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P 200923Z DEC 89
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8961
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
EASTERN EUROPEAN POSTS

EXCISE

SECTION 01 OF 03 SOFIA 06889

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PHUM, PREL, BU, TU
SUBJECT: THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC TURK PROBLEM:
- STRAWS IN THE WIND?

1. ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY. WHILE THUS FAR THE MLADENOV REGIME HAS MADE NO MAJOR CHANGE IN THE OVERALL BULGARIAN POLICY OF FORCED ASSIMILATION OF ITS ETHNIC TURKISH MINORITY, THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF SIGNS THAT IT MAY ADOPT A MORE FORTHCOMING APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM. THESE INCLUDE WILLINGNESS TO PERMIT DIRECT TELEPHONE DIALING TO AND FROM TURKEY; ESTABLISHMENT OF A PARTY COMMISSION TO ANALYZE THE PROBLEM AND PROPOSE SOLUTIONS; APPOINTMENT OF AN ETHNIC TURK TO THE POSITION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS; PUBLISHED INFORMATION THAT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAS SENT INSTRUCTIONS TO TREAT RETURNING ETHNIC TURKS MORE FAVORABLY; AND PERMITTING THE CHIEF MUFTI ACTUALLY TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE INFRINGEMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF BULGARIAN MUSLIMS. THE

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IM/IPS/CR/IR RRS Date: 11-21-97

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JANUARY 9 MEETING OF BULGARIAN AND TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTERS IN KUWAIT WILL BE AN IMPORTANT TEST OF JUST HOW FAST AND HOW FAR THE NEW REGIME IS WILLING TO MOVE ON THIS CRITICAL QUESTION. END SUMMARY.

3. THE LINE TAKEN IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS BY SENIOR BULGARIAN LEADERS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS AND VISITING USG OFFICIALS REGARDING THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC TURKISH PROBLEM HAS WITHOUT EXCEPTION BEEN AS FOLLOWS: THE PROBLEM IS A VERY SERIOUS ONE; WE

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MADE MISTAKES IN THE PAST; WE WANT TO RESOLVE IT AND WANT TO HAVE A BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH TURKEY; BUT WE NEED TIME. THEY CONSTANTLY ASSERT THE PROBLEM IS VERY COMPLEX AND THAT THE INCIDENTS OF THE PAST SUMMER HAVE RAISED EMOTIONS ALL AROUND WHICH MUST BE CALMED BEFORE ANYTHING MAJOR CAN BE DONE.

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4. SPEECHES MADE AT THE DEC 11-12 CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM ECHO THE ABOVE POSITION:

-- BOYKO DIMITROV, NEW FOREIGN MINISTER, MADE A VERY HARD HITTING SPEECH WHICH DEALT WITH THE COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR WHAT HAD OCCURRED IN BULGARIA. HE ENDED HIS SPEECH AS FOLLOWS: "LET ME JUST SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT A SPECIFIC ISSUE. I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS SPECIAL SATISFACTION WITH AND SUPPORT OF THE FACT THAT IN ITS REPORT, THE POLITBURO TOOK A CLEAR STAND ABOUT THE NECESSITY OF CONDUCTING A PROFOUND AND COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS AT THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF SUCH A FATEFUL ISSUE FOR OUR DOMESTIC STABILITY AND INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS, AS THE ETHNIC ISSUE. I BELIEVE THAT IN THE NEAR FUTURE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH

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THE PRIORITY IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE, WE SHALL BEGIN A BROAD, SERIOUS, AND IMPARTIAL DISCUSSION OF ALL THE ASPECTS OF THE ETHNIC ISSUE." THIS WAS THE ONLY FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE DISCUSSED IN HIS SPEECH.

-- DIMITUR STANISHEV, ALTERNATE POLITBURO MEMBER, SAID THAT THERE IS A NEED TO DEVELOP A NEW POLICY OF THE BCP ORIENTED TOWARD CONSOLIDATION OF THE ENTIRE BULGARIAN PEOPLE, TOWARD BROAD OPEN DIALOGUE WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL GROUPS OF THE POPULATION, THE MUSLIM INCLUDED, FOR OVERCOMING OF THE HITHERTO DISTORTIONS.

-- ALEKSANDUR LILOV, NEW POLITBURO MEMBER, AT A RELATED PRESS CONFERENCE, SAID THAT THE "RIGHT SOLUTION WILL BE SOUGHT ON THE BASIS OF THE PRESENT-DAY CONCEPT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, BY PRESERVING BULGARIA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS." HE SAID, "WE CANNOT AFFORD ANY IMPROVISATIONS." HE ALSO SAID THAT "WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE DETERIORATION OF BULGARO-TURKISH RELATIONS IS TO THE INTEREST OF NEITHER PARTY NOR TO THE INTEREST OF THE BALKANS. WE WANT TO MAINTAIN GOOD NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS WITH TURKEY. WE ARE WILLING TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE AND WILL SEEK TO EXTEND IT IN ORDER TO TAKE BILATERAL RELATIONS OUT OF THEIR PRESENT SITUATION."

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5. THE RESOLUTION PASSED AT THE PLENUM CONTAINED THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:
 "THE PLENUM IS OF THE OPINION THAT THE PARTY POLICY FOR CONSOLIDATION OF THE PEOPLE MUST BE BASED ON THE FULL EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW OF ALL BULGARIAN CITIZENS

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P 200923Z DEC 89
 FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8962
 INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
 EASTERN EUROPEAN POSTS

SECTION 02 OF 03 SOFIA 06889

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
 TAGS: PHUM, PREL, BU, TU
 SUBJECT: THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC TURK PROBLEM:

WITHOUT ANY DIFFERENCE DUE TO THEIR SOCIAL POSITION, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, CULTURE AND ETHNICAL SELF-AWARENESS. THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ENTRUSTS THE POLITBURO WITH THE TASK TO ESTABLISH A PARTY COMMISSION WHICH SHOULD ANALYZE IN DETAIL AND WILL PROPOSE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE A PLATFORM FOR THE DURABLE RESOLUTION OF THIS PROBLEM OF VITAL IMPORTANCE."

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6. ALL OF THE ABOVE STATEMENTS AND EVEN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARTY COMMISSION CAN BE VIEWED

IN A VARIETY OF WAYS. DEPENDING ON HOW ONE ASSESSES THE MOTIVATION OF THE NEW BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT. THERE HAVE, HOWEVER, BEEN A NUMBER OF SIGNS INDICATING THAT MLADENOV AND COMPANY ARE TAKING A DIFFERENT APPROACH THAN ZHIVKOV AND COMPANY TO THE PROBLEM. THEY INCLUDE:

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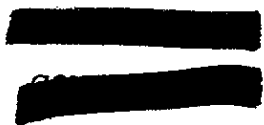


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-- ON DECEMBER 12 THE GOB ANNOUNCED ITS WILLINGNESS TO INTRODUCE DIRECT TELEPHONE DIALING BETWEEN BULGARIA AND TURKEY. THIS SERVICE, WHICH HAS BEEN IN PLACE WITH ALMOST EVERY OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRY FOR YEARS, WILL MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR EASY COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN DIVIDED FAMILIES AND FRIENDS SEPARATED BY THE BORDER. IT WOULD BE A MAJOR STEP FORWARD WHEN IMPLEMENTED.

-- ON DECEMBER 13 THE CHIEF MUFTI ACTUALLY SPOKE OUT AND PUBLICLY ADMITTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN INFRINGEMENTS OF BULGARIAN MUSLIMS' RELIGIOUS RIGHTS AND THAT MOSQUES HAD BEEN CLOSED OR ALLOWED TO OPEN ONLY AT CERTAIN VERY LIMITED TIMES. HE MENTIONED PROBLEMS IN CERTAIN AREAS WITH REGARD TO CIRCUMCISION AND ALSO WITH REGARD TO MUSLIM BURIALS. HE POINTED OUT THAT THERE WAS A SCHOOL TO TRAIN MUSLIM CLERGYMAN UNTIL 1952 AND CALLED FOR IT TO BE REOPENED. THE FACT THAT THE CHIEF MUFTI WHO HAS STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO ADMIT ANY PROBLEMS WHATSOEVER IN THIS COUNTRY HAS BEEN PERMITTED/TOLD/OR ENCOURAGED TO DO SO IN TRUD, A NATIONAL PAPER, IS A DEFINITE POSITIVE SIGNAL.

-- A VARIETY OF TURKISH JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN ALLOWED INTO BULGARIA OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS. ALTHOUGH THE TURKISH EMBASSY RIGHTLY POINTS OUT THAT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN INTERVIEWS WITH SENIOR OFFICIALS, THAT HAS ALSO BEEN THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER WESTERN JOURNALISTS HERE. THE EXCEPTION BEING LARGE, SCHEDULED PRESS CONFERENCES AT WHICH ALL JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING THE TURKS, HAVE BEEN FREE TO ATTEND.



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-- NADYA ASPEROUKOVA, AN ETHNIC TURK, HAS BEEN APPOINTED DEPUTY CHAIRWOMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. HER PORTFOLIO SHOULD INCLUDE A NUMBER OF SOCIAL ISSUES WHICH IMPACT DIRECTLY ON THE ETHNIC

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TURKS IN BULGARIA. WHILE SHE HAS TOTALLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE OFFICIAL POLICIES OF THE REGIME IN EVERY WAY (OR OTHERWISE SHE WOULD NOT BE WHERE SHE IS), THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT IF THE REGIME DOES CHANGE ITS OVERALL POLICIES, SHE COULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHANGE. WE NOTE THAT UNTIL THIS POINT THERE HAS BEEN NO ATTEMPT MADE BY THE REGIME TO EXPLOIT HER ETHNICITY AS A SIGN OF GREATER TOLERANCE.

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-- ON DEC 15 IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAD SENT A LETTER TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES OF THE REGIONAL PEOPLE'S COUNCILS WITH INSTRUCTIONS ON EASING THE PLIGHT OF INDIVIDUALS (ETHNIC TURKS) WHO HAD RETURNED TO BULGARIA FROM TURKEY AND HAD GIVEN UP OR SOLD THEIR HOUSING. THE LETTER WAS SIGNIFICANT IN THAT IT PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGED AT LEAST ONE OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY THESE RETURNING EMIGRANTS AND PROPOSED CONSTRUCTIVE METHODS FOR DEALING WITH IT.

7. []

A DOCUMENT PURPORTING TO BE THE TEXT OF A POLITBURO DECISION TAKEN JUST BEFORE MLADENOV FLEW TO MOSCOW IN EARLY DECEMBER FOR THE WARSAW PACT BRIEFING ON THE MALTA SUMMIT. THE DOCUMENT, ACCORDING TO [] MAKES THREE MAIN POINTS: A) THE FORCED ASSIMILATION POLICY DIRECTED BY TODOR ZHIVKOV WAS A

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RP-10 USIE-00 SP-02 SR-06 PRS-01 P-02 /084 W

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P 200923Z DEC 89
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8963
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
EASTERN EUROPEAN POSTS

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E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PHUM, PREL, BU, TU
SUBJECT: THE BULGARIAN ETHNIC TURK PROBLEM:

MAJOR MISTAKE FOR BULGARIA WHICH HAS LED TO SERIOUS
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PROBLEMS; B) THE POLICY SHOULD
BE EXAMINED AND CHANGED. THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS
IMPLEMENTATION SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM OFFICE; AND
C) IT IS IN BULGARIA'S INTEREST TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONS
WITH ALL OF ITS BALKAN NEIGHBORS, INCLUDING TURKEY.

8. COMMENT.

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
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9. REGARDING THE SIGNALS AND THE STATEMENTS WHICH
HAVE BEEN MADE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO STRESS THAT WE
BELIEVE THAT THEY INDICATE A MORE FLEXIBLE APPROACH
TO THE PROBLEM ON THE PART OF THE NEW BULGARIAN
GOVERNMENT. AT THE SAME TIME, WE HAVE NOT SEEN
SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE CHANGE IN THIS AREA, AND WE
STILL ARE RECEIVING REPORTS THAT EVEN THE PROMISED
INCREASED TOLERANCE FOR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND
EVERYDAY USE OF LANGUAGES OTHER THAN BULGARIAN IS
VERY MUCH DEPENDENT ON THE WHIMS OF LOCAL OFFICIALS.
THE UPCOMING JANUARY 9 MEETING IN KUWAIT MAY PROVIDE
SOME INDICATION OF THE SPEED AND DEGREE TO WHICH
MLADENOV AND COMPANY ARE WILLING TO MOVE ON THIS
FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE.
POLANSKY

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