

UNCLASSIFIED

147

PAGE 01 SOFIA 07019 01 OF 03 291703Z
ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	ADS-00	AID-00	INR-05	SS-00	OIC-02	CIAE-00
	EB-00	DODE-00	H-01	IO-19	NSCE-00	NSAE-00	HA-09
	L-03	LAB-04	TRSE-00	PA-01	STR-18	SIL-01	INRE-00
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 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9049
 INFO USIA WASHDC 6367
 EASTERN EUROPEAN POSTS
 AMEMBASSY ANKARA
 AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

SECTION 01 OF 03 SOFIA 07019

USIA FOR PENDERGAST AND IGNATIUS

BRUSSELS FUR USEC-AMB. NILES

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
 TAGS: PHUM, PINS, BU
 SUBJECT: VODENICHAROV REPORTS SUCCESSFUL MASS MEETING
 IN MADAN

1. [REDACTED] - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY. INDEPENDENT SOCIETY LEADER RUMEN VODENICHAROV REPORTS THAT 20,000 PEOPLE GATHERED IN MADAN ON 24 DECEMBER FOR THE INDEPENDENT SOCIETY'S SECOND MASS MEETING IN BULGARIA'S POMAK REGIONS. HE ALSO ANNOUNCED HIS PLANS FOR THE NEW YEAR, INCLUDING MORE MEETINGS IN POMAK AND ETHNIC TURKISH AREAS, CONTINUED SOCIETY GATHERINGS IN SOFIA'S SOUTH PARK, PARTICIPATION IN A POLITICAL SEMINAR IN VIENNA, AND A TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES. HE SAID THAT, SOON,

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PAGE 02 SOFIA 07019 01 OF 03 291703Z

THE SOCIETY WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE WHETHER TO BECOME OVERTLY POLITICAL OR TO REMAIN A HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION. END SUMMARY.

3. AT LUNCHEON WITH POST HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AND PAO ON 27 DECEMBER, RUMEN VODENICHAROV REPORTED THAT THE INDEPENDENT SOCIETY'S MASS DEMONSTRATION IN SUPPORT OF MINORITY RIGHTS HAD BEEN COMPLETELY SUCCESSFUL. (NOTE: POST HAD ARRANGED FOR PAC AND AIR DATT TO TRY TO ATTEND THE MEETING, BARRING EXPLICIT

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MFA REFUSAL OF OUR REQUEST TO ENTER THE PERMANENT RESTRICTED AREA (PRA) NEAR THE BORDER WITH GREECE AND TURKEY. WHEN THESE OFFICERS INSTEAD WENT TO THE BULGARIAN-ROMANIAN BORDER TO ASSIST WITH EVACUATION OF EMBASSY BUCHAREST PERSONNEL, WE SENT OUR ECONOMIC OFFICER AND DAO ASSISTANT, WHO WERE TURNED BACK BY MILITIAMEN AS THEY CROSSED INTO THE PRA 30 KMS FROM MADAN.) VODENICHAROV SAID THAT 20,000 PEOPLE, PRIMARILY POMAKS (BULGARIAN MUSLIMS), HAD ATTENDED. THE MEETING HAD FOLLOWED THE SOCIETY'S STRATEGY OF TAKING ITS PROGRAM ONE STEP FURTHER WITH EACH PUBLIC EVENT: THE 18 NOVEMBER DEMONSTRATION HAD FIRST RAISED THE ISSUE OF EQUAL RIGHTS FOR THE COUNTRY'S MUSLIM MINORITIES. THE NEXT MEETING OF THE SOCIETY IN SOFIA'S SOUTH PARK HAD REAFFIRMED THE GROUP'S COMMITMENT TO EQUAL RIGHTS AND FOR THE FIRST TIME STATED THE CLOSING OF ITS MEMBERSHIP TO COMMUNISTS. THE 2 DECEMBER MEETING, WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AS GUEST OF HONOR, HAD INCLUDED AN ADDRESS FROM HASSAN BYALKO, WHO IS PERHAPS THE COUNTRY'S LEADING POMAK ACTIVIST. THE 10 DECEMBER SOFIA MASS DEMONSTRATION, IN WHICH VODENICHAROV COULD NOT PARTICIPATE BECAUSE HIS

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UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03

SOFIA -07019 01 OF 03 291703Z

DAUGHTER WAS BEING MARRIED, SAW THOUSANDS OF POMAKS AND ETHNIC TURKS DEMANDING THAT THEIR NAMES BE RETURNED TO THEM. THE 16 DECEMBER GOTSE DELCHEV GATHERING HAD BEEN A TEST OF THE NEW BCP LEADERSHIP'S WILLINGNESS TO ALLOW MUSLIMS TO MEET PUBLICLY. THE MADAN MEETING REPRESENTED A DIRECT EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS RITES AS THREE IMAMS OPENED AND CLOSED THE MEETING WITH PRAYERS AND INTONATIONS OF "ALLAH IS GREAT."

4. ACCORDING TO VODENICHAROV, THE LOCAL MILITIAMEN HAD BEEN REPLACED WITH MEN FROM THE NEARBY REGION OF SMOLYAN BECAUSE LOCAL AUTHORITIES WERE AFRAID THAT THE LOCAL FORCES WOULD REACT TOO HOSTILELY TO THIS, THE FIRST SUCH GATHERING IN MADAN. THE SMOLYAN OFFICERS WERE RESTRAINED AND THE PROCEEDINGS PROGRESSED CORDIALLY. VODENICHAROV DID HAVE TO CONTENT WITH TWO SMALL GROUPS OF HECKLERS, WHICH PROFFERED "COUNTER-SLOGANS AND COUNTER-SIGNS," INCLUDING "RADOSLAVOV 1919, VODENICHAROV 1989." (VODENICHAROV EXPLAINED THAT RADOSLAVOV WAS A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WHO FIRST ADVOCATED BULGARIZATION OF THE MUSLIMS' NAMES IN THE EARLY PART OF THE CENTURY. "PLANTED" PROTESTORS ARE NOW CLAIMING THAT VODENICHAROV'S ADVOCACY OF A RETURN TO TURKISH NAMES INVITES A MAJOR VIOLATION OF THE MINORITIES' RIGHTS.) ONE GROUP OF HECKLERS WERE PART OF THE NEW "PATRIOT" ORGANIZATION, WHICH

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VODENICHAROV SAYS IS A GOVERNMENT-BACKED CLAUVINIST FRONT EXPRESSLY FORMED TO COUNTER HIS SOCIETY'S CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVITIES.

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5. PRESS COVERAGE OF THE EVENT WAS NOT OBJECTIVE. ON 27 DECEMBER, "RABOTNICHESKO DELO" CARRIED A STORY

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

*** Current Classification ***

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