

## Briefing.

Mikhail Zadornov, performed by Evgenii Petrosian

1987

Comrade tourists! You are going on a tour of Western Europe. During this trip you must act cultured as soon as you get on the train. Do not act the way you do on a train here at home. Do not litter in the train's aisles. Do not smoke in your compartment. Do not open beer bottles with your teeth. And do not throw empty cans and papers out of the windows just for the excitement of seeing them fly through another compartment's window. Do not try to pass for foreigners. Remember! Our man is easily recognizable in any train in the world by his warm-up suit, smoked sausage, and a bottle of vodka that he begins to guzzle right after putting on this warm-up suit.

As experience has shown, when our tourists are in the West they seem to be especially fascinated by automatic hotel doors. Comrades, do not try to see if the doors will have enough time to open up after you take a running start at them.

Another thing. Experience shows that when our folks enter a hotel room they don't immediately understand the correct use of some items. We had this one guy who took off all his clothes, climbed into the bath tub and began randomly pressing all the buttons, including the button that activates the fire sprinklers. The sprinklers sprayed some sort of foam all over him. This tourist was very happy. He immediately started to rub the foam all over himself with a sponge. And then he told everyone about this wonderful service! Water falls from the ceiling right along with the bath soap! And the soap was so powerful that it even washed off his tattoo depicting "Ivan the Terrible Murdering His Son" from his chest.

Comrade tourists! Do not forget that you are going on this tourist trip to see masterpieces of world art. At least brush up a little on the art of the countries before you go so you don't embarrass our country with your questions. We had this one bumpkin from Nechernozem'e who asked his guide in the Louvre how many bushels of winter crops had been harvested from the Champs Élysées this year. And another jet setter was wondering if it's true that Maupassant was a guide because his first name was "Guy de."

Oh, also, one evening you will attend a concert of organ music in Cologne. Make sure you take a good long nap before the concert, so that you don't fall asleep during the Bach fugues and start knocking heads every five minutes with the person sitting in front of you. And if you snore stay away from the concert. We had this one tourist who fell asleep in the first row and began producing such fugues of his own, that he had the whole back row in tears.

Before you go to a café, memorize a few words from the phrase book so that you don't blabber nonsense like: "Me, pleez, one kofe and one bulochka, and the sandwich is too expensive, so pleez, it go to hell, koroche (in short – OM), me water."

Now, with regards to your free time. Remember, according to the official regulations, our citizens can only experience free time in groups of five. So, if anyone invites you over to their house, do not refuse – we have democracy now. But remember to say: "There will be four other people with me. They won't eat anything. They will just sit there and listen."

When you are in other people's homes act cultured at the table. Remember! They use forks and knives abroad! If you can't remember this, then write it down somewhere. One eats a piece of lemon after drinking cognac. One doesn't drink a bottle of beer after drinking cognac. Dry wine is to be consumed along with the main course, it's not for you to take home with you. Forks with two prongs are for eating the lemon, not for picking your teeth.

Also. Think before you respond to the foreigners' provocative questions. They said to one comrade: "We have just raised our unemployment benefits." And he responded: "Well, we did the exact same thing. We just raised our engineers' salaries." And when responding to the questions: "Why don't you have brothels? Where do Russians go to relax?" another tourist answered "What do we need brothels for? We have sanatoriums. And they they are just as good. Plus all the services are paid for by the trade unions."

More about relaxation. We understand that the main form of relaxation for our tourists is to go shopping. Keep in mind: there are no lines in their stores. So you don't need to come to the store at six in the morning with a pre-prepared enraged expression on your face. And don't try to buy enough clothes for your entire family on the amount of money that we will exchange for you. That amount has been specially calculated for you to have exactly enough cash to buy gifts for the tour organizers, have a cup of coffee, and look at the quality goods.

Also, don't shop around for cheap stores. This one guy thought he had found one and started trying on rain coats, coats, and pants. Turned out it was a dry cleaner's.

And this other guy spotted some really inexpensive white shirts in a store window. So he goes in the store and says: "Please, measure my neck, I want to buy myself a shirt." The store turned out to be a funeral supplies store. The tourist says: "Just make sure you measure really well, so that the shirt doesn't rub against me." The sales girl says: "I've been working here for quite a few years, no one has ever complained." And then this comrade says: "Then I'll buy another one for my father-in-law. And do you have anything that I could buy as a gift for the guy who arranged this trip for me?" The sales girl says: "Yes we do. We have a jacket with a zipper on the back." So when this comrade comes back home, he gives this jacket with a zipper on the back to the guy who arranged the trip. The tour organizer says to him: "You'll go abroad again only when you see me wearing this jacket."

And one last thing... Comrade men! Do not attempt to have an affair with foreign female citizens! No matter how much they tell you they love you, don't believe them! Remember! The only woman who can fall in love with one of our men is a female CIA agent on a very special assignment. All the other foreign female citizens know that the most our men abroad can provide them is a souvenir pin from the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the town of Syzran or the colorful "Altai Mountains Billy Goats" postcard collection.

Now, sign here stating that you have listened to this briefing. This way later on you won't blame us when, despite all our warnings, you men sell black caviar and vodka to buy enough neck ties to last your son's lifetime, because ties that don't offend his sense of dignity will never be sold in our country.

That goes for you, too, ladies. After all the banquets and receptions you will, no doubt, be collecting food leftovers into plastic bags to eat them the following morning in the hotel, instead of going down to breakfast. This way you can save some cash to buy an extra pair of tights for that growing daughter of yours.

And then some of you, to save even more money, will boil packets of powdered domestic fish soup in your own little pot, at three in the morning, while forgetting to shut the door. And this will trigger an international incident because everyone will think that those Russians have set off some sort of tear-gas bomb.

In other words, we hope you return with bags filled with impressions!

### **It's Time to Take Measures**

Mikhail Zadornov, perf. Yevgenii Petrosian  
1987

Of course we have lots of problems, but we shouldn't be afraid to resolve them in a bold fashion. For example, we have this problem of lines in stores. Statistics show that in the rankings for the number of people simultaneously standing in lines, we are number one in the world. So, since we can't resolve the problem of lines, in the interest of taking care of our citizens, we need to make these lines more comfortable. Let's set up a few chairs and some couches. If you come to buy green peas – here's a lounge chair for you. If you come to buy vodka – here's a cot. We should also invite actors to perform for these lines. This way standing in line will be a fun activity. An emcee should be singing songs with the crowd. Won't it be great: a man is sitting down in line singing all day long, "Wide is my dear country, full of forests, fields, and rivers." And he no longer cares that you can't buy a pair of tights in this country. Because, as the song says, there isn't another country like this in the world.

Don't be afraid of paradoxical solutions. For so many years we've been saying we do things the way we should but everything just turns out wrong. Well, let's start doing things the wrong way and everything will turn out right. We want our refrigerators to be full of groceries? Well, let's make smaller refrigerators.

If we want people to be happy with their lives, let's stop showing them Western films, that way they won't have anything for comparison. And if we do have to compare something, let's use the year 1913.

If we want to raise potato crops, let's create more research institutes whose employees can work in the fields.

If there is a problem – create an institute! If there are no problems – invent some! Someone gave this matter a lot of thought and came up with the "Institute of Redirecting Northern Rivers to Central Asia." But that's good but not enough. We can also create an "Institute on Transporting Sand from Central Asia to Chukotka." Think of all the beaches we could create! Plus we'll confuse all our enemies. They will completely lose track of what we have and where we have it.

By the way, some steps have already been taken in this direction. Someone just had the brilliant idea of beginning foreign trade. We sell timber to Finland, and they sell us fashionable tank tops, socks, pants, and plastic bags made from by-products of our own timber. But we could make these deals even more profitable. We could sell them oil, and they would sell us buttons. Or we sell them gold and they could sell us thumb tacks. What else can we do when our own thumb tacks don't stick into anything? Our steel is only good for making tanks and rockets, but not thumb tacks: they just get bent. The only thing our thumb tacks are good for is putting them on a teacher's chair. Because our tacks only stick on soft materials.

Along those same lines I must note: it is wrong to say that our products aren't good for anything. They are good. You just need to know when and how to use them. You can't hear music on your disc player? But it spins, doesn't it? So, try sharpening your knives on it. That candleholder gift set is good for self-defense. And our "Carnation" cologne is enough to make mosquitoes suicidal.

Women complain that our domestic bras are impossible to wear. Judging by what they have to say, they really are impossible. But what if we cut the bras in half and made them into fashionable shoulder pads? And with the larger size bras we could make hats for the kids. And extra large bras would make good ventilated traditional hats for people in Central Asia.

Cookies that cost 14 kopecks and are made of all-natural products – like baking soda, sand, and lime – would be good for store window decorations. You could arrange these cookies to spell out the slogan “Glory to Work!” in a bakery.

Of course, it is possible to use all our goods the way they were intended to be. But then we should be stricter with our ministries. For example, our Light Industry Minister should be sentenced to wearing domestic clothes, made with French templates, from our own fabrics. If the French had seen those fabrics, they couldn’t have given us their templates in the first place.

And the Minister of Transportation should be periodically sentenced to travel in a night train compartment with wet linens, a domestic air conditioner (the kind that blows carbon monoxide into the compartment), and another passenger who has just eaten garlic and onions. And he should be forced to ride all the way to Vladivostok without the right to leave the train.

What else? Things are fine with our healthcare system. There is even a folk saying that our medical diagnosticians are the best in the world. Which is true. People die exactly from the diseases they were being treated for.

What else? Secondary education? That’s easy. If we want children to do well in school, we should start giving them financial incentives, just like in industry. If you get a “2” (F), you pay a “5.” Then parents will really start doing homework with their kids. This way we’ll also raise the cultural level of the parents. Once a little boy asked his Dad: “Dad, who wrote the book ‘Who is Happy in Russia?’” The Dad says: “You know, son, although we have glasnost now, I can’t answer that question.”

We’re still not very strong in the field of industrial construction, so we should make more deals with foreign companies. It took the French six months to build the 32-storey hotel “Cosmos” in Moscow. They did it quietly, calmly. Without dirt blowing around. Not one single foul word heard on the job site. And there were about one hundred of them working there. Meanwhile, at a nearby jobsite 457 of our men were putting together a half-storey electrical substation. After three years of construction, the children in the daycare center across the road were playing a game called: “There is still no cement, and so to hell with it.”

But let’s not overdo it with the foreigners. This one comrade has recently proposed: “Let’s sell gas, timber, buckwheat, whey, and sea-buckthorn oil to Japan. And in exchange they can build developed socialism for us!” This is simply not right. We have already built socialism ourselves. This socialism may not be very developed, but at least it’s ours.

What else? We have dealt with most of the West’s provocations by now. They have to think real hard to find something negative they can say about us. But just as they think of something bad to say, they discover that our newspapers have already written about it. Because we have already done it before they could even think of it. Things that wouldn’t even occur to normal people. The BBC is a children’s radio program compared to the stuff on Moscow News.

They say that out of desperation the West has decided to take really drastic measures against us. They had planned to launch a satellite that would transmit their television programs to our homes. This way they planned to corrupt our population. They would be showing horror movies, sex... They would show us sex!!! But then they chickened out. Because we immediately told them: “We’ll retaliate by launching our own television satellite. In the morning we’ll show you “Rural Hour.” Then the “Health” program. This one is a real horror show. Watch it once and you’ll never want to have sex again.”

Speaking of sex, lately, we’ve been reading a lot about this certain type of women, you know the type that I mean, that until now supposedly didn’t exist in our country. Now that was a real problem. They existed everywhere, except in our country. Now you can read all about them

in great detail. How they work, how much money they make, where they live, what they wear. After all these news stories some of our young girls who graduate from trade schools decide not to work in the fields they've been training for.

And can newspaper articles really eliminate this repulsive phenomenon? We should just simply legalize the whole thing. We should create country's first cooperative brothel. Strictly adhere to all normal workforce rules. Give them a plan! Organize a socialist competition. Have mentors. Make every female worker assume her personal responsibilities. Pictures of the best workers should be displayed on the employee of the month board of fame. And those with special talents can work overtime at home. And instead of money let's pay them with awards. They should also become patrons of our collective farms. Collective farmers would be very happy to see these patrons.

And let's make these women an official segment of our Light Industry. This way, once the state is in charge of them, nobody will be interested in doing anything with them, and then we really won't have any of these women in our country.

In other words, if you try hard enough, you can solve any problem. Produce instructions, monuments, print directives, and launch campaigns. But what does one do to get rid of directives and campaigns forever? Nobody knows. Although I think I know one way. We should change our economy so that the ruble costs its real value. And that rubles are paid to those who actually work, and not only to those who just consume. Then we will build such a socialism that those Japanese will be buying our electronics. And we will be buying their Sony as raw material for our electronics... I don't really know what I just said...

Anyway, even if we can't do all this yet, there is still nothing to worry about. As long as our country has lots of forests, fields, rivers, gas, buckwheat, sea-buckthorn oil, and whey, our generation can survive any and all social experimentation.

**Vasilii Stepanovich's Dream**  
**Arkadii Arkanov, perf. Evgenii Petrosian**  
**1990**

Vasilii Stepanovich had this strange dream where they introduced rationing coupons for the fulfillment of marital duties and he loses the coupons. Marital duties are the kind of duties that you would like to fulfill once in a while regardless of your religious beliefs, party memberships, or racial prejudices. Even the most zealous radicals and pacifists will, every once in a while, fulfill their marital duties, because, as Karl Marx so aptly noted, nothing human is alien to them. You can trust Marx in these matters.

And so Vasilii Stepanovich appeals to his spouse: "Comrade Katerina, I am addressing you on a strictly personal matter with regards to strengthening our connections and external relations."

And Katerina responds: "Please present your rationing coupon for the month of April, comrade. Then I will gladly supply you with what is required, with no short-changing or profiteering."

Here Vasilii Stepanovich explains that he has lost his rationing coupons. He then asks Katerina to allot his ration to him on next month's coupon or, in the worst case, at the exorbitant cooperative price. But his spouse Katerina takes a hard line. She assures Vasilii Stepanovich that the government wasn't playing games when it introduced these coupons. The rationing coupons were intended as a measure to facilitate a smooth transition to regulated market relationships, to fight against profiteering and the shadow economy, with the goal of satisfying the demands of the still working – despite everything – population.

So deeply depressed Vasilii Stepanovich goes to his old friend, the pensioner of national importance, Petushkov, and says: "The last time that you, Petushkov, fulfilled your marital duty was fifteen years ago. Your rationing coupons are – so to speak – going to waste."

And Petushkov responds: "For God's sake, Vasilii Stepanovich, my coupons are the special pink pensioner coupons. They only entitle you to receive a kiss on the forehead."

Despondent, Victor Stepanovich heads down Tsvetnoi boulevard towards the market place. He walks down the boulevard, jealous of the pigeons... Those birds are fulfilling their marital duties right on the pavement without the need of any rationing coupons. They are even fulfilling their marital duties on top of a statue of Karl Marx, who is responsible for these coupons in the first place, not only to our misfortune, but evidently to his own as well.

Then Vasilii Stepanovich decides to go the Party district headquarters inspired by the "mind, honor, and conscience of our epoch." His friend, Kozyr'kov, is an instructor there. And Kozyr'kov says: "You, Vasilii Stepanovich, were too hasty with giving up your Party membership, you really acted too fast. They have just given us some special rationing coupons."

And he shows Vasilii Stepanovich a special coupon. It's laminated and inscribed with the words: "Anywhere. With anyone. Even in the frozen regions of Far North."

Vasilii Stepanovich screamed wildly in his dream, then awoke and saw his wife, Katerina, sleeping indifferently and apathetically facing the wall. And he contemplated her back for a long time asking himself what was it that she reminded him of? And then it came to him! He understood and it frightened him. Katerina, his wife, was an exact replica of our perestroika. They both promise something good all the time, but when it comes to actually delivering, they hide in the bushes.

Vasilii Stepanovich got out of bed, got dressed and, forgetting all about his marital duties, ran to the store to exchange his rationing coupons for sugar, meat, butter, bread, sun, air, water, and the "mind, honor, and conscience of our epoch."

Mikhail Zadornov.

### **I don't Understand Again.**

(1991)

I must confess that five years ago I didn't understand anything, but now I understand even less.

For example, I don't understand what they take us for. You enter an elevator and on the wall they have these rules for using the elevator. I don't understand what sort of intellectual level you have to have, if – before pressing that button – you have to read those instructions on how to use the elevator. Have you ever read them? I'd understand if you got stuck. And then you see that at the very bottom it always says: "Never use a malfunctioning elevator!" How can I use it if it isn't working? What am I supposed to be doing in an elevator that doesn't work? I don't understand.

I don't know, maybe I am the only slow one, but I don't understand why the proverb "Money can't buy happiness" exists only in our language. Maybe we should be more precise: "It's our money that can't buy happiness."

There are really a lot of things I don't understand. I don't understand the majority of our place names. If one district in the city is named "Soviet," are the rest of them "Anti-Soviet"?

I don't understand the name "Wings of the Soviets." I don't understand how Soviets can have wings. I just understand that "those born to crawl cannot fly."

I also don't understand why a factory needs to be named "The Red Giant" rather than just "The Giant." I don't get it. Why is the giant red? Because he's drunk? And what about "The Red Seamstress"? Why is she red? Is she blushing with shame at her own production? Maybe she's the wife of the red giant? Or maybe they are both Indians?

Another thing I don't get: they taught us in school that communism is when there is no money and lots of goods. Then what do we have here?

I also don't understand how you can fight against the Communist party under this party's own guidance. Under the slogan: "More socialism!" What? They want even more?

By the way, I really don't understand a lot of our slogans. For example, I could never get the slogan "Communism is Soviet power plus electrification of the entire country." Does this mean that if you cut off all the electricity under communism, the darkness would be Soviet power? I just don't get a lot of today's slogans. What does this new slogan mean: "Turn the economy with its face to the man!" I wonder what part of the economy faced the man before they thought that one up?

And now I will whisper so that only those of us who don't understand will hear me. I truly don't understand if Yeltsin becomes the President of the Russian Federation and all state republics separate from the state, what is Gorbachev going to be president of?

When I watch television, I also don't understand anything. For example, the sessions of the Supreme Soviet... Have they created this endlessly entertaining show just for us? Before we used to wait for months to see an episode of "Around Laughter." Now any day you can just turn on the television when you come home from work and laugh the night away.

By the way, I don't understand if some of the deputies themselves understand what they are saying:

"We are at the beginning of the road towards building socialism..." What do you mean? We are at the beginning again? And I also don't get their favorite expression: "We won't give away our achievements!" What achievements are we talking about? To whom are we not giving them away? Who would ask for them in the first place?

And I completely don't understand the expression "socialist camp." I only understand that no good place is ever called a "camp." So what do we have here? They have the capitalist world, and we have the socialist camp? If so, then we must be one of the camp's merriest barracks.

And now, I don't even know if I should be telling you this. I'll tell you, but don't pass it along to anyone else. I've just read in the paper and didn't understand why they recently restored the cruiser "Aurora." Can it be that they are preparing it for something again? I don't understand, for what...

Of course, I don't understand everything. But then I strained my brain and finally got one. I finally understood one of their slogans: "Pioneer, you are responsible for everything!" Before, I couldn't understand who is responsible for everything, and now I get it. It's that pioneer!

And also I finally understood the most important and the most subtle thing of all. And it gave me immense pleasure. I now understand the secret essence of perestroika. Really. Remember, how birth control used to be sold everywhere but now you can only buy it in clinics reserved for members of the state apparatus? You know why? So that a species like that one doesn't reproduce itself. This will be the real achievement of perestroika!

Mikhail Zadornov.  
**Internal monologue of the Russian president.**  
(1997)

What sort of people do I have working around me? They've created chaos in the Army. Driven Russians abroad. The teachers, pensioners, and miners are starving... Thieves and bribe takers are all around... Crime is skyrocketing. They are profiteering on the war in Chechnya. And the worst thing is they are all thinking only about themselves, only about themselves. It's a disgrace... But what about the people? Who is going to think about the people? Do you think I will? What's in it for me?!

Mikhail Zhvanetsky.  
**Let's Be Frank.**  
(2001)

Let's speak frankly. We live badly.  
Let's be frank. Many homes have no food.  
I will be frank about myself. I don't have warm winter boots.  
I will be even more frank – I am losing my hair.  
I will be completely frank – my right arm is missing.  
And to be completely honest – I don't have legs either.  
But just between us, I don't need them.  
I don't need education either.  
I have a big family. We live peacefully. But to be perfectly frank, I don't need my family for anything.  
And, to be honest, they don't need me either.  
I'll tell you more. Everybody in this country annoys me.  
They don't need anybody.  
No matter what they may pretend to need.  
They don't need the State and, just between us, they don't need all those natural resources either.  
Agriculture they need, of course, but life would be easier without it.  
I would release all the animals, wild and domesticated, and I would just stretch out on the beach contemplating life, although life is easier without contemplation.  
I'm not sure that thinking about things is worth the bother.  
So kisses to everyone within reach.