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NSCE-00 NSAE-00 SSO-00 HA-09 L-03 TRSE-00 PM-10
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FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8920
INFO EASTERN EUROPEAN POSTS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

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BRUSSELS FOR ASEC - AMB NILES

MUNICH FOR JEFFREY

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, BU
SUBJECT: 10,000 WANDER IN SQUARE IN SCATTERED PROTESTS

REF: SOFIA 6838

1. (U) SUMMARY: THE EXPECTED TARGET TURNOUT FOR THE 15 DECEMBER FOLLOW-ON TO THE PRECEDING DAY'S DEMONSTRATION IN SOFIA DID NOT MATERIALIZE. HOWEVER, DESPITE GOVERNMENT WARNINGS AND SEVERE PRESS ATTACKS ON THE 14 DECEMBER DEMONSTRATORS, APPROXIMATELY 10,000 PEOPLE ASSEMBLED IN THE AREAS AROUND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING. THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS WERE UNFOCUSED, HOWEVER, AND MORE THAN HALF OF THE CROWD LEFT AFTER THE FIRST HOURS. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) APPROXIMATELY 10,000 PEOPLE GATHERED.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
IM/IPS/CE/IR RRS Date: 11-21-97
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AROUND NEVSKI SQUARE, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING, AND THE MONUMENT TO THE RUSSIAN LIBERATORS AT 1700 HOURS ON 15 DECEMBER. FOR THE FIRST THIRTY MINUTES, FEW APPROACHED THE ASSEMBLY BUILDING. ZHELO ZHELEV (CHAIRMAN, UNION OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES) AND DR. KONSTANTIN TRENCHEV (LEADER, PODKREPA) LED A GROUP AROUND THE MAIN STEPS OF NEVSKI CATHEDRAL. PETKO SIMEONOV ADDRESSED A GROUP ON THE CATHEDRAL'S SOUTH SIDE, AND OTHERS GATHERED TO THE SOUTHWEST FOR A VIGIL FOR ANDREI SAKHAROV. EVENTUALLY, ALL

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BUT ZHELEV'S GROUP CONVERGED AROUND THE ASSEMBLY BUILDING, WHERE THEY JOINED A GROUP OF STUDENTS WHO WERE SHOUTING "RESIGNATION" AND "MFAIA" AND MAKING CATCALLS JUST AS THEY HAD DONE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS EARLIER. MANY OF THE STUDENTS REMAINED FOR NEARLY FOUR HOURS AND CONTINUED THEIR SHOUTING AND CHANTING. TWO STUDENTS CARRIED A LARGE BANNER IN ENGLISH, COMPUTER-TYPE SCRIPT: IT READ, "GAME OVER," A PHRASE FAMILIAR EVEN TO NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PLAY VIDEO MACHINES. THE SHOUTS WERE MORE INNOCUOUS THAN THOSE OF THE PREVIOUS DAY, HOWEVER, WITH "WE ARE THE PEOPLE," "BULGARIA," "FREEDOM," AND "DEMOCRACY," PUNCTUATING THE DEMANDS FOR RESIGNATIONS AND THE NAME-CALLING. MOST OF THE CROWD, PARTICULARLY THE MIDDLE-AGED, WAS SILENT, AND MANY MORE CARRIED CANDLES THAN ON THE PREVIOUS EVENING.

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3. (U) ONE GROUP OF STUDENTS BROKE AWAY FROM THE CROWD AND MARCHED TO THE HEADQUARTERS OF BULGARIAN TELEVISION, WHERE THEY PROTESTED THE MEDIA'S ACCUSATIONS THAT THE 14 DECEMBER DEMONSTRATORS WERE "CRUDE," "VULGAR," AND TRYING

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TO INCITE RIOTS AND GENERAL CHAOS. THEY CARRIED A PLACARD READING, "THE GOAL OF DISINFORMATION: MANIPULATION."

4. (U) AS HE, RUMEN VODENICHAROV (INDEPENDENT SOCIETY LEADER, WHO HAD CALLED FOR QUIET REFLECTION ON SAKHAROV'S DEATH INSTEAD OF A DEMONSTRATION) AND EMIL KOSHLUKOV (LEADER, INDEPENDENT STUDENTS SOCIETY AND FEDERATION OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS) HAD DONE IN LOCAL MEDIA DURING THE DAY, ZHELEV IMPLORING THE PEOPLE TO DEMONSTRATE PEACEFULLY AND MAKE THEIR VOICE HEARD ONLY THROUGH THEIR PRESENCE AND QUIET PROTEST. HE CALLED FOR A MEETING OF "ALL DEMOCRATS" ON 16 DECEMBER AT 1100 HOURS. MOST OF HIS GROUP THEN LEFT THE SQUARE.

5. (U) ZHELEV'S MEETING IS NOT EXPECTED TO GARNER A LARGE CROWD, IN PART BECAUSE MANY ACTIVISTS WILL BE IN THE SOUTH PARK AND AT A MARCH TO THE PLACE IN SOFIA WHERE TRAICHO KOSTOV, A LEADING COMMUNIST, WAS EXECUTED IN 1949. (HIS REHABILITATION HAS RECEIVED WIDE ATTENTION RECENTLY, IN PART BECAUSE OF THE WIDE BELIEF THAT TODOR ZHIVKOV PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN HIS DEMISE.)

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6. (C) COMMENT: THE DEMONSTRATORS OF THEIR LEADERS MAY HAVE BEEN INTIMIDATED BY DENUNCIATIONS OF THE

14 DECEMBER GATHERING BY MLADENOV, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AND MANY ORGANS OF THE OFFICIAL PRESS. THE ASSEMBLY'S DECLARATION AGAINST THE GATHERING HAD THREATENED REPRISALS UNDER "THE VALID CONSTITUTION AND THE LAWS OF THE LAND." THE PEOPLE MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN INTIMIDATED BY THE LARGE POLICE PRESENCE.

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POLICE HAD MOVED THEIR BARRIERS FARTHER OUT FROM THE BUILDING AND HAD BARRICADED THE ENTIRE RUSSIAN MONUMENT TO PREVENT DEMONSTRATORS FROM CLIMBING ON IT. MILITIAMEN SURROUNDED THE PARAMETERS OF THE BUILDING AND THE MONUMENT BY STATIONING THEMSELVES AT TEN-FOOT INTERVALS. POST'S HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER ALSO OBSERVED THREE PROMINENTLY POSITIONED

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BUSES, EACH FILLED WITH MILITIAMEN, ALL WITHIN THREE HUNDRED YARDS OF THE BARRICADES. ALSO, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS, HE NOTICED WHAT APPEARED TO BE A LARGE CONTINGENCY (MORE THAN 100) OF PLAINCLOTHES SECURITY FORCES.

7. (C) FINALLY, THE CROWD'S ENTHUSIASM MAY HAVE

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BEEN DAMPENED BY THE ABSENCE OF A SITTING (LITERALLY) TARGET: THE ASSEMBLY HAD ENDED ITS SESSION EARLIER IN THE AFTERNOON, AND ONLY FOUR OFFICIAL MERCEDES SEDANS WERE PARKED IN THE BUILDING'S CARPORT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE DEMONSTRATION. TWO HOURS INTO THE EVENING, THE LIGHTS INSIDE THE BUILDING WERE TURNED OFF. END COMMENT. MONTGOMERY

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