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ACTION HA-09

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INFO LOG-00 ADS-00 AID-00 INR-05 EUR-00 SS-00 OIC-02
CIAE-00 EB-00 H-01 IO-19 NSCE-00 NSAE-00 L-03
LAB-04 TRSE-00 PA-01 STR-18 SIL-01 INRE-00 RP-10
SP-02 SR-06 PRS-01 P-02 /084 W

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R 191456Z DEC 89
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8952
DIA WASHDC
INFO EASTERN EUROPEAN POSTS
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
USIA WASHDC 6345
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

SECTION 01 OF 03 SOFIA 06881

BRUSSELS FOR USEC - AMB. NILES

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TAGS: PHUM, BU

SUBJECT: MUSLIMS MEET TO HEAR HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERS
- IN POMAK REGION

1. (U) SUMMARY. EMBASSY OFFICERS ATTENDED A DEMONSTRATION IN GOTSE DELCHEV ON DECEMBER 16. THE CROWD OF OVER 5,000 WAS COMPRISED PREDOMINANTLY OF MALES, MOST OF WHOM WERE POMAKS AND TURKS. SPEAKERS STRUCK A CONCILIATORY NOTE, BUT WERE EQUALLY FIRM IN DEMANDS FOR THE RESTORATION OF NAMES AND THE RIGHT TO THEIR CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY. WHEN IT WAS KNOWN THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY WERE PRESENT, OFFICERS WERE BESEIGED BY A FLOATING GROUP OF 100-150 PEOPLE EAGER TO TELL THEIR STORIES OF OPPRESSION. END SUMMARY.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
IM/IPS/CR/IR/RRS Date: 11-21-97
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FOIA Exemptions _____ TS authority to
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2. (U) DAO AND USIS OFFICERS ATTENDED THE "MEETING" IN GOTSE DELCHEV, WHICH HAS A LARGE POMAK AND TURKISH POPULATION IN THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE. LARGE CROWDS OF POMAKS WERE SEEN WALKING TO GOTSE DELCHEV, PRESUMABLY FROM THE POMAK VILLAGES FIVE MILES OUT OF TOWN. THE POMAKS WAVED ENTHUSIASTICALLY AT THE DAO VEHICLE, PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY KNEW THE U.S. DESIGNATION "DT-02".

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3. (U) IN GOTSE DELCHEV THE UNIFORMED MILITARY

WERE DIRECTING TRAFFIC TO PARKING AREAS NEAR THE STADIUM WHERE THE MEETING WAS TO BE HELD. THE TONE OF THE MILITSIA WAS VERY LOW KEY, EVEN FRIENDLY. ONE UNIFORMED MILITSIA SERGEANT EVEN DIRECTED THE EMBASSY VEHICLE TO "THE POLITICAL MEETING."

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4. (U) THE MEETING WAS HELD IN A LOCAL STADIUM AND THE CROWD SEEMED SMALLER THAN IT WAS, DUE TO THE VAST EXPANSE OF GRASS AND SEATS. WE ESTIMATE THE CROWD AT OVER 5,000.

5. (U) BANNERS AT THE MEETING CALLED FOR THE RETURN OF MUSLIM NAMES, COOPERATION BETWEEN BULGARIA'S PEOPLES, UNITY, AND FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION. ONE READ, "TODOR ZHIVKOV - AMBASSADOR TO TURKEY."

6. (U) SPEAKERS EMPHASIZED THE FACT THAT UNITY, NOT SEPARATION, WAS NECESSARY FOR BULGARIA. RUMEN VODENICHAROV (LEADER, INDEPENDENT SOCIETY; SPOKESPERSON, UNION OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES) BEGAN THE SPEECHES BY NOTING THAT FOREIGN COUNTRIES WERE WATCHING BULGARIA WITH INTEREST. HE APPEALED FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, AND FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, RELIGION, AND

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ASSEMBLY. DURING HIS SPEECH, KONSTANTIN TRENCHEV ARRIVED FROM SOFIA AND THERE WERE TUMULTUOUS CHEERS AS HE TOOK HIS PLACE. THROUGHOUT THE DAY THE MOST POPULAR CHANT WAS "PODKREPA."

7. (U) THE SECOND SPEAKER WAS A LOCAL POMAK FROM LUZHNITSA NAMED HADZHIEV. HE CALLED FOR FREEDOM FOR MUSLIMS, CHRISTIANS, AND JEWS. "OUR HOME," HE SAID, "IS ONE - IT IS BULGARIA." HE SAID THAT WITHOUT OPPOSITION THERE IS NO DEMOCRACY. "LET US SING ONE SONG TOGETHER, AND LIVE FREE AND EQUAL IN DEMOCRATIC BULGARIA," HE IMploRED. HE ALSO NOTED THAT A PETITION FOR THE MUSLIM RIGHTS HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WITH OVER 60,000 SIGNATURES.

8. (U) AT THIS POINT IN THE PROCEEDINGS EMBOFFS LOST TRACK OF THE SPEAKERS: SOMEONE IN THE CROWD ASKED WHERE THEY WERE FROM, AND WHEN IT BECAME KNOWN THAT THEY WERE AMERICAN EMBASSY OFFICIALS THEY WERE SURROUNDED FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MEETING BY A CROWD VARYING IN SIZE BETWEEN 100 AND 150, EAGER TO TELL THEIR STORIES OF REPRESSION.

9. (U) FOR OUR PURPOSES THE STORIES THEY TOLD CAN BE DIVIDED INTO TWO CATEGORIES, PRE- AND POST- NOVEMBER 10. THE LITANY OF ATROCITIES BROUGHT

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UPON THE POMAKS AND TURKS BY THE BULGARIANS SINCE THE TURN OF THE CENTURY IS ALREADY WELL DOCUMENTED.

10. (U) BEFORE NOVEMBER 10:

--THE MOSQUE IN THE VILLAGE OF BLADSKA WAS DESTROYED

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A YEAR AGO.
--FINES FOR SPEAKING TURKISH REACHED 100 LEVA.
--DURING THE CIVIL MOBILIZATION 190 PEOPLE FROM KORNITSA, BREZNITSA, AND LUZHNITSA WERE "INTERNEED", NOT USED FOR LABOR.
--RELIGIOUS CIRCUMCISION IS STILL NOT POSSIBLE.

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--ONE MAN WAS FORCED TO BURY HIS FATHER AS A CHRISTIAN.
--WHEN SOMEONE APPLIES FOR A PASSPORT, WORD IS PASSED
TO THE WORKPLACE AND THE PERSON IS FIRED.
--POMAK CHILDREN ARE REPORTEDLY GIVEN GRADES IN
SCHOOL BASED ON THEIR VILLAGE OF ORIGIN.
--TEACHERS IN THE POMAK REGION HAVE BEEN FIRED AND
IMPRISONED FOR TEACHING THE CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR

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HERITAGE.

11. (U) SINCE NOVEMBER 10: NOTHING HAS CHANGED
ACCORDING TO THE DOZENS WHO SPOKE TO US. THEY HAVE
LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN THE AUTHORITIES TO BRING ABOUT
ANY IMPROVEMENT TO THEIR LOT.

--POMAKS ARE STILL DENIED PASSPORTS FOR FOREIGN
TRAVEL.

--THE TURKISH LANGUAGE IS STILL FORBIDDEN (AS
RECENTLY AS LAST WEEK, THE WIFE OF ONE OF THE TURKS
HAD BEEN ADMONISHED).

--MAIL FROM AND TO TURKEY IS REGULARLY INTERCEPTED.

--ON DECEMBER 10, ONLY 2 OF 24 CARS FROM BREZNITSA,
KORNITSA, AND LUZHNITSA REACHED SOFIA FOR THE
DEMONSTRATION. THE REST OF THE CARS WERE TURNED
BACK BY MILITSIA WHO LEVELED AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AT
THEM.

--BULGARIANS IN GOTSE DELCHEV HAD REPORTEDLY BEEN
REQUIRED TO WORK A FULL DAY ON NOVEMBER 16 SO THEY
COULD NOT ATTEND THE MEETING.

--THE DECEMBER 15, 1989, EDITION OF THE NEWSPAPER
"MADANSKA TRIBUNA" CARRIED A FRONT PAGE ARTICLE
TITLED "CLEAR POSITION" WHICH STATED "WHOEVER SPEAKS
BULGARIAN LANGUAGE, CANNOT HAVE A TURKISH NAME."

--ONE WEEK AGO A PARTY SECRETARY IN A POMAK VILLAGE
REPORTEDLY TOOK THE SCHOOL CHILDREN TO A MOSQUE AND
HAD THEM BREAK THE WINDOWS. OTHER CHILDREN HAD BEEN
COLLECTING MONEY FOR RENOVATING THE MNSQUE.

12. (U) THE ONLY POSITIVE NOTE WE HEARD WAS THAT
IN SOME VILLAGES MOSQUES HAVE BEEN OPEN FOR TEN
DAYS RUNNING. HOWEVER, IN OTHER VILLAGES MOSQUES

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ARE STILL CLOSED. IN STILL OTHERS, THEY ARE OPEN
ONLY ON FRIDAYS.

13. (U) THE POMAKS AND TURKS PLEADED FOR THE U.S. TO

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APPLY PRESSURE TO THE BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT. "OUR ONLY HOPE IS FROM OUTSIDE," SAID ONE.

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14. (C) COMMENT: THE POMAKS AND TURKS ARE BEGINNING TO ORGANIZE AND THE GOVERNMENT STILL SEEMS DETERMINED TO KEEP THEM SEPARATE FROM THE BULGARIAN MAJORITY. KONSTANTIN TRENCHEV IS CLEARLY A FAVORITE AMONG POMAKS AND PODKREPA SEEMS TO HAVE BROKEN THE ETHNIC BARRIER TO AN EXTENT NO OTHER GROUP HAS. DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE AUTHORITIES PERMITTED THIS MEETING, WE ARE DISCOURAGED BY THE APPARENT LACK OF CHANGE IN THIS REGION. THE REPRESSION APPARENTLY STILL CONTINUES. IT SEEMS THAT THE GOB HAS NOT YET SUCCEEDED IN MAKING SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THIS AREA.

15. (C) THERE IS MUCH TALK AND LITTLE ACTION. THE MINORITY GROUPS SEEM CONCILIATORY - THOUGH FIRM IN THEIR RESOLVE BUT THE GOB SEEMS CONCERNED ABOUT A POSSIBLE NEGATIVE MAJORITY REACTION TO ANY FORM OF REDRESS (I.E. MERELY RETURNING TO THE STATUS QUO).

16. (C) THE WILLINGNESS OF THE POMAKS TO SPEAK WITH EMBOFFS, EVEN UNDER THE EYE OF OFFICIAL VIDEO CAMERAS, INDICATES THAT THIS GROUP IS LOSING ITS FEAR OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES. THIS IS A REGION WHICH HAS EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE IN THE PAST. SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT FAIL TO ACT ON THE DEMANDS OF POMAKS AND TURKS THERE IS A POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER UNREST.



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END COMMENT. POLANSKY

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a
*** Current Classification ***

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