



Directorate of Intelligence

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Bulgaria: Coping With the Papal Assassination Scandal

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An Intelligence Assessment

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**Bulgaria:
Coping With the
Papal Assassination Scandal**



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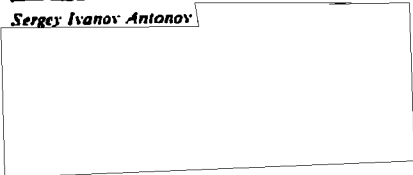
Introduction

Bulgaria has been struggling for two years with the fallout from its alleged complicity in the 1981 papal assassination attempt, and it now faces renewed negative publicity as the trial date approaches. In November 1982 Italian authorities in Rome arrested the Balkan Airline manager, Sergey Antonov, after the papal assailant, Mehmet Ali Agca, identified him as one of several coconspirators in the attempt to take the life of Pope John Paul II. After a three-year investigation into allegations of an international conspiracy in the attack, investigating Magistrate Ilario Martella in late October 1984 formally indicted Antonov, two other Bulgarian officials currently in Sofia, and four Turks. The trial probably will begin sometime in 1985.

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Sergey Ivanov Antonov



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This Intelligence Assessment analyzes how Sofia has coped with allegations about its involvement in the assassination attempt and considers how it plans to contain any future damage resulting from the scandal. It also assesses some of the longer term implications for Bulgaria for its relations with the East and West and its involvement in other illicit activities, such as arms and narcotics smuggling and foreign intelligence operations. This paper does not treat the ultimate question of Bulgaria's guilt or innocence in the affair and does not weigh the voluminous and frequently contradictory information concerning this controversial case. This paper therefore focuses on Bulgarian and—to some extent—Soviet policy reactions to the affair, on the key elements of Sofia's defense strategy, and on the broader policy implications of the scandal for Bulgaria.

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waning Soviet economic support.' The ensuing international publicity further tarnished Bulgaria's already unsavory image and drew attention to its links to some terrorist groups and to arms and narcotics smuggling. Many journalists, for example, also cited the bizarre 1978 murder of emigre dissident Georgi Markov in London as corroborating evidence of the heavyhanded tactics used by the Bulgarian Intelligence Service (Durzhavna Sigurnost (DS))

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Skirting Diplomatic Isolation

The arrest of Sergey Antonov seriously embarrassed the Zhivkov regime and threatened to undermine Bulgaria's push for improved relations with the West—a strategy intended in large part to offset

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