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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION (OSCE)

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki process, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. Since then, its membership has expanded to 55, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. (The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, has been suspended since 1992, leaving the number of countries fully participating at 54.) As of January 1, 1995, the formal name of the Helsinki process was changed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The OSCE is engaged in standard setting in fields including military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns. In addition, it undertakes a variety of preventive diplomacy initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States.

The OSCE has its main office in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations and periodic consultations among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government are held.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION (CSCE)

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the agreements of the OSCE.

The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. House of Representatives, nine members from the U.S. Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair are shared by the House and Senate and rotate every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

To fulfill its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates information on Helsinki-related topics both to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports reflecting the views of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing information about the activities of the Helsinki process and events in OSCE participating States.

At the same time, the Commission contributes its views to the general formulation of U.S. policy on the OSCE and takes part in its execution, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings as well as on certain OSCE bodies. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from OSCE participating States.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN BULGARIA

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The Helsinki Commission's last comprehensive report on Bulgarian CSCE implementation was published in 1988. (The Commission also published a report in 1991 on the ethnic Turkish minority in Bulgaria). At that time, Bulgaria was in violation of many of its CSCE commitments. Its human rights record was among the worst of the Helsinki signatory states. Clearly, much has changed since then.

Since the fall of communism in November 1989, Bulgaria has made impressive strides towards becoming a democratic state based on the rule of law. With the holding of several multi-party elections, Bulgaria has been governed by a popularly elected president and parliament. Democracy is steadily developing strong roots. Viewed from a historical context, Bulgaria has moved rapidly to implement political and economic reforms similar to those being pursued by its central-European neighbors to the north.

Treatment of minorities, especially the ethnic Turks, has improved markedly, thus repudiating one of the most egregious legacies of Bulgaria's communist past—the forced assimilation campaign against the Turkish minority. Nevertheless, minority issues such as intolerance towards Gypsies have not yet disappeared from the human rights agenda.

Basic human rights are respected, and individuals can freely express themselves. In July 1991, a new Bulgarian constitution was approved. While not perfect, it is a significant marker on Bulgaria's road to a post-communist society. In short, Bulgaria has come a long way in meeting its commitments under the CSCE.

Bulgaria's post-communist transition has been peaceful and relatively stable, especially when compared to its Balkan neighbors. Bulgaria has witnessed no political or ethnic violence. But the road to democracy and a free market undoubtedly has been rocky, and probably will continue to be erratic. Bulgaria has had five prime ministers since 1989, and has suffered from intense political infighting. Indeed, the political situation in Bulgaria remains fluid. Yet there have been no social explosions and, in contrast to many of its neighbors, relatively few expressions of excessive nationalism. Decisions over the future course of the country have been arrived at within the governing structures, and not violently in the streets. But the democratization process and the transition to a free-market economy continue to suffer occasionally painful delays, and there are continuing concerns about re-communization, as well as about the slowdown in the pace of political and economic reform.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

At the time of the publication of the Helsinki Commission's 1988 implementation report, Bulgaria was a Communist state where human rights were routinely flouted, especially with regard to minorities. While there were attempts at political and economic reform in the late 1980's, most of these were rebuffed by Todor Zhivkov, Bulgaria's long-time, hard-line leader. In the late spring and summer of 1989, Bulgaria was the subject of international scrutiny and criticism as hundreds of thousands of repressed ethnic Turks were expelled from or fled Bulgaria for Turkey. And in October 1989, the CSCE Sofia Environmental Meeting, which was held in the Bulgarian capital and in which the Helsinki Commission took an active role as members of the U.S. delegation, provided protective cover for unprecedented public protest activity against the Communist regime, thus serving as a catalyst for Zhivkov's ouster a few days after the meeting's conclusion.

POST-ZHIVKOV POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

Following the forcible resignation in 1989 of Todor Zhivkov, who had ruled Bulgaria as Communist Party and state leader since 1954, reform communists, under pressure from pro-democracy demonstrators, began to initiate political and economic reforms and reverse some of the more egregious rights violations.

In June 1990, Bulgaria held its first multi-party elections in over four decades, with the reform communist Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) winning 211 of 400 seats in the legislature (Grand National Assembly). The Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) won 144 seats. These were Bulgaria's first free and contested elections in over 40 years. Although they were marred by instances of irregularities and intimidation, the Bulgarian parties accepted the results of the elections. In the words of one opposition leader, the elections were "free and democratic, but not completely fair."

Despite the mandate for the BSP to govern the country, the opposition, especially the UDF, rejected the Socialists' proposal to join them in a national coalition. In August 1990, the Grand National Assembly elected Zhelyu Zhelev, the leader of the democratic opposition UDF, as president. During the fall of 1990, the government, led by Socialist Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov, was unable to keep the economic situation from deteriorating.

In December 1990, a multi-party government was formed under Dimitar Popov, unaffiliated with any party. His government proceeded to implement reforms. In July 1991, the Grand National Assembly adopted a constitution, despite the refusal to sign it and walk-out of many UDF deputies. Bulgaria became the first of the former Warsaw Pact countries to adopt a constitution.

Shortly after, in October 1991, Bulgarians elected a new parliament. The October 13 elections for the 240 seat parliament resulted in a narrow victory for the UDF, which received 34 percent of the vote, compared with 33 for the BSP, the former Communist Party. The largely ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) won 7.5 percent of the vote. These elections were free and administered in a fair manner. According to a delegation of international observers organized by the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs: "The October elections marked a further step in Bulgaria's extraordinary transition from a one-party, totalitarian regime to a multiparty democracy in which human rights are respected and free elections serve as the basis for choosing leaders at all levels of government."

In November 1991, Bulgaria's parliament approved the country's first government in 47 years without communist ministers, led by Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov.

In January 1992, the first popular presidential elections in the country's history took place, with UDF-backed President Zhelyu Zhelev winning narrowly in the second round—53 percent to 47 percent over his BSP opponent.

During much of 1992, Bulgaria underwent a lengthy period of parliamentary stagnation that culminated in the fall of Dimitrov's UDF coalition government. In December 1992, a loose alliance of BSP and the largely ethnic-Turkish MRF parliamentarians brought a non-party government led by centrist economist Lyuben Berov to power. The Berov government has defined itself as a cabinet of experts independent of party affiliation, although some of its ministers were until recently connected with the UDF.

On the economic front, Bulgaria, like other East-Central European states, is in transition from a command economy to a market system. It has pursued systemic change under hostile economic conditions and has made substantial progress in pursuing economic reforms. There is much greater economic freedom of choice for the individual and consumer goods are much more widely available, although the privatization of state firms and breakup of collective farms is not moving as quickly as many had hoped. Inflation remains a problem (with a 60 percent rate forecast in 1993) and industrial production is at low levels. Bulgaria has relaxed controls on foreign investment and economic activity, but still faces the challenges of attracting more foreign investment and restructuring its foreign debt. In addition, the Bulgarian economy is reeling from the embargo imposed on the former Yugoslavia.

Current Political Situation. In June 1993, the anti-communist opposition UDF demanded President Zhelev's resignation, accusing him of failing to stop what they view as the reemergence of communism in Bulgaria. (Before becoming President, Zhelev had been leader of the UDF). Former UDF supporters of President Zhelev set up a tent city in front of his office, effectively blocking him from using it. In late June, UDF parliamentarians walked out of Parliament, dissatisfied with independent centrist Prime Minister Berov's appointment of five new ministers and other governmental changes. The UDF opposition, or what remains of it, charges that changes amount to little more than an effort to put the government back under the control of the communists.

Despite the highly vocal opposition calling for new elections, and the resignation of vice-president Blaga Dimitrova, the parliament accepted Prime Minister Berov's reshuffled cabinet by a vote of 126 to 84. Berov's independent government of professionals is supported by a majority made up of the Socialists and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms. On July 22, Berov survived a no-confidence vote by a margin of 147 to 81 , and on July 29, he survived yet another UDF backed no-confidence vote by a 141 to 80 margin.

The UDF leadership's posture has caused a split within its ranks, thus weakening the party, which had enjoyed a narrow parliamentary plurality. This has served to strengthen the Socialists. Centrist UDF members appear to be increasingly cooperating with the BSP and the MRF. The political situation is still far from settled, and may not be completely resolved until new parliamentary elections, which are expected to be held in 1994. Because of the splits in the UDF, it is likely that the Socialists will win these upcoming elections and install their own government.

At the same time, the UDF is trying to reconstitute its earlier strength by considering allowing other anticommunist parties and organizations to join the coalition. The UDF, in a July 1993 memorandum, outlined several key goals, including immediate general elections, declassification of secret police files, and prosecution of former leading communist officials.

The BSP, as well, is by no means monolithic and encounters internal divisions, especially between the more conservative and reformist elements.

On the economic front, while the process of reform and privatization will continue, its pace probably will not increase substantially in the near future. The current slowdown in economic reform has been blamed on political infighting and the lack of a strong center to counteract both the UDF and some BSP members who have helped to delay reform.

Despite its unsettled internal political situation, Bulgaria continues to play a stabilizing and constructive role in the Balkans. It has been enforcing the UN Security Council mandated sanctions, despite severe losses to its struggling economy. It was the first country to recognize all four former Yugoslav republics, including Macedonia. Bulgaria has worked for the peaceful resolution of the Bosnian conflict, while maintaining that no Balkan area countries should participate in any peacekeeping or other interventions there. Bulgaria has continued to engage in constructive relations with its neighbors, including Turkey, with which it has had a long and troubled history.

Human Right. The Bulgarian government now has a good record of compliance with its CSCE human dimension commitments—one that stands in sharp contrast to its dismal pre-1989 record. Bulgaria has made enormous progress in the field of human rights, both in law and especially in practice. The ability of the average citizen in post-communist Bulgaria to exercise his or her rights has been enhanced considerably.

Notwithstanding these gains, several problems remain. Although Bulgaria's new July 1991 constitution guarantees basic human rights, many of its provisions are somewhat nebulous and lack precise implementing legislation. According to the State Department and other observers, despite the many human rights gains, Bulgaria has made little headway in instituting a clear judicial basis for dealing with human rights complaints.

With respect to international documents, Bulgaria in 1992 ratified the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right of individual complaint, and has accepted the optional protocol under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which allows individuals to file complaints directly with the UN. In May 1992, Bulgaria gained full membership in the Council of Europe—another indication of its progress in fulfilling CSCE commitments.

There are no political prisoners in Bulgaria. Former political prisoners were given amnesty and released following the overthrow of Zhivkov. Instances of political or extra-judicial killings or torture are unheard of, although there have been reports of police beatings of Roma (Gypsies). The monitoring of mail and telephones, so common in the communist era, has diminished greatly, if not ceased altogether. Nevertheless, there are residual concerns that the authorities monitor the calls and letters of some government opponents.

POLITICAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Freedom of speech, association, press, assembly, religion, and travel are constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in Bulgaria, despite the deficiency of concrete legislation to strengthen these rights.

Freedom of the Press. The Bulgarian media is incomparably freer than it was under communist rule. There is an extensive, vibrant and divergent independent press—newspapers, journals, books—representing a wide spectrum of political views. The constitution forbids censorship of the press and media. Independent radio stations are also emerging—more than half a dozen radio stations have begun operating in Sofia within the last year, in addition to independent radio stations in several other cities.

The greatest constraints on the media are economic. Many newspapers not affiliated with parties or other large organizations have had to shut down, largely for economic reasons, including a shortage of newsprint. Major newspapers are directly affiliated with various parties and trade unions. Hence, many newspapers tend to be strongly politicized.

Bulgarian television is a state monopoly under the control of the National Assembly. There are, to date, no independent television stations. According to Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty, "journalists working for the national broadcast media have been quite successful in asserting their journalistic independence vis-a-vis both the government and other political institutions."

On the other hand, while the official channels offer opposition views, they are generally seen as being biased towards official views and subject to the influence of the powers-that-be. One example is the removal by the parliament of Asen Agov, who was the director-general of national television under the UDF-Dimitrov government (1991-92) following the fall of that government. Asov had made many innovative changes in Bulgarian television. The current, unaffiliated Prime Minister, Lyuben Berov, ousted Ivo Indzhev, the director of the state news agency (BTA) in June 1993, purportedly for disseminating distorted information about state institutions. These and several other dismissals have prompted accusations of censorship. On July 14, 1993, the Bulgarian Supreme Court ruled that Indzhev's firing was unconstitutional. Significantly, the Court observed that the government has no authority to exert control over the news agency.

Freedom of Association and Assembly. Both freedom of association and assembly are provided for by the constitution, although with some qualifications.

With respect to freedom of peaceful assembly, rallies and demonstrations have been commonplace in Bulgaria since the fall of the communist regime. Peaceful protest is, with few exceptions, tolerated. In June 1993, for instance, three weeks of anti-government protests were held in Sofia. A night vigil on June 14, organized by the UDF in support of a hunger strike declared by Edvin Sugarev, a UDF parliamentarian, was called illegal by the Council of Ministers. On June 15, the Council of Ministers approved an amendment to the Assemblies, Rallies and Demonstrations Act, determining the perimeter of areas around certain government buildings that will be closed to rallies. The bill was to have been introduced in parliament. There have been occasional instances, however, where meetings of unregistered groups, including Macedonian groups, have been broken up by police.

Although protected by the constitution, freedom of association has been somewhat problematic in Bulgaria. This right has been subject to some restrictions. The constitution bans organizations that threaten the country's territorial integrity or unity, or that incite racial, ethnic, or religious hatred. It also prohibits the formation of political parties defined along religious, ethnic, or racial lines. Bulgaria has come under criticism at several CSCE fora because of this prohibition, which limits the rights of groups to form associations of their choosing and to take part effectively in the political process. Minority groups have faced the greatest restrictions to the right of free association (see following section on Minority Rights).

Workers have the right to form or join trade unions, as well as the right to strike. These rights generally have been respected. Strikes are not uncommon. There are two major trade union confederations—Podkrepa, the former opposition independent trade union, and the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria, which is the successor to the former official trade union. The constitution also forbids "citizens' associations," including trade unions, from engaging in political activities, although, according to the State Department, this restriction has not yet been tested and the trade union Podkrepa has maintained an active political profile. Despite attempts to limit their power, trade unions exercise considerable influence on the Bulgarian political scene.

Freedom of Movement:

Bulgarians now have the right to emigrate and travel, and, as of January 1991, exit visas are no longer required. Not surprisingly, emigration and travel have increased substantially, although Western countries are becoming increasingly restrictive for those attempting to immigrate for economic reasons. Tens of thousands of ethnic Turks from southern Bulgaria alone, for instance, have left for Turkey within the last few years. The only restrictions to emigration are in exceptional circumstances involving national security, although in 1990 and 1991, international passports were withheld from a Macedonian group that had been judged to be separatist, and hence, illegal.

Entry into Bulgaria is much freer than in the past. American nationals traveling to Bulgaria privately, for instance, are entitled to stay for one month without a visa or any other entry requirement.

Religious Freedoms. Religious freedoms have expanded notably since the fall of communism. The average citizen is free to exercise his or her religious beliefs. There are no restrictions on religious education, attendance at religious services, religious publications, or contacts with co-religionists abroad. Religious property confiscated or closed under the Zhivkov regime has been returned or reopened, and religious institutions are flourishing, at least in comparison to the pre-1989 era.

The principal religions in Bulgaria are Eastern Orthodox Christian and Muslim. According to the December 1992 census, Christianity is professed, at least nominally, by 87 percent of the population (86 percent Orthodox, less than 1 percent Catholic and Protestant), and Islam by 12.7 percent (12 percent Sunni Muslim, less than 1 percent Shiite). Muslims, in particular, are free to practice their religion, in stark contrast to the late Zhivkov era, when mosques were destroyed and many Islamic religious practices forbidden.

Bulgaria's 1991 constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion, but it does prohibit political parties from forming along religious lines. The constitution's description of the Orthodox Church as the "traditional religion" initially provoked some concern among other religions, but this concern appears to have diminished.

While the constitution also provides for separation of church and state, actual practice somewhat belies this. A Directorate of Religious Affairs, created in January 1991, requires registration by all religious bodies, permitting registration only if their statutes are consistent with Bulgarian law and if elections of religious officials are properly conducted.

The Directorate of Religious Affairs has been involved in several controversial dismissals of leaders of both the Orthodox and Muslim religions. In 1991, it ruled that both the 1985 election of the Chief Mufti and seven other regional muftis, and the 1971 election of the Orthodox Patriarch were illegitimate, as they had been appointed by a communist government without proper election by the religious faiths themselves. This move was part of the UDF-Dimitrov government's efforts at decommunization, given the strong evidence of collaboration by both Orthodox and Islamic religious leaders with the Zhivkov regime.

The move to dismiss the head of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Maxim, especially has taken political overtones. Following Maxim's refusal to step down after intense pressure from reformers, the Directorate declared Maxim's 1971 election invalid, claiming it had not been in accord with Bulgarian Church canons and had been influenced by the Bulgarian secret police. The Directorate's intervention drew criticism as interfering in internal church affairs, even among some of those with qualms about Maxim. The Orthodox Church was thrown into confusion, with a split in the church into rival church Synods (governing councils)—Patriarch Maxim's and a

provisional Synod under Metropolitan Pimen. It should be noted that one of the key reformers and critics of Patriarch Maxim was Khristofer Subev, a UDF parliamentarian and then Chairman of the parliament's Commission on Religious Affairs. In November 1992, Bulgaria's Constitutional Court ruled both Synods invalid: "the original for not observing Orthodox canons or state laws when it applied for registration and the provisional because the Board had no right to register a Synod not elected by church members."

In April 1993, Prime Minister Berov dismissed Metodi Spassov, head of the Directorate for Religious Affairs, because of his controversial ruling which ostensibly caused a schism in the Orthodox church. Despite earlier indicating that the Directorate would be dismantled, Berov appointed as Spassov's successor historian Khristo Matanov, who has promised not to interfere with church matters.

There are now more than 25 registered faiths in Bulgaria. However, there is concern, magnified by occasionally sensationalist media reporting (including allegations of drugs, teenage suicides and forced prostitution), about the apparently growing influence of non-mainstream religious groups. In April 1993, over 100 members of a religious sect from Sweden were denied entry visas into Bulgaria, reportedly because, inter alia, they had earlier carried out religious work in Bulgaria without the necessary registration and license. The sect's activities had "provoked numerous protests on the part of state and public organizations, individual citizens and religious communities."

Protestant evangelical churches increasingly have expressed concern about possible proposed restrictions on missionary activity and increased media attacks that have confused their churches with foreign non-Christian sects active in Bulgaria since 1989. Bulgarian evangelical Protestants charge that they are facing restrictions in the form of excessive custom duties on humanitarian aid received from abroad. Also, requests for extensions of stay for missions beyond a certain period are being denied, most recently to American Mormon missionaries who were told they would be given only six-month stays in the country.

Apparently, little distinction is made among the various non-Eastern Orthodox religions and a growing number of Bulgarians seem to be supporting state restrictions for non-Orthodox evangelical activity. Many of these attacks on non-Eastern Orthodox religions—whether long established Christian denominations or non-Christian sects—appear to be motivated more by nationalistic, rather than by religious, considerations.

MINORITY RIGHTS

Law/ In general, minority rights have been strengthened by legislation adopted after 1989. The Bulgarian constitution focuses on the rights of individuals but falls short of protecting the collective rights of minorities, omitting even the word "minority." And, as stated earlier, political parties based on ethnicity, race, or religion are prohibited by the constitution. The legitimacy of what is in effect the third largest party in Bulgaria (the MRF) has been challenged in the courts for allegedly violating several articles of the constitution because most of its members are ethnic Turks and, hence, it contributes to divisiveness and disunity. Before the October 1991 parliamentary election, the MRF tried to register as a political party but was denied by a Sofia municipal court. The attempt to prevent the MRF from participating in the elections was criticized at the September 1991 Moscow CSCE Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension by the United States and other countries. Shortly thereafter, the Bulgarian Central Electoral Commission ruled that MRF's previous registration for the June 1990 parliamentary election was a permanent registration, thus allowing it to participate as a political party.

Soon after the October 1991 election, in which 23 MRF deputies were elected, effectively becoming the swing vote in the Bulgarian parliament, the BSP challenged the constitutionality of the Central Electoral Commission's ruling on the MRF. (Their political motivations seemed clear: The BSP correctly suspected that the MRF would, together with the UDF, outvote them on legislation). In April 1992, a narrow Constitutional Court decision upheld the MRF's legal status—on what was essentially a technicality. Unfortunately, this decision does not resolve the issue of political parties or movements based on ethnic or religious minorities.

Because of these constitutional restrictions, minority groups have faced some constraints. The Roma (Gypsies) and Macedonians have been the most affected, as efforts by these groups to form political parties have been thwarted by the authorities.

Implementation. As a practical matter, despite legal restrictions, members of Bulgarian minorities are far freer than in the past to manifest their identities—speak their languages, follow their cultural traditions, and maintain contacts with their ethnic compatriots living outside Bulgaria. A return to the wholesale suppression of specific minority groups as exemplified by the 1984-89 assimilation campaign is inconceivable in today's Bulgaria. Bulgaria continues to struggle to return to its pre-communist tradition of pluralism and relative tolerance.

At the same time, problems with respect to minorities have not disappeared. There are fears that the difficult economic situation in Bulgaria may exacerbate ethnic tensions. According to Ilona Tomova, a consultant on ethnic relations affiliated with Bulgaria's presidential office, unemployment in regions with a mixed population is alarmingly high and minority groups have begun to complain about discrimination. Among the discriminatory treatment that members of minorities (particularly, Turks, Gypsies and Pomaks) complain of are: being offered substandard housing in many cities and being denied equal job opportunities, including receiving lower level positions and being the first to get laid off in factory closings.

A Bulgarian government official, speaking at the Warsaw CSCE Seminar on Minority Rights in May 1993, told the participants of governmental plans for job-creation projects and retraining programs to counter high unemployment and minority groups' claims of discrimination in ethnically mixed regions in southern Bulgaria.

Turks. According to the December 1992 Bulgarian census, there are 822,000 ethnic Turks, constituting 9.7 percent of the population.

Since the 1878 liberation from Ottoman rule, Bulgaria's treatment of its largest minority has ranged from tolerance to brutal repression. Bulgarian repression is best exemplified by the 1984-89 communist government's notorious forcible assimilation campaign, in which ethnic Turks were forced to adopt Bulgarian names and prevented from practicing their culture or religion. The campaign culminated in the 1989 exodus of some 350,000 ethnic Turks to Turkey.

Following the November 1989 downfall of Todor Zhivkov and subsequent reversal of the assimilation campaign, the government's treatment of the Turkish minority has improved substantially. At the same time, Bulgaria's relations with Turkey have improved dramatically.

Nevertheless, the Turkish minority has encountered obstacles to the full realization of its cultural and political rights, in part because of the resurgence of nationalism—primarily of small but vocal anti-Turkish groups, especially in 1990-91.

Ethnic Turkish minorities in their areas of primary concentration (south-central and north-east Bulgaria) have faced some discrimination manifested in high unemployment, limitations on language rights, and exclusion from officer ranks in the military. Tens of thousands, mostly from the Kurdzhali region in south-central Bulgaria, have departed for Turkey since 1989. The majority of migrants have gone to Turkey for economic reasons, especially as the once thriving tobacco-growing sector has declined markedly.

On the other hand, the ethnic Turks have been politically empowered, with representatives of their Movement for Rights and Freedoms playing a key and sometimes deciding role in the Bulgarian parliament, as the third largest parliamentary force in Bulgaria. As neither the UDF nor BSP formed a majority, the MRF has been critical in the formation of governments. In 1991, the MRF enabled the formation of the UDF-Dimitrov government. When the MRF withdrew its support, the Dimitrov government fell. The current Berov cabinet, elected in December 1992, was formed using the mandate assigned to the MRF. Indeed, the MRF has exhibited political skill in national politics. It has advanced its own program for minority rights, but at the same time, it "has expanded its own focus beyond the ethnic and minority rights issues that launched it."

Several additional parties have been set up within the last year, including the Turkish Democratic Party, the Democratic Party of Labor (set up to defend the interests of Bulgarian Muslims), and the Muslim Justice Party. Many ethnic Turks have also been elected to local offices in areas of mixed population. As such, Turks are enjoying real power in many areas where they constitute a majority.

In sharp contrast to the late Zhivkov era, ethnic Turks, like other ethnic groups, do not face any legal restrictions on observance of cultural traditions, religious customs and the speaking of Turkish. Following the fall of Zhivkov and reversal of the assimilation campaign, ethnic Turks began pressing for optional teaching of the Turkish language in Bulgarian schools, despite opposition from some Bulgarian ultra-nationalist groups. In 1991 the government established voluntary Turkish language instruction as part of the regular school program in areas with substantial numbers of ethnic Turks. In August 1993, Bulgarian radio began Turkish-language broadcasts over medium wave radio. This is to be expanded to three daily one-hour broadcasts in October 1993.

Important efforts have also been made to redress financial grievances of ethnic Turks who had fled Bulgaria to Turkey in 1989 during the assimilation campaign. Over half of the 350,000 Turks who left have subsequently returned to Bulgaria. Many were unable to recover property that had been lost, sold (often under less than ideal circumstances) or expropriated. In 1992, the National Assembly passed legislation providing restitution for ethnic Turks who had lost property during the name change and expulsion campaigns. Some of the people who bought the property from the fleeing Turks are to be compensated by the state as well.

Pomaks. Pomaks are ethnic Bulgarian Muslims whose ancestors converted to Islam during Ottoman rule. Most of the 100,000 - 200,000 Pomaks live in the south-western Rhodope mountain region of Bulgaria or in the central part of the country. Like the Turks, they too suffered from forcible assimilation campaigns, primarily in the 1970's.

Along with other minorities, Pomaks charge discrimination in housing and employment, and, like the Turks, have been among the hardest hit by the economic situation in Bulgaria. Additionally, there have been increasing allegations of attempts by the ethnic- Turkish MRF to Turkify the Pomak population, forcing Bulgarian-speaking Pomaks to learn Turkish.

According to reports in the Bulgarian media, some local MRF leaders in villages in south-west Bulgaria were pressuring Pomaks to change their Bulgarian names and to learn Turkish. One report in November 1992, on the eve of the Bulgarian census, indicated that religious leaders in several villages were pressuring Bulgarian Muslims to say they are Turkish, suggesting that those who would not would burn in hell. Other reports indicated that some imams were refusing to bury people with Bulgarian names or to officiate at traditional rituals. Others, including some foreign observers, find little substance to charges of Turkification. The issue is complicated because a segment of the Pomak population (20 percent according to some estimates), in the last few years, has been identifying themselves as Turks.

In April 1993, Bulgarian Prime Minister Berov addressed this issue in parliament, stating that his cabinet "will not tolerate expressions of nationalism and attempts to manipulate the population or Turkification in areas of mixed ethnic and religious communities."

Roma. According to the December 1992 census, 288,000 or 3.4 percent of the population of Bulgaria identified themselves as Gypsies (Roma). Estimates of their population are generally higher, as many Roma reportedly identify themselves as Bulgarians or Turks. They are divided into many subgroups, separated along religious, occupational and even linguistic lines, as there are several dialects of the Romany language. Most are Christian or Muslim.

During the communist era, Bulgarian authorities were inconsistent in their treatment of Roma, early on permitting some cultural freedom and later attempting to assimilate them. In post-communist Bulgaria, they are faring better with respect to basic freedoms.

One of the greatest obstacles to political participation by the Roma is Bulgaria's constitutional ban on ethnic and religious parties. Prior to the October 1991 parliamentary elections, the Democratic Roma Union, formed in 1989, was denied registration as a political party, even though its membership was open. The courts determined that despite the open membership, the Union focused on the protection of the rights of a specific ethnic group, and hence, was an ethnic-based party. Some Roma belong to existing political parties, but their participation is limited and they do not occupy significant posts.

The Gypsies have not been successful in coalescing into a unified political force. There exist two national-level Gypsy organizations. On May 8, 1993, a new Gypsy organization was founded in Sofia—the Confederation of Roma in Bulgaria. The focus of the group is to improve the living conditions and standing of Gypsies. Another Roma group, the Associated Roma Union, was formed in October 1992. In June 1993, the Roma Union issued a declaration claiming that Gypsies are manipulated by parties and the media, administratively oppressed and otherwise discriminated against.

Like other minorities in southern Bulgaria, the Gypsies have been especially hard hit by layoffs resulting from Bulgaria's deep recession. The transition from a centralized, command economy to a market economy has had an especially devastating impact. Unemployment among Roma is very high, exceeding 60 percent in many regions. Most live in inferior housing. According to the State Department, "Gypsies reportedly encounter difficulties applying for social benefits, and rural Gypsies are discouraged from claiming land to which they are entitled under the law dividing up agricultural collectives."

Gypsies constitute the poorest, least healthy, least educated and most discriminated sector of Bulgarian society. Popular prejudice against Gypsies and perceptions of them as criminals exist in Bulgaria as in virtually every East-Central European country where they reside. Indeed, there are indications of an increasing crime rate among Gypsies associated with their inordinately high unemployment rates. This is serving to further fuel tensions and perpetuate the vicious circle that exists between Gypsies, on the one hand, and other Bulgarian citizens, including ethnic Turks and Bulgarians.

Gypsies have also been subjected to police mistreatment. In a much reported case in June 1992, police in Pazardzhik attacked members of the Gypsy community, seriously injuring 50 to 60 people, ransacking Gypsy homes and damaging their property. Other clashes between police and Gypsies or incidents of mistreatment have been reported in the cities of Haskovo, Shumen and Plovdiv. By most accounts, prejudice and violence against Gypsies is increasing. According to Mikhail Ivanov, President Zhelev's advisor on national and ethnic matters, clashes between Gypsies and police are no longer isolated incidents.

The government is attempting to take measures to improve the situation of the Gypsies and respect their cultural identity. Romany dialects are being taught in some elementary schools. Also, following the incident in Pazardzhik, Bulgarian authorities announced various reform efforts, including the investigation of charges of police brutality, recruitment of Gypsies into the police force, improvement of crowd control techniques, and other steps to promote contacts between police and Gypsies. In addition, the government has initiated projects to find solutions to Gypsy problems, including literacy and employment programs.

Macedonians. There have been many debates in Bulgaria over the question of whether or not a separate Macedonian minority exists in Bulgaria, much less a separate Macedonian people. Most Macedonians in neighboring Macedonia do not identify themselves as ethnic Bulgarians. Many Bulgarians reject the notion of a separate Macedonian nationality, although this is beginning to change. According to RFE-RL, "...in Bulgaria it is increasingly common to distinguish Macedonians from Bulgarians. This change represents movement toward acknowledging that the Slavs of Macedonia, while once Bulgarian, are now in fact a separate ethnic entity." The Bulgarian government, which in January 1992 was the first country to recognize Macedonia as a state and whose relations with Macedonia are quite favorable, is not, however, prepared to recognize the Macedonian people as a distinct ethnic group.

The official Bulgarian position on the Macedonian nationality question is perhaps best articulated in a recent interview with Mikhail Ivanov, President Zhelev's advisor on national and ethnic and affairs:

> The term `nation' has different meanings. Some people think of a nation as a group of people who have the same ethnic background, an ethno-nation. That is why we did not recognize the existence of the Macedonian nation, because people who live there have the same ethnic background as we.

On the other hand, he acknowledges that some of the population of Pirin Macedonia have a non-Bulgarian ethnic consciousness, including Macedonian but quickly adds that the majority of the population in Pirin Macedonia has an ethnic Bulgarian consciousness.

The Bulgarian government has been sensitive about claims of a small number of Bulgarian citizens living in south-western Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia) that they are ethnic Macedonians.

In 1990, the Bulgarian government denied the Macedonian nationalist group UMO-Ilinden registration as a legal organization and permission to form a political party. An appeal by UMO-Ilinden was rejected in 1991. During the October 1991 elections, they were not permitted to participate as a political party. Public meetings by members of this group have been broken up by police within the last few years. Also, in 1990, some Ilinden members had their passports confiscated by Bulgarian border officials and were prevented from leaving Bulgaria. Their passports were later returned. UMO-Ilinden has refrained from expressing territorial aspirations, and, in any event, does not promote violence, although one of the members of this group, at a press conference in 1992, reportedly stated that the Bulgarian army should be withdrawn from Pirin Macedonia.

The Macedonian group TMO-Ilinden, which is made up of Bulgarian citizens who consider themselves ethnic Macedonians, was registered in 1992 and operates freely. Still other Macedonian groups support the government's position that Macedonians are a Bulgarian people, and these have not encountered problems.

Other Groups. Other minorities include Armenians and Jews. Bulgarian government treatment of these and other small minorities has been positive and there are few reports of discrimination or anti-Semitism. These groups practice their cultures and religions freely. Hebrew and Armenian language schoolbooks, for instance, are being donated from abroad. In February 1993, the National Assembly marked the 50th anniversary of Bulgaria's successful resistance of Nazi pressure to deport thousands of Bulgarian Jews to Nazi concentration camps.

RULE OF LAW

Bulgaria has moved in a determined way from a totalitarian legal system towards the rule of law based on justice. Progress in the rule of law has been slower than that in human rights, especially given Bulgaria's historical legacy. In Bulgaria, as elsewhere, the legal system and the judiciary were inherited from communism. The law in Bulgaria was an instrument of Communist Party policy and was misused or flouted to achieve political ends.

Constitutional and Judicial Reform. A milestone in the development of a post-communist Bulgaria based on the rule of law was the promulgation of the July 1991 constitution. Despite its flaws—and few deny that it has flaws—the constitution lays the foundation for the implementation of democratic reforms. Adoption by the then Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)-dominated Grand National Assembly (an extraordinary legislature that had been charged with creating the constitution and which had a small BSP majority) was arduous, as many UDF parliamentarians attempted to block the constitution's passage.

The constitution provides for political pluralism and equal rights and freedoms for citizens, and states that Bulgaria is to be a "law-governed state." It offers a clear-cut separation of powers doctrine through a parliamentary republic, with state power divided between the legislative, executive and judicial branches. It can be amended with the approval of three-quarters of the parliament voting in favor of an amendment.

Among the constitution's weaknesses are ambiguity surrounding balance of power between the parliament and the President, and the relative weakness of the Presidency, including the lack of real veto power. A troubling aspect of the constitution is language that limits political activity, according to a United States Institute of Peace (USIP) report on Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian constitution takes a disturbingly paternalistic approach to political life. In place of the expected guaranty of the right of citizens to form political parties and to undertake political activity, Bulgaria's constitution takes a statist approach to political parties that, perhaps, reflects the cultural legacy of the recent past.

The most visible flaw, however, is the constitution's insufficient protection of minority rights, especially with respect to the ban on formation of political parties organized along ethnic, racial or religious rights, which is in violation of the right to peaceful association (see previous section). For this reason, the overwhelming majority of deputies from the MRF boycotted the vote on the constitution.

The Bulgarian constitution includes various provisions designed to ensure an independent judiciary. The constitution includes such protection for defendants as access to legal counsel, limitations on pretrial detention and other elements of due process, including fair and public trials. Restrictions on due process rights have been removed, although there are still occasional reports of violations. For instance, according to a February 25, l993 article in the Bulgarian newspaper Trud, a Georgi Georgiev of Devnya, charged with a matter relating to stolen guns in November 1991, was in pre-trial detention over a year later, well over the prescribed time.

According to several observers, the Bulgarian judiciary system needs procedural reform, is not always functioning smoothly, and suffers from a shortage of trained lawyers and judges. Nevertheless, as a general rule, criminal defendants experience markedly better treatment in post-communist Bulgaria, and procedures have become more transparent and open to observation.

Separation of powers, especially the independence of the judiciary, is taking root in Bulgaria. For instance, the Bulgarian Supreme Court overruled a governmental decree on six occasions in a five month period ending July 15, 1993. Many prosecutors and judges compromised by their service in the Zhivkov era have been retired or replaced, although it is difficult to immediately fill their shoes with qualified, and untainted, individuals. Also, the Ministry of Justice has attempted some reforms aimed at revamping administrative and criminal procedures, but these have not yet been fully implemented.

Despite problems in important areas of rule of law such as the judiciary and criminal procedure, however, "it appears that the Bulgarian emphasis on increased judicial supervision of the arrest and detention of suspects, increased judicial independence, the depoliticization of the procuracy, and guarantees of independence of the bar are steps in the right direction," according to the USIP report.

Post-communist Bulgaria has also made efforts to reform its security services. Purges have taken place of many Interior Ministry officials, especially those who had taken part in anti-Turkish repressions. In May 1993, the government approved bills on the National Police and National Security Service designed to enhance the ability of citizens to exercise their constitutional rights and freedoms while at the same time guaranteeing public order. The National Security Service Bill regulates the structure and activities of the Interior Ministry's Counter-intelligence Unit, and restricts domestic surveillance. The Bill follows accusations by UDF parliamentarians, denied by the Interior Ministry, that members of the National Assembly had their phones wiretapped and had been spied upon. Charges were made earlier in 1993 as well that the previous, UDF-Dimitrov, government had used the Interior Ministry for surveillance and eavesdropping of politicians and trade union leaders. (The above are not the only examples of possibly politically-motivated charges. Allegations, for instance, have been made

against the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms for allegedly interfering in the work of "independent organs of authority" in their stronghold of Kurdzhali in southern Bulgaria. It is difficult to substantiate these various charges, given the political motivations behind them.)

While the intrusive domestic role of the state security forces which characterized the communist era has largely been eliminated, an August 1993 regulation permits the Ministry of Interior to employ secret informers. The Interior Ministry, however, stressed the distinction between the new informers—who would inform about crime, and the communist era informers—who would notify secret police about people's political convictions.

Bulgaria's military also has been engaged in the process of reform, in 1991 acquiring its first civilian Minster of Defense in over 50 years. The military has made important progress in depoliticization and decommunization and despite personnel and social problems, is becoming a respected, nonpartisan institution.

Decommunization—Trials and Tribulations. While substantial improvements have been made in respecting rights of individuals, there have been some questions raised about the pre-trial detention of former Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov, as well as some concerns about possible biases in proceedings against former Bulgarian dictator Todor Zhivkov and other high-ranking communist officials.

Several former high-ranking communist officials have been tried and convicted, including Zhivkov, who was found guilty in 1992 of abuse of power involving state funds and sentenced to seven years in prison. He faces proceedings on other counts as well, including one for his role in the forced assimilation campaign against ethnic Turks. In August 1993, Zhivkov was formally charged with diverting state funds to leftist governments and communist parties abroad. Another 21 former state and communist party functionaries, including former prime ministers Andrei Lukanov and Georgi Atanasov were also charged with diverting funds.

In October 1992, Bulgaria's last communist Prime Minister, Georgi Atanasov, was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, and former Economics Minister Stoyan Ovcharov to 9 years, for embezzlement of state funds during the late 1980's. Not unexpectedly, these and other convicted former officials have charged that the trials were unfair and politically motivated, although most observers agree that due process in these trials has been observed.

Other former officials—former Deputy Premier Grigor Stoichkov and former Deputy Health Minister Lyubomir Shindarov—were convicted in 1991 to three and two year prison terms respectively for withholding information about the aftereffects of the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

In a June 1993 trial of four former Bulgarian labor camp guards, the country's Prosecutor-General Ivan Tatarchev demanded the death sentence, given the extreme cruelty practiced at the 1959-1962 Lovtech camp. The defense objected to the trial on the grounds that Bulgaria's 20-year statute of limitations had expired. These objections were rejected by Tatarchev who maintained that Bulgaria did not have a normal legislative system at the time and that there should be no statute of limitations "for such crimes against humanity." [Note: one of the defendants died in late July 1993—the trial is to resume in September.]

Five former State Security officials are also on trial in Ruse for applying unnecessary force and detaining ethnic Turks in an improvised labor camp in 1989. According to Radio Free Europe, it is the first time civil servants are being prosecuted for their actions during the forcible assimilation campaign.

In July 1992, former Bulgarian Prime Minister and top-ranking Socialist Andrei Lukanov, was accused of misappropriating state funds and stripped of his parliamentary immunity, arrested and jailed. Lukanov cried foul, arguing that he was being singled out for what were collective policy decisions taken by a former government. A number of international observers, including the Helsinki Commission, expressed concern about circumstances surrounding his pretrial detention, including his health. In December, parliament voted to rescind the government's authority to arrest Lukanov. He was released from detention and allowed to return to parliament. In August 1993, however, Lukanov was formally charged for his role in donating hard currency, arms and other assistance to communist organizations abroad.

In January 1993, the parliament voted to strip former BSP leader Alexander Lilov of his parliamentary immunity. Lilov, a former leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, also faces charges similar to those against Lukanov. The BSP strongly protested the parliament's actions as being politically motivated.

These efforts to hold former officials responsible for past misdeeds should be seen as part of the overall democratization of Bulgaria, according to a RFE report on Bulgaria's communist legacy.

> As a result of this process, people may learn more about aspects of their common past that previously were concealed; those who eventually rewrite Bulgaria's postwar history may be given invaluable material; and in the long run, a contribution may be made to the restoration of respect for the law and moral values.

Others, however, view these trials as politically motivated attempts to seek revenge, rather than efforts to ensure that justice is done. Given the politically charged atmosphere in Bulgaria today, even the most sensitive handling of these cases will probably provoke criticism.

Some apprehension has been expressed with respect to a draft law that would provide amnesty for several thousand criminal defendants who had been convicted by People's Courts during 1944-45. While many of these people were imprisoned for political reasons, others were convicted for genuine war related crimes. In April 1992, the European parliament issued a resolution urging the government to withdraw this bill because of its blanket coverage.

Decommunization - Lustrate. Trials of communist-era officials are but one component of Bulgaria's attempts to wrestle with and overcome the legacy of its communist past, in what is commonly referred to as decommunization. As in other East-Central European states, it was the policies of the ruling Communist Party that were responsible for the egregious human rights violations, not to speak of economic and environmental ruin. Recognizing its own bankruptcy, the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1990 changed its name to the Bulgarian Socialist Party, and in 1991 even accepted responsibility for the country's economic woes. Soon after the fall of Zhivkov, decommunization measures such as the depoliticization of the police and military, the firing of many Interior Ministry officials, and the dismantling of Communist Party cells at workplaces took place.

In Fall 1991, the BSP was accused of massive misappropriation of funds from the state between 1944 and 1990, and most of its financial assets were frozen by the Bulgarian Supreme Court. On the other hand, attempts to formally ban the BSP obviously have been unsuccessful. For example, on March 11, l993, the Supreme Court ruled against a lawsuit calling for the BSP to be declared illegal.

Decommunization efforts were especially vigorous under the UDF-Dimitrov government, where steps were taken to break the hold on the civil service enjoyed by Communist Party supporters. These steps included firing unqualified employees or those employees who had been given their jobs as a direct result of their favor with the Party.

The Bulgarian parliament has promulgated legislation that would exclude categories of people associated with the communist regime from certain positions (so-called "lustration," or purification). The most prominent of these laws is the March 1992 Banking Law, which prohibited former communist functionaries and certain other employees of the Communist regime from holding high-ranking posts in the financial sector. In June 1992, a lustration provision was also added to the Pension Law which prohibited former communist functionaries from obtaining pensions. These lustration provisions were revoked in July 1992 by the Constitutional Court, which held that they violated several provisions of the Bulgarian constitution, including Article 6 prohibiting discrimination on the basis of, inter alia, political affiliation.

In December 1992, parliament adopted a controversial UDF-sponsored law—the Panev Law, named after its author—which called for the removal of academic staff previously affiliated with the Communist Party from management positions. The law prohibits scholars formerly closely affiliated with the Communist Party from holding management posts in research and science over the next five years. The law does not provide for an appeals process for the individuals in question and there are insufficient safeguards to privacy and access to materials. Following the law's adoption, 102 parliamentarians, joined by President Zhelev, petitioned the Constitutional Court challenging the law. In February 1993, the Constitutional Court narrowly ruled that the law was constitutional, astonishing human rights activists and legal specialists. Subsequently, there have been so far unsuccessful efforts at compromise legislation that would reduce the number of academic staff affected.

Implementation of the Panev Law has had a negative affect on Bulgarian institutions of higher education. According to a August 1993 Helsinki Watch report:

> Allegedly intended to improve the professional standards of those in elected positions within the universities, instead its results have been arbitrary and without consideration for the true professional qualifications of the individuals affected.

Other draft lustration bills submitted to the parliament in 1992 have not reached votes in the parliament, and it is questionable that they will, at least in the near-term. In May, a group of parliamentarians introduced legislation that would weaken the effects of lustration laws. UDF parliamentarians have accused the new majority in parliament (which includes the BSP, ethnic Turkish MRF and some former UDF parliamentarians), of blocking the passage of decommunization laws.

According to Helsinki Watch: "Unfortunately, the draft lustration laws currently before the Bulgarian parliament proceed from a concept of collective guilt, providing that people are to be punished not for specific acts but for belonging to specific groups."

As the ex-communist BSP is still a commanding force on the Bulgarian political scene, there are worries of "recommunization," especially among the opposition UDF. Despite the BSP's continuing, and even growing, influence, it is unlikely that Bulgaria will witness the reestablishment of communism. In response to persistent UDF criticism, President Zhelev has given assurances that recommunization in Bulgaria is out of the question. At the same time, however, he has opposed lustration legislation.

A January 1993 parliamentary decision to prohibit the divulging of secret police files could impede decommunization efforts. This decision effectively overturns some of the decommunization efforts of the UDF-Dimitrov government. According to a penal code amendment, individuals spreading information related to the activities of the secret police can be sentenced to three years in jail, and in the case of an official or if the information is spread by mass media, up to six years.

CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

Bulgaria is experiencing a rare historical opportunity in which it can genuinely forge its own fate. Unshackled from the external Soviet empire of communist rule with which it had especially close links, Bulgaria is developing a democratic, rule of law state where the rights of all of its citizens are being met with greater respect.

There are numerous complicating factors facing Bulgaria in its post-communist transition. There can be no question that the brutal war in neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina, with its potential for spillover, constitutes a dramatic threat to the fledgling post-communist Bulgarian state.

Bulgaria has been one of the few examples in the Balkans of peace and stability, and has not been caught in the web of ultranationalism. Despite some inter-ethnic tensions, especially with respect to the treatment of Gypsies, the majority of the population of Bulgaria appear to be moderate and relatively tolerant in their views. There are no significant separatist movements and few Bulgarians question their Bulgarian citizenship. Nevertheless, greater efforts need to be taken so that all ethnic and religious groups—including Gypsies and non-Eastern Orthodox Christians—are made to feel included as a part of Bulgarian society.

Bulgaria is proceeding with its political and economic reforms, although the pace of change has slowed recently. There are currently numerous tensions in Bulgarian political life—both among and within political parties and coalitions. The lack of consensus among Bulgaria's main political forces—the UDF and BSP—has led to a government without a clear mandate to govern and an unstable parliamentary base. Furthermore, the rifts within the UDF, which led to the fall of the first non-communist Bulgarian government in October 1992, as well as the confrontation between the UDF and President Zhelev have had a discouraging effect on efforts to ensure the continued influence of democratic forces in Bulgaria. Political infighting of this kind is not surprising in a young democracy struggling to come to terms with its past and chart its future, but it can further slow the pace of reform and lead to political paralysis.

The economic dimension—particularly efforts towards the free market and away from the command system—will be an especially important harbinger for Bulgaria's further overall development. Lack of economic improvements, of course, could stall, and even reverse, democratic reforms.

Decommunization efforts are significant as well for Bulgaria's development, but great care needs to be taken to ensure that the rights of all citizens are protected, including those of former Communist Party functionaries. It is important that while redressing historical wrongs, new wrongs are not perpetrated, even if these are relatively mild in comparison.

Clearly, Bulgaria has made steady, if not always even, progress and is evolving into a genuinely democratic state based on rule of law. Its commitment to CSCE principles is generally positive. However, as in other post-communist states, time will be required to completely break from past practices and overcome old habits.

While Bulgaria faces considerable problems in its post-communist transition, and will continue to in the foreseeable future, it is doing much better than most of its Balkan neighbors. Moreover, it is exceeding the expectations of those who until recently viewed Bulgaria through the prism of being the Soviet Union's "16th republic" and the home of papal assassination plots and forcible assimilation campaigns. Despite its very real problems, Bulgaria is indicating that it is more tolerant, pluralistic, democratic and stable than many would have supposed.