

Petya Panayotova and Vanya Tsvetkova from Bulgaria worked on this contribution. Petya presents two articles about the Chernobyl catastrophe from the newspaper "Narodna Mladezh". The first one is from the 29th April; the second is from the 30th April 1986. Vanya investigated the "Rabotnichesko Delo" from the 29th April 1986.

Petya Panayotova:

Narodna Mladezh (29th April 1986):



MOSCOW: There was an accident in the Chernobyl NPP. One of the nuclear reactors is damaged. Measures are taken to eradicate the consequences of the accident. The injured are being helped. Government commission was formed.

The newspaper is "Narodna Mladezh" (something like "Popular Youth") – the organ of the communist youth union in Bulgaria) from 29th April 1986. The notification is published under the rubric "Chronicle" (or "News in Brief") and as you see, it's the last new in the section. There was no opportunity to scan the whole page of the newspaper in order to be seen where the notification is exactly situated. The next day message regarding the accident is published under the same rubric.

Bulgaria was a part from the Warsaw Convention at that time so the country strongly depended on the decisions of the Soviet Union. Obviously this official message was widespread from the Soviet Union responsible authorities and it was destined to the countries from the Warsaw Convention. So there were strict rules for spreading information and that's why the information eclipse occurred. There was an agreement between Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) and the Soviet Union. The censorship was very strong at that time. Media didn't have the opportunity to inform, they were rather manipulation instrument as they weren't independent (today they aren't too but the levels are completely different). In my opinion after the accident, the mass disinformation seemed to be the most serious problem and the biggest mistake.

Vanya Tsvetkova:

The Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) is a political party that managed the People's Republic of Bulgaria in the period from 1946 to 1990. The Official newspaper of the BCP was "Rabotnichesko Delo" (Eng.: Worker's Affairs), dated 1927-1990. "Rabotnichesko Delo" was originally released weekly as a body of the Bulgarian Workers Party (BWP), left oriented. The newspaper was banned after the Devetnadesetomayskiyat coup (19th May 1934) and released illegally until 9th September 1944. After that "Rabotnichesko Delo" actively promoted the power of the Communist Party and turns out as its main propaganda platform. In 1990 due to the socio-economic changes the newspaper was renamed to "Duma" (Eng.: Word).

In Bulgaria the news about the Chernobyl accident appear like a "Hood after the rain". The censorship was mainly due to the fear of Kremlin and to the fact that at that time Bulgaria couldn't afford to experience panic amongst the population as this would lead to a massive disruption of production and consumption of certain products. There wasn't any efficient civil protection system existing at that time as well, as the citizens were thought how to protect against possible nuclear attacks by the "capitalist aggressors". Surprisingly this accident wasn't caused by a bomb but by the "fraternal" Soviet Union and "the peaceful atom".

Rabotnichesko Delo (29th April 1986):



The first printed information about the Chernobyl accident in Bulgaria was in “Rabotnichesko Delo” on 29th April 1986, edition 117. In the rubric “World Briefly”, right before the Sports rubric, there is a message as big as a Post Stamp, stating: *“There was a breakdown in the Chernobyl NPP. One of the reactors is damaged. Measures are taken to eradicate the consequences of the accident. The injured are being helped. Government commission was formed.”*

Always read the small print! But how many did notice and read it? Most people would ignore this information thus considering it is insignificant, but in fact this was the first print in Bulgaria about the nuclear accident of Chernobyl! The information eclipse was formed by a contract, signed between Kremlin and the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA), right after the accident, to release the news without causing any panic and to take comfort in the society. BTA and the officious “Rabotnichesko Delo” released manipulative and reassuring messages about the “appropriate Chernobyl”. Desperate attempts were made to avoid the accusations for concealing the facts about the background radiation. If you were a non-specialist it was hard to find your way in deciding how dangerous is the dose of radiation you’ve been exposed to, how the risk increases over time and what the actual damage to your health is. Throughout that time, however, there were no regulations set out for hazardous and lethal doses.

Two days after, 1st May 1986 Bulgaria celebrates the Labor and International Worker’s Solidarity Day. Numerous employees and students took part into the elaborated parades in the major cities all around the country, marching under the spring rainfall – the fallout of Chernobyl.