

February 12, 1991

## **DESTROYING ETHNIC IDENTITY: SELECTIVE PERSECUTION OF MACEDONIANS IN BULGARIA**

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### **Introduction**

Many bloody battles have been fought over Macedonia, and the "Macedonian question" -- one of the most complex human rights issues in the Balkans -- still ignites passions. One Bulgarian referred to the Macedonian question as a "volcano" and warned: "No one knows when it will erupt anew." In the late nineteenth century, when it appeared that the Ottoman Turks might have to relinquish control over Macedonia, numerous arrangements were proposed for dealing with the territory, including partition and autonomy. The present-day configuration of Macedonia was settled after World War I, when the territory was divided into four parts and incorporated into Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, and Serbia.<sup>1</sup>

In Bulgaria, there are estimated to be more than one million citizens (out of a population of nine million) whose ancestors inhabited Macedonia. Although many continue to live in the Bulgarian Macedonian region, known as

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<sup>1</sup>After World War II, a Macedonian republic with federative status was established within Yugoslavia.

Pirin Macedonia, Bulgarians with Macedonian ties live throughout the country. The ethnic identity of these people is hotly debated. The official Bulgarian position is that individuals of Macedonian ancestry who live within Bulgaria are ethnic Bulgarians. However, a small proportion of these Bulgarian citizens—perhaps several thousand—call themselves Macedonians and say that they have a Macedonian consciousness. They claim that their number would be much higher if the government did not repress their rights.<sup>2</sup> The official government position has created substantial human rights problems for them. One Macedonian explained to Helsinki Watch: "I have suffered all my life. I was in prison twice, fired from my job twelve times, not allowed to have a private home, cannot practice my profession as a teacher, and live knowing that my children have been fired from their jobs on account of my activities." Another said: "For the past 45 years, Macedonians have been assimilated."

Two unofficial Bulgarian organizations defend the rights of Macedonians today. One group, the Ilinden United Macedonian Organization ("Ilinden"), is based in Pirin Macedonia and claims a membership of approximately 500. It was founded in April 1990 and is named after the Ilinden uprising of August 2, 1903, when persons living in the Macedonian region began an unsuccessful attempt to rid themselves of Ottoman rule. The second group, Ilinden IMRO-Independent, is based in Sofia and claims a membership of more than 600. It was founded in November 1989. Members of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent have experienced numerous human rights violations, including restrictions on petition gathering, inability to hold a congress, confiscation of their passports, and intimidation by State Security (the secret police). Their organizations have been denied registration by Bulgarian courts.

### **The Macedonian Policies of the Bulgarian Communist Party – A History of Human Rights Abuse**

Immediately after the Bulgarian Communists assumed control of the government in 1944, they endorsed Tito's solution to the Macedonian question, officially recognizing the existence of a separate Macedonian nationality within Yugoslavia. In endorsing Tito's solution to the Macedonian question, Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian Communist leader, paved the way for Bulgarians of Macedonian ancestry to call themselves Macedonians.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1944 and 1948, the Bulgarian government's policies encouraged the development of an ethnic Macedonian consciousness. Macedonians living in Bulgaria had Bulgarian citizenship, but their passports stated that their nationality was "Macedonian." Macedonian theatres and newspapers operated and classes in the Pirin region were taught by teachers who came from Yugoslav Macedonia. These teachers remained in Bulgaria until 1948, when relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia soured.

Today some Bulgarians take a dim view of these years. In an interview with Helsinki Watch, Dimitar Arnaudov, a member of Parliament, criticized the Communist Party's position during this period, and claimed that it was "dictated" by the Soviet Union. Some observers believe that the policy was taken to repay Yugoslavia for fighting against the Germans in World War Two. Stoyan Boyadjiev, the president of the Union of the Macedonian Societies-IMRO, an association of Bulgarian refugees from Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia, told Helsinki Watch that the Bulgarian government "gave Macedonia as a gift to Tito." According to Mr. Boyadjiev, many Bulgarians were forced to call themselves Macedonian against their will during this period. For example, when a national census was taken in 1946, Bulgarians living in the Pirin region were required to state that their nationality was Macedonian. They were also

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<sup>2</sup> In this report, Helsinki Watch refers to Bulgarian citizens who express a Macedonian consciousness as "Macedonians." Under international law all citizens have the right to belong to the ethnic group of their choice.

<sup>3</sup> Evangelos Kofos, "The Macedonian Question: The Politics of Mutation," Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1987.

required to accept passports with this designation. Those who refused were frequently persecuted. Mr. Boyadjiev, who refused to call himself a Macedonian, was imprisoned at the Belene concentration camp for five years. He explained his reasons for refusing to call himself a Macedonian: "Many of us emigrated from Greece so that we could call ourselves Bulgarian. My uncles were killed by the Greeks because they declared themselves to be Bulgarian. I wanted to declare myself a Bulgarian." Mr. Boyadjiev estimated that more than 10,000 Bulgarians were sent to concentration camps in the late 1940s for refusing to call themselves Macedonian.

In the 1950s, Bulgaria's Macedonian policy followed the ups and downs of Soviet-Yugoslav relations. In the mid-1960s, however, Todor Zhivkov decided to develop Bulgarian patriotism within the Macedonian community. Henceforth, the official Bulgarian position denied the existence of a separate Macedonian nationality and ethnic consciousness and asserted that Macedonia was only a geographic region. The repercussions of this policy were felt within Pirin Macedonia. Residents were forced to declare their nationality as "Bulgarian."

In 1964, the Bulgarian government initiated a campaign to issue new passports (necessary for travel within Bulgaria) to people living in the Pirin region whose passports stated their nationality was "Macedonian." The campaign continued until 1974, by which time nearly all passports had been changed. Those who refused to accept passports with the "Bulgarian" designation were denied the privileges of Bulgarian citizenship, fined, or detained. Several people reported to Helsinki Watch that they were fined in the late 1960s and early 1970s for refusing to change their passports. One person stated that he was detained for four days when he told local officials that he did not want to change his passport. In Petric, the chair of the local council informed Sokrat Markilov that he would have to change his passport before he could receive a certificate for his son which his son needed to apply for higher education. The chair of the local council told Mr. Markilov that he was acting on orders from high Communist Party officials. One Macedonian reported that he was denied a passport because he had written that his nationality was Macedonian on the application form.

In order to implement its new policy, the government deleted references to a Macedonian nationality in other official documents, and sometimes secretly. A resident of Petric told Helsinki Watch: "In 1965, I was a student in Sofia and I filled out a form stating I was a Macedonian. I saw the form when I returned to Petric...they had crossed out 'Macedonian' and written 'Bulgarian.'"

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the 1970s, the government tried and imprisoned Macedonian activists who were working underground. In 1962, Georgi Suharov was sentenced to three years of imprisonment under Article 108 of the Bulgarian Criminal Code ("anti-state activities") for distributing leaflets advocating Macedonian rights. In 1973, seven members of an unofficial Macedonian organization were sentenced under Articles 108 and 109 of the Bulgarian Criminal Code for "anti-state activities." Three of the members received five-year sentences, two members received four-year sentences, and the others received shorter terms. Sokrat Markilov, who was sentenced to five years, told Helsinki Watch that the Blagoevgrad trial judge refused to accept the defendants' testimony that they were Macedonians and told them: "You are all Bulgarians." Stoyan Georgiev, one of the members who was sentenced to four years of imprisonment, said that he served part of his sentence in Department 7 of the Sofia Central Prison where persons sentenced to death were confined. "All the time, we could hear them moaning and groaning," he said, "and this psychological pressure was terrible."

### **Post-Zhivkov Government Implements New Minorities Policy But Continues to Violate Rights of Macedonians**

The Bulgarian government revised its minorities policy in late 1989, shortly after Todor Zhivkov left office, but the new program failed to improve the human rights situation for Macedonians. Despite its professed interest in extending human rights to all Bulgarians, the government actually took measures to repress the human rights of

**Macedonians. Today, it continues to violate the human rights of this community.**

**On December 29, 1989, the government announced that everyone in Bulgaria would be able to choose his or her name, religion, and language freely. This new policy was taken to return rights to Bulgarian Muslims, who had experienced serious human rights violations under Todor Zhivkov's regime. Ever since 1984-85, when the assimilation campaign was initiated against the country's one million ethnic Turks, foreign governments had strongly criticized Bulgaria for its minorities policies. By returning rights to the Turks--the most visible minority community in Bulgaria--the government improved its standing in the world community.**

**However, for Macedonians, the changes wrought by the revolution of 1989 have been largely imaginary. Yordan Kostadinov Ivanov, the president of Ilinden for the Pirin region, told Helsinki Watch: "The people in Macedonia live in constant fear. We even fear the government that assumed power after the 10th of November. We fear the nationalism and chauvinism of greater Bulgaria." Another Ilinden member said: "Today the basic rules of the totalitarian state still operate."**

**Many political leaders, government officials, and other Bulgarians indicated that they do not want the government to register Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent or to allow their members to engage in activities. They articulated two primary concerns--that the groups threaten the security of the country, and that their members have an erroneous conception of history.**

**Many Bulgarians said that these groups want territorial autonomy for Macedonians, which poses a security threat to Bulgaria. Some Bulgarians alleged that the Yugoslav government is supporting the Macedonians so that one day it will be able to make territorial claims on Pirin Macedonia. Dimitar Arnaudov, the chair of a parliamentary sub-committee on the nationalities question, told Helsinki Watch: "My fear in a border region [such as Pirin Macedonia] is that if you give a minority cultural and political autonomy, all of the ethnic Bulgarians will leave. Can you give me guarantees that the people remaining in the border region will not then seek autonomy?" Georgi Margaritov, the chair of the Todor Alexandrov Society in Petric, said: "Serbian expansionism never ends. At the moment, the leaders of Serbia say they want to reclaim their ethnic and historical boundaries...We have reasons to be afraid of Ilinden because these people are closely connected to the leading circles in Skopje and the Yugoslav government...They receive financial and material resources from Yugoslavia, which has been made easier by the liberalization of the borders." Evgeni Karadaliiev, the mayor of Petric, used even stronger language to describe Ilinden's purposes: "Ilinden's aim is the division of Bulgaria. Its aim is to separate Macedonia from Bulgaria. Its aim is the disintegration of Bulgaria. It wants to destroy this country."**

**Bulgarians who expressed fears about Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent acknowledged that the groups do not use violence to achieve their objectives. However, they expressed concern about the behavior of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent members. Michail Neydelchev, a member of Parliament, said: "Ilinden has not used violence, but its behavior is provocative. For example, its members appear at meetings that other groups sponsor carrying banners and slogans." Bulgarians also referred to the long and bloody historical struggle for control of Macedonia, and suggested that at some time in the future the Macedonians might again resort to violence to achieve their objectives. Mihail Ivanov, President Zhelev's advisor on nationality questions, said: "If tensions increase in Pirin Macedonia, much blood will be shed. For decades and decades, blood had been shed. Certain groups practiced terrorism in the region. During the last few decades, there hasn't been violence in the region, but the memory of violence is still there, particularly in the consciousness of older people."**

**Bulgarians claimed that members of the Macedonian groups misinterpret history, and blamed the Bulgarian Communist Party and Serbian propaganda for distorting the historical truth about the Macedonian question. The mayor of Petric said: "To discuss the Macedonian question, we have to look at history. The people who belong to Ilinden are being manipulated. For me Macedonia exists, but it's merely a geographical area where Slavic people live. Macedonia exists from a geographical point of view, but we are all Bulgarians. These people need to know the truth**

**about history...The idea of Macedonia as a separate state, as a separate nationality, was proposed at the moment of Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman Turks (because) the leaders of the world didn't want Bulgaria to be powerful."**

**Several Bulgarians cited sociological data to dispute the claim that citizens living in Pirin Macedonia belong to a separate nation or people. Ognian Dobrev, the secretary of "Macedonia," a newspaper published by the Union of the Macedonian Societies-IMRO<sup>4</sup>, said: "It takes ages to form a nation, and especially the language, which is the most important criteria for a nation. There is no linguistic or religious difference between us and them. We live on the same territory. The fact that they want to deny that they are Bulgarians is a psychological and pathological question. There aren't cultural differences."**

**Some Bulgarians suggested that Helsinki Watch should focus its attention on other regions of Macedonia--especially Yugoslavia--where they claim ethnic Bulgarians are denied their rights and are called Macedonians by the Yugoslav government. They claimed that ethnic Bulgarians living in Yugoslavia are unable to call themselves Bulgarian or to adhere to Bulgarian traditions. Maria Koiva, a founding member of the Union of the Macedonian Societies-IMRO, stated: "We want all Bulgarians in Macedonia to be able to say that they are Bulgarians."**

### **Recent Examples of Human Rights Violations Against Macedonians**

**Since November 10, 1989, the new Bulgarian government has frequently violated the human rights of Macedonians.**

#### **Registration of Macedonian Groups Denied by Courts**

**Bulgarian courts have refused to register Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent. The apparent reason is that the groups endanger the territorial integrity of Bulgaria, even though members state that territorial integrity is not a present objective.**

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<sup>4</sup>**The Union of the Macedonian Societies-IMRO is an association of Bulgarian refugees from Yugoslav and Greek Macedonia. It was registered by the Bulgarian government.**

Ilinden submitted its application for registration to the Blagoevgrad regional court in May 1990. On June 17, the court denied registration, and based its decision on Article 52 of the Bulgarian Constitution. Article 52, paragraph 4, defines organizations that are prohibited in Bulgaria: "Organizations which endanger the sovereignty, the territorial integrity of the country and the unity of the nation, incite racial, ethnic or religious intolerance, or violate personal rights and freedoms, as well as fascist organizations striving to achieve their purposes through violence, are prohibited." Those familiar with the court process told Helsinki Watch that the Blagoevgrad court had reservations about Ilinden's program and concluded that Ilinden was a separatist organization.<sup>5</sup>

Ilinden appealed the regional court's decision to the Supreme Court. On November 9, the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision and denied registration. In December, Ilinden revised its statutes and made a final appeal to the Supreme Court.<sup>6</sup> The Supreme Court is expected to issue its decision imminently.

Ilinden IMRO-Independent applied for registration after it was advised to do so by the Sofia procurator's office. On May 15, 1990, procurator R. Gichev sent a letter to the president of Ilinden IMRO-Independent, warning him that he should either register the organization or disband it. At the same time, the procurator indicated that even if the group registered, its activities would be illegal. The letter stated:

...this is an organization which has concrete political aims directed against the territorial integrity of Bulgaria and the unity of the nation...The organization is not registered in court according to [the Law on Political Parties]. In spite of this the organization has engaged in activities and propaganda and organizes events even when they are not permitted to do so by the state authorities...The aims and activities of this political organization contradict the legislation of this country and the requirement of Article 3(2)(1) of the Law on Political Parties<sup>7</sup>...Therefore, and also based on Article 13(4) of the Law on Political Parties, I suggest to Ilinden IMRO-Independent to cease their activities or within a month to register as a political party in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Political Parties.<sup>8</sup>

The group applied for registration to the Sofia district court at the end of May. The Sofia procurator's office argued that the group's purposes were illegal in a letter to the court:

According to the text of the [i] platform, Ilinden IMRO-Independent is set up as a movement of the Macedonians living in Bulgaria, and according to Article 1 of the statutes, their goal is defined "as the unification of all Macedonians living in Bulgaria on a cultural basis." Also, in articles 19, 20, 21 of the same statutes, they point to goals and purposes that have a political character...In Article 19 of the statutes they define the Macedonians as an ethnic minority living in Bulgaria. Thus, they deny the Bulgarian character of this population and ascribe to it a different ethnicity. Article 20 of the statutes declares the organization's support for the right to self-definition which...contradicts the provisions of Article 52, paragraph 4, of the Bulgarian Constitution. They deny that the population of a certain region belongs to the Bulgarian people and State, thus stressing their ethnic relation with populations in other countries. In this way the organization is aimed against the national unity and the territorial integrity of the country.

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<sup>5</sup> Ilinden's statutes can be interpreted in the opposite way. Article 5 states: "Ilinden is not working against the territorial integrity of Bulgaria."

<sup>6</sup> Ilinden's revised statutes, adopted in December 1990, state that Ilinden has no territorial claims, does not fight for political power, wants Macedonians living in Bulgaria to be recognized as a minority, and wants Europe and the Balkans to exist without borders.

<sup>7</sup> Article 3(2)(1) provides: "No political party can be constituted if its aims contravene the Constitution and the laws of the country."

<sup>8</sup> Article 13(4) provides: "When a...public organization under the preceding paragraphs obviously acts as a political party, the district public procurator shall ask it to discontinue that activity or to register as a political party within a month."

The court apparently accepted this reasoning. At a July hearing, it told the group that they could not be registered because of their political aims, and advised the group to revise their official documents and to re-apply for registration.

Ilinden IMRO-Independent adopted a new platform in August, which stated: "We declare that the...organization...is neither political, nor terrorist, nor separatist, nor chauvinistic, but it is humane, peaceful, democratic, wholly based on spiritual and cultural grounds. We declare that Ilinden IMRO-Independent does not fight for power or any parties, and does not violate the territorial integrity of Bulgaria." The organization also amended its statutes. On October 4, it re-applied for registration to the Sofia district court. As of this writing, no decision has been rendered by the court.

### **Macedonian Congress Interrupted**

On August 2, 1990, Ilinden day, the Bulgarian authorities detained members of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent who were holding a congress in the village of Oshtava. Members were informed that the meeting was illegal, even though they were holding it in a peaceful manner and other Bulgarian groups were allowed to hold similar meetings to commemorate the Ilinden uprising.

Mishu Ivanov, an employee in the Interior Affairs Ministry, told Helsinki Watch that Ilinden had applied prior to August 2 for permission to hold its congress, and that permission was denied by local authorities on the grounds that Ilinden was nationalistic and anti-Bulgarian.<sup>9</sup>

On the morning of August 2, the police stopped and searched cars travelling to the congress in Oshtava, and confiscated written materials, including a report prepared by Ilinden's president about the June 1990 human rights meeting in Copenhagen of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. As of this writing, these materials have not been returned.

Later that afternoon, while the meeting of some 103 Macedonians was still in progress, more than 120 police, State Security, and special Interior Ministry troops surrounded the congress. The Interior Ministry troops wore riot control gear and wielded clubs; some police officers had dogs. The authorities ordered the Macedonians to stop their congress, and confiscated papers and other items, including the traditional Ilinden flag and a book written by the Macedonian hero Gotse Delchev. As of this writing, these materials have not been returned.

Eleven participants were detained and taken to the Sandanski police station where they were each required to pay fines ranging from 300 to 350 leva (approximately one month's salary) for organizing and holding the meeting

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<sup>9</sup>The law on Gatherings, Meetings, and Demonstrations, article 8, requires a group to notify the local council or mayor's office of their intention to hold a meeting at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

Article 12 of the same law gives the mayor or local council's office broad authority to ban a meeting. It provides: "The chairman of the executive committee of the local council or the mayor can prohibit the holding of the gathering, the meeting, or demonstration if they have reliable information that: 1) the meeting is directed towards a forceful change of the constitution, social and state system, or against the territorial integrity of the country; 2) they threaten the public order in the respective place; 3) they threaten the people's health after there has been a quarantine (for health reasons); 4) they violate the rights and freedoms of other citizens. The denial has to be given in a written form to the organizers 24 hours from the time that they handed in their notification and the organizers of the meeting can object to the local council or mayor's office who are to state their opinion within 24 hours. If they do not state their decision within 24 hours, the people can organize and hold their meeting. If the local council pays no attention to the organizer's objection, they can appeal to the local court which has to pronounce its decision within 5 days, and this is the final decision."

without the permission of the authorities. Three participants were detained and taken to the Blagoevgrad police station for questioning. One of them was pressured to sign a statement prepared by a State Security officer affirming that he would not organize a similar congress in the future.

### **Restrictions Placed on Petition Gathering**

Local authorities in parts of Pirin Macedonia have prohibited members of Ilinden from gathering petition signatures. The authorities have apparently acted to prevent confrontations between Ilinden members and other local residents. However, Helsinki Watch received no evidence to suggest that Ilinden's petitioning activities would incite violence or otherwise pose a serious threat to the public order.

On October 14, 1990, a small group of Ilinden members planned to gather petition signatures in the main square of Petric. Their petition supported the registration of Ilinden. As the president of the local Ilinden group, Georgi Suharov, was taking the first signature, four police officers approached him and told him that he would have to go to the Petric police station to explain his activities. At the police station, Valerie Vangelov Bohorov, an investigator from State Security, interrogated Mr. Suharov for approximately two hours.

On the following day, Mr. Suharov was required to return to the police station. Mr. Bohorov informed him that he could not gather petition signatures in support of Ilinden. The investigator gave Mr. Suharov a written citation, warning him "not to make activities aiming at engaging Bulgarian citizens to support the registration of Ilinden by the gathering of petition signatures." The warning noted that "Ilinden is not registered by the court and until it is, they cannot engage in such activities," and stated that Mr. Suharov would be held legally accountable if he violated the citation.

An employee in the Interior Affairs Ministry, Mishu Ivanov, told Helsinki Watch that the mayor of Petric had ordered the local police to stop Ilinden from gathering signatures, and that he had the legal authority to take this action because Ilinden's activities threatened the public order. In an interview with Helsinki Watch, the mayor described his concerns: "While the Ilinden people gather signatures, accidents could occur. Some people could attack them and there might be a fight...perhaps violence will come out of it." However, the mayor also expressed disapproval of their activities: "They gather signatures from children in Petric. They ask them: 'Do you want Ilinden?' and have the children sign. Even my own child signed. They don't know what they're signing. It's normal for people to gather signatures, but only in a cultured society...I have nothing against the existence of these people. But I want them to stop manipulating the children about history." He also criticized Ilinden's aims: "Ilinden's aim is the division of Bulgaria. Their aim is to separate Macedonia from Bulgaria. Their aim is the disintegration of Bulgaria. They want to destroy this country."

Helsinki Watch asked several Petric residents if they thought that Ilinden's petitioning would incite violence. No one believed that serious incidents would result, although some indicated that minor confrontations were possible. Georgi Margaritov, the Petric chair of the Todor Alexandrov Society, said: "It would not lead to violence if Ilinden gathered signatures. Well, it is possible—the population might start to call them names."

Ilinden's president told Helsinki Watch that his members have been prevented from gathering petition signatures in cities and villages throughout Pirin Macedonia. In October, they were unable to gather petitions in Sandanski, and in November, they were prevented from gathering petition signatures in Blagoevgrad, Bansko, Razlog, and Gotse Delchev.

An Ilinden coordinator who collects signatures in Blagoevgrad reported that some people do not sign his petitions because they fear repression. He elaborated: "There are people who fear repression from State Security and don't sign, even though they feel themselves to be Macedonian. They fear [for] their jobs, their children's future,

because today the basic rules of the totalitarian state still operate." Another Ilinden officer reported that a neighbor of his did not sign the petition because he feared that if he did, his wife would lose her job the next day.

### **Confiscation of Passports**

Helsinki Watch has received the names of 13 Ilinden members whose passports were confiscated by Bulgarian border officials in 1990, and who were not allowed to leave the country. Some of them wanted to attend Macedonian conferences in Yugoslavia; others were planning to attend Skopje University. They were told that their departure would threaten state interests.

The following is a list of Ilinden members whose passports were confiscated<sup>10</sup>:

Angelak Andreev-passport confiscated on September 16  
Vasil Chaeev-passport confiscated on October 5  
Yordan Goshev-passport confiscated on September 22  
Vasil Iliev-passport confiscated on September 16  
Ilia Karamachev-passport confiscated on September 16  
Atanas Kiriakov-passport confiscated on September 16  
Bozhidar Kirianov-passport confiscated in late October  
Sokrat Markilov-passport confiscated on September 22  
Damyan Rizakov-passport confiscated on September 16  
Angelak Tomov-passport confiscated in autumn 1990  
Kostadin Zlatinov-passport confiscated on September 16  
Lyuben Zlatinov-passport confiscated on September 16  
Stoyan Zlatinov-passport confiscated on September 16

The passport of Stoyan Georgiev was confiscated by a Bulgarian border official on October 24 as he was returning to Bulgaria from Skopje.

The Law on Passports allows passports to be confiscated from persons whose departure from the country would threaten state interests. According to Mishu Ivanov of the Interior Affairs Ministry, a Blagoevgrad court determined that the departure of Ilinden members from the country would threaten state interests, and authorized the confiscation of their passports.

### **Intimidation by State Security**

The activities of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent are closely monitored by State Security (the secret police). The following are some examples in addition to those described elsewhere in this report.

The president of Ilinden IMRO-Independent reported that State Security summoned him in late November 1989, about one week after his organization had held a founding meeting in a Sofia park. State Security asked Mr. Solunski: "Why do you deal with these issues now? You should give them up."

An Ilinden member said: "State Security people are constantly after us. They follow us wherever we go." Others reported that State Security monitored their telephones.

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<sup>10</sup>According to the information received by Helsinki Watch, at least five of the persons on this list have had their passports returned: Damyan Rizakov, Angelak Tomov, Kostadin Zlatinov, Lyuben Zlatinov, and Stoyan Zlatinov. Their passports were returned in late October.

In an interview with Helsinki Watch, Atanas Kiriakov, Ilinden's coordinator from Blagoevgrad, claimed that the copying stores in Blagoevgrad have been told by State Security to refuse to copy Ilinden materials. A Helsinki Watch representative accompanied Mr. Kiriakov to one copying store in Blagoevgrad where he requested a copy of an Ilinden document. After looking at the document, the store worker told Mr. Kiriakov: "No copies because this is a political document." In an interview with Helsinki Watch, she denied that she was ordered by the authorities to refuse to copy Ilinden materials. She explained that the store is a cooperative and that the workers decided among themselves to refuse to copy Ilinden materials because "Ilinden is against the interests of many people here." She elaborated: "The Ilinden people have political purposes and territorial claims."

Helsinki Watch then visited a state-owned copying store in Blagoevgrad and requested copies of Ilinden's statutes and program. The store worker copied them. Helsinki Watch asked her if the store ever refused to make copies of Ilinden documents, and she replied: "Well, you see it's not a problem."

### **Macedonians Ask for Rights**

In interviews with Helsinki Watch, Macedonians defended the position that they are a separate ethnic group. They described several cultural differences between themselves and Bulgarians, including separate folk heroes, music, dances, language, and holidays. They also claimed to have a distinct Macedonian consciousness. Helsinki Watch asked Macedonians: "What does it mean to be a Macedonian?" They gave varied responses. The following are some examples:

--Sokrat Markilov, one of the founding members of Ilinden: "The most dear thing to a person is his family, his roots, his place of birth...The Macedonian way of life differs very much from the Bulgarian way of life. We have our own folk music. We have our own holidays."

--Stoyan Georgiev, the president of Ilinden: "I was born a Macedonian and I feel Macedonian. I can never feel myself Bulgarian. I feel a special pride in being Macedonian. I adore Alexander the Great, the representative of the ancient Macedonians...I also adore Gotse Delchev and Yane Sandanski."

--Yordan Kostadinov Ivanov, the president of Ilinden for the Pirin region: "It's a very difficult question. When you're 12 or 13, you acquire a sense of self and personality. Through your family, you develop a close feeling to other families that share the same folklore and holidays. I was born in 1932. In 1942, the World War began. In our village there were barracks in the school. I was 10 or 11. I could feel the difference between Macedonians, Bulgarians, and Germans. We were already familiar with the folk songs sung by our parents about national heroes--songs about an independent national state. I would listen to my grandparents who told stories about the past--for example, about rebellions in Kresna. When I was in school, I didn't know how to speak in Bulgarian. I could only speak Macedonian, and teachers and schoolmates mocked me. So I became silent. I tried to find the reason for the difference. I read literature and this made me proud to be Macedonian."

--An Ilinden member: "The history of each nation is written by historians, and historians are bound to be influenced by the government. If we read Bulgarian historians, there is no Macedonia. I personally believe life history, the one told by my grandfather and great-grandfather, both of whom participated in the Ilinden rebellion. For me, the Macedonian identification is historical."

--Another Ilinden member: "History is not enough to make a nation. We have culture, folklore, and rituals. Ours are different from those found in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Greece. I personally am attracted to music and can differentiate between Bulgarian, Serbian, and Greek music. There is something different in Macedonian music. So for

me the identification is not only historical."

**–Georgi Solunski, the president of Ilinden IMRO-Independent: "I feel myself Macedonian and am proud to be Macedonian. I inherited this from my grandparents who told me legends about Macedonian kings—there were about 27 of them—and who sang me Macedonian songs, and I have read Macedonian literature. We have a saying that your blood can never become water. This is why I will always be Macedonian."**

**Macedonians stated that their primary goal is to obtain basic political, civic, and cultural rights for Macedonians living in Bulgaria. Georgi Suharov, the president of the Petric branch of Ilinden, said: "The Bulgarian nationalists totally misunderstand us. At the moment we want to have our human rights. We want to be acknowledged as an ethnic or national group living in Bulgaria." Sokrat Markilov explained: "All I want is the right to call myself Macedonian just as some people call themselves Bulgarians."**

**Members of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent told Helsinki Watch that they want the State-controlled mass media to stop portraying their community in a negative light. They complained that Bulgarian television and radio present a one-sided picture of the Macedonian question and rarely allow representatives from the Macedonian community to present an opposite viewpoint. Atanas Kiriakov, Ilinden's coordinator, elaborated: "The mass media here never speaks about us, so no one can get the right idea about us. The radio, television, and newspapers consciously manipulate the community in Bulgaria about our organization...we've tried hundreds of times to express ourselves, but unsuccessfully."**

**Some Macedonians said that they would like their children to be able to study the Macedonian language in Pirin schools. They explained that many older people can speak the language, but younger ones cannot. However, Macedonians disagreed about whether a pure Macedonian language exists. Some said that it does, particularly in more secluded areas like Novo Komomladi, Bansko, Dobrinishte, Eleshnitsa, and Razlog, while others noted that it has taken on Bulgarian and Serbian influences. Stoyan Georgiev, the author of "Macedonia, Above All," said: "My book is written in a mixture of Macedonian and Bulgarian because I have never been able to study pure Macedonian language. Even my parents don't speak it, because they have been assimilated."**

**Macedonians said that autonomy is not one of their immediate goals, but many cited it as a long-term goal. Those who mentioned autonomy as a goal defined it in different ways. Some described it as cultural and spiritual unification of all Macedonians. A member of Ilinden stated: "...we don't ask for union with Yugoslavia. However, we must be able to communicate in a spiritual way with our neighbors in Yugoslavia because we share a common culture." Others expressed a preference for a politically-autonomous Macedonian region. Yordan Kostadinov Ivanov said: "At the moment we just want cultural autonomy. But at a later date the European powers and the United Nations should consider the autonomy of Macedonia." Some Macedonians are more emphatic about their desire for a politically-autonomous Macedonian territory. Georgi Solunski stated: "The Greeks want Macedonia for the Greeks, the Serbs for the Serbs, the Bulgarians for the Bulgarians. We want Macedonia for Macedonians...We will continue to fight until we have political autonomy—Macedonia for the Macedonians...But we will use peaceful, democratic means."**

**The statutes of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent explicitly disclaim the use of violence to achieve their objectives. Ilinden's statutes state: "The organization will not use violence or any brutal, inhumane, or illegal actions in order to achieve its goals." The statutes of Ilinden IMRO-Independent provide: "The organization will not use violence, or any brutal, inhumane or illegal means."**

**Several Macedonians -- and other Bulgarians -- mentioned a "united" or borderless Europe as a long-term solution to the Macedonian question. Stoyan Georgiev, Ilinden's president, said: "We want Macedonia to find its own place within a Europe without borders." Petur Dertliev, the chairman of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party, told Helsinki Watch: "I know that the Macedonian problems will subside when there is a common European home." Similarly, Michail Neydelchev, a member of the Radical Democratic Party, said: "For us, the solution is the overall**

democratization of society, including the Macedonian region, and better relations with Greece and Yugoslavia." In a meeting with Helsinki Watch, a Bulgarian diplomat predicted: "Once Bulgaria enters Europe, borders will become less important and tensions will subside."

## **Recommendations**

**Helsinki Watch urges the Bulgarian government to:**

- **Acknowledge publicly that all citizens are entitled to the same human rights protections, even if their views are unpopular or they have a different interpretation of history from the majority.**
- **Allow all citizens, including Macedonians, the right to their own identity and culture, including the right to their own language and newspapers.**
- **Return all materials confiscated from the Macedonians on August 2, 1990.**
- **Return all passports that have been confiscated from the Macedonians, and allow Macedonians to leave and to return to the country if they so choose.**
- **Direct the state-controlled television and radio to provide objective coverage of the "Macedonian question," and to air varying viewpoints, including those of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent.**
- **Direct the local police and State Security to allow members of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent to hold meetings, to gather petitions, and to engage in other activities without interference.**
- **Direct State Security to stop intimidating Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent members, and to stop monitoring their telephones.**
- **Direct the local procurators' offices to drop their opposition to the registration of Ilinden and Ilinden IMRO-Independent.**
- **Direct the local procurators' offices to prosecute state employees who refuse to provide services to individuals or who otherwise discriminate against individuals on the basis of ethnic or national background.**

**Helsinki Watch urges the Bulgarian Parliament to:**

- **Amend Article 52, paragraph 4, of the Bulgarian Constitution to ban organizations only if their aims and activities present a clear and present danger to the security of Bulgaria. The language should state that organizations cannot be prohibited for advocating territorial autonomy for ethnic or national minorities, unless these organizations use violence to achieve their purposes. Article 3(2) of the Law on Political Parties should be amended in a similar fashion to narrow its prohibition on political parties.**
- **Adopt a law that explicitly allows groups to engage in activities without registering if they so choose (the purpose of registration should be to accord special legal status to a group for the purpose of owning a bank account, etc.).**

- **Amend the Law on Gatherings, Meetings, and Demonstrations to limit the authority of mayors and local councils to restrict meetings. Restrictions should be allowed only if the local authorities have clear evidence that a meeting is likely to disrupt public order. Any limitations which are placed on meetings should be narrowly tailored and proportionate to the need to maintain public order. In general, they should restrict only the time, place, or manner of the meeting, and not the meeting itself.**
- **Amend the Law on Passports to allow the confiscation of passports only if an individual's departure from the country would present a clear and present danger to the security of the nation.**

**Helsinki Watch also urges the Bulgarian government and the Socialist Party to make public the archives that contain information about the Communist Party's positions on the Macedonian question during the years 1944-1989.**

### **International Agreements and International Law**

**International agreements and international law protect the right of individuals to belong to an ethnic or national minority, and to express, preserve, and develop their cultural traditions:**

**To belong to a national minority is a matter of a person's individual choice and no disadvantage may arise from the exercise of such choice. Persons belonging to national minorities have the right freely to express, preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity and to maintain and develop their culture in all its aspects, free of any attempts at assimilation against their will. (June 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, paragraph 32.)**

**In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language. (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 27.)**

**The participating States...reaffirm that respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities as part of universally recognized human rights is an essential factor for peace, justice, stability and democracy in the participating States. (June 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, paragraph 30.)**

**International law prohibits states from discriminating on the basis of ethnic or national identity, and requires states to take positive measures to prevent discrimination on these grounds:**

**All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 7.)**

**All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 26.)**

**[All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law will prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground. (June 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Paragraph 5.9.)**

**International law protects freedom of expression, freedom to obtain and disseminate information, and freedom of association, including political association:**

**Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19.)**

**The participating States reaffirm that...everyone will have the right to freedom of expression including the right to communication. This right will include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. The exercise of this right may be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and are consistent with international standards. In particular, no limitation will be imposed on access to, and use of, any means of reproducing documents of any kind, while respecting, however, rights relating to intellectual property, including copyright. (June 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, paragraph 9.1.)**

**[The participating States will...respect the right of individuals and groups to establish, in full freedom, their own political parties or other political organizations... (June 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, paragraph 7.)**

**The participating States reaffirm that...the right of association will be guaranteed...(This right) will exclude any prior control. (June 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, paragraph 9.3.)**

**Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 20.)**

**International law protects the right of citizens to leave their own country, and to maintain unimpeded contacts with citizens of other states with whom they share a common ethnic or national origin or cultural heritage:**

**Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13.)**

**Persons belonging to national minorities...have the right...to establish and maintain unimpeded contacts among themselves within their country as well as contacts across frontiers with citizens of other States with whom they share a common ethnic or national origin, cultural heritage or religious beliefs. (June 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, paragraph 32.4.)**

**The participating States reaffirm that...they will respect the right of everyone to leave any country, including his own...consistent with a State's international obligations and CSCE commitments. Restrictions on this right will have the character of very rare exceptions, will be considered necessary only if they respond to a specific public need, pursue a legitimate aim and are proportionate to that aim, and will not be abused or applied in an arbitrary manner. (June 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, paragraph 9.5.)**

*This report was written by Theodore Zang Jr., Staff Counsel at Helsinki Watch and is based on interviews conducted in Bulgaria between October 1990 and January 1991 by Lois Whitman and Theodore Zang Jr.*

*News From Helsinki Watch is a publication of Helsinki Watch, an independent organization created in 1979 to monitor domestic and international compliance with the human rights provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The Chairman is Robert L. Bernstein; Vice Chairs, Jonathan Fanton and Alice Henkin; Executive Director, Jeri Laber; Deputy Director, Lois Whitman; Washington Representative, Catherine Cosman; Staff Counsel, Holly Cartner and Theodore Zang, Jr.; Staff Consultant, Ivana Nizich; Orville Schell Intern, Robert Kushen; Intern, Jemima Stratford; Associates, Sarai Brachman, Mia Nitchun, and Elisabeth Socolow.*

*Helsinki Watch is a component of Human Rights Watch, which includes Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Africa Watch, and Middle East Watch. The Chairman is Robert L. Bernstein and the Vice Chairman is Adrian W. DeWind. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director; Kenneth Roth, Deputy Director; Holly J. Burkhalter, Washington Director; Susan Osnos, Press Director.*

*Helsinki Watch is affiliated with the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, which is based in Vienna.*

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### **Helsinki Watch Publications on Bulgaria**

**News From Bulgaria: Deep Tensions Continue in Turkish Provinces, Despite Some Improvements, August 1990.**

**News From Bulgaria (on minority problems and pre-election conditions), March 1990.**

**Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks, October 1989 (66 pages).**

**News From Bulgaria (on harassment of independent groups), May 1989.**

**News From Bulgaria (on harassment of independent groups), January 1989.**

**News From Bulgaria (letter from political prisoner), June 1988.**

**Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Bulgaria, An Update, September 1987 (58 pages).**

**Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Bulgaria, June 1986 (39 pages).**