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FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8920
INFO EASTERN EUROPEAN POSTS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 06840

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 LARGE 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 AROUND NEVSKI SQUARE, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING, AND THE MONUMENT TO THE RUSSTAN 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 SIMEONOVOV ADDRESSED A GROUP ON THE CATHEDRAL'S SOUTH SIDE, AND OTHERS GATHERED AT THE SOUTHEAST FOR A VIGIL FOR ANDREI SAKHAROV. EVENTUALLY, ALL

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 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 KOHLOKOV (LEADER, INDEPENDENT STUDENTS SOCIETY AND FEDERATION OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS) HAD DONE IN LOCAL MEDIA DURING THE DAY, ZHELEV INSPIRED 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.)

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

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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...
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.


MONTGOMERY