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Bulgaria: A Traditional Vassal State Serves a New Warlike Master

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The US... supported military deployments to Iraq from long-established US and Nato bases in Europe. But the US also set up temporary bases in other parts of Europe - in countries such as Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. These nations will soon be the newest members of Nato. Each has recent memories of life under a repressive regime and each was a stalwart and vocal member of the coalition against Iraq... [T]hese countries want US forces. In welcome contrast to recent sentiment in Germany and France, which for decades has refused to have US troops on its soil, countries such as Romania and Bulgaria have invited them in. Local opinion polls show that the hospitality of these governments reflects the will of their people... [I]t would be cost-effective. The newly free economies of Europe are embracing economic freedom with zeal but operations are less expensive there. A garrison near Bucharest would cost less than one near Bonn.

~ US Sen. George Allen (R-VA), *Financial Times*, May 6th, 2003.

INTRO: NATO AND "NEW EUROPE"

Among the seven ex-Communist countries gearing up to join the Cold War-era NATO alliance next year is Bulgaria, which thrust itself into the international limelight when it sided with the US, Britain and Spain on the UN Security Council in February, becoming one of only four members to back war on Iraq. Bulgaria's foreign policy stance again identified the ex-Warsaw Pact state with "vassalage": Western observers used to call Bulgaria the "16th republic" of the USSR for its slavish obedience to the Kremlin. Now, Bulgaria's post-Communist government is demonstrating the same fealty to Washington it once showed to Moscow.

As Sen. Allen indicates, the people of Bulgaria want to shoulder part of the burden of defending the free world. But is the expansion of the US-led armed camp a product of true democratic will? Could it be that, the ever-widening "community of democracies" constituting US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's "New Europe" is actually leaving democracy and the rule of law out in the cold? George Allen's "local opinion polls" notwithstanding, overall

public attitude in each NATO candidate state toward America's most recent military adventure have been notoriously negative. This may not be proof of low public esteem for NATO per se, but since NATO's agenda now includes operations in far-flung places such as Afghanistan that cannot realistically threaten the states of New Europe, it is logical to conclude that public enthusiasm for what NATO may entail for the ex-Warsaw Pact countries' legions of conscripts is not high.

The pact offers no real material advantages to ordinary citizens. NATO member Poland's recent purchase of forty-eight fighter aircraft from US defense giant Lockheed Martin at a cost of over \$3.5 billion - at a time when unemployment is at a record high and medicine is prohibitively expensive - should strike the outside observer as a grotesque waste of public resources. The Polish government went ahead with the purchase in keeping with the NATO requirement that two percent of its GDP be spent on military "upgrades," to the great benefit of the US defense sector and the furtherance of wars against states that pose no clear threat to America. It justified this with "offsetting" US investments in high technology production, opting for guns over much-sought-after butter.

As the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported on May 2:

The leaders of the US Department of Defense are ardent supporters of the idea of transferring bases to the East. According to Rumsfeld and his aides, establishing bases on the territories of new NATO member states will not only mean a substantial reduction of costs, it will also enhance the Americans' mobility and win them a circle of loyal allies in this part of the world. Our [Pentagon] interlocutor did not conceal the fact that the Pentagon does not want US bases to continue to earn Germany millions of dollars now that Berlin does not support US policy on Iraq. "Some of our bases are bound to stay in Germany. Nevertheless, I think that our funds should go more and more often to the countries that stood and continue to stand at our side."

This passage and events over the past decade make clear that NATO's primary purpose is neither to be a military counterweight to an opposing armed camp, nor to offer collective security against outside aggressors. It proved this during the 1999 war against Yugoslavia, a state that had attacked no other country. Instead, NATO is a "club" of governments facilitating continued arms deals, enrichment of the military-industrial complex, and kickbacks to politicians at the expense of civilian economies. While the British government was the most culpable in Europe among those supporting the US war of aggression, giving the War Party in Washington at least one ally on the UN Security Council, the corrupt, money-hungry political elites in Rumsfeld's "New Europe" are a big part of the problem.

Bulgaria's government will soon seize its "historic opportunity" to join NATO under conditions of shrinking population, wide-scale poverty, and daily allegations corruption and connections to organized crime at the highest levels of state. As this is written, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Pasi is in the United States, meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell and other US officials to consolidate the new "friendship." In March, I traveled to Bulgaria to see what this much-touted "stalwart and vocal member of the coalition against Iraq" with "memories of life under a repressive regime" - this stellar new democracy "embracing economic freedom with zeal" - actually looks like.

A SORRY OUTPOST OF EMPIRE

After the most recent Bulgarian parliamentary election, in mid-2001, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha became prime minister. In 1943, Simeon had become King of Bulgaria at the age of six but was forced to flee the country into exile in 1946 after the Communist government abolished the monarchy by referendum. A former business consultant living in Spain, Simeon returned to Bulgaria in 1996, renounced all claims to royalty and formally changing his name to Simeon Saxecoburggotski, though this appellation is never used in reference to the former king in press and media. Many Bulgarians apparently got their hopes up with Simeon, who

had promised to reverse the country's ill fortunes in 800 days, reintroducing public accountability, creating jobs, increasing wages, and improving social services. However, since the party of Simeon, National Movement-Semen II (NMS), won exactly half the seats in the 240-seat National Assembly (parliament) in June 2001 and took effective control of the government, nothing has materialized to justify ordinary Bulgarians' high hopes for the advent of prosperity and a decent, ordered life.

Simeon now increasingly appears a familiar political type in the ex-Communist bloc - the long-time émigré, coaxed out of retirement in the West by the powers-that-be, immigrating to his country of origin to take up office but remaining a "stranger" in his re-adopted land. Other examples of note have been Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus (a US resident for fifty years who had acquired American citizenship) and Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga (for decades a citizen of Canada). None have achieved wide, sustained popularity in their respective countries. Each has faithfully toed the Western line on economic reform and integration with "Euro-Atlantic" structures. One Bulgarian journalist told me the popularity of Simeon - now mockingly referred to as "The Tsar" - had fallen from roughly 68% at the time he took office to about 13%.

Since Bulgaria is on the threshold of admittance to the NATO alliance, having signed the protocol for accession on March 26th, it might be natural to assume that the country is in at least a better economic and political state than NATO aspirants for whom a date of admission has not yet been set. Ukraine, for example, is not viewed as close enough to Western standards to join NATO, while Bulgaria presumably is. Yet anyone arriving to Bulgaria from Ukraine, as I did in March, can only be struck by how poorly the Balkan state compares with the former Soviet republic to its north. The cityscape of Sofia visible on the journey from the airport to the center is almost unspeakably grim in comparison with the view on the road from Kiev's Borispol International Airport to the downtown area of the Ukrainian capital. The central train station in Sofia is a dim, dirty and apparently dangerous place compared not only with Kiev's main train station, but also with train stations in provincial capitals such as Lvov, in western Ukraine. The Bulgarian trains themselves also compare most unfavorably with those in the ex-USSR. Even the most unpleasant and ill-maintained ex-Soviet train on which the author has traveled was far more comfortable and clean than the overnight train from Sofia to the Black Sea coast. A road or rail trip across the Bulgarian countryside reveals mile upon mile of empty and abandoned plants, and towns and villages that look mostly cleared out of inhabitants as well. The fields are mysteriously strewn with rubbish and plastic bags, everywhere clinging to the weeds and shrubs in derelict vineyards and orchards.

Varna appears tidy and orderly in contrast to Sofia, although graphic, hardcore pornographic publications are in full display in bus station kiosks, visible to anyone passing by, young and old alike. Regular travel in the "New Europe" tends to desensitize the traveler to the omnipresence of the sex trade and general culture of porn, but at first it seems oddly incongruent that such dissolute facets of the free market should be so blatant in a place England's Prince Charles was due to visit in a matter of days, having just presented six Bulgarian companies with a Business Ethics Standard award in Sofia and himself been decorated with a Bulgarian business forum "special badge."

The grim vista of Bourgas is visible by day from the top floor of the Hotel Bulgaria, where US military personnel were staying during my visit. In a settlement south of Bourgas called "Pobeda" (Victory), I drove through intense poverty and squalor amid single-storey tumbledown houses, where children were picking through rubbish tips and roads were not properly paved. Garbage was strewn everywhere along the streets and sidewalks, both in the city center and the outskirts. In the evening, it is not safe to wander far from the well-lit area of the hotel itself, as a resident warned me in no uncertain terms. Indeed, I was approached by a group of five or six grubby young women who looked like they lived on the street, offering sex near the Bourgas train station after dark one evening, tugging at my sleeves and putting their hands in my jacket pockets until I could tear myself away from them and get back to a well-lit area.

THE COMMANDEERING OF THE BOURGAS AIRPORT

The Bulgarian government's significant behind-the-scenes material support to the American military has enjoyed a low profile in Western press and media. US forces have used an airfield at Bourgas on the Black Sea coast, a holiday spot in the warmer months, and US troops have occupied a nearby camp, relocating from their old base in Germany. Finally, Bulgaria agreed to send a battalion of troops to provide assistance to the "coalition" forces in Iraq in some ill-defined way.

Some genuine opposition to war in Bulgaria has arisen in the form of organized labor. On March 14th, over 3,000 trade union organizations throughout the country supported the KSNB's (Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria) protest against a military operation in Iraq. After the European Labor Confederation called for a protest to be staged against the war in Iraq throughout Europe, the KSNB organizations in Pernik, Pazardzhik, Padomir, Sofia, Blagoyevgrad, Sandanski, Razlog, Simitli, Kyuestendil and Bourgas supported the protest action by stopping work for one hour. Although politicization of strikes could theoretically slow down the war machine if widespread and numerous enough, in Bulgaria trade unions and organized labor have little real power as an independent political force. Even if the stoppage could have gained much attention, it would have had little real effect. Since production has mostly collapsed in Bulgaria, there is not much to "stop."

Within parliament, opposition to Bulgaria's pro-US stance has come primarily from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), led by Sergei Stanishev, who said on March 9th:

We see a fundamental contradiction between the official views expressed by the Bulgarian state about unceasingly seeking a peaceful settlement of the crisis over Iraq, and the policy followed up by Minister Pasi and implemented at the UN Security Council by Bulgaria's Ambassador Stefan Tavrov... Minister Pasi's replacement is the only useful move that the prime minister could make in order to preserve his own prestige as a leader of the government and of the incumbent majority.

Bulgarian President Georgi Purvanov, also from the BSP, expressed his opposition to Bulgaria's Iraq policy on March 19th - a position that should have carried significant political weight given he is commander-in-chief of the armed forces. But by all indications, Foreign Minister Pasi and Defence Minister Svinarov run the show, helped by the fickleness the BSP revealed over the NATO attack on Kosovo in 1999. Having opposed NATO's war on Kosovo while the attack was going on, the party turned around and supported Bulgarian membership in the military alliance after bombing ended. Purvanov supports NATO membership, and now cheers on the occupation of Iraq.

The American military aircraft, personnel and equipment that steadily arrived to the Bourgas civilian airport met with the disapproval of ordinary Bulgarians, and protests occurred outside the airport once US forces began setting up shop. One was a march by women on March 11th, demanding that the US forces relocate to a nearby village called Ravnets. The Warsaw Pact base at Ravnets was emptied when Bulgaria reduced its military from 120,000 to the current 43,000 in the early 1990s, and it had remained intact with an airstrip fit for use by the Americans. Alexander Indzhov, a journalist with Bourgas' daily newspaper Chernomorski Far, told me the protesters complained that the community heavily depended on tourism for its survival, and the Americans were threatening their livelihood. Last year, Mr. Indzhov said, the Bourgas airport had 25-30 chartered flights arriving each day and 400,000 foreign tourists for the year. But US Ambassador to Bulgaria James Pardew had brushed aside local concerns, insisting the Bourgas airport should be used because it had served America during the Afghanistan operation.

Amb. Pardew had announced on March 12th that Bulgaria would receive about \$280,000 per month in rent, but it is doubtful the residents of Bourgas region will ever see any benefits from the money. According to Indzhov, the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense had announced that the

funds would go to the country's military budget even though the airport was part of the civilian economy. Since it is a condition of NATO membership that 2% of new members' GDP must be spent on defense, it can be reasonably concluded that the US money will simply be used, in circular fashion, to buy expensive hardware from Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and other leading US defense firms. This should hardly be a priority for Bulgaria in light of its blatant social and economic problems, and the ambiguity of current threats to the country's security. "The US promised Turkey \$26 billion, then \$35 billion for its support in the war on Iraq," said Mr. Indzhov. "But it promised Bulgaria nothing."

At the Bourgas Airport, all my efforts to speak with officials proved futile. The airport's technical director, Mincho Minchev, seemed frightened when I requested an interview, and said that all authorization for answering questions had to come from the director of the airport himself. The director was absent, supposedly due to illness, although the journalist Alexander Indzhov informed me that evening that the airport director was "always ill." In fact, Minchev had been interviewed only a few weeks beforehand by Ian Traynor of The Guardian newspaper, and said he was upset about being misquoted. When I asked him how, he nervously fudged the issue, saying his words had been manipulated and taken out of context. Undoubtedly, the article had upset others as too. Commercial Director Marin Batchvarov was similarly uninformative and said no one at the airport would be able to talk about anything relating to the US military presence. He had recently been instructed to direct all questions to Sgt. Jason Smith, the US Air Force public relations officer, who was quoted in the Ian Traynor article as saying that the military was "in a rush" and "preparing for future operations."

Sgt. Smith was supposedly located at the military camp at Sarafovo, a village across the highway from Bourgas Airport. Sarafovo has been cited as the location of a new NATO base in Bulgaria. But when I attempted to approach the camp, a guard carrying a Kalashnikov rifle stopped me and asked for my passport. Confiscating my papers, he then instructed me to go around to the main entrance of the camp, where the guards - who seemed surprisingly nervous at my presence - told me to wait at a distance, across the road, while they retrieved my identity document. Another, equally nervous looking guard said he would pass on any message I had for Sgt. Smith, and - as I left him with a card and mobile phone number for Smith to call - assured me the sergeant would return my call that afternoon. However, I never heard from Sgt. Smith, remarkable in light of the fact that this non-commissioned officer's job was to liaise with the general public and press. It was also remarkable in light of my having seen Smith in the hotel bar the night before, where I helped him and his brothers-in-arms to order a drink. They appeared profusely grateful at the time, but the senior officer among the three (a major) had evidently advised his subordinates to stay away.

In the village of Sarafovo, several hundred meters from the troop encampment, I was confronted with extreme destitution. Sarafovo had apparently been a popular holiday destination during the Communist period, but had fallen into disuse in recent times. I attempted to speak with several of the inhabitants, but found almost all of them coy and unresponsive. In several instances, a person would respond positively to my request for answers to a few questions, but then when I solicited an opinion concerning local disposition toward the new military neighbors, the interviewee would immediately move away and say that he or she did not want to talk, a look of fear settling on their otherwise expressionless faces.

A couple of women did talk to me from the other side of their garden fences, however, and both expressed unequivocally negative views on both the war and the American military presence. One woman, a retired schoolteacher, said that no one in Bulgaria wanted the war but no one believed the government would use the money from the airport rental to improve people's lives either. She said the roads and infrastructure in Sarafovo badly needed repairing, and even praised the memory of former Bulgarian Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov, who had ruled Bulgaria for thirty-five years until 1989. She said the standard of education had declined drastically since the Zhivkov days, when she was teaching, and complained that young male students were now going to school with long hair and carrying handguns. The other woman was emphatic that Bulgaria should be a "neutral country" and

that "no one needs this war," saying Bulgaria was much closer to Iraq than America was and would now be a target, even though it had never had any problem with the Arab state in the past and even maintained diplomatic relations with Baghdad. She said that if America had a problem with Iraq it should take care of it without Bulgaria's help, but that the government and parliament were so corrupt they would never listen to the people.

BULGARIAN TIMELINE ON THE IRAQ WAR

January 25th: Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Pasi backs the US call to arms in the UN, saying Iraq "must fall in line by February 14th or be forced to do so."

February 5th: Bulgaria features among ten ex-Communist states (the "Vilnius 10") to have signed the "Letter to Washington" in support of US war aims in Iraq. The foreign ministers of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia declare:

"[T]he United States [has] presented compelling evidence to the United Nations Security Council detailing Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs, its active efforts to deceive U.N. inspectors, and its links to international terrorism... The trans-Atlantic community... must stand together to face the threat posed by the nexus of terrorism and dictators with weapons of mass destruction... The clear and present danger [emphasis added] posed by Saddam Hussein's regime requires a united response from the community of democracies. We call upon the U.N. Security Council to take the necessary and appropriate action in response to Iraq's continuing threat to international peace and security."

February 7th: The Bulgarian parliament authorizes the commitment of Bulgarian nuclear, biological and chemical defense units in support of a US-led military operation against Iraq. It is announced that the Bulgarian contingent will be deployed in countries neighboring on Iraq. It also authorizes the use of a military base at Sarafovo on the Black Sea coast for US troops.

February 10th: France, Russia and Germany issue a joint statement calling for disarmament of Iraq peacefully, by extending UN inspections.

February 11th: US Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Joe Lieberman (D-CT), Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Evan Bayh (D-IN) announce that they will introduce a resolution praising European allies for their support for enforcing UN Security Council Resolution 1441 which demands Iraqi disarmament. "The majority of Europe's democracies have spoken, and their message could not be clearer: France and Germany do not speak for Europe. Most European governments support the Security Council's clear mandate to require Iraq's full disarmament and do not shrink from the grave responsibilities such a commitment entails," says Sen. McCain. "Most European governments understand clearly that if the Security Council fails to enforce its demands of Iraq, the Council risks impotence and irrelevance. In short, most European governments behave like allies that are willing to meet their responsibilities to uphold international peace and security in defense of our common values. We thank this European majority for standing with us." (NOTE: The combined total of the populations of the ex-Communist Vilnius 10 is less than the population of France.) Press reports surface that the parliaments of several Vilnius 10 countries did not know of the Letter to Washington until after it was sent, and public opinion polls show strong popular opposition to war in each of these states.

February 13th: US military transport aircraft begin arriving daily from Ramstein air force base in Germany to Bourgas airport on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast.

Mid-February: Bulgarian news agency BTA reports that Iraqi Vice Premier Tariq Aziz has warned Bulgaria it will not get its money back from Iraq if it supports war on the Arab state. Iraq's debt to Bulgaria is estimated at \$1.7 billion.

Late February: Prime Minister Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Defence Minister Svinarov, and Foreign Minister Pasi conduct negotiations with US President George W. Bush in Washington concerning the Iraqi debt, and receive a commitment that American companies will repay it.

At a European Union summit in Brussels, French President Jacques Chirac lashes out at the ex-Communist countries that have supported war, singling out Romania and Bulgaria for particular scorn. Noting that the two are not included in the current round of EU enlargement but hope to join in 2007, the French president accuses them of "dangerous" and "childish behavior," stating: "If they had tried to decrease their chances for getting into Europe, they couldn't have done a better job."

March 6th: British Minister for Europe Denis MacShane arrives in Sofia to furnish Mr. Pasi with a letter from Tony Blair, assuring him that Bulgaria's position on the Iraqi crisis will not be linked to its membership in the EU.

March 7th: Bulgaria's Ambassador to the UN, Stefan Tavorov, addresses the UN Security Council, proclaiming Bulgaria's readiness to back the draft resolution tabled by the US, Britain and Spain. "The adoption of such a resolution would be a logical continuation of the Security Council's efforts to make Iraq understand that there is a limit to the council's patience," he says. Knowing the new resolution will fail to achieve the minimum nine out of fifteen votes to pass, the "coalition of the willing" (US, UK, Spain and Bulgaria) decide to forego a vote and prepare for war.

March 18th: Bulgarian Deputy Defence Minister Ivo Ivanov announces that over 60 per cent of the expenses involved in the participation of Bulgarian troops in a possible war on Iraq will be paid for by the United States.

March 19th: Bombs begin raining on Baghdad, as the "coalition" assault on Iraq gets under way.

April 16th: Washington requests that Bulgaria send infantry units to Iraq, and the Bulgarian government agrees.

April 21st: Solomon Pasi announces that Bulgaria has earned \$9 million from hosting US military forces, stating publicly: "All those who exploited the fears of the people in connection with the Iraqi conflict now have every reason to apologize." Pasi also says that, if Bulgaria succeeds in attracting one or more US bases, both the state and the relevant region will benefit.

May 2nd-5th: Solomon Pasi visits Jordan and Kuwait for talks with the government.

May 6th-9th: Solomon Pasi visits the US for talks with Secretary of State Colin Powell and others.

RULE OF LAW?

According to Alexander Indzhov of Chernomorski Far, the Bulgarian government had announced it did not need to hold referendums on NATO or EU membership. "The MPs say, 'What do we need a referendum for when the people have chosen us to decide for them?'" said Indzhov. Even in states staging referendums cynically - holding polls repeatedly until the "right" result is obtained, and employing increasingly questionable voting procedures (e.g., Ireland in 2002) - there is usually an official acceptance that the sort of changes to the national constitution that EU and NATO membership necessitate requires a popular referendum to legitimate. Not so, it would seem, in Bulgaria.

Quite apart from the questionable legality of the Bulgarian government's approach to EU and NATO accession, other aspects of Bulgaria's society raise serious doubt about its

classification as a law-governed state. On March 11th, the Bulgarian newspapers Dnevnik, Novinar, and Douma quoted Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs Chief Secretary Boiko Borissov as saying that "currently there are six to seven antagonistic groups in the country that are armed and will start shooting at one another sooner or later." Douma reported the same day that there were "8,000 armed bandits in the streets" and the state was "on alert" after two high-profile murders only days before.

On the evening of March 7th, Ilya Pavlov - billed by Poland's Wprost magazine as the eighth richest man in the "New Europe" and widely believed to be the richest person in Bulgaria - was shot in the heart as he exited the headquarters of his MG (Multigroup) Corporation in Sofia. MG is a typical post-Communist "conglomerate" active in a range of industries, from leisure and tourism to food to supply and servicing of petroleum and gas pipelines. The killing of the businessman was evidently important enough for the Bulgarian government to report that Bulgarian Minister of Internal Affairs Georgi Petkanov was "updating Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha on a regular basis" about it. A report by the East European Constitutional Review from Fall 2001, discussing the merit of Simeon's closest advisers, suggests that the relationship between Simeon and Pavlov may have been closer than propriety should have dictated:

A further troubling sign is the connection between Simeon and Ilya Pavlov, who is the CEO of Multigroup. This holding company is considered by foreign media and foreign intelligence services to be the largest Bulgarian mafia organization to have engaged in money laundering for the former communist regime. In addition to communicating with the former king, Pavlov has returned conspicuously with everyday appearances in newspapers, on television, and in public ceremonies related to the new government's inauguration.

The day before his death, Pavlov had testified in the Andrei Lukanov murder trial. Lukanov, Bulgaria's first post-Communist prime minister, was shot four times in the back on October 2nd, 1996. He had been a high-ranking apparatchik in Communist Bulgaria but became a reformer and anti-corruption crusader during the period of Gorbachev's perestroika, eventually bringing about the downfall of Todor Zhivkov and presiding over the establishment of private banks and other companies during a period of unprecedented economic privation in the republic. A former business partner of Lukanov's claimed the ex-prime minister had expressed his intention to reveal documented evidence of high-level corruption before his was killed.

On March 12th, Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was assassinated while standing next to his limousine. According to the daily newspaper Trud on March 14th, there were "a number of coincidences which Interior Ministry Chief Secretary Boiko Borissov reportedly sees between the killing of Pavlov and that of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic... Both men were shot in close succession by snipers putting a bullet through the victim's heart, which is said to be a hallmark of Serbian killers. Besides, Pavlov was killed with a Steyr, a type of carbine which the special services in the Serbian police and armed forces have been using for many years." Also, Trud reported: "Pavlov ran a brisk business in Macedonia, avoiding Serbia over the last few years - he may have owed something to people there."

The exact motive for Djindjic's killing remains unclear, but the current Serbian authorities have used the assassination as a pretext to establish a "state of emergency," conduct mass arrests, wipe out political opposition, and call for the West to allow a temporary reinstatement of the death penalty. The late premier may have angered members of both the political and business community in the Balkans when he ordered the incineration of 88 tons (\$60 million-worth) of confiscated cigarettes in May last year. Djindjic declared his intention to subject substances like tobacco and alcohol to taxation, diverting revenue to the state. However, such actions may have angered people in high places, such as Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic - a friend of Djindjic's who was allegedly playing tennis with the late Serbian premier in Montenegro while NATO bombs rained down on Belgrade in 1999. Djukanovic is widely viewed as a kingpin in entrepreneurial cigarette smuggling in the region, including Bulgaria. It is very possible that Djindjic's actions angered some of his successors in the Serbian leadership as well.

On the same night Pavlov was murdered, the Mercedes of a business partner of Pavlov's, Sevdalin Stratiev, was riddled with bullets in Varna. Eighteen hours after Pavlov was shot, a businessman named Stepan Ribakov, a citizen of the ex-Soviet republic of Moldova, was found dead in his car outside the Ambassador Hotel in Sofia. The Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs was quick to proclaim the Pavlov and Ribakov murders unrelated, but the Pavlov murder and the close interest reportedly being taken in it by the head of the Bulgarian government - in the context of press reports of the country being on the verge of a mob war - reflect questionably on the rule of law in this candidate for EU and NATO membership.

On April 18th, the Mercedes carrying another Bulgarian businessman, Ivan Todorov, blew up as it was slowing down at an intersection in downtown Sofia. The bomb was apparently intended for Todorov, who happened to be driving while the driver rode in the passenger seat and was killed. A subsequent report in the Bulgarian newspaper Monitor revealed a "foreign counterintelligence service" had warned of possible attempts on the lives of those close to the late Ilya Pavlov. The newspaper Trud described Todorov as one of the few legal distributors of cigarettes in Bulgaria.

Allegations of ties between the Bulgarian government and the mafia have sharply escalated in recent weeks. On April 22nd, daily newspaper 24 Chassa showed a member of Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha's cabinet photographed with a person notorious for illegal cigarette trading schemes. On the same day, Novinar cited a report by Boiko Borissov stating that only the Bulgarian Socialist Party was free of ties to the mob. Monitor reported: "An item of written information supplemented by photographs of politicians in the company of thugs has disappeared." Borissov, the paper claimed, said the National Service for Combating Organized Crime had provided the records to the Interior Minister, but the Interior Minister did not even know whether such records existed. Zemlya quoted Borissov as saying: "A government minister and an MP feature on the scandalous list of politicians identified as connected with the mob." On April 23rd, 24 Chassa wrote that the Interior Ministry report on politicians and magistrates' links with criminals contained photos showing Bulgarian Finance Minister Milen Velchev (a former executive of Merrill Lynch investment bank), Transport and Communication Minister Plamen Petrov and MP Miroslav Sevlievski of the Simeon II National Movement on a yacht with Ivan Todorov, the latter being suspected of involvement in cigarette smuggling. This prompted the leader of the Bulgarian Confederation of Trade Unions to say at a Mayday rally:

Today, May 1st, we say: the king lied to us... We do not want to live like this - they in yachts and we in garbage cans! Today we demand the resignation of the prime minister and the government. [Deputy Prime Minister] Nikolai Vasiliev [former vice president of Lazard Freres bankers] must go - the little liar that he is! The minister of education must go! The minister of the first private ministry - the Ministry of Transportation - must go! The culture minister and his [wife] Lyulinka must go! I am not going to list them all, but let me say this - the autumn [election] is coming, when we will shout: the king is naked! Get on your yachts and go home!

Sega commented that: "Instead of restructuring, laws and control over the secret services, what we have is growing NATO criticisms and political bickering... What should be done in such cases is to first shake the government, and then topple it." Former National Security Service Chief Maj. Gen. Atanas Atanassov was quoted as asking: "Why have Gen. Borissov's statements and photos replaced the real problem of crime, which has been soaring in the past six months?"

CONCLUSION

On April 30th, 24 Chassa quoted Prof. Rocco Buttiglione, Italy's European Union Policy Minister, as saying: "Bulgaria has made considerable progress. It has a functioning market economy and an efficient public administration." Buttiglione, visiting Bulgaria at the invitation of Foreign Minister Solomon Pasi and European Affairs Minister Meglena Kouneva, described Bulgarian Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha as a "brilliant politician enjoying great popularity in Italy."

For the most part, ordinary people in the New Europe have given up trying to "rise up" at election time to "throw the bums out." Less-than-clean electoral processes have snuffed out popular faith in the Western-style democracy NATO is paradoxically designed to defend, and the widely visible rise of familiar figures from the previous era, reinvented as patriotic democrats - in some cases (e.g., NATO candidates Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania) working hand-in-hand with transplanted Western émigrés who have no meaningful ties to local life - has only enhanced popular disillusionment. Electorates have witnessed the Western show of preference for these figures over genuinely popular indigenous candidates, parties and movements, so that after a brief initial period of mass euphoria from national independence, faith in active political participation as a vehicle for effecting real social and economic change quickly rolled over and died. Facilitating the rise of corrupt ex-Communist elites (sometimes with Quisling-type émigrés as figureheads), Western governments have furthered the advent of societies in which the people are tired, worn-down, and trying to get out by any means necessary. Under such circumstances, the exhausted, pale and downtrodden have little time or energy to participate in organized shows of force opposing NATO or US-led wars. In any state in Rumsfeld's "New Europe," the most powerful and immediate impression is the complete absence of political life. People have stopped caring. Their societies are all but dead. They are like morally broken and destitute populations that serve as "captive nations" for expanded and continued war.

The widespread sense of hopelessness in "New Europe" was already palpable in the worldwide antiwar demonstrations before and during the Iraq war. Countries such as Spain, Britain, Italy and Australia hosted record-breaking mass antiwar protests, while states of the ex-Communist bloc saw no big marches, though each registered strong public disapproval of the war in opinion surveys (in NATO member Estonia, public opposition to the Iraq war during the hostilities reached 80%).

Official estimates put Bulgaria's population decrease at about 45,000 in 2002, but the real number may in fact be much higher. No one disputes that, like all ex-Communist states, the population has declined substantially since the Communist era. According to the "Millennium Development Goal Initial Report," an analysis of poverty levels in EU candidate states, incomes in Bulgaria are roughly ten times lower than in EU countries and half those of other states about to enter the EU. The report also claims that Bulgaria's unemployment level is twice as high as the EU average. Yet part of Bulgaria's requirements for EU membership involves fulfillment of the "Energy Chapter" of EU negotiations by closing the third and fourth reactors of the Kozludoy Nuclear Power Plant, something that will undoubtedly increase joblessness further. This is a familiar theme in the ex-Soviet bloc countries, as the EU has demanded of Lithuania that it close its only nuclear reactor as a condition of membership. The idea is to make Bulgarians, Lithuanians, and other suffering citizens of ex-Communist states dependent on higher-priced electricity from Western sources while they shiver in winter. By the looks of things in both countries, the loss of cheap electricity that will result could not possibly accrue to the benefit of ordinary people.

The KSNB's Mayday rally reportedly only attracted about 500 people, but on March 30th the BTA news agency reported that thousands of people had gathered in the streets of Sofia and other Bulgarian cities to march in protest against the Iraq war. Protesters, including Iraqi nationals living in Bulgaria, carried signs that included "Bush and Blair in The Hague" and "We say 'no.'" As BTA reported, upon reaching the government building, the protesters started shouting: "Resign!" Bulgarian Socialist Party leader Sergei Stanishev declared: "We re against Bulgaria's participation in this war, and those who turn a deaf ear to us today will hear our voice tomorrow and the day after tomorrow!" Whether those inside could hear them or not, it is doubtful any were listening. With US warplanes using Bulgarian territory and the Bulgarian head of state expressing opposition to war, government power in the country was firmly in the hands of the Foreign and Defense Ministers.

After the US conquest of Baghdad, talk about canceling "odious" Iraqi debts did not extend to Bulgaria, which managed to secure commitments of repayment from Washington. On March 6th Bulgarian Deputy Finance Minister Krasimir Katev said that although he was personally

unaware of any interest shown by US companies in buying out Iraqi debt, "[t]hese are negotiations which Defense Minister Svinarov may have held," and "we at the Finance Ministry are unfamiliar with that." It was not reported which US companies had committed to assume the debt burden, but presumably since the war is expected to "pay for itself" through the military seizure of Iraqi oilfields, one or another of the US oil companies could cover it through a front company. How strange, though, that the Defence and Foreign Ministries should be handling negotiations over servicing of state debts while the Finance Ministry is left out - another indication of the way constitutionality and the rule of law are functioning in Bulgaria.

Supreme Allied Commander Europe Gen. James Jones has pointed to Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo as a "model" for US bases elsewhere. Anyone who has seen the gigantic and ominous Bondsteel, set amid the wasteland of bombed out and destitute Kosovo, has an idea of what the US-imposed New World Order will look like - destroyed dumps where a fortress houses thousands of American military personnel behind its walls and the fearful population outside can rot in hell.

Bulgaria's Standart News wrote on April 30th that the US Congress would approve the NATO accession protocols in the coming weeks, citing a statement by US Secretary of State Colin Powell. The Pentagon is looking for sites for new bases further east, and Bulgaria and Romania are among the "favorites," according to Supreme Allied Commander Europe Gen. James Jones. This daily added an analysis by Washington's Heritage Foundation that listed Bourgas, Varna, Dobrich and Kroumovo as possible sites of Pentagon bases. But even as Bulgaria is absorbed into America's militarized New World Order, the already tired language from Heritage and other right-wing NWO mouthpieces about the "free market" in places like Bulgaria cannot conceal the extent of the corruption and violent crime endemic in all the NATO and EU candidate countries. Even if all the allegations of ties between politicians and organized crime in Bulgaria are politically motivated, the sheer fact that such charges are regularly and publicly made should presumably give cause for concern about admitting the ex-Warsaw Pact state as a member of either the EU or NATO. Then again, that it does not only bolsters the increasingly gangster-like image of Western leaders. Western governments have obviously decided Bulgaria exhibits the necessary level of mafia rule to justify its inclusion in an armed camp of miserable and dirty little "democratic" states, all models of the "free market" and respect for "human rights."

Chad Nagle is a lawyer and freelance writer who traveled to Bulgaria on behalf of the British Helsinki Human Rights Group. Copyright Chad Nagle 2003. For fair use only/ pour usage équitabile seulement .

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