

Bulgaria – Now On Track For A Secure Future?

By Dr Trevor Waters

Introduction

Bulgaria is arguably the most forgotten, and so least known, of all the countries that quit the Soviet sphere of influence in 1989. From what we do know of it, moreover, Bulgaria suffers from a somewhat tarnished image in most parts of the West at least. Bulgaria was on the “wrong side” in both World Wars; widespread political unrest, not to speak of terrorist violence, savage repression, revolutionary intrigue, bloody *coup d'état* followed by counter-coup – all this has been endemic to modern Bulgarian political life since the 1877-78 War of Liberation from Turkish bondage. Todor Zhivkov, leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) for 35 years (1954-1989), was – even by the standards of East European communist leaders – particularly subservient, indeed servile, to Moscow, and suggested on two occasions that Bulgaria be incorporated into the USSR; in Bulgaria itself in self-deprecating moments, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the Soviets’ closest ally was often jocularly or scornfully referred to as the “Sixteenth Republic”. What we tend to remember Bulgaria for in recent times is the brutal “umbrella” murder in London of exiled journalist Georgi Markov (widely attributed to the Dărhavna Sigurnost, the Bulgarian state security organ), possible involvement in the assassination attempt on the Pope, and Zhivkov’s “assimilationist” policies – ie his persecution of the Turks.

There was no tradition of critical dissent during the communist period in Bulgaria (even less so than in Romania) – no Solidarity, no People Against Violence, no Havel, no Sakharov, no *refusniki* - indeed, no democratic opposition movement of any type emerged in Bulgaria until as late as 1988. It was a palace coup, moreover, not a popular revolution which, in November 1989, secured the fall of Zhivkov and his replacement as Party leader and head of state by his foreign minister, Petăr Mladenov. The “power of the people” had not, of course, been wholly lacking in Bulgaria in late 1989, but it was in significant part the consequence, rather than the cause, of the end of the Zhivkov dictatorship, with the largest demonstrations taking place in December and January, not in October and November. Doubts about the popular support for, and democratic legitimacy of, the newly-installed non-communist opposition – uncertainty, that is, as compared with incoming administrations in other East European countries (with the exception of the special case of the “hijacked” revolution in Romania) – undermined, initially at least, the confidence of the new ‘democratic’ leadership and may, indeed, even continue to place a distinctive stamp on Bulgaria’s strivings to establish a post-communist identity.

With regard to integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, Bulgaria – until recently, at least – has lagged far behind in the integrational endeavour, as compared with most Central European former communist states. Striking, for example, is the fact that as late as in 1996, after three rounds of discussions with NATO, Bulgaria

(under Bulgarian Socialist Party rule) concluded that it did not wish to pursue membership – a sharp contrast indeed with the violent hammering on the NATO door by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and even Romania, or with the clamour to join NATO by former Soviet Baltic republics.

On the basis of all this we might be tempted to conclude that Bulgaria is a rather nasty, far-away country of which we know little, and perhaps wish to know even less. But this would be a mistake, for there is some good news from Bulgaria! The return to power of the Union of Democratic Forces in the spring of 1997 heralded a decisive major shift for the better in Bulgarian internal and international politics. For the post-electoral rhetoric about consensus, democracy, reform, transparency, and Euro-Atlantic integration was not merely a matter of extravagant words and high-flown phrases (as might well have been expected), but characterised instead a fresh approach to policy making, signalling new imperatives and new initiatives in both domestic and foreign policy, as subsequent developments have clearly shown. As a result the prospects for Bulgarian security, as this paper will argue, have been enhanced, have recently taken a convincing turn for the better. This claim must, however, be understood in the light of two caveats.

(1) Any discussion of national security issues will inevitably make certain broad assumptions of varying degrees of controversiality – all argument must start somewhere – and this paper is no exception. For example, in the present case, one such assumption (a fairly non-controversial one in many western circles) among many, is that Bulgaria's continued integration into Euro-Atlantic structures (Bulgaria was the first post-communist Balkan state to be admitted to the Council of Europe in May 1992), including NATO – provided, of course, that she meets the conditions outlined in the 1995 NATO Enlargement Study – rather than remaining in a “grey zone”, is a positive development. It follows (on this assumption at least) that if Bulgaria's policy on military reform is seen to be actively preparing the country for integration with the Alliance, and if such preparations are broadly welcomed and encouraged by NATO, then there are grounds for speaking of an improvement, a gain or increment with respect to Bulgaria's national security. The policy initiatives, economic data, military and political developments, and so forth, which constitute the evidence for our contention that Bulgaria is now on track for a somewhat more secure future are to be interpreted against a number of unspecified, fairly non-controversial background assumptions which will be familiar to most Western readers. (It must be emphasised, however, that it is, of course, both possible and proper to challenge the most non-controversial of background assumptions in the light of which we make assessments of national security developments, for “security”, like “freedom” and “democracy”, remains an essentially contested concept).

(2) “Security” is not only a contested notion, it is also a relative concept, for no individual, community, society, nation or state has ever achieved a state of complete or total security. This relative aspect of the concept of (national) security suggests that Oliver Twist-like we can always ask for more, or, to change the figure, like woman's work, security is never done. There is always room for improvement and enhancement, that is to say, no matter how impressive national security developments may appear to be.

Post-Communist Political Developments

As elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, Bulgaria has suffered from a mindless proliferation of political parties since 1989 – some 200 parties have been registered including no fewer than 17 Agrarian Unions – and from the painfully weak and ineffective government resulting from the highly polarised and confrontational style of politics between the major political forces. In what is commonly referred to by Bulgarians as the “bi-polar model” neither the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) (the renamed former BKP) nor the anti-communist Union of Democratic Forces (Sâyuz na demokratichnite sili (SDS)) secured – until the spring of 1997 – enough seats to push through significant legislation, resulting in endless bickering over policies, failure to agree on economic, military, or indeed, any other kind of reform, and, ultimately, parliamentary deadlock. In the first multi-party elections of June 1990, the Bulgarians returned to power with an absolute majority the BSP, ie the very party whose monopoly they had overthrown just seven months earlier in November 1989.

June 1990 Parliamentary Election Results

(Total number of seats in the Grand National Assembly: 400. Voter turnout: 90.6%)
(Combined proportional representation (200 seats) and single-member constituency (200 seats) system.)

Party/Movement	Seats	%-age of the vote
Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)	211	45.6
Union of Democratic Forces (SDS)	144	36.6
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)	23	5.8
Bulgarian Agrarian Party	16	7.8
Fatherland Union	2	
Independent	2	
Social Democratic Party	1	

A pattern of voting was established in the 1990 elections which has dominated post-communist Bulgarian politics ever since: great urban support for the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) with strong residual support for the BSP among the elderly, the poorly-educated and in smaller towns and in the countryside. In late August 1990, public order was seriously threatened by violent clashes in the streets – the Socialist (ie former Communist) Party Headquarters in Sofia was ransacked and set on fire by anti-communist demonstrators, and the newly elected president, the former dissident philosopher, Zhelyu Zhelev, of the SDS, was only with difficulty able to restore order.

The 1991 general election was a very close-run thing. Savage political infighting eventually leading to a 3-way split within the SDS on the very eve of the election resulted in the narrowest of victories for the opposition. Anti-socialist political forces nonetheless hailed it as a turning-point (wrongly, as it happened) whereat Bulgarian socialism had finally been laid to rest.

October 1991 Parliamentary Election Results

(Total number of seats in the new National Assembly: 240. Voter turnout: 79.2%)

Party/Movement	Seats	%-age of the vote
Union of Democratic Forces (SDS)	110	34
Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)	106	33
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)	24	7.5

(All other parties failed to pass the 4% threshold necessary for representation in parliament.)

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (Dvizhenieto za prava i svobodi (DPS)) that had been formed to represent the interests of Bulgaria's ethnic Turks and Pomaks (Slav Bulgarians whose religion and customs are Islamic), and had secured parliamentary representation in the 1990 elections, now held the balance of power in the new Assembly (the Bulgarian nation consists of three peoples: Blues, Reds, and Turks, as the joke had it) – a notion that outraged many Bulgarians (including some SDS supporters), through it was evident that the SDS and the DPS shared a desire to rid the country of its communist inheritance as soon as possible. However, weak government and political impasse, the seriously ailing economy, social dislocation, the huge increase in Mafia-style crime together with the ostentation of those who were growing fat on it – all this provided fertile soil for a nostalgic assessment of the recent political past.

In the December 1994 elections Bulgaria followed a trend in Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia by returning reformed (velvet) communists to power. “We have been elected by the people and govern in its name,” was the message of the BSP, which (with 44% of the vote) won an absolute majority (125 of the 240 parliamentary mandates) under the new, dynamic, young leader, Zhan Videnov. “A restoration of communism!” was the counter-cry of the SDS (with nearly 30% of the votes) from within the still highly polarized Bulgarian political landscape, while the body politic continued to be split between the government and the presidency. It was only with the presidential elections in November 1996 that the left tide in Bulgarian politics began to turn. Having outrun the SDS incumbent, ageing, ex-dissident, philosopher-president Dr Zhelyu Zhelev in primary elections held in June, lawyer Petar Stoyanov was elected president in a landslide 60%-40% victory that many held to signify a major shift in public opinion for real reform and effective transition to a market economy.

December 1994 Parliamentary Election Results

Voter turnout: 75.2%

Party/Movement	Seats	%-age of the vote
Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)	125	44
Union of Democratic Forces (SDS)	69	28
People's Union	18	7
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)	15	6
Bulgarian Business Block	13	5

(All other parties failed to pass the 4% threshold necessary for representation in parliament.)

Meanwhile the BSP had exploited its 1994 election victory to revive a centrally-planned economy, by reintroducing “socialist cooperatives” in agriculture, for example, and to impose direct control over national radio and TV. The 1996 grain

harvest yielded less than the 1939 one and bread-queues became a familiar sight in much of urban Bulgaria. The Bulgarian economy which was said to be “on the verge of cardiac arrest” in late 1989 – in 1990 Bulgaria was the only country in post-revolutionary Central and Eastern Europe to declare a moratorium on foreign debt repayments (until Russia in 1998) - and had continued its downward spiral ever since, began to decline even more rapidly in 1996. A massive devaluation of the Lev in the spring, a crisis in, indeed the collapse of, the banking system resulted in the pauperisation of the people, with average salaries falling to US\$50 per month as compared with a high of \$120 a month in 1993. A sharp fall in public confidence in the government was followed by a winter of discontent – by November average wages had fallen to below \$25 per month. In the wake of the “January events” which included large-scale, violent street demonstrations in which a desperately angry crowd – wages had by then dropped to some \$10-\$15 a month - attempted a quasi-storming of the National Assembly building, and with the smell of civil war hanging in the air, the BSP threw in the towel, agreed to abandon its constitutional right to form a new government after Prime Minister Videnov’s resignation before Christmas, and announced early parliamentary elections to be held in April.

1996/97 Winter of Discontent – Some Economic Data

At the end of 1996 inflation stood at 311%.
 Monthly inflation for February 1997 exceeded 240%.
 Annual inflation (some 30% in 1995) shot up to 2,100% for the period February 1996-February 1997. The Lev was devalued by more than 1500% and the basic rate of interest reached 180%.
 GDP decreased by 11% while unemployment rose to 12%.
 17 banks filed for bankruptcy.
 One billion US dollars left the country; people withdrew 600 million dollars’ worth of deposits from the banks to keep at home.

April 1997 Parliamentary Election Results

Voter turnout: 58%

Party/Movement	Seats	%-age of the votes
United Democratic Forces ⁽¹⁾ (ODS)	137	52
Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)	58	22
Alliance for National Salvation ⁽²⁾	19	7.5
Euroleft ⁽³⁾	14	5.25
Bulgarian Business Block	12	4.95

(All other parties failed to surmount the 4% barrier necessary for representation in parliament.)

- (1) The United Democratic Forces (ODS) is a coalition comprising the Union of Democratic Forces (as the dominant partner), the Democratic Party, the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party.
- (2) The Alliance for National Salvation is a new coalition based on the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) and including Agrarians, Ecologists, Monarchists and Liberals.
- (3) The newly-established Euroleft is a coalition largely composed of reform-minded socialists who quit the BSP.

The Rebirth of Bulgaria

With 52% of the vote, the United Democratic Forces were swept to power having achieved 137 parliamentary mandates, which secured them a majority in the National Assembly that was both absolute and without precedent in post-1989 Bulgarian politics. Bulgaria had “irrevocably made its choice in favour of reform, democracy and European integration,” as President Stoyanov put it to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (no doubt indulging to some extent in euphoric, post-electoral hype), adding that the past few months had put “an end to the policy of simulation – simulation of reform in internal and foreign policy and in the economy.” SDS deputies wanted “to turn the page of pointless confrontation,” said Prime Minister Ivan Kostov in his May address to the inaugural session of the 38th National Assembly, emphasising that a broad national consensus was the only option for Bulgaria’s recovery and salvation. And indeed on 8th May 1997 the National Assembly adopted a National Consensus Declaration proposed by the SDS, and thereby declared its support for the following proposals: (1) the introduction of a currency board; (2) a just distribution of the social cost of reform; (3) the speedy restitution of the ownership of agricultural land; (4) decisive measures against crime, especially organised crime and corruption at all levels of state administration regardless of political colour; (5) the opening of secret files on politicians, senior court officials and administrators in order to neutralise their dependence on the former security service; (6) Bulgaria’s fully-fledged membership of the EU; (7) Bulgaria’s membership of NATO.

As we shall see below, the latest balance sheet with regard to the above proposals is not bad. But the real achievement in 1997 was perhaps this. For the very first time – the January events may have shocked them into it – Bulgarian politicians seemed genuinely to acknowledge the value of a readiness to compromise together with the value of self-restraint (as opposed to a “winner takes all” attitude) – values that are central to the democratic control of political power – which inaugurated a new style of political debate, based on consensus and informed by Bulgaria’s national interest, that replaced the confrontational model that had dominated Bulgarian politics since 1990.

Post-communist Bulgarian Security and the New National Security Concept (Summary and Comment)

It was the “San Stefano syndrome” which informed Bulgaria’s understanding of national security during the period following the country’s liberation from the Turkish yoke in 1878 until the communist seizure of power in 1944. The dream of restoring the borders of the all-too-short-lived San Stefano Treaty “Big Bulgaria” (March 1878) which encompassed all ethnically Bulgarian territories (and was dismembered by the Congress of Berlin in July 1878), inspired Bulgaria to fight four wars – the First and Second Balkan Wars (1912/1913) and the First and Second World Wars – all of which ended in catastrophe, humiliation, misery and defeat. During the communist period (1944-1989), “The Soviet Union’s Most Loyal Ally whose clock was set on Moscow time” was only too willing to identify national security with the systemic security of the Moscow-led association of Warsaw Treaty states united by a common ideology. The Kremlin imposed an obligation upon each of the member states to defend and strengthen the ideological system of real existing socialism, with no regard for intrinsic considerations of national security

per se. With the collapse of the USSR, Warsaw Pact, and Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, Bulgaria lost its allies, the protective Soviet umbrella, indeed all guarantees for its security - and this in a much troubled and highly volatile region of the world.

Moreover, Bulgaria's unavoidable and pressing quest for security was undertaken at a time when security questions were becoming ever more complicated as individual states and the international community struggled to adjust to the post-communist New World Order. While the consideration of military force clearly remains the core issue in any serious strategic assessment of security relationships, military threats to a state's political or territorial integrity in the post-communist era have increasingly been accompanied by economic, social, demographic, ethnic and environmental challenges.

Bulgaria's new National Security Concept, adopted by the National Assembly in April 1998 by more than three-quarters of the deputies (see *Dărzhaven vestnik*, 22 April 1998, pp 1-5) is sensible of these complexities. The document contains 57 paragraphs and consists of a brief introduction followed by sections on the new realities, general provisions, principles of national security, priorities and factors of national security, and the organization and functions of the national security system. A partial summary of the national security concept follows with analysis and comment. Certain topics (crime, for example) feature on more than one occasion in the document (both in the new realities and in the priorities and factors of national security sections), but are addressed only the once. Further comment is offered later in this paper in separate sections on military developments, ethnic issues, and Bulgaria, Kosovo and the Balkan powder-keg.

The goal of Bulgarian national security is to become firmly rooted in the Euro-Atlantic and European collective security system (NATO, EU, WEU, OSCE); if Bulgaria were to remain isolated from the global integration process, this would in itself constitute a threat to the security of Bulgarian citizens, society and state. It is evident that there is as yet no fully effective collective security system in continental Europe, as conflicts in former Yugoslavia have shown. Indeed, there exists a "grey zone" consisting of countries that are partially or totally excluded from the integration process. This zone is characterised by social insecurity, a decline in living standards and the emergence of international criminal networks. These criminal groups, specialised in organised violence, smuggling, and trafficking of people, drugs and arms, constitute a real threat to the fragile democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. The Balkans are an area of conflict and tension in Europe which pose serious risks for Bulgaria's national security.

[Comment: If NATO membership was a controversial issue – at least until spring 1997 – European integration has remained a priority foreign policy goal from 1990 onwards when the then European Community and Bulgaria signed a Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Nonetheless, it seems clear that for much of the transition period – during the “largely wasted” or “lost” years – Bulgarian politicians accomplished little more than endless rhapsodizing over the perceived benefits of Euro-integration, rather than actually achieving the concrete reforms that might make such integration possible. In recent months, however, Euro-Atlantic assessment of Bulgaria's integrational endeavours has struck a more positive note. In April 1998, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana found that Bulgaria had “radically changed” with “remarkable progress” having been made in economic and military reform; he described Bulgaria as a “generator of stability in the region.” In

October, European Commission President Jacques Santer praised Bulgaria for “considerable progress in the past year” with regard to preparations for accession to the EU. Later in the same month Robin Cook was “impressed by the progress made by Bulgaria in reforming its economy and state administration;” he described the country as a “quality applicant for EU membership.” Austrian Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schüssel, president of the European Union Council of Foreign Ministers, spoke of the “positive contribution of Bulgaria to strengthening regional stability in southeastern Europe” and of the “enormous progress” the country had made in areas concerning its relations with the EU, eg structural reform, price liberalization, and the fight against corruption and organized crime. Such tributes – perhaps more a matter of encouragement, rather than appraisal – could be multiplied; they reflect Bulgaria’s determination and clear political will to secure fully-fledged membership of the EU and NATO.]

Unwillingness to undertake radical reform blocked the transition to democracy and the market economy, to Euro-Atlantic and European integration. Against a background of political demagoguery, there occurred a catastrophic decline in the living standards of the population. This led to a serious demographic crisis which was exacerbated by an unprecedentedly high degree of emigration. Moreover, there was a decrease in longevity and the birth-rate dropped sharply, which created a danger for the future survival of the Bulgarian nation.

[Comment:

The Demographic Crisis			
Since 1989, 600,000 Bulgarians – most of them young, highly-skilled and well educated – have left the country to seek a better life elsewhere.			
Birthrates, Deathrates and Population Change			
Year	Births per 100,000	Deaths per 100,000	Increase/Decrease per 100,000
1950	25.2	10.2	15.0
1960	17.8	8.1	9.7
1970	16.3	9.1	7.2
1980	14.5	11.1	3.4
1990	12.1	12.5	-0.4
1991	11.1	12.8	-1.7
1992	10.4	12.6	-2.2
1993	9.9	12.9	-3.0
1994	9.4	13.2	-3.8
1995	8.6	13.6	-5.0
1996	8.6	14.0	-5.4
1997	7.7		

From a high of more than 8.9 million in 1985, the Bulgarian population (following the forced, mass exodus of more than 300,000 ethnic Turks in 1989) fell to 8.3 million at the end of 1996, and is projected to decline to 8 million by the year 2000, to 7.5 million by 2010, and to as few as 6.8 million by 2020. Given the rise in the average age of the population, there are already fears that the national demographic base will be unable to deliver the manpower that will be required even by the much smaller army envisaged under current plans for reform. Bulgaria’s declining birth-rates, moreover, are not so strongly marked among the Roma and the ethnic Turks. The proportion of these minority groups in the population at large is therefore likely to increase, which may, though need not be, a cause of instability.]

Three major factors determine Bulgaria's national security:

- (1) the degree of development and the resources of the country;*
- (2) the effectiveness of its foreign and domestic policy;*
- (3) the participation of Bulgaria in collective systems of security and economic development.*

The Republic of Bulgaria does not make any territorial claims on any other state, nor does it recognise any such claims on its territory. This principle eliminates longstanding tensions in the region, while not creating any new regional tensions, and thus reaffirms Bulgaria's role as a source of security. Bulgaria seeks security in Southeastern Europe and is against any military and political unions in the Balkans.

The process of integration into NATO and the EU has a positive influence upon Bulgarian security. However, only full membership in these institutions will provide complete guarantees for Bulgaria's security – this is Bulgaria's national priority.

[Comment: The wholesale denunciation of irredentism assumes a strongly ritual character in official pronouncements on security matters in post-communist states. This is, of course, readily understandable given the historical experience of the region in conjunction with a wholly commendable enthusiasm for a return to the “civilized” values of (Western) Europe. In Bulgaria's case, moreover, ritualistic pronouncement has thus far been underpinned by the absence of any outwardly aggressive chauvinism or xenophobia. According to Gallup polls, more than two-thirds of the population (the highest level in Balkan states) did not feel threatened by any neighbouring country (in 1993); 77% accepted the present-day state borders and 70% opined that Bulgaria should make no territorial claims against its neighbours (in 1996).

Bulgaria has indeed refrained from supporting or joining any of the various axes or alliances that have been mooted in the Balkans – eg the “Orthodox axis” comprising Romania, Serbia and Greece as contrasted with an “Islamic axis” consisting of Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo and Turkey – but has instead sought to develop good relations with all its neighbours.

As surveys have consistently revealed, throughout the transition period Bulgarian public opinion sees no alternative to the EU. Opinion polls conducted shortly after the April 1997 elections showed that 43% of Bulgarians supported joining NATO, with 19% opposed.]

The successful integration of Bulgaria into Euro-Atlantic and European security structures depends on the progress achieved in the peace-building process in Southeastern Europe and is retarded by military conflict and destabilisation in neighbouring countries. Hence the need for Bulgaria to have a very proactive foreign policy aimed at strengthening peace in the Balkans. This policy is the most important element in the strategy for the preventive defence of Bulgarian interests.

Bulgaria's own security is determined by the degree to which the country projects security on to neighbouring countries. Consequently, Bulgaria's regional initiatives are aimed at greater mutual confidence in the political-military field to support the strengthening of security and stability in the Balkans.

[Comment: Bulgaria has indeed striven to conduct a proactive foreign policy that seeks to project security on to neighbouring countries and to strengthen peace. The aim of the October 1997 Sofia Defence Ministerial was to agree on initiatives that would accelerate Balkan states' integration into Euro-Atlantic security structures by promoting regional cooperation and improving confidence and security building measures in southeastern Europe; such meetings, moreover, were to become an annual event. One concrete outcome of the September 1998 Skopje Ministerial is the establishment of a 2,000 strong multinational peace-keeping force for southeastern Europe, operating within the UN mandate, headquartered (for four years) in the Bulgarian city of Plovdiv, and to be in operational readiness by mid-1999. Bulgaria regards the creation of these forces, comprising Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Romanian and Turkish troops, as evidence of the political will for military cooperation, as a concrete element of military reform and of the preparations for accession to NATO, and as a practical way of solving security issues as a member of the democratic international community. The Turkish Defence Minister even suggested that the peace-keeping force might put an end to "Balkanism" (in the negative sense of the word) in the Balkans!]

It was Bulgaria that launched the initiative that led to the Joint Declaration by Balkan ministers of foreign affairs on the Kosovo crisis in March 1998. The Joint Declaration – which called for greater autonomy for Kosovo within the existing borders of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and for the deployment of international monitors in Kosovo as a means of preventive diplomacy – established a regional political framework for participation in the solution of the Kosovo conflict, while also enhancing transparency with regard to the interests of the major regional players.]

The economic factor is decisive for the guarantee of national security. Only stabilisation and growth of the Bulgarian economy will be able to satisfy the interests of Bulgarian citizens, society and state, to solve problems associated with a deficiency of resources, and to improve living standards and enhance the degree of social protection.

[Comment: Following the Declaration on National Consensus in May, Bulgaria introduced a currency board on 1 July 1997, whereby the Lev was pegged at 1,000 to the German mark. Economists agree that some 15 months after its introduction the board is an unqualified success as far as (short-term) macro-economic indicators are concerned. Annual inflation for 1998 is projected to be 9%, 7.4% - 6.3% for the end of 1999, 6.1% at the end of 2000, and 5.4% by the end of 2001 – as recently as August 1997 the monthly inflation rate was 5.5%. Consumer prices have fallen steadily in recent months, as has unemployment. The fixed exchange rate has restored international confidence in the Lev and the Bulgarian National Bank's foreign reserves increased from US\$381 million in January 1997 to US\$2.9 billion in June 1998. GDP growth for 1998 is projected at 4%, for 1999 at 4.5%, for 2000 at 4.8%, and at 5.1% for 2001. The average monthly wage was US\$111 in June 1998 (the highest since April 1996), though still well below wages in Central Europe and below an earlier peak of US\$128 in September 1993. There was a major increase in foreign direct investment in 1997 to US\$498 million, as compared with US\$109 million in 1996.]

The significance of Bulgaria's economy for national security and for stable development depends on the capability for development of its own infrastructure as

an important connecting link between European countries and the new markets in the Black Sea-Caucasian region, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Strategic intercontinental transport, communication and energy corridors which are vital for national and European security pass through the territory of Bulgaria. The country's contribution to global and European security will depend on the establishment of these channels, and the transformation of the country into a Balkan communications and energy centre.

The reaffirmation of Bulgaria as an important component of European and regional security depends on the re-establishment of the lost position of Bulgarian manufacturers and tradesmen in traditional markets, especially in the strategic market of the Commonwealth of Independent States, on the development of joint ventures and cooperation with leading European manufacturers, as well as on ensuring the energy independence of the country.

[Comment: With only other Balkan states as neighbours, Bulgaria's geographical location in southeastern Europe makes it a crossroads for transport, communications, infrastructure and energy links between East and West, North and South. It seems that Bulgaria fully understands that "trade, transport and the movement of goods are the essence of economic development," as Richard Schifter puts it, as special adviser to the US secretary of state for Southeastern Europe and architect of the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI). Bulgaria is a member of the 11 country Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organization, has earned praise from the EU for actively seeking to join TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia – a latter-day version of the Silk Road) – President Stoyanov attended the September 1998 Baku TRACECA international conference – has sought to strengthen its diplomatic presence in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and participates fully in SECI infrastructural development projects, eg the opening of new Bulgarian-Turkish and Bulgarian-Greek border-crossing points, the standardization of border-crossing procedures and a new rail link between Bulgaria and Macedonia.

Given Bulgaria's all but complete reliance on Russian energy resources, the "gas wars", when the Russian Gazprom threatened to cut off supplies and the Bulgarian government responded that it would suspend the flow of Russian gas through Bulgaria to third parties, highlighted a particularly bad patch in Bulgaria's relations with Russia (from April 1997 to March 1998.) The energy war now appears to be over. However, the stakes in energy transfer markets will remain very high, and conflict over energy supplies could easily erupt again. The August 1998 meeting between the presidents of Bulgaria and Russia established conditions for better trading relations between the two countries. But, as some Central and Eastern European countries know to their cost, energy dependency on Russia makes government especially vulnerable to pressure from Moscow and can severely limit any number of policy options. Bulgaria would be well advised to consider ways to diversify its supplies of energy.]

The armed forces and the security services are the principal guarantors of national security. Their effectiveness depends on the resources allocated to them, on the strength and stability of the legislation upon which their activity is based, on motivation of the human factor, as well as on the availability and precision of information concerning threats and dangers.

A Military Doctrine is being elaborated on the basis of this Concept and the Law on Defence and Armed Forces. This will provide the framework within which reform and modernisation of Bulgaria's armed forces is undertaken.

[Comment: Bulgaria already has a military doctrine which was adopted in the absence of a national security concept in 1994. The Introduction to the Military Doctrine seeks to relate – albeit very briefly – military security to the broader concerns of national security in general, but it is by no means clear that the doctrine was formulated primarily on the basis of foreign and domestic policy considerations, in addition to the obvious military input. However the final section of the document states: “The military doctrine is an open system... Its provisions are periodically redefined in accordance with the changes in the military political situation and the adoption of new strategic concepts.” The revised military doctrine is yet to appear.]

Security guarantees for the country are reinforced through the realisation of initiatives to increase political-military confidence in the region, and through the successful implementation of the Partnership for Peace programme for integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

[Comment: In 1996, Bulgaria established in Karlovo a specialized training centre to train troops for participation in international peace-keeping operations and for joint exercises within the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. Bulgaria was the eighth state to join NATO's PfP in February 1994, but Sofia did not strive – initially at least – to be an especially enthusiastic, or generous, member of the partnership. Indeed, despite her involvement in UNTAC (Cambodia), UNOMA (Angola), and UNAVEM (Tajikistan), Bulgaria's participation in international peace-keeping operations has been limited in comparison with other partners. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania dispatched battalion-sized units to IFOR/SFOR from January 1996, while Bulgaria's first contribution was an engineer platoon that was not deployed until mid-1997. A further transport platoon was assigned to SFOR in summer 1998.]

The judicial branch of government instils respect for the laws of the country by punishing those who break the law through an effective and just judicial process. The long-term guarantee of the national interest requires development of legislation and its harmonisation with the norms of the European Union.

The effective functioning of the juridical branch presupposes reform and modernisation of the judicial organs on the basis of a unified strategy for combating crime and corruption. The national interest requires there to be a national consensus on the measures, policies and resources to be allocated to the fight against crime. The state strategy for combating crime and corruption is a further development of this Concept in the field of internal security.

[Comment: There is a crisis of legality in Bulgaria and the rule of law does not function properly. Indeed, the distinction between what is legal and what is illegal, between those who enforce law and those who break it is all too often in practice a distinction without a difference. State authorities merge with criminal groupings, insurance companies become protection rackets, police are afraid of criminals, not vice versa, banks rob people of their savings, and the country is described as a kleptocracy. Drug-trafficking, money laundering, and the pirated manufacture of compact discs are Bulgarian specialities.

A National Service for Organized Crime Control and a National Drugs Council have recently been established, a new bill against money laundering was approved in April 1998, and Bulgaria has signed cooperation agreements on combating crime with Turkey, Romania and Russia. However, the fight against organized crime is proving to be much harder than expected, and lawlessness will continue to jeopardize the success of Bulgaria's transition to the market and democracy.]

Environmental factors – the restoration and protection of Bulgaria's natural environment – are important for national security. The national interest is realised when there is an optimum balance between the protection of nature and water resources and the requirement to exploit natural resources for reasons of national development.

[Comment: In Bulgaria, green issues constituted a principal focus for dissent in the dying days of the Zhivkov regime and many of those who were active in the environmental movement entered politics after 1989. But the ensuing lost years of economic decline have not favoured environmental policy making. The EU continues to express concern about the safety of the nuclear power plant at Kozloduy – a “hot issue” – and Bulgarian parliamentarians still refuse to accept the recommendations for closure of the Kozloduy reactors. Water leaks from a uranium mine near Sofia and enters water-courses, resulting in pollution levels that are 100 times higher than the safety norms.]

According to the Constitution, the President, the National Assembly and the Council of Ministers have responsibilities with regard to national security. The President chairs the National Security Advisory Council, the status of which is defined by law. The National Assembly enacts the legislation that provides the legal foundations for the national security system. It exercises control over the executive power by means of its permanent National Security Committee and its permanent Committee on Foreign Policy and Integration. The Council of Ministers makes an annual assessment of the level of protection of the national interest, and allocates national resources, as appropriate, to enhance that level. The Council of Ministers is assisted by a Security Council comprising the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of the Interior, their deputies, the Chief of the General Staff of the Bulgarian Army, and the Chiefs of the Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence organs. The Security Council

- (1) summarises, analyses and draws conclusions from all available information regarding risks to national security;*
- (2) plans concrete measures for the neutralisation of threats and proposes solutions in a crisis;*
- (3) offers the Council of Ministers an annual report on national security.*

[Comment: It was not possible to form the Security Council until late September because the opposition challenged the initiative and it was necessary to wait for a pronouncement by the constitutional court.]
Civilian control over state policy on national security and over the bodies implementing it is guaranteed by the Constitution and the laws of the country.

Military Developments, The Bulgarian Army and NATO

All has not been well in the Bulgarian Army. Prime Minister Ivan Kostov has joked that Bulgaria contributes to peace and stability in the Balkans by not being able to threaten any of its neighbours! Articles with titles like “Our Navy is the weakest in the Balkans”, “We are destroying our combat aviation without a war”, “Live flesh to be cut away from the army in 1997”, “Bulgarian army fleeced by thieves and fraudsters” have been a familiar feature of the military press. Commentators have frequently spoken of the “lost years” (ie from 1989 to April 1997) during which defence policy and military development was chaotic and contradictory, reflecting the antagonistic divide along BSP-SDS lines – a period during which little was achieved with regard to substantive military reform.

In 1990, moves to depoliticise the military were on the whole welcomed – service personnel were not permitted to hold party membership or to attend political meetings in uniform, while those officers who wanted to remain active in politics were required by law to resign. Between 1990 and 1994 some 6,000 officers quit the armed forces, but this rather large number clearly included many serving officers who took advantage of the law to shorten their period of military service. Following the 1991 elections under the new Constitution, Dimitŭr Ludzhev became Bulgaria’s first civilian Defence Minister – all subsequent Ministers of Defence have also been civilians – and set about reorganising the Ministry, appointing civilians to posts ordinarily held by serving officers.

According to the 1991 Constitution, Bulgaria’s directly elected president is commander-in-chief of the armed forces and shares direction and control of the military with the cabinet. A number of episodes have tested the authority of the executive and in each case the principle of the primacy of the civil power – and the constitutional arrangements for the exercise of that power – has been successfully confirmed. In 1994 there was a violent public disagreement between Defence Minister Alexandrov and Chief of the General Staff General Petrov over the government’s policy of enforcing rigorously the mandatory retirement age at fifty for career officers. Backed by the BSP, Petrov stated publicly that this was an attempt to purge the officer corps on political grounds, which degraded Bulgaria’s defence capability. President Zhelev dismissed Petrov, replacing him with General Totomirov (Toto the Iron Hand who had served for 36 years). Following its election victory in spring 1997, the ODS amended the Law on National Defence (1) to state explicitly that the Chief of the General Staff is subordinate to the Defence Minister and (2) to require that the Chief of the General Staff be nominated by the Defence Minister. General Totomirov was, in turn, relieved as Chief of the General Staff in June 1997 and replaced with Air Force Colonel-General Mikho Mikhov. The latter change was justified in terms of the principle of rotation, but there was clearly rather more to it than that. As *Demokratiya*, the government coalition party daily, editorialised: “The change of guard at the top of the army is a kind of signal that shows the intentions of the cabinet and the head of state to implement a radical change in the Bulgarian Army in line with our striving to join NATO and the Euro-Atlantic structures as a full member, for the post is being taken over by a professional air force man with modern European thinking. This means that our armed forces ... will also begin to think and work according to European standards.”

In June 1997 Defence Minister Georgi Ananiev announced the start of the long-awaited military reform “over which we have been dragging our feet for years”. He noted that there was no direct military threat against Bulgaria and that Bulgaria’s bid to join NATO had received considerable support from the adjacent states like

Greece and Turkey (already NATO members) and Romania (a candidate for NATO membership) that possessed the three largest armies of all neighbouring states. This made it possible to switch part of the effort regarding the military component of national security to the field of military-political contacts and military cooperation, which to some extent relieved pressures on the budget thus freeing up resources for military reform.

In March 1998 when Major-General Marin, commander of the missile and artillery troops, openly criticised military reform and stated he would not cooperate with its implementation, President Stoyanov discharged him from his post within days.

From January 1998 there was a further reduction in the length of conscript service from eighteen months to one year (in 1995 the term had been reduced from two years to eighteen months). University graduates serve only nine months. In 1992 the Bulgarian army had some 100,000 men under arms; this had only fallen to 93,000 by the beginning of 1998. This reduction in force levels of less than 10% contrasts sharply with the cuts in personnel of about 50% which the Czech, Hungarian and Polish armies have been able to achieve. The reform programme envisages further reductions to 75,000 by 2001 and to 65,000 maximum by 2010. There are plans to make the army more professional by moving to a system of mixed manning (conscript and career soldiers), but the take-up of long-term service contracts by suitable personnel has thus far been rather disappointing. From January 1999, young men will be able to choose between military and alternative national service (which is twice as long as the military variety).

Army reform provides for the establishment, by 1999, of Rapid Reaction Forces of up to three brigades headquartered in Plovdiv, and Defence Forces with four zones of responsibility, two in the north and two in the south of the country, comprising two Army Corps. During the same period the Bulgarian Marines are also to be re-established.

Structural reform in the Air Force has led to the introduction of a corps and brigade-type organisation in place of the former division and regimental structures. Less than 50% of Bulgarian Air Force equipment is serviceable, according to Lieutenant-General Stefan Popov, Chief of the Air Staff and Commander of the Air Force. 30% of the 235 combat aircraft will have to be mothballed. In the longer term there are plans to switch to Western equipment, starting with light helicopters and transport aircraft. Bulgaria can no longer afford to maintain all eleven air-force bases countrywide and four of them are to close as part of the defence reform.

Reform in the Navy is to be carried out in three stages by 2010. The end of 1997 saw the close-down of the Reserve Officers' School and cuts in expenditure on electricity, communications, etc. 52 officers were laid off. The second stage will see the formation of a battalion of marines and the reorganisation of the hydrographic service. The third stage from 2001-2010 envisages a rearmament of the Navy in line with the shipbuilding programme that has already been formulated. The Bulgarian Navy is about half the size of those of neighbouring states. In 1997 the Turkish Navy had 190 fighting ships and patrol craft, while Greece had 140 ships and Romania 170. By way of contrast, the Bulgarian Navy is in the same league as Yugoslavia, which has some 90 ships and patrol craft.

Bulgarian Army (Land Forces and Air and Air Defence Forces) Overall Holdings as of January 1998	
Men	92955
Tanks	1475 (1042 T-55; 433 T-72)
Armoured Combat Vehicles	1985 (100 BMP-1; 114 BMP-23; 758 BTR-60; 1013 MT-LB)
Artillery	1744 (686 2S1; 206 D-20; 195 M-30; 72 M-46; 4SM-4-I; 222 BM-21; 359 Tundzha (Mortar))
Combat Aircraft	234 (89 MiG-21; 64 MiG-23; 21 MiG-29; 21 SU-22; 39 SU-25)
Attack Helicopters	43 Mi-24

Like most post-communist armed forces, the Bulgarian Army has its fair share of problems with poor discipline, “bullying”, crime and corruption, alcohol and drug abuse, housing and social support. In December 1997 a dozen generals and senior officers in the rear support services were punished for serious violations in dispensing state funds, thefts from military stores, and other offences. However, in mid-1998, the Provost Marshal General was able to report that crime in the Bulgarian Army had been halved. Between January and May 1998 crimes totalled 594, while 1,229 crimes had been recorded for the same period a year earlier. Going AWOL accounts for 32% of all incidents. Thefts account for 25% of all crimes. The clear-up rate in the army is 84%, the Provost Marshal General said. The number of drug addicts, alcoholics and suicides is on the rise, according to a report made in August 1998, though the number of registered cases of bullying had decreased from 330 in 1997 to 280.

Of all the post-communist states in Eastern Europe, Bulgaria showed the least inclination to seek NATO membership – at least until spring 1997 when the new government became hyperactive in its bid for second wave candidacy. Indeed, on the eve of the July NATO Summit in Madrid Foreign Minister Nadezhda Mikhailova predicted that there would be four winners, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, which would be invited to join the alliance – and Bulgaria! However, given the seven lost years and the unpreparedness of the country for integration with NATO, the Madrid Summit, in the event, simply ignored Bulgaria – there was no mention of the country even as a candidate for a second wave of future expansion. But the Madrid rejection has led to a growing awareness that Bulgaria’s membership in NATO is something that has to be earned through military reform, and that such reform can be effected probably only at considerable economic and social cost, so joining the NATO club is clearly a matter for the distant rather than the near future.

Bulgaria’s Ethnic Minorities

The following table gives data for ethnic groups in Bulgaria according to the census conducted in December 1992.

Ethnic Groups	Number	Percentage of Population
Bulgarian	7,271,185	85.67
Turk	800,052	9.43
Roma	13,396	3.69
Russian	17,139	0.20
Armenian	13,677	0.16
Vlach	5,159	0.06
Karakachan	5,144	0.06
Greek	4,930	0.06
Tatar	4,515	0.05
Jewish	3,461	0.04
Other (approx 20 groups)	48,649	0.57
Total	8,487,317	100.00

Pomaks, estimated to number some 270,000 are included in the Bulgarian and Turkish groups.

The ethnic Turks who are concentrated in the eastern Rhodope mountains near the Turkish border and in northeastern Bulgaria are the country's largest minority. However, the figure of 800,052 given in the census is inflated both by a number of the Pomaks and by Roma who identified themselves as Turks. The next largest group is the Roma who have the lowest status of all Bulgarian ethnic groups. At 13,396 they are almost certainly under-reported in the census and demographic specialists claim the real number is nearer 600,000. The third largest minority is the Pomaks, Slav Bulgarian-speaking Muslims who converted to Islam under the Ottoman regime, who presently live in compact communities in the Rhodopes in south-western and southern Bulgarian, and number, according to unofficial estimates, between 250,000 and 270,000. The Pomaks do not feature as a separate ethnic group in the census, but are included in the Bulgarian and Turkish groups, because Bulgaria regards them not as a minority per se, but simply as Bulgarians who practice Islam, unlike the Orthodox majority of the population.

Bulgaria differs from many other Central and Eastern European countries in that following the collapse of communism there have been no significant expressions of malign radical nationalism. Attempts to restore the rights and property of Turks and Pomaks were among the first manifestations of democracy in Bulgaria and, as we have seen, the Turkish DPS became the third political force in the National Assembly. There has been, it must be said, the occasional ugly nationalist backlash, as in the anti-Turkish demonstrations of 1990, but relations with Turkey have steadily improved throughout the transition period – President Stoyanov offered a formal apology in Ankara in July 1997 for the suffering of Bulgarian Turks during the Revival Process – to the point where Bulgarian Turks, according to Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, now form a bridge that links the two countries. Bulgaria has agreed to provide pensions for Bulgarian immigrants in Turkey, the reunion of divided families has been hailed as a breakthrough in bilateral relations, the delimitation of the Bulgarian–Turkish border along the Rezovska river has been settled, and Turkey has stepped up investment in Bulgaria and supports her bid to join NATO.

Ivan Kostov's government is the first since 1989 to undertake concrete measures to integrate minorities and hopes to adopt a national programme for the integration of Roma by the end of 1998. Meanwhile, the government sent a message of congratulation to the first national congress of the Kupate (Together) Romany Social

Union and has replaced one of its MPs with Asen Khristov, who became the only Romany deputy in parliament.

The Bulgarian constitution makes no reference to ethnic Bulgarians who are not citizens and who do not live within the country's borders (cf Hungary and Macedonia). In Bulgaria ultranationalistic political parties are marginal and without significant following (cf Romania and Slovakia).

Bulgaria, The Macedonian Question, Kosovo and the Balkan Powder-Keg

As stated above, Bulgaria went to war four times this century in order to win back *terra irredenta*, much of which presently forms part of the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. It is a longstanding Bulgarian claim that the Slavophone population of Macedonia has no distinctive national identity, speaks a Bulgarian dialect, and is, in reality, Bulgarian. In the Socialist Republic of Macedonia within the (now defunct) second Yugoslavia, language planners created an official written Macedonian language in order to foster the idea of a Macedonian national identity. The new standard was based on Macedonian dialects that resembled literary Bulgarian and from the start the Yugoslavs maintained that Macedonian was a language distinct from Bulgarian – a claim that Bulgaria has vigorously disputed ever since. Ethnic Albanians were by far the largest minority in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia and language featured prominently in the Macedonian authorities' campaign against Albanian nationalism in the 1980s. Albanian names for individuals, cities and towns were banned, teachers were sacked for not insisting on the use of Macedonian, and legislation was introduced which severely reduced the number of Albanians who were able to attend schools in which Albanian was the language of instruction. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) became independent following a referendum in September 1991. Bulgaria recognises FYROM as a sovereign state, but not as a nation, and nor does it recognise Macedonian as a language. President Kiro Gligorov of Macedonia urges that "every nation has the right to give the language it speaks its own name", while Bulgarian diplomats, following talks with their Macedonian counterparts, continue to report that they have spoken "in our language".

Tensions in Bulgarian-Macedonian relations are never far below the surface. What may have been a careless remark by US diplomat Richard Holbrooke - "Bulgaria may decide to grab a piece of Macedonia" – caused outrage in Sofia. President Gligorov's remark that "renewed great-state ambitions of neighbouring states [ie Bulgaria] are the greatest danger for the security and sovereignty of the Republic of Macedonia" was held in Sofia to be a case of playing the "Bulgarian card" in the old Tito manner as a diversion. In August 1998, according to the Macedonian Information Centre Newsletter, the Bulgarian authorities prevented Macedonians from marking the 85th anniversary of the division of Macedonia after the Balkan wars.

With regard to the situation in Kosovo, many observers and analysts agree with the sentiments expressed in August by President Gligorov: "The possible spillover of the conflict will not involve only Macedonia and Albania, but also the other countries in the region, including two NATO forces. This would imply the placing of all of Southeastern Europe in a zone of instability and stop the democratic process. This Balkan war ... will further regress the Balkans ... Thus it is necessary to use the

small room we have left for diplomatic action, for calming down the situation, in which the international community has a significant role and duty.”

Diplomatic action, indeed limited military deployment – in this case the Holbrooke agreement, OSCE compliance verifiers in Kosovo, and the NATO extraction force along the Macedonian border – such measures are no more likely to make for a quick fix for the Kosovo crisis than Dayton has achieved a rapid settlement of the debacle in Bosnia. But if the news is bad for Kosovo, there are perhaps some encouraging prospects for increasing stability in Macedonia. Relations between Greece and Macedonia have never been better; Macedonia’s autumn parliamentary elections ushered in a government that unites Macedonian and Albanian nationalists; and Bulgaria’s premier hopes for a “new chapter” in relations with Macedonia.

Concluding Note

Unlike other Central and Eastern European countries, Bulgaria got off to a slow and uncertain start following her revolution, or rather palace coup in 1989: there were indeed seven lost years. However, the last eighteen months have seen a more tolerant, more prosperous nation moving – with renewed hope and with ever greater confidence – closer to Europe. There are indeed good grounds for optimism and hope that Bulgaria is now firmly on course for a more secure future.