18th May)

All the Iron Curtain countries have been invited.
Accepted: Hungary.

Tourist Visits

About a hundred Soviet tourists attended the Winter Olympics in Cortina in January. Most of them were writers, journalists, sports promoters, trainers and engineers. They afterwards visited Rome and Venice.